

## Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of *The English Language Growth (ELG) Project*, a large-scale project conducted in five Australian universities in 2008-09 to address the ongoing English language development of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds. While these international students have a level of English deemed adequate for entry to university, as measured through: the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or similar tests or experience, many students require further language development to be successful in their studies. The previous English language experiences of these cohorts of students vary markedly. Many have learned English after the so-called “critical period” and face maturational constraints: disadvantages that are augmented by cultural and academic adjustment.

The term “language growth” as used in our title *Addressing the Ongoing English language Growth of International Students*, although not used widely in the literature, was adopted to attract international students’ interest regardless of their skill level. Judging by the number of respondents, the choice of this title, we feel, was successful and seems to have related directly to their immediate concerns.

This study therefore focused on international students and the factors influencing the growth in their English language competence over time. The study sought to investigate the relationship between academic success and two factors affecting language development: 1) language and academic learning strategy use and 2) affective learning variables (e.g., motivation, anxiety, beliefs).

Using an online survey inviting both qualitative and quantitative responses, almost 800 international students provided a rich source of data. Students provided information on their attitudes, motivation and beliefs about language learning, their strategies for improving their language skills, and their strategies for academic learning. These data were correlated with the participating students’ grade point averages or similar academic measures. Many participants took considerable time and effort in responding to the survey’s open-ended questions, and a small number volunteered to be interviewed. These data enhanced the production of two further deliverables that have been generated through this project: a digital resource for students to advise them on what may/may not advance their academic success; and a resource for academics to assist with the teaching and supervision of diverse student cohorts.

The study provides evidence that a range of language learning strategies do not correlate well with academic success at this higher level. By contrast, involvement in more active (integrated and social) language learning environments—where students need to be resourceful with their language and instigate a degree of risk-taking—does show weak but positive correlations with academic success. Other issues were also raised by our participants. For example, many students reported the importance of cultural knowledge in order to understand and use English effectively.

Weak positive correlations were found for those strategies that promoted day-to-day interaction in English and risk-taking behaviours, such as inferring meaning from surrounding linguistic cues. Weak negative correlations were found for time-consuming strategies such as developing word lists and charts. There was a

positive correlation between academic success and the provision of linguistic feedback on assignments, and a negative correlation with failure to attend lectures.

These findings have implications for universities' policy-making, particularly with regard to addressing students' social and cultural integration and the maintenance of their own identity in the face of a globalised educational environment. The findings also raise questions about the scope of internationalisation of the curriculum and establishing an appropriate balance between recognising students' cultural backgrounds and developing their acceptance of Australian culture.