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Innovative progress tracking: Enhancing student achievement with effective interventions

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Abstract: *This paper examines the efficacy of academic support interventions provided by the Swinburne College Student Hub for international students enrolled in the Postgraduate Qualifying Program (PQP) or English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS). Interventions for PQP students encompass plagiarism checking, paraphrasing, proofreading, referencing, and essay structure guidance, while ELICOS interventions are skill-based workshops focusing on reading, listening, and writing. The study highlights the importance of tracking student progress to refine interventions effectively. Program-specific student trackers were developed, leading to significant improvements in student success rates in assignments and unit completion, as revealed by analysis of empirical data from 2022. The findings underscore the effectiveness of tailored academic support, with implications for enhancing the delivery of support services and improving academic outcomes for PQP and ELICOS cohorts in academic settings.*

Keywords: *English as an additional language (EAL), pathway programs, student tracker, student progress, interventions*

Introduction

After nearly two years of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the reopening of university campuses and international borders in 2022 has allowed international students to resume face-to-face support for their studies. Academic staff can now refer students to academic skills services for in-person assistance with their assignments and the return to campus has provided more opportunities to involve students, academic staff, and academic skills services in the intervention process. Interventions are crucial

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for improving student academic achievement, especially when undertaken at the department or school level (Baik et al., 2016). However, the efficacy of interventions for international student cohorts with English as an additional language (EAL) backgrounds in degree pathway programs requires further research.

In this research, 'intervention' refers to specific actions, approaches, or strategies designed to support student academic success (Sneyers & De Witter, 2016). These interventions aim to enhance academic language proficiency, cultural adjustment, and tailored academic support for EAL students in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and Postgraduate Qualifying Program (PQP) programs, fostering academic success and a smooth transition into Australian higher education. Despite their potential benefits, detailed studies on the implementation of effective interventions for international EAL students in degree pathways, and the role of tracking student progress in improving academic performance, remain under-researched. This gap may be due to historical research focusing on broader student issues rather than specific EAL needs or the challenges of tailoring interventions, which requires collaboration between support services and faculty, along with organisational adjustments and resource allocation.

This study investigates intervention methods used for ELICOS and PQP cohorts at an Australian university and examines their impact on student academic performance. It aims to understand how tracking student progress can improve academic outcomes for international students, especially through collaborative efforts between academic support services and academic staff.

Literature review

ELICOS as an adult context for teaching English

In Australia, ELICOS courses serve as a pivotal context for teaching English to adults, particularly to international students preparing to enter higher education (Hyland, 2018). ELICOS programs play a crucial role in equipping learners with the language skills necessary for academic success, including proficiency in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Weigle & Malone, 2016). These courses cater to diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, providing a supportive environment for students to improve their English proficiency and navigate the academic demands of Australian universities (Fenton-Smith et al.,

2017). Consequently, understanding the role of ELICOS within the broader landscape of English language education is essential for comprehensively examining student experiences and support practices in Australian ELICOS contexts.

The interactive nature of ELICOS EAP classrooms aligns with the principles of constructivism, emphasising communication and knowledge sharing among learners. Applying constructivist theory in EAL contexts can offer insights into the learning processes as it is rooted in active learning and emphasises learners' role in constructing knowledge from their experiences (Sankey, 2020). Learners, according to this theory, build subjective representations of reality by integrating new information with existing knowledge (Crosslin, 2016). In the realm of EAP, which integrates various theories and methods, constructivist theory finds applicability in understanding learning experiences (Asoodar et al., 2014).

In addition to addressing pedagogical challenges, it is imperative for student support services in ELICOS contexts to respond effectively to the diverse needs of learners. EAP pedagogies are essential for fostering learning in such environments, where students are tasked with managing complexities of language acquisition alongside disciplinary content (MacDiarmid & MacDonald, 2021). As educators navigate the dynamic interplay of learning tasks, environments, students, and teachers, student support must align with pedagogical approaches to optimise learning outcomes. MacDiarmid and MacDonald (2021) advocate for continuous exploration and research into EAP pedagogies to meet the evolving needs of diverse learners, such as those in ELICOS contexts, and stress the importance of reflective engagement with classrooms to inform decision-making processes. Furthermore, academic staff should demonstrate innovation and adaptability to address the specific needs of each ELICOS classroom, balancing disciplinary content with language instruction (MacDiarmid & MacDonald, 2021). In essence, effective student support services complement EAP pedagogies by providing tailored assistance, resources, and guidance to enhance the learning journeys of English language learners in ELICOS settings.

ELICOS and assessment

In ELICOS contexts, assessment practices follow institutional and regulatory requirements to ensure effective learning outcomes for international students (Department of Education, 2023). Upon

arrival, students undergo placement assessments to determine their initial class level (English Australia, 2024). EAP courses employ assessments to gauge general proficiency or competency-based learning outcomes and direct entry courses for higher education maintain rigorous schedules that include both formative and summative assessments. Institutions offering ELICOS programs adhere to regulatory mandates, adjusting assessment practices based on stakeholder feedback to meet diverse learning needs and ensure appropriateness across student groups (Department of Education, 2023). Clear assessment policies outline formative and summative components that track student progress, ensuring validity, reliability, fairness, flexibility, and alignment with predefined criteria (Department of Education, 2017). Oversight and moderation mechanisms uphold assessment integrity, supporting student readiness for higher education while meeting rigorous standards.

ELICOS assessments in Australia are designed to prepare students for undergraduate and postgraduate university programs, aligning curricula with specific IELTS band equivalences that assess academic readiness (Weigle & Malone, 2016). These assessments integrate academic, cultural, and ideological dimensions relevant to studying in Australia, influenced by stakeholders like the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English (Mauranen et al., 2016). EAP courses monitor student progress through diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments across core skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and research project. Each skill area is weighted: listening (20%), reading (20%), writing (20%), speaking (20%), and research project (20%). Ongoing feedback and support are integral to these assessments. Specific assessment tasks include listening and reading examinations, writing workshops, project presentations, and a project assignment spanning Weeks 1 to 5. To successfully pass the course, students must satisfactorily complete all required tasks and assessments, including those from Weeks 1 to 5, to progress to subsequent units.

International students studying in English and academic support

Australia's international education industry has been steadily growing to become one of the Australian economy's largest goods and services exports (Department of Education, 2024). While international student numbers experienced a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic (Department of Education, Skills, and

Employment [DESE], 2020), overall Australian universities have seen a significant increase in the number of international students enrolled in higher education in the past few decades (DESE, 2024a). In Australia, international students are defined as individuals who are enrolled in higher education institutions on a temporary student visa (subclass 500) (Ferguson & Spinks, 2021). International students form a significant proportion of the Australian tertiary education student population (DESE, 2023).

The importance of supporting international students throughout their academic pursuits becomes evident when we recognise the substantial economic and social impacts they have on Australian society (ICEF Monitor, 2020). Beyond their financial contributions, international students significantly enrich the cultural tapestry of Australian society. International students using English as EAL contribute to the diversity of the tertiary education system in Australia (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018; Lin, 2014), which is mostly reflected in the cultural and linguistic differences between students (Lin, 2014). Data also highlights the role of international education in sustaining nearly 250,000 jobs in Australia during the 2018-19 period (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020b). Notably, Australia's university sector attributes the preference of international students for studying in Australia to the sector's high educational standards, the opportunity to live in a safe learning environment, and the overall quality of life (Universities Australia, 2019).

Before commencing higher education studies, a substantial proportion of these students undertake ELICOS studies (DESE, 2024b). Upon completion of ELICOS courses such as English for academic purposes (EAP), students are able to enter a higher education course through an arrangement called 'ELICOS Direct Entry' (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2023). In recent years, EAP has become a significant part of English language teaching and research (Hyland & Jiang, 2021). The purpose of EAP programs is to equip students with the essential skills for tertiary study while improving English language proficiency (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). EAP courses have been provided to international students to improve their academic English language skills and demonstrate a certain level of English language proficiency before entering their higher education studies (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018;).

A body of research reveals a problematic deficit approach where international students often struggle with English

proficiency, encounter participation issues due to language barriers (Baik & Greig, 2009; Lin, 2014; Warner & Miller, 2015), and experience accent-related communication barriers impacting their confidence and engagement (Ma, 2020). Additionally, deficit-focused research highlights struggles with class participation, writing tasks, and critical thinking skills (Andrade et al., 2014; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). In addition to delivering high-quality education and educational opportunities at our universities, it is crucial to assist international students during their adjustment to studying within the Australian higher education system (Le & McKay, 2018). This involves familiarising students with the academic conventions typical of Western learning and teaching methods, as Australia welcomes students from diverse backgrounds, educational experiences (including those from non-Western educational traditions), and linguistic abilities. Given the unique challenges faced by international students, as they adapt to a new academic environment, including the need to understand academic integrity standards, it is essential to provide customised academic support. Higher education institutions must recognise the importance of offering tailored assistance to international students to ease their transition into the Australian academic landscape. By understanding students' needs and cultural backgrounds, educators can develop English intervention approaches to provide help and support (Wong et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need to develop methods that can support international EAP and postgraduate degree students to enhance their English language proficiency and help them engage with new knowledge and information (Han & Schuurmans-Stekhoven, 2017; Hyland & Jiang, 2021). In this study, we explore how the academic support provided by the Swinburne College Student Hub impacts the learning process of international EAL students with a particular focus on learners in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and Postgraduate Qualifying Program (PQP).

EAP and other postgraduate pathway students may require various support measures throughout their learning journey, including implementing English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as demonstrated in the study by Wong et al. (2017). This involves employing specific teaching strategies aimed at facilitating the learning process (Ayu et al., 2017). Providing crucial information, assistance and programs that help international students meet their educational goals is of high importance for educational

providers (Andrade & Hartshorn, 2019). A number of researchers (Beatty et al., 2014; Pantelich, 2021; Silva et al., 2016) have investigated the effectiveness of the academic and language support programs developed by Australian universities. Pantelich (2021) suggests that even though international students have improved their English proficiency to meet the linguistic demands of their course or degree, they may still benefit from language support services, particularly as they familiarise themselves with their new learning environment. Thus, international EAP and postgraduate degree students can benefit from English proficiency support and resources that will help them progress through their studies and improve their English skills (Lin, 2014). Australian universities, therefore, are looking for ways to academically support the EAP and international postgraduate degree students in enhancing their educational experiences and developing their academic skills. This is often delivered through linguistic and academic support, faculty-based workshops, academic literacy skills sessions, and citation conventions workshops (Lin, 2014). More recently, some universities have increased their support services in the areas of critical thinking, presentation skills, and digital literacy to better reflect contemporary student needs (Pantelich, 2021).

So far, research conducted on specific support programs that assist international students has focused on peer support between host students and international students by attending on-campus social activities (Andrade, 2006), transitions into studying in Australian higher education contexts (Le & McKay, 2018), understanding academic integrity requirements (Fass-Holmes, 2018; Fatemi & Saito, 2020), shifting into learning in English rather than their L1 (Freeman & Li, 2019; Le and McKay, 2018). Ashton-Hay et al. (2016) and Silva et al. (2016) have detailed the types of linguistic support for international students in Australian universities, while Pantelich (2019) has advocated discipline-specific linguistic support approaches. The Swinburne College Student Hub provides international students with varying levels of support in these domains. This article addresses a research gap by analysing student progress tracking through program-specific trackers (e.g., ELICOS and PQP) and its possible impact on student success and unit completion rates.

Interventions applied and their (in)effectiveness

Researchers have examined the types of English language support that educational institutions need or are already providing

(Akanwa, 2015; Andrade et al., 2014; Ashton-Hay et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2016). So far, various intervention methods such as early reading intervention (fluency, comprehension of text, and meaning of vocabulary), one-on-one tutoring, and providing additional support within the classroom have been implemented (Amendum, 2014). While universities in Australia are continuing to review and improve practices to support international students in improving their English language proficiency (Pantelich, 2021), additional active support is needed to help learners improve their English language needs and abilities (Amendum, 2014; Pantelich, 2021; Silva et al., 2016). One of the factors that influences whether an additional language learner can acquire knowledge is the context of the learning environment and its productivity conditions (Serrano et al., 2011). Another factor is the learner's beliefs that impact their learning strategies, motivation to study, and the extent to which to participate in discussions (Lee, 2016).

Upon more detailed consideration of the different interventions used by institutions that offer English language support, it can be seen that some interventions are more effective than others. One-time workshops, as a lone intervention method, have been found ineffective in helping learners achieve their goals (Amendum, 2014). Although attending workshops has positively influenced students' academic skills, a challenge for international students, especially those from non-Western educational backgrounds, is adapting to the academic and language demands in Australia (Freeman & Li, 2019; Le & McKay, 2018). This requires rapid adjustment to a new learning environment, including learning in a language in addition to their existing languages (L1s) It has been argued that higher education institutions have increased their support for international students in recent years (Arkoudis, 2019; Fatemi & Saito, 2019), indicating a positive trend. Research conducted by Freeman and Li (2019) indicates the advantages of integrating support directly into courses and a gap in academic support across disciplines. Much of this assistance is delivered at specific times throughout the semester, typically involving one-to-one support, occasional workshops, or language support (Ashton-Hay et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2016). These endeavours are primarily structured as a 'supervisory framework' rather than continuous, comprehensive support (Silva et al., 2016). Therefore, a more proactive support system that actively addresses the needs of students every week

has been suggested (Pantelich, 2021).

Face-to-face writing sessions that are conducted in a dedicated learning environment on campus can enhance students' understanding of managing their own learning processes (Lee, 2016). This type of workshop differs from a traditional classroom learning environment as it provides a particular space and time for the tutor and the learner to interact outside the classroom (Lee, 2016). One common issue that researchers have found with such workshops is that tutor dominance is often evident in facilitating interactions with the learner (Lee, 2016). A study in New Zealand explored the efficacy of developing writing interventions with a particular focus on improving delivery of instructions (Jesson & Parr, 2019). These interventions incorporate specific instructional focus such as examining texts, combining sentences, and summarising, as well as writing support through collaboration, planning, setting goals, and providing feedback (Jesson & Parr, 2019). Interventions about writing skills are based on the Inquiry Learning Model (a framework using evidence of the learning needs) and the Learning Schools Model (based on classroom observations and analysis of students' strengths and areas for improvement) (Jesson & Parr, 2019). The purpose of these models is to help academic staff develop effective classroom practices for improving learners' writing skills (Jesson & Parr, 2019). Another intervention model used for improving students' writing skills is the Feedback Cycle Model, where feedback is provided on student writing, starting from comprehension of instructions and requirements, through formative evaluation of assignment drafts, to summative assessment (Warner & Miller, 2015). The purpose of the feedback is to identify the areas where students need to improve and help them achieve better results (Warner & Miller, 2015).

Researchers have also examined whether students can improve their academic performance during their studies by participating in discipline-related academic support sessions (Baik & Greig, 2009). In general, Australian university Language and Academic Skills (LAS) programs support international students through English language and academic skills development, academic writing, and oral communication. In addition, supplementary study skills, research techniques, digital literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication are offered (Ashton-Hay & Chancock, 2023; Gleeson & Davison, 2016). Since LAS often focuses on developing generic English skills, faculties

and colleges in Australian universities have developed their own units for providing discipline-related courses and workshops to advance students' academic skills (Baik & Greig, 2009). Thus, researchers have suggested that students are more inclined to attend extra-curricular workshops when the content is closely related to their field of study and when there is a mediator who can interact with students and provide vocabulary that is tightly related to their discipline, resulting in increased comprehension of the topics (Baik & Greig, Pantelich, 2019; Woollacott et al., 2014).

Other researchers have found that when second language learners interact outside of class, their grammatical accuracy and writing skills may improve (Trofimovich et al., 2013). Two programs have been examined that provide: (i) comprehension-based sessions focusing on reading and listening activities; and (ii) traditional sessions that focus on all four language skills (Trofimovich et al., 2013). The comprehension-based model has been found to be more beneficial for learners than the traditional model owing to the greater repertoire of skills covered in the learning materials (Trofimovich et al., 2013).

In this study, we explored the effectiveness of these interventions provided by the Swinburne College Student Hub. For the ELICOS students, we examined the outcome of the face-to-face skills sessions covering the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For the PQP students, we explored the effectiveness of academic and linguistic interventions, such as plagiarism and similarity score checking, paraphrasing support, proofreading, assistance with materials and task comprehension, referencing formatting, spelling and grammar, and essay and report structure guidance. During the intervention process, academic staff and academic advisers provided timely feedback through appropriately detailed annotations on student assignment drafts.

Tracking student progress to develop effective interventions

Teaching requires undertaking important educational decisions based on context. However, teaching actions do not always produce the same results for different learners (Jesson & Parr, 2019). To improve the effectiveness of teaching practice, professional learning for individual academic staff members and the systems where they work is considered a useful approach (Jesson & Parr, 2019). The limited opportunities for academic

staff to get to know their students in a meaningful way is a challenge within large and diverse classrooms comprised of students with different interests, backgrounds, knowledge and learning styles (Woollacott et al., 2014). The more the academic staff member knows their students and their learning capabilities, the more they will be able to assist them in the learning processes of their students (Woollacott et al., 2014). For this reason, universities and colleges are emphasising the importance of academic staff knowing their students to be able to help them throughout their educational journeys (Woollacott et al., 2014).

While Andrade et al. (2014) found that a large proportion of educational institutions do not track student progress or are not aware of how to track progress, higher education providers in Australia track student progress through regular assessment and feedback, attendance monitoring, and academic advising (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA], 2020). They also utilise learning management systems, student records, surveys, and graduation/retention rates to monitor and support student success, facilitating continuous improvement in educational programs and services for students, including those identified to be at academic risk (TEQSA, 2022). Many higher education institutions engage in monitoring and student performance data, and opportunities for improvement in the utilisation of such data by institutions to proactively identify potential academic issues exist (TEQSA, 2020). These institutions use traditional support approaches where a combination of required coursework and additional optional support such as tutorials, skills centres, and workshops are utilised (Andrade et al., 2014). Less than half of Australian higher education institutions track retention and persistence to graduation (Andrade et al., 2014). This creates the need for institutions to develop methods and systems that source data, identify student needs, and track, and support student progress (Andrade et al., 2014). Predicting student performance using educational data mining techniques has been found to assist educators in creating educational intervention materials and strategies, understanding their students, and facilitating the student learning process (Ragab et al., 2021). Such data extraction can provide early diagnostics about specific learners' areas for improvement or unwanted student behaviours (Ragab et al., 2021).

Depending on the university systems, intervention models can be developed by collaborating with educational ministries or

educational institutions may create their own internal measures and systems to facilitate the learning process in students (Jesson & Parr, 2019). Intervention models focus on understanding the teaching processes and their alignment with the learning outcomes for students (Jesson & Parr, 2019) and for each intervention model continuous evaluations are conducted to examine whether the changed practices have been incorporated as required and whether they contribute to increased learning performance (Jesson & Parr, 2019). It is important that the evaluation model is based on sourcing data about how the student is performing or in a certain area (e.g., writing) and accordingly determining any underperformance by using established measures (Jesson & Parr, 2019). Data sources can include student performance over time, academic staff member and student interviews, classroom observations, and survey questionnaires for leaders (Jesson & Parr, 2019). Based on the data sourced, the underperforming behaviours and the intervention needs are determined by the school in the form of an action plan (Jesson & Parr, 2019).

Since 2011, Post-Entry English Language Assessment (PELA) has been implemented in around 65% of all Australian universities (Wong et al., 2017) and has now been implemented by 69% of Australian universities in some capacity (Veitch & Johnson, 2022). Its purpose is to identify incoming international students enrolled in research degrees who may need English-language support and help educators develop targeted interventions (Tynan & Johns, 2015; Wong et al., 2017). PELA can assist students to become aware of their English language skills, while, from the university perspective, PELA can identify students who are at risk of failing due to the level of their English language skills (Wong et al., 2017). Based on the PELA insights, educators can provide support mechanisms and writing assistance (Wong et al., 2017). However, the accuracy and effectiveness in diagnosing students' needs through PELA have been questioned by researchers, especially in terms of negative results and student frustrations due to the assessment being incoherent with classroom pedagogy and the learning processes (Wong et al., 2017). Therefore, universities and colleges should aim to develop course-related English language support mechanisms, which will help international students improve their skills through discussions and written exercises with specifically focused vocabulary in their area of study (Wong et al., 2017).

The Student Hub's approach is to undertake a targeted view of students' progress through the ELICOS and PQP student trackers. The student tracker is an electronic documentation system where academic staff can flag students and add brief comments outlining any concerns or observations related to declining attendance, reduced engagement, poor output, reduced participation, and poor performance of students. Academic staff can tag each other in their comments to ameliorate any lack of face-to-face conversations about student progress. By enabling a whole department view, the student tracker allows academic staff to see if their co-teachers and those delivering other units are experiencing similar behaviours or trends amongst their students.

Methodology

Research setting

The study was conducted at Swinburne College, a private entity that delivers ELICOS and PQP courses in liaison with Swinburne University of Technology. For the ELICOS cohorts studied in this research project, we used data from all EAP and General English (GE) courses from 2022. These courses are five weeks in length, with most assessments taking place in the final week of each term. EAP courses are divided into A and B modules. Courses in the A modules take on a formative approach to assessments, notably with writing, where students are required to complete writing workshop assessments in weeks two, three, and four. This way, students are provided with ongoing feedback to improve their writing skills and academic staff can identify any perceived areas that may require an intervention. GE courses are also divided into A and B modules. In GE courses, both A and B modules include three grammar skill assessments scattered at regular intervals throughout the term. Macro skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) are formally assessed in weeks 4 and 5 of each term. Interventions take place between weeks one and four of each term. There are nine terms in each calendar year and most students study at least two courses. Most of the interventions were recorded before, between, or after students attended ELICOS skills sessions.

We also observed the intervention data for students studying in the PQP program. Unlike the ELICOS cohorts, PQP students are required to complete four non-award units which are designed to prepare students who have not met the English language or academic entry requirements to commence postgraduate study.

Once complete, the program enables guaranteed entry to the first year of a postgraduate degree. The units aim to combine academic studies and English language training by providing students with the required skills for success in postgraduate study disciplines. These include business administration, marketing, social impact, supply chain innovation, practicing accounting, finance and banking, digital business management, information technology, and media and communications. Operating concurrently with other Higher Education (HE) courses, the PQP program runs twice per calendar year. Each unit has four assessments, except for Applied Academic Literacies, which has five.

The ELICOS student tracker

In our centre, each ELICOS class is taught by at least two different academic staff members. The nature of timetabling means that not all academic staff members encounter each other in the staffroom. As such, face-to-face conversations about student progress do not always occur. For example, a student might display a relatively sudden decline in attendance, engagement, participation, or performance. The same student might fall slightly behind or be absent from a couple of classes or ask for an extension on an assignment. In cases like this, if co-teachers are also experiencing these kinds of behaviours, or if other academic staff are seeing similar trends in the behaviours of their students, then appropriate timely interventions will need to be developed to support the student.

Therefore, our approach is to undertake a department-wide view of our students' progress through the ELICOS student tracker. Academic staff can flag students and add brief comments outlining any concerns or observations. Not only do these tags notify the Student Hub, but they also indicate that the student has been referred for academic support. Academic staff can also refer to these comments when they teach students in subsequent teaching terms, thereby remaining up to date in terms of their knowledge of their students. In the follow-up stages, the Student Hub academic advisors will often contact the academic staff of flagged students for their feedback on the particular student(s) in question. This can help determine whether the student is experiencing difficulties in a particular skill (e.g., reading) or if there are other possible underlying issues at play (e.g., the student is experiencing a health issue). A simple colour code is also used

to identify new, repeating, and conceded pass-receiving students. New students are highlighted in blue, repeating students in yellow, and conceded pass-receiving students in green. The Student Hub academic advisors also record student weekly engagement in the intervention process through ELICOS skills sessions attendance and one-to-one consultations.

The PQP student tracker

Like its ELICOS counterpart, the PQP student tracker relies on effective communication between academic staff. Academic staff still record their observations by making comments related to indicators of risk, including declining attendance, reduced engagement, poor output, reduced participation, and poor performance. Academic staff can also tag other each other in their comments to ameliorate any lack of face-to-face conversations about student progress and are required to add any other useful information in the notes section. Taking a department-wide view, academic staff are able to see if their co-teachers and those delivering other units are experiencing similar behaviours or trends.

Three main aspects of the PQP Student tracker make it unique. Firstly, the ELICOS Student tracker is used for five weeks only, as that is the length of each ELICOS term. When each ELICOS term is complete, the engagement data is recorded. When each new ELICOS term begins, the engagement data is removed, commencing students are added, and recently graduated students are removed. However, the PQP student tracker is used for 12 weeks across the duration of the semester, which is in line with the university's higher education calendars. In addition, PQP students undertake and are attached to four units each semester. This contrasts with ELICOS students, who are only allocated one subject code each term. Lastly, owing to the frequency of terms, the ELICOS student tracker uses colour coding to highlight new, repeating, and late-enrolling students. The PQP student tracker does not require this step as the length of the course is longer and each student is inherently new to the course. A snapshot of the PQP student tracker can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1. PQP Student Tracker engagement snapshot.

Student Name	Student ID	Country	Unit Code	Unit Name	Academic staff member	Flagged?	Reason	Ast#1	Ast#2	Ast#3	Ast#4	Ast#5	Notes
Stu_1	xxx	China	Unit_1	Unit_1	xxx	Yes		Fail					
			Unit_2	Unit_2	xxx								
			Unit_3	Unit_3	xxx								
			Unit_4	Unit_4	xxx								
Stu_2	xxx	Cambodia	Unit_1	Unit_1	xxx	Yes		Fail					
			Unit_2	Unit_2	xxx	Yes							
			Unit_3	Unit_3	xxx	Yes							
			Unit_4	Unit_4	xxx	Yes							
			Unit_3	Unit_3	xxx	Yes							
			Unit_4	Unit_4	xxx	Yes							

The study participants

The study was conducted over 12 months beginning in the first week of the five-week ELICOS term in January 2022. In line with higher education commencement dates, the PQP program was included in the study at the beginning semester one in March 2022. Initially, some of the ELICOS students were offshore and studied in a hybrid learning environment, while in Teaching Period 7, hybrid learning environments ceased to be offered. In the semester one PQP cohort, two students were initially offshore and studied in a hybrid learning environment. These two students then arrived in Australia in week 6 of a 12-week semester mid-semester break and completed the rest of the coursework face-to-face. In semester two, all students were studying face-to-face in this study. The participants are summarised in the table below:

Table 2. Number of participants per course.

Course	**Number of students**	**Countries of origin**
2022 ELICOS	553	Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Russian Federation, Thailand, Timor-Leste, The People's Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, The Republic of China (Taiwan), Türkiye, Vietnam
Semester one 2022 PQP	7	Cambodia, The People's Republic of China, Vietnam
Semester two 2022 PQP	14	Bangladesh, Cambodia, The People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam

Data collection

In this study, each ELICOS and PQP student's academic performance and engagement over the 2022 year was recorded. This was performed using the ELICOS and PQP student trackers. When a student engaged with the intervention process in weeks one to four, an engagement was recorded. For ELICOS students, an engagement was recorded when they attended a skills session, attended a one-to-one meeting, or sought feedback or guidance electronically. Engagements were not recorded in week five as this

is the main assessment window in ELICOS courses. In week five, each student's final course grade was recorded. A snapshot of ELICOS engagement and academic performance in a single teaching term can be seen in Figure 2 in the following text.

Data analysis

From observing each student's final course grade and their engagement in the intervention process, emerging trends were identified, with a particular focus on whether there were more overall pass scores among students who engaged in the intervention process and more fail scores among those who did not engage. The research team also identified academic performance and engagement trends among students who received conceded passes. A similar strategy was adopted when analysing the data from the PQP cohorts. When observing the data, various trends emerged and form the focus of the results section of this paper.

Results

Student performance in ELICOS: Interventions

Table 3 highlights the frequency of ELICOS student engagement in the intervention process. As can be seen, there was significant fluctuation in the number of students in ELICOS programs in each teaching period throughout 2022, particularly in Teaching Period 2 (19 students) and Teaching Period 9 (102 students). These fluctuations were the result of less busy and busier teaching periods as pathway intake deadlines approached. Table 3 shows that approximately 34% of ELICOS students engaged in interventions, while the level achieved (LA) rate for ELICOS courses was 89%. Over 90% of students engaging in interventions passed their ELICOS units, compared to just over 58% who did not engage. Smaller student cohorts in teaching periods correlated with higher incidence of LAs. For level not achieved (LNA), the rate for ELICOS students was around 7%, with approximately 26% engaging in interventions. About 74% of LNAs did not engage in any interventions. Larger cohorts, particularly in teaching periods 4, 7, 8, and 9, saw more LNAs, possibly due to increased variability and resulting in challenges for Student Hub staff in managing interventions. Regarding conceded passes (CPs), the rate for ELICOS courses was slightly above 4%, with a 33% engagement in the intervention process. Overall, the data suggests that student engagement in interventions potentially leads to improved pass rates.

Table 3. 2022 ELICOS level achieved (LA), level not achieved (LNA), and conceded pass (CP) engagement data.

Teaching period	Total number of students in program (per period)	LAs*	LAs who engaged	LAs who did not engage	Number of LNAs**	Number of LNAs who engaged	Number of LNAs who did not engage	Number of CPs***	Number of CPs who engaged	Number of CPs who did not engage
1	48	44	18	26	2	0	2	2	1	1
2	19	19	8	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	59	53	23	30	2	1	1	4	2	2
4	79	70	20	50	7	2	5	2	0	2
5	63	53	27	26	6	3	3	4	0	4
6	38	33	9	24	1	0	1	4	3	1
7	67	62	23	39	5	2	3	0	0	0
8	93	84	30	54	5	0	5	4	1	3
9	102	88	17	71	10	2	8	4	1	3
Total	568	506	175	331	38	10	28	24	8	16

***LA** (Level Achieved) denotes students who passed their unit of study with an overall minimum score of **65%** with no less than 60% in any skill area.

****LNA** (Level Not Achieved) denotes students who did not pass their unit of study.

*****CP** (Conceded Pass) denotes students who passed their unity of study with between **55%** and **59%** in one skill area only (e.g., Reading). This does not include Writing and a **CP** is not possible at an exit point (e.g., EAP 4B into Foundation Studies or UniLink, EAP 5B into undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and the PQP Program).

The intervention sessions were created based on data from previous groups of students to tailor the content to address specific needs identified in those cohorts. Additionally, the interventions are designed to provide each class with opportunities to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, ensuring a comprehensive approach to language support. All students were sent invitations through the university email account to the interventions relevant to their skill level. From terms 6-9, the interventions were held in the Student Hub classroom space once all students were able to return to Australia for ELICOS studies. In addition to attending language skills interventions, academic staff were encouraged to recommend specific students to engage on a one-to-one academic support intervention basis if they were deemed at a higher risk level. Interventions were typically 45 minutes in length, other than Conversation Club (30 minutes). An overview of a typical ELICOS skills interventions timetable can be seen below in Figure 1:

Figure 1. ELICOS skills sessions timetable from Teaching Period 9, 2022.

ELICOS skills sessions TT T922 from November 14, 2022. NOTE: these sessions will be held in XXXX.	
Date	**Session Name**
Monday 10:45am – 11:15am 11:15am – 12:00pm 12:45pm – 1:15pm	 Conversation Club EAP 3 Skills (reading and listening) EAP 3 Writing drop-in 1:1 consultations
Tuesday 10:45am – 11:15am 12:45pm – 1:30pm 1:15pm – 2:00pm 2:45pm – 3:30pm	 Conversation Club Skills Plus (EAP 4A reading and listening) Skills Plus (EAP 4B reading and listening) EAP 4 Writing drop-in
Wednesday 10:45am – 11:15am 1:15pm – 2:00pm 2:45pm – 3:30pm 4:45pm – 5:30pm	 Conversation Club EAP 5A Skills (reading and listening) EAP 5B Skills (reading and listening) EAP 5 Writing drop-in

It is important to note that if a student attended an ELICOS skills intervention, and by extension engaged in the intervention process, it did not mean that they were necessarily categorised as an 'at risk' student. Intrinsic motivation and commitment may have driven this type of engagement to learning, since motivated students often pursue additional opportunities, like skills interventions, to improve their language proficiency. It could also reflect their commitment to achieving their academic goals and preparing for the next phase of their studies, given the tight turnaround between completing ELICOS studies and commencing degree programs.

Engagements were recorded in the ELICOS tracker when a student attended any intervention in any given week. This meant that, for example, if an EAP 3 student attended a Conversation Club and EAP 3 Skills, their engagement was recorded as once for the week, while a student attending EAP 4 Skills once on Tuesday morning also meant one engagement for that week. This approach differs from simple attendance records by focusing on recording engagements based on participation in any intervention within a week, rather than just recording the presence of a student at specific interventions. This approach offers a more holistic view of student engagement, capturing overall participation levels rather than just the frequency of attendance at individual interventions. It also ensured a simpler engagement data collection process, as data was only able to be collected within four weeks in each term, and helped create an engagement snapshot for each term before new terms recommenced every five weeks (Figure 2).

Figure 2. ELICOS Student Tracker engagement snapshot.

Given name	Family name	Preferred name	Student ID	Student email	Country	Course Code	Previous course	Pathway course	Teacher's name	Student flagged/ student referred	Flagged by (teacher's name)	Notes	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total engagement	Last course grade	Final course grade
xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	Vietnam	ENL00012	ENL00012	Foundation Year (Business)	xxxx	Yes	xxxx		ü	ü		ü		3	LNA	LA
xxxx	xxxx		xxxx	xxxx	Cambodia	ENL00012	N/A	Foundation Year (Design)	xxxx					ü	ü	ü	4	NA	CP
xxxx	xxxx		xxxx	xxxx	China	ENL00017	ENL00016	Bachelor of ICT	xxxx	Yes	xxxx				ü	ü	c	CP	LA
xxxx	xxxx		xxxx	xxxx	Thailan	ENL00017	ENL00017	Bachelor of Computer Science	xxxx	Yes	xxxx		ü	ü	ü	ü	4	LA	LA

Student performance in ELICOS: LA, LNA, and CP

As can be seen in Table 3 above, the percentage of ELICOS students who engaged in an intervention throughout 2022 was just under 34%. The LA rate for ELICOS courses throughout 2022 was 89%. Just over 90% of students who engaged in an intervention passed their ELICOS and received an LA in 2022, while just over 58% received an LA without engaging. Generally, the teaching periods with smaller student cohorts had the highest incidence of LAs.

Among the LNA data, the LNA rate for students studying ELICOS courses throughout 2022 was a little under 7%. The percentage of these students who engaged in an intervention throughout 2022 was just over 26%. Just under 74% of students who received an LNA for an ELICOS course in 2022 did not engage in any interventions. As affirmed by teaching periods 4, 7, 8, and 9, when there were more students enrolled in the teaching period, more LNAs were recorded. This is not surprising as larger cohorts generally increased variability and a greater range of results. The increased proportion of LNAs in these terms may also be due to the increased difficulties in managing interventions with larger student cohorts. While students received invitations to the skills sessions relevant to their learning level, ensuring they attend these sessions (and including academic staff in the communication processes involved in the intervention process) is more laborious in comparison to periods with fewer students. Equally, this may help explain why the teaching terms with the fewest total enrolments (teaching periods 2 and 6) had the lowest incidence of LNAs.

Among the CP scores, the CP rate for ELICOS courses throughout 2022 was a little over 4%. The percentage of these students who engaged in interventions throughout 2022 was 33%, while just 67% of students who received a CP in an ELICOS course did not engage in any interventions throughout 2022. The most striking observation to emerge from this data is that when students engage in the intervention process, the probability of their receiving an LA for an ELICOS course is higher. Among the LNAs and CPs, those who did not engage with the intervention process significantly outweigh those who did engage. Therefore, this data indicates that engagement in the intervention process likely results in increased student pass rates. Engagement records also affirm that when students receive an LNA or a CP, they most likely did not engage with the intervention process.

Student performance in PQP units: Interventions

Unlike the intervention process used in ELICOS cohorts, the PQP students were not provided with a regular weekly skills session timetable. Rather, the intervention process began when once a student failed an assignment, which is communicated on the tracker to prevent them from failing the next assignment. Effectively, this intervention is undertaken to prepare students for the next assignment. Some academics also used the tracker to indicate when they believed a student was at risk of failing an assignment, or the unit overall.

As many of the assessments in PQP units were report or essay based, a combination of academic and linguistic interventions was applied to this cohort. Commonly, these included plagiarism and similarity score checking, paraphrasing support, and proofreading. Other students required assistance with materials and task comprehension, referencing formatting, spelling and grammar, and essay and report structure guidance. Student Hub advisers would carefully read student drafts and submissions before providing timely feedback through appropriately detailed annotations.

Student performance in PQP units: Results of interventions

Table 4 highlights when interventions were required for the PQP units in semester 1, 2022. Interventions were required in two of the four PQP units. In Unit 1, two students failed Assignment 1, while one student failed Assignment 1 in Unit 2. However, these students then went on to passing the subsequent assignments following their engagement in the intervention process. One student also failed Assignment 2 in Unit 1 before passing after an intervention. In semester 1, no fails were recorded in Unit 3 and Unit 4. Ultimately, all PQP students passed all their units in semester 1.

Table 4. Semester 1, 2022 PQP engagement data.

Semester 1	**No of students**	**Unit_1**	**Unit_2**	**Unit_3**	**Unit_4**
Assignment 1	total	7	7	7	7
	failed	2	1	0	0
	passed	5	6	7	7
			Intervention		
Assignment 2	total	7	7	7	7
	failed	1	0	0	0
	passed	6	7	7	7
		Intervention			
Assignment 3	total	7	7	7	7
	failed	0	0	0	0
	passed	7	7	7	7
		Intervention			
Assignment 4	total	7	7	7	7
	failed	0	0	0	0
	passed	7	7	7	7
Assignment 5	total	N/A	N/A	7	N/A
	failed	N/A	N/A	0	N/A
	passed	N/A	N/A	7	N/A
Final result	**total number of interventions**	**4**	**1**	**0**	**0**
	passed	**7**	**7**	**7**	**7**
	failed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

As can be seen in Table 5, interventions were required in three of the four PQP units in semester 2. In Unit 1, two students failed Assignment 3. However, these students subsequently passed Assignment 4 following their engagement in the intervention process. In Unit 2, one student failed Assignment 1. Like the previous instance, this student then went on to pass the following assessment after successfully engaging in the intervention process.

Two interventions were administered in Unit 3, while another two took place in Unit 4 resulting in the successful completion of the subsequent assignment. All PQP students passed all their units in semester 2.

Table 5. Semester 2 PQP, 2022 engagement data.

Semester 1	**No of students**	**Unit_1**	**Unit_2**	**Unit_3**	**Unit_4**
Assignment 1	total	14	14	14	14
	failed	0	1	0	0
	passed	14	13	14	14
			Intervention		
Assignment 2	total	14	14	14	14
	failed	0	0	0	2
	passed	14	14	14	12
Assignment 3	total	14	14	14	14
	failed	2	0	1	0
	passed	12	14	13	14
		Intervention		**Intervention**	**Intervention**
Assignment 4	total	14	14	14	14
	failed	0	0	1	0
	passed	14	14	13	14
				Intervention	
Assignment 5	total	N/A	N/A	14	N/A
	failed	N/A	N/A	0	N/A
	passed	N/A	N/A	14	N/A
Final result	**total number of interventions**	**4**	**1**	**0**	**0**
	passed	**7**	**7**	**7**	**7**
	failed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

Discussion

This study found that student engagement with the intervention process, such as attending live language skills workshops, as well as 1:1 academic support session, has a positive impact on their learning processes. These engagements were made visible through the program specific ELICOS and PQP trackers, where academic support staff and academic staff could track student engagement and progress while identifying any additional areas of support. The interventions for ELICOS comprised of language skills sessions conducted at the Student Hub, which is an environment dedicated to study located outside the classroom. This aligns with Heron (2018) and Lee (2016) who emphasised that international students improved their academic skills and English proficiency when attending workshops in a dedicated learning environment on campus. The interventions for PQP students were most effective when implemented as a combination of both academic and linguistic skills assistance, which included plagiarism checking, proofreading, paraphrasing, help with task comprehension, spelling and grammar check, and guidance for writing structure. The positive results of these interventions are in line with the literature where writing interventions have been found to improve student academic and linguistic skills by focusing on sentence structure, text examination and summarising, collaboration with advisers, and setting goals through the learning process (Jesson & Parr 2019). Student advisers providing feedback on the written texts of PQP students, by reading student assignment drafts before submission and providing comments and feedback for improvement, was also found an effective approach in enhancing students' writing skills. This supports the intervention method discussed by Warner and Miller (2015) which helps students improve their writing skills by assisting with task comprehension, and feedback on assignment drafts and assessments.

The development of the student tracker allowed for the reporting of information on the types of interventions needed to help students improve their academic and linguistic skills. Researchers have suggested that educational institutions need to develop methods and systems for sourcing data on students' academic needs and accordingly create educational intervention strategies (Andrade et al., 2014; Ragab et al., 2021). Data recorded in the Swinburne College tracker was related to student performance throughout their studies, students at risk, as well as students who underperform in certain areas such as writing or

in-class discussions. This functionality of the tracker is in line with the model suggested by Jesson and Parr (2019), which was designed to help educators determine the areas of students' underperformance and consequently develop intervention measures. This enables Swinburne College staff and the Student Hub to create specific interventions suited to student needs, as well as to record the student learning progress, refer students who are considered at risk, and cross-check if other co-teachers are experiencing similar behaviours amongst their students.

Developing systems to source data on student progress, needs, and at-risk status, particularly among international students, is recommended for determining appropriate interventions to assist students throughout their learning process. This comprehensive approach is promising for enhancing student outcomes and fostering academic success in diverse educational contexts, not just limited to ELICOS and PQP cohorts. By pooling resources and expertise, institutions can collaboratively develop targeted strategies to address student needs effectively. Continuous data analysis allows for ongoing improvement, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and impactful.

Perceived surveillance and student encouragement

One potential concern with the implementation of tracking and interventions is the perception of surveillance among students. Ethical considerations ensure tracking mechanisms are transparent and respectful of student privacy (Mutimukwe et al., 2022). Communicating the purpose and benefits of these interventions clearly to students and academic staff helps reinforce the primary goals of providing support and enhancing academic success. While tracking student progress is a key component of effective interventions, balancing this with a supportive approach is also beneficial. When tracking is framed as a tool for providing personalised feedback and assistance, students may be more likely to perceive it favourably. By emphasising the supportive nature of these interventions, we can mitigate concerns about surveillance and foster a more encouraging academic environment.

Several best practices are recommended. These focus on the supportive aspects of interventions, clearly communicating their benefits, providing regular feedback, and involving students in the process to enhance their sense of autonomy and control. At an organisational level, allocating resources and facilitating collaboration between academic support services and academic

departments may help ensure that interventions are tailored to meet the unique needs of international EAL students.

Conclusion

This study has investigated intervention methods used for English ELICOS and PQP cohorts at an Australian university and aimed to understand their impact on student academic performance. By investigating the impact of monitoring student engagement needs and progress through a student tracker, the study adds essential knowledge to the field of language education and academic support services. The analysis highlights that student engagement in interventions, particularly in ELICOS courses, can improve pass rates.

Additionally, the importance of proactive approaches to learning should not be underestimated. These initiatives reflect student commitment to academic success and preparation for future studies. Collaboration between academic support services and teaching staff plays a crucial role in administering interventions and fostering student engagement. Interventions in PQP units also contribute to student success, particularly in addressing assignments that a student did not pass and providing necessary academic and linguistic support. The intervention process, initiated when a student did not pass an assignment, can be used to guide students towards successful completion of their units. Overall, the findings emphasise the significance of tracking student progress and implementing intervention strategies collaboratively to ensure improved academic performance.

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