More than Learning English? The Impact of University Intensive English Language Program Attendance on International Student Academic Achievement

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Abstract: This study frames intensive English language programs (IEPs) in institutions of higher education as potential vehicles for social justice among marginalized international students. In this study we examine the differences in academic achievement between international students who enter a university through an English proficiency test and those who pass through an IEP. We compared both populations through nearly 900 cases, out of a sample of 4888, who had similar language proficiency at the time of enrolling at a large research-intensive university in the Southwest of the United States. The results revealed great similarity between the populations of students indicating that as an intervention-style

program, the IEP was successful in meeting the linguistic and academic needs of the students. The study also revealed potential implications for higher education policy in ensuring both program quality and benefit to students. The paper also raises issues of equity in terms of the lack of analysis in long-term outcomes for these types of programs compared to other interventions, the need for expansion of international student data collection by institutions of higher education and overall transparency in pre-university programs.
Keywords: international students; intensive English language program; academic achievement

¿Más que aprender inglés? El impacto de la asistencia al programa universitario intensivo de inglés en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes internacionales

Resumen: Este estudio enmarca los programas intensivos de idioma inglés (IEP) en instituciones de educación superior como vehículos potenciales para la justicia social entre los estudiantes internacionales marginados. En este estudio examinamos las diferencias en el rendimiento académico entre los estudiantes internacionales que ingresan a una universidad a través de una prueba de dominio del inglés y los que pasan por un IEP. Comparamos ambas poblaciones a través de casi 900 casos, de una muestra de 4888, que tenían un dominio del idioma similar al momento de inscribirse en una gran universidad de investigación intensiva en el suroeste de los Estados Unidos. Los resultados revelaron una gran similitud entre las poblaciones de estudiantes, lo que indica que, como programa de estilo de intervención, el IEP logró satisfacer las necesidades lingüísticas y académicas de los estudiantes. El estudio también reveló posibles implicaciones para la política de educación superior al garantizar tanto la calidad del programa como el beneficio para los estudiantes. El documento también plantea problemas de equidad en términos de la falta de análisis en los resultados a largo plazo de este tipo de programas en comparación con otras intervenciones, la necesidad de ampliar la recopilación de datos de estudiantes internacionales por parte de las instituciones de educación superior y la transparencia general en la educación preuniversitaria.
Keywords: estudiantes internacionales; programa intensivo de idioma inglés; rendimiento académico

Mais do que aprender inglês? O impacto de frequentar o programa intensivo da universidade de inglês no realização acadêmico de estudantes internacionais

Resumo: Este estudo enquadra os programas intensivos de língua inglesa (IEPs) em instituições de ensino superior como veículos potenciais para a justiça social entre estudantes internacionais marginalizados. Neste estudo, examinamos as diferenças no realização acadêmico entre estudantes internacionais que entram em uma universidade por meio de um teste de proficiência em inglês e aqueles que passam por um IEP. Comparamos ambas as populações em quase 900 casos, de uma amostra de 4888, que tinham proficiência de idioma semelhante no momento de matricular-se em uma grande universidade de pesquisa intensiva no sudoeste dos Estados Unidos. Os resultados revelaram grande semelhança entre as populações de alunos, indicando que, por ser um programa de intervenção, o IEP foi bem-sucedido em atender às necessidades lingüísticas e acadêmicas dos alunos. O estudo também revelou implicações potenciais para a política de ensino superior, garantindo a qualidade do programa e o benefício para os alunos. O documento também levanta questões de equidade em termos da falta de análise dos resultados de longo prazo para esses tipos de programas em comparação com outras intervenções, a necessidade de expansão da coleta de dados de

estudantes internacionais por instituições de ensino superior e transparência geral no período pré-universitário programas.

Palavras-chave: estudantes internacionais; programa intensivo de inglês; realização acadêmico

Introduction

Social justice curricula are encouraged in many institutions across higher education. These initiatives are often framed to educators as "how privileged students can be educated without recentering their privilege in ways that sacrifice the education of the marginalized" (Applebaum, 2009, p. 376). International students can be found within these marginalized groups, even though some display common factors that would normally preclude someone from being marginalized, such as high socio-economic status and family support to study abroad. Though there are less data collected about these students' backgrounds, not all international students come from privileged financial situations. Some have indicated the need for financial support while they seek their education, which they do not have access to in their own countries (Sherry et al., 2010). Additionally, a proportion of these international students did not have the financial capacity or physical proximity to language education in order to be prepared for English language instruction and navigating college education in the US – which leads to their eventual enrollment in Intensive English or equivalent programs at institutions where English is the medium of instruction (Bray, 2013; Dawson, 2010). This casts intensive English programs (IEPs) in a distinctly social justice-oriented light, given that their explicit goal is to remove language as a barrier to success in a university setting. This effectively recenters the privilege of language competency before university enrollment avoiding the "sacrifice [of] the education of the marginalized" (Applebaum, 2009, p. 376).

In spite of these potential hurdles, international students have increasingly chosen the United States as an educational destination, with proportional increases in enrollment from 3.3% to 5.5% in the last decade (Institute of International Education, 2018). These changes in student composition, especially in public higher education, are considered to be at least partially driven by decreased state support to institutions (Bound et al., 2016; Jaquette & Curs, 2015). However, monetary motivations (Cantwell, 2015) are far from the only rationale that explain increasing international student populations, with factors such as increased demand (Findlay, 2011) traditional internationalization initiatives (Altbach & Knight, 2007), and global development (Stein et al., 2019) also thought to play a role. This growth in international student populations has been accompanied by a corresponding growth of various international student services. By the authors' calculation from the Annual Survey of Colleges, roughly 77% of public colleges and universities offer some sort of incoming orientation for international students. These institutional service entities vary widely in scope and organizational structure, with offerings potentially including orientation support, personal and academic advising, immigration services or language support (Chen & Bartlett, 2017; K. A. Johnson, 1993). As a result, much of the research in these areas revolves around single institution studies on the various factors of student adjustment (L. R. Johnson et al., 2018; Sherry et al., 2010; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). One common feature in many of these adjustment studies deals with English language proficiency as a predictor of psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

This language proficiency is often not interrogated beyond whether the international students are proficient or not, and how the proficiency (or lack thereof) impacts their lives. In the studies explored by Zhang and Goodson (2011) in their systematic review and in many contemporary conversations the focus is on international students as matriculated students - and their differences,

similarities and experiences within university settings. The role of language proficiency programs in general serve as equalizers for students who may not have had the opportunity for language instruction in their home context. By providing these sorts of programs, universities give another avenue to students who would otherwise not be able to benefit from their educational offerings. However, whereas domestic student programs aimed at equalizing access (e.g. discipline specific orientations, first generation college student programs, low income student orientations, etc.) often have robust data mechanisms around them to verify outcomes beyond the program, language programs often do not. This disparity in ensuring, or at the very least tracking, analogous outcomes among different types of students presents a lapse in social justice-oriented institutions. From a policy perspective, the implications for institutions concerning these unverified student outcomes are far reaching. From recruiting to enrollment, it becomes an issue of justice and is incumbent upon universities to utilize this data to determine if students will benefit from the course of study in an IEP. Additionally, policy makers within universities must consider the resources dedicated to tracking the outcomes of students that move across programs, departments and data systems.

This paper aims to begin raising the level of consciousness in the field regarding the outcomes of unexplored sub-groups of international students and the responsibilities that universities have toward them. It is impossible to ensure equity within international student populations when there exist unexplored multiplicities of internal university status for international students, be it through language programs, discipline specific pathways programs, or other status group at the university. In starting to acknowledge and explore the differences in the ways in which international students can be classified, we can recognize a variety of ways in which public universities integrate and prepare various groups of international students for academic success. Doing this will allow a focus on the wide variety of services that each group receives and how effective these services are.

Therefore, our focus in this paper is on one common sub-group of international students: those attending a U.S. university by way of an intensive English language program. In fact, of the more than one million international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, almost 10% are enrolled in intensive English language instruction (Institute of International Education, 2016). While the goal of these programs on the surface is clear — to increase English language proficiency to the minimum level required by the university — there are a number of other roles that they often serve in their mission to meet the various social and academic needs of international student populations. The foundation for these additional roles has been thoroughly outlined through professional standards in the English language education field, or TESOL (Bitterlin, 2003), as well as in English program accreditation guidelines. For instance, one specialized accreditation agency, the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA), details a number of student services standards which are aimed at providing "an optimal learning environment" for international students (Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, 2014, p. 27). Among their number are standards that call for acclimatizing pre-arrival communication and ongoing orientation requirements, as well as in-depth personal and academic counseling and/or advising.

These additional elements, among others to be detailed below, show that intensive English language programs (hereafter, IEPs) provide valuable services to their limited English proficiency international student populations. The question then becomes, does IEP attendance benefit the overall academic trajectories of IEP-attending international students as compared to directly admitted international students? We hypothesize that international students attending an intensive English program will do the same or better than their directly admitted counterparts. Using programmatic and institutional data, this study will begin to answer this question and explore the international student population of one large research institution. We hope that confirming this hypothesis will encourage institutions to act on the collection and utilization of data related to international students.

Literature Review

The literature related to international students understandably spans a diverse range of specialties, as is the case with any population that crosses disciplinary boundaries. These include obvious connections related to common issues that international students face, such as acculturation into university settings (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Rienties et al., 2011; Senerchia, 2015) and language proficiency (Benzie, 2010; Johnson, 1988; Wongtrirat, 2010), which map onto disciplines such as linguistics, second language acquisition, higher education and sociology. Abdullah, Aziz and Ibrahim (2014) in an extensive review of the past 30 years of literature on international students found that in fact "a majority of the articles focus on the students' in-campus, academic and social experience" (p. 235).

This focus holds true when looking specifically at the higher education literature. These studies have a breadth of topical foci localized on the international student experience utilizing a diverse range of theoretical and methodological lenses. For instance, Sherry, Thomas and Chui (2010) conducted a single institution survey locating and highlighting international student experiences with social, cultural, linguistic, and financial problems. In the same year, Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson (2010) also conducted a single institution survey focused on the well-being patterns of international students, specifically through their connectedness to community and risk-taking behaviors. Hellstén and Prescott (2004) focused on the experiences of international students faced with the internationalization of curriculum at their host institutions. In another article, Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2013) conducted a case study using a critical theoretical lens that found student support services in an Australian research university lacked the intellectual capital within the institution to procure resources away from heavy research reputational activities. This led to experiences of international students enrolling in a reputationally superior school only to find limited student services. While the topics are far ranging, most studies within higher education deal with the experiences of international students that focus specifically on those students that are fully enrolled.

The literature surrounding IEPs follows a similar pattern to that of international students in general, that is rich in material on factors that speak to the student experiences like motivation (Alshumaimeri, 2013), mediated social and academic engagement (Fox et al., 2014) and confidence (Keefe & Ling Shi, 2017) in these types of programs, interrogating issues such as language proficiency and international student support services on IEP academic success. However, few researchers follow students from IEP to university coursework, leaving many studies that either focus on internal IEP academic success or aggregated international student populations once in matriculated settings. While these studies cast light on specific elements of specific programs, there is little attention on the part of their parent institutions (and the IEPs themselves) regarding commonly collected data elements that track matriculated student progress (i.e. retention data, time to graduation, etc.) which is found in databases mandated by state and federal law for student populations. This desire for collection and eventual transparency, though dire at the IEP level, is taking place in higher education more broadly – with calls for "common guidelines and/or format setting out minimum information which all HEIs must provide – as a public good – about the quality of the total student experience" (Hazelkorn, 2012, p. 356).

It should be noted that this study is predicated on the idea that while sufficient language proficiency is an important factor in student success, it does not predict academic success once a student's proficiency reaches a certain point (Graham, 1987; Gue & Holdaway, 1973; Ho & Spinks, 1985; Light et al., 1987; Saville-Troike, 1984). While this is the case, there is still much debate about the ways in which this appropriate proficiency level might be effectively proven to an institution (e.g. testing, English medium coursework, etc.; Oliver et al., 2012).

While elements that contribute to the academic performance of international students outside of language proficiency, such as student supports services, financial support, and others listed above, are studied with high frequency, the literature rarely addresses IEP attendance and related program factors as a variable impacting international students that matriculate into mainstream university coursework. Mamiseishvili (2012) illuminated links between international student persistence and factors like language proficiency and social interaction. She found in her logistic regression analysis that international students across contexts were less likely to persist if they were enrolled in remedial English courses in their first year. However, this study is limited in its ability to explore variables related to IEP enrollment as the focus is on fully matriculated international students in university departmental remediations. What work there is on these segments of IEP-to-university students are largely smaller-scale qualitative studies. One instance, Keefe and Shi (2017), explored the experiences of eight IEP students during their first term as matriculated students bypassing challenges that the students felt were mediated by their attendance in the IEP. Finally, one recent study in an Australian university setting does address similar issues as those that will be addressed in this paper. Floyd (2015) found that IEP students passed at similar rates to those who tested into the university, but with lower GPAs overall. While the results do not appear favorable to IEPs on the surface, the study had several problematic elements that could have influenced the results. First, much of the information was collected in the form of a questionnaire filled in by students and unverified. Second, students had to select into the study and offer permission for access to their grades. Both of these elements impact the potential implications of the study.

## Background of Study

IEP Program Procedures

Any first-time freshman who 1) is not a citizen, permanent resident, or refugee in the United States, 2) has a cumulative high school GPA of 3.00 or higher and 3) has completed secondary school coursework that meets certain competency standards (for high schools outside of the US, four years of math and three years of laboratory science) can apply directly to the institution for admission. However, these students must also supply an official score from one of a select list of English language proficiency exams: greater than a 61 iBT TOEFL, 53 PTE, or 6.0 IELTS. Students who meet all admissions requirements, save for those related to language proficiency, are given a conditional admission and encouraged to enroll in the institution's IEP.

The IEP is geared toward helping international students meet their language goals, develop experience with American culture and prepare for academic study at the university level. They meet the primary goal of the program, English language education, through a six-level program of full-time coursework (21 hours per week). Each program level consists of an eight-week session, with a full course of study taking 48 weeks, or three full semesters on the institution's schedule.

Upon admission to the program, students are given internal English proficiency placement tests and placed into the corresponding language course. For example, students with no English ability would likely test into 'Basic 1'. This developmental level of the program creates and builds on basic language competency. By comparison, 'Advanced 2', the final level of the program, has students developing materials like source-based essays using academic vocabulary. By completing the highest level of the program, students are considered to have proven a sufficient level of English proficiency for admission to the institution. They are allowed to bypass the language testing requirements and gain full admission to the institution.

Figure 1
Intensive English Program Progression from Admission to Program to Admission to University
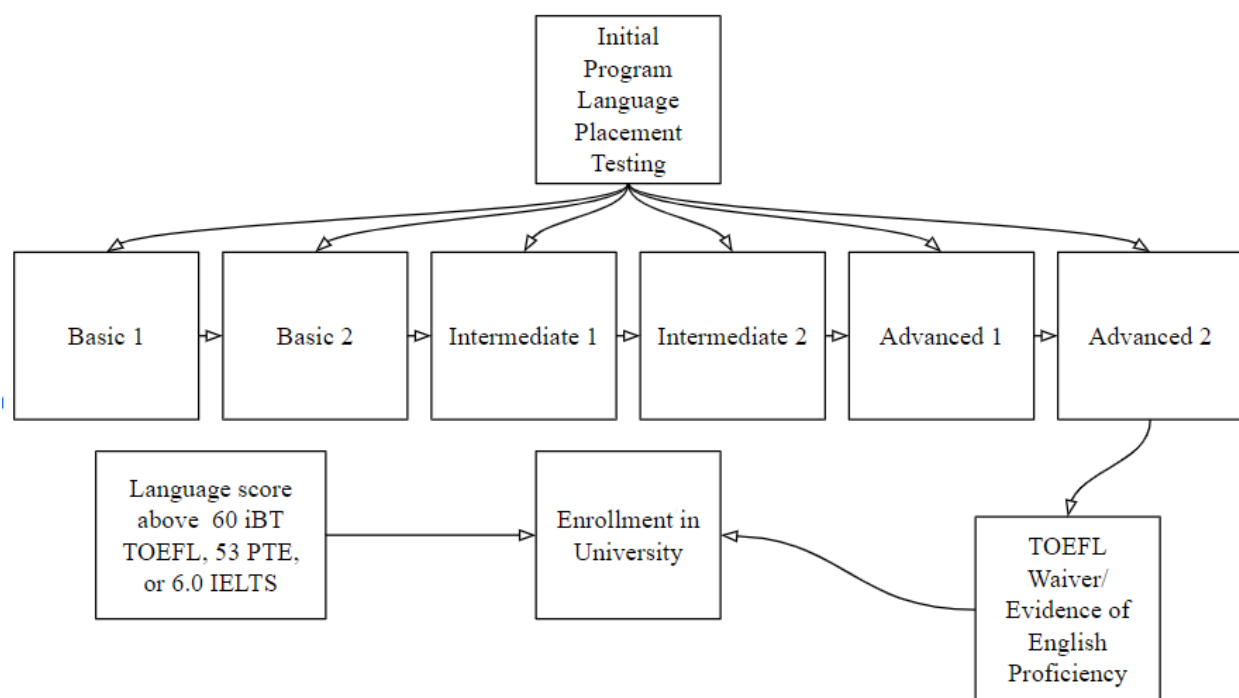
IEP Placement Measures

While TOEFL, PTE and IELTS are adequate for ensuring that students meet a minimum university standard for language proficiency, they are less commonly used as placement measures for language programs. This is due largely to the aggregated nature of the score, and the need for disaggregated data on students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills for appropriate course placement (Moglen, 2015). As such, many IEPs, including the one in this study, conduct a battery of testing measures to ensure accurate placement within the program.

The three components include both productive skills (speaking and writing) and passive skills (listening, reading, grammar). The three parts are an oral interview, a written essay, and The CaMLA English Placement Test (EPT), a standardized instrument (Lippincott, 2017). The oral interview is given by trained faculty members within the program who attend regular norming sessions to maintain the reliability of the scoring. The score is based on 24 question prompts about eight pictures, depicting the everyday life of a drawn character. Question prompts range from simple yes/no questions to an extended narrative about the character's day. The students are scored on each question, based on the structure of their language, vocabulary and delivery. The second placement instrument, the written essay prompt, is given to students to plan and write a personal narrative or persuasive piece within 20 minutes. The essay is scored in terms of form, vocabulary, organization, grammar, punctuation and logical development by two trained raters, guided by level standards. If there is a disagreement between raters, a third rating takes place. Inter-rater reliability is 73% for the written essay (Lippincott, 2017). Finally, the EPT, as a standardized placement, is timed and given as designed. The test covers passive language skills: listening, grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Each element produces a score that the program uses to establish where the student falls within the various level cut scores. In the event of test disagreement on level placement, the scores are averaged.

Methodology

Data and Sample

The data for this study came from the institution's administrative data. The data contains records of all 6,346 first-time freshmen international students who enrolled during Spring 2013 to Spring 2018. Students' background information includes age, gender and country of origin along with high school location; admissions status in relation to the English proficiency requirements (TOEFL score or IEP placement level). Students' academic profile and progress at the institution includes academic major, semester GPA, credits completed, as well as academic standing.

As the institution exempts English proficiency scores for students from particular countries that are English speaking or dual language (n=224) as well as students who graduated from U.S. high schools (n=839), they are excluded from this sample. The sample is restricted to students who are between the ages of 18 and 25 (excluding under 18 and over 25 n=326). The total sample size is 4,957.

Variables

The dependent variables of the study focus on measures of academic achievement. In developing an understanding of international students' academic success, three variables were employed as indicators of achievement for international students. Those include: freshman GPA collected, number of credits completed, as well as students' academic standing (i.e. being on probation or not) at the end of the student's first semester.

The variable of interest is whether or not an individual student went through the IEP before they started taking college credits in their program of studies. To estimate the impact of the program on students' academic performance, we consider various mechanisms that place students in IEP. These include students' TOEFL scores as well as IEP beginning level. We converted all TOEFL scores (e.g., Paper Based TOEFL or Computer Based TOEFL) into the Internet Based TOEFL scores (IBT), using a standard correlation chart. There are six class levels in the IEP, ranging from no proficiency to high proficiency; the highest three levels were included in this study: intermediate II, advanced I and II.

We also control for a number of demographic characteristics that might be related to students' placement into the IEP as well as their academic performance at a U.S. institution. While the administrative data are limited in capturing a wide variety of students' background information, the data include students' nationality (geographical region), gender, age, and academic major. We included these in our statistical models.

Analytic Approach

In order to estimate the effect of actual enrollment into the IEP, one might employ a regression discontinuity (RD) design where students' enrollment into IEP is determined based on a single test score. For example, TOEFL score presents one possibility for adopting this analytic approach. At the institution, international students whose iBT TOEFL score is below 61 are automatically placed in the IEP, while students who have scores higher than 61 do not have to take IEP courses. If this were the only mechanism to place students into the IEP, we could compare students who are just below and above the cut point of 61 that determines whether they take or do not take the IEP.

Yet, the placement includes a more complex process, as the institution also allows students to apply without submitting a TOEFL score. Instead, students can enroll in the IEP and take the IEP placement test. The placement test is based on proficiency and cannot be correlated to a TOEFL

score. This limits our ability to adopt the RD as our analytic strategy and estimate the causal impact of the IEP.

While a simple regression model where we simply test the association between IEP and outcomes raises selection bias, we tried to address this issue by adopting the idea of RD in our analytic strategy. As students whose TOEFL scores are just below or above the 61 point cut-off and students who are placed to IEP program at the highest levels might be similar in their English proficiency, we limit our analytic sample to those students. The comparison would happen at different bandwidths of the TOEFL scores (e.g., +/-1, +/-3, +/-5, and +/-10). We estimate the following model using OLS regression (GPA and credits completed) and logistic regression (good academic standing):

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \left(IEP_{ig} \right) + \beta_2 X_{ig} + \varepsilon_{ig}$$

Where y_i is academic outcomes of individual i in the TOEFL score bandwidth g, IEP_{ig} is an indicator variable on whether the student was required to enroll in the IEP. X_{ig} is a vector of individual characteristics including region of origin, gender, age, and academic major.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Regional demographics in the overall sample show large populations of students from Asia and the Middle East. Among those directly admitted, Asia accounts for 72% of the student population (*n* = 2,267) with the Middle East at nearly 22% (*n* = 679). However, when looking at IEP students in the overall sample, we see a more even split between the two groups with Asia (n = 843) slightly lower than the Middle East (*n* = 957). When breaking down the overall sample by academic major, business is revealed as the most common major for directly admitted students (*n* = 1472) by several hundred students, whereas, IEP students select into business (*n* = 678) and engineering (*n* = 721) by tighter margins. There are proportionally more males having attended the IEP at 81% than those directly admitted to the institution at 71%.

When comparing students who are only within our 'analytic sample', that is +/-1 of the TOEFL cut score of 61 and advanced I, II, intermediate II in the program, the descriptive statistics show a picture of increasing similarity as compared to the overall sample. In terms of regional demographics most of the students in the analytic sample are still largely from Asia or the Middle East. Middle Eastern populations are more represented in the IEP group (*n* = 364) whereas Asian populations are nearly evenly split between the direct admit (*n* = 238) and IEP groups (*n* = 226). The direct admit populations share the highest proportion of students in business (*n* = 144), whereas the IEP business group is at a lower percentage but similar quantity (*n* = 179). IEP has a higher share of students in engineering (*n* = 264). In terms of age, we see that both IEP groups are older than directly admitted students (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for All Students and Analytic Sample by Direct Admit International Students (N = 3144, N= 299) and IEP International Students (N = 1813, N = 597)

	All Direct Admit	All IEP	Analytic Sample Direct Admit	Analytic Sample IEP

Region	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Africa	38	1.21	4	0.22	1	0.33	0	0
Asia	2,267	72.11	843	46.50	238	79.60	226	37.86
American	54	1.72	6	0.33	1	0.33	4	0.67
Europe	186	3.37	3	0.17	2	0.67	3	0.50
Middle East	679	21.60	957	52.79	57	19.06	364	60.97
Major								
Undecided	445	14.15	211	11.64	43	14.38	74	12.40
Major								
Business	1472	46.82	678	37.40	144	48.16	179	29.98
Engineering	650	20.67	721	39.77	35	11.71	264	44.22
Liberal Arts	577	18.35	203	11.20	77	25.75	80	13.40
Gender								
Male	2,217	70.52	1,475	81.36	223	74.58	472	79.06
Female	927	29.48	338	18.64	76	25.42	125	20.94
GPA	2.99	1.01	2.85	0.96	2.86	0.99	2.93	0.93
Earned Credit Hours	12.88	3.97	12.51	3.99	12.71	3.97	12.71	3.80

The Impact of IEP on First Year Outcomes

The purpose of the study was to determine whether IEP attendance accounted for variance in international students' academic success as measured by (a) GPA; (b) number of earned credit hours; and (c) academic standing compared to students who were similar in their English proficiency to study at a U.S. higher education institution. As we mentioned above in our analytic approach, we employed a different bandwidth of the scores to capture students at different levels of similarity in their language proficiency.

Table 2 reports the results from the "naïve" model on GPA, where we included all students in the sample (*N*=4,888). The regression coefficients suggested that students who were placed in and took IEP were not significantly different from the students who did not take IEP in terms of their course taking and academic standing. However, students who attended IEP had a 0.126 lower GPA (*p*<.001), compared to their non-IEP counterparts. This model also revealed that all students from

Asia and the Middle East had a 0.182 and 0.482 lower GPAs as well. In addition, GPAs were higher for business (0.139) and engineering (0.201) and lower for liberal arts (-0.140).

Table 2

Regression of Naïve Model on GPA

	GPA				GPA	
	B	*SE*			*B*	*SE*
IEP	-0.126**	0.031		**Major**		
Region				Business	0.139**	0.045
Asia	-0.554**	0.153		Engineering	0.201**	0.052
American	-0.381	0.197		Liberal Arts	-0.140**	0.053
Europe	-0.182	0.178		**Gender**		
Middle East	-0.482**	0.154		Female	0.452**	0.033
				Age	-0.007	0.012
n =	4,888					
Constant	3.422**	.294				

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

Once we limit the students to only +/-1 from the TOEFL cut scores, the statistical significance on the IEP coefficients disappear, indicating that there is similarity across the participants in the specific bandwidth. Although not statistically significant, the estimated outcome suggested that students who attended IEP had slightly better outcomes compared to their non-IEP peers: IEP students had a 0.029 higher GPA, 0.058 more course hours earned, and more likely to be in a good academic standing. Yet, these differences were not statistically significant. In addition, there were several significant results in the sample of note. First, both business and engineering majors are predicted to earn 1.460 ($p < 0.01$) and 1.939 ($p < 0.01$) more credit hours respectively than the constant. Second, females are predicted to have higher GPAs by 0.360, earn more credit hours by 1.321, and be in good academic standing (1.18; see Table 3).

Table 3

Regression of Analytic Sample on GPA, Credit Hours Earned, and Academic Standing

	GPA	Credit Hours Earned	Academic Standing

	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
IEP	0.029	0.076	0.058	0.302	0.044	0.223
Region						
Asia	-0.854	0.950	-2.088	3.796	-11.044	790.989
American	-0.319	1.036	-2.542	4.140	-	-
Europe	-0.380	1.039	-1.438	4.153	-	-
Middle East	-0.837	0.953	-2.671	3.809	-10.710	790.989
Major						
Business	0.109	0.106	1.460**	0.411	0.347	0.297
Engineering	0.133	0.117	1.939**	0.452	0.472	0.332
Liberal Arts	-0.169	0.119	0.415	0.463	0.063	0.324
Gender						
Female	0.360**	0.080	1.321**	0.316	1.18**	0.303
Age	0.005	0.028	-0.123	0.112	0.020	0.086
n =	884		896		876	
Constant	3.486**	1.123	15.843**	4.484	11.683	790.991

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

Table 4 shows the results where we analyzed the impact of IEP for students in different bandwidths around the cut TOEFL scores. While the coefficients for IEP were not significant at all bandwidths, the differences between the IEP and non-IEP groups become smaller as the bandwidths become more restricted (i.e. moving from +/-10 to +/-1 from the TOEFL cut of 61).

Table 4

Robustness Check of Alternative Analytic Samples (TOEFL Cut of 61 ±1, ±3, ±5, ±10 to IEP Intermediate/Advanced 1/Advanced 2) on IEP Attendance by GPA, Earned Credit Hours and Academic Standing

	±1		±3		±5		±10	
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
GPA	0.029	0.076	0.060	0.070	0.055	0.066	0.012	0.061
	N =	884	N =	1,103	N =	1,309	N =	1,772
Earned Credit Hours	0.058	0.302	0.283	0.283	0.225	0.265	0.121	0.247
	N =	896	N =	1,119	N =	1,328	N =	1,800
Academic Standing	0.044	0.223	0.128	0.199	0.099	0.189	0.048	0.178
	N =	876	N =	1,094	N =	1,292	N =	1,757

Discussion

This paper adds to the edges of policy discussions in higher education around the ways in which colleges and universities become more internationalized. In many ways, the IEP allows for policymakers to point to increases in international students attending the university as an element of increased diversity, as well as another metric of internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This also plays into the common discourse that university policymakers as sensitized to the revenues brought in by international students, as potential 'cash cows' (Cantwell, 2015). However, this paper also encourages those same policymakers to consider the potential emancipatory and social justice-oriented nature of an IEP. In truth, the results of this study are best framed with the IEP as an intervention style program, like countless others based on demographic factors of incoming university students in the interests of educational equity (e.g. remediation programs, "at-risk" programs, low-income programs, etc.). Furthermore, the IEP has shown that a social justice-oriented program can achieve results – that they have engaged in work that equalizes outcomes in relation to language. In this regard, the IEP has been successful, in that it accomplished its mission of assisting students in meeting their language goals, that is, bringing them up to the minimum requirement set by the institution and helping them move on to become successful students once matriculated. This resonates with the literature indicating that once a certain level of language proficiency has been

achieved, it no longer becomes a hinderance in academic achievement (Graham, 1987; Ho & Spinks, 1985; Saville-Troike, 1984). Consequently, having no statistical difference among the various academic measures on IEP attendance is a suitable outcome for this type of program.

Of course, the hope of these sorts of programs is not only to level the playing field for their specific population of students, but also to give them an advantage in their future endeavors. In this way, our study is well paired with others that attempt to establish the psychosocial and acculturation benefits of international students in specific programs or treatments (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). It is likely that these additional benefits would extend from the other branches of the IEP's mission: developing experience with American culture and preparing for academic study at the university level – elements that move beyond language proficiency. Our original hypothesis posited that students that attended IEP would preform as well, or better than their direct admission counterparts. As we stated above, the 'or better' part of the hypothesis was largely driven by those extensive cultural and academic preparatory elements implemented by the IEP and IEPs in general. In the case of our study, these activities include cultural events at the institution and around the state (e.g. museum tours, national park and monument visits, academic talks etc.); and language work designed and implemented in consultation with university academic units (e.g. lab reports, academic essays & presentations, etc.) However, as these elements are part of the total IEP attendance variable, they were not able to be analyzed separately in this study. In addition, there are a number of academic and non-academic outcomes that we did not observe that were in different institutional databases or were non-collected variables. These include, but are not limited to, participation in student groups, job placement or internships, and community engagement elements.

It was necessary to align the bandwidth scores of the TOEFL with the highest levels of the language program in the analytic sample due in some part to the many other unknown variables of the sample. International students applying to the institution do submit the common application (or an institutional version that collects the same information) outlining their high school credentials, GPA and other required elements. However, due to the diversity in education systems within - and lack of standardized government level statistics from - various countries of origin, it was not possible to include other common variables in the bandwidth selection. Therefore, the decision was made to adopt the key idea of RD to compare groups that are similar in terms of the selection mechanism in our regression analysis.

The other statistically significant variables unrelated to IEP attendance have been well established in the literature. In terms of earned credit hours, business and engineering have long had higher credit requirements and/or required courses (Pitter et al., 1996). In terms of gender disparities in grade point average, it has long been established that women have higher undergraduate GPAs (DiPrete &Buchmann, 2006; Alexander & Thoits, 1985).

Conclusions

This study hopes to encourage further publication of institutional assessments of international student progress by pre-program in the desire for more equitable outcomes. At an even larger scale, we hope to encourage institutional, state and federal policymakers to consider the thousands of students enrolled in IEPs when addressing issues around accountability and reporting of quality within higher education institutions. More specifically, for the many IEPs that have not engaged in the specialized accreditation process of the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, we hope institutions might begin to reflect on how they engage these IEPs in their own institutional accreditation processes. Leaders might begin to institute policies that ensure these elements, from establishing minimum necessary information for students to determine quality (Hazelkorn, 2012) to

ensuring that academic preparation and experiences are available to all students (Fox et al., 2014). In this regard there are three wider elements that speak to this hope, that are the interrelated elements of: equity in analysis, the expansion of data collection by institutions and transparency.

First, when considering equity in analysis, we mean to indicate that it is equally important to understand the full range of outcomes for international students as that of their domestic counterparts. This is especially true for alternative entrance avenues that are becoming more and more common. While the IEP in this study, and others like it, have been around since the mid to late twentieth century (Matsuda, 2003), there are new and innovative international student university admission avenues being developed every day. For instance, the parent unit of the IEP has developed other programmatic avenues for admission to the institution. This alternative offering is a dual-enrollment pathways program that allows for students to take English language courses alongside university courses and ease their entrance into the institution. While the pathways program requires a specific TOEFL score to attend, it bears to reason that understanding how this group of students does compared to other international groups would be important to understand its efficacy as we have here for the IEP. Additionally, more public universities are entering into partnership agreements with for-profit servicers to both recruit international students and teach English language courses (Redden, 2010; Winkle, 2011). It becomes paramount to not only conduct studies on student success in programs broadly, but to also serve as a measure of accountability for public resources.

Secondly, stemming from the desire for equity in analysis, it is also important for institutions to expand the data collected on international students. Due to the Higher Education Act of 1965, specifically pertaining to Title IV, the federal government has mandated the reporting of several key indicators related to (among other things) student persistence and success. This has led to robust publicly available data by way of federal databases like the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) reports. However, in these databases, relatively few international student variables are presented. This is in part because (a) there are few legal requirements and (b) many of the variables are related to federal money, or applications for federal money. Therefore, it is incumbent on each institution to collect information that will lead to more robust outcome and assessment variables. These could include, but are in no way limited to, variables detailing family educational history (i.e. first in family to attend college), specific background on academic achievements and financial information beyond what is required for I-20 immigration forms for F-1 visas. Equity in analysis also requires the allocation of appropriate resources. The IEP in this study devoted considerable time and resources in order to move this project forward. That being said, the road to accessing the data for this study – even with the cooperation of the program – encountered a number of institutional barriers. This is not the case in all contexts, and even if it were – this is where issues of transparency come into play. Small changes in law could mandate the disclosure of certain student data that could aid researchers and programs in ensuring more socially just environments for international students.

Lastly, the commitment to transparency is the most vital component to equitable outcomes for international students. This study outlines quite clearly that IEPs contribute to the potential of international students in that they provide access into university study through a method that is of equal validity to a TOEFL score. Perhaps programs would be reluctant to publish this information if that were not the case, especially in situations where large sums of money were involved, such as the for-profit partnership agreements discussed above. While pushing for transparency is outside the scope of this paper, advocacy to accreditation bodies, local, state and federal policymakers, and international student funding agencies may be able to encourage change in this category.

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