

## Part 4 Appreciating the role confidence plays in international student retention

Confidence is key in many areas of life, including international student success. Yet, unlike academic qualifications or test scores, it's not always easy to quantify or measure. However, **a strong IELTS score can be a powerful indicator of a student's confidence level.** Our research has shown that strong IELTS scores **boost the confidence of international students, which is essential for successful academic performance, mental well-being, and helping students navigate the social landscape of their institution.** As international students hone their communication skills, their confidence in university life and professional settings grows. IELTS--with its focus on real-world communication--empowers students to take ownership of their educational journey and future endeavors.

A comprehensive longitudinal study of international students across 14 U.S. universities over three academic years from Spring 2021 to Spring 2022 investigated the impact of achieving the necessary IELTS score required for enrollment and the impact of IELTS scores on student success during studies (Brunsting, Yu, Smart, & Bingham, 2022). The findings indicated that higher **IELTS scores at the time of university placement were strongly associated with increased confidence in English.**

This heightened sense of **confidence** played a significant role in reducing academic stress, also facilitating better social integration, as students with higher IELTS scores engaged more with local peers and the community (Brunsting, Yu, Smart, & Bingham, 2022).

### Case study: Rajesh's story

Rajesh, a student from Hyderabad, India, knew that he would study in the United States in the future. He performed well on an innovative English language assessment that used artificial intelligence, focusing on general vocabulary and grammar. His high scores helped secure his admission to a university in California.

However, things quickly changed on campus. The university asked students who had submitted scores from the short, AI-based assessment to take their institutional English Language Proficiency test, and suddenly, Rajesh realized he had a significant challenge: he scored well below the average for incoming students. Unwilling to let his dream of studying in the U.S. slip away, he accepted that he needed to improve his proficiency and agreed to enroll in two semesters in the Intensive English Program. After intense study, he took an IELTS test to confirm his progress. During the speaking interview, as he found himself speaking clearly and confidently, he felt assured that he would have a true measurement of his English proficiency.

Returning to his undergraduate studies, Rajesh became more engaged in classes, performed well on assignments, and presented research at conferences. He graduated with honors, demonstrating the benefits of comprehensive language education and the importance of accuracy proficiency assessment for success.

Additionally, the study found that confidence lasted through all three semesters. These results show that overall **English proficiency is not just about meeting entry requirements—it is about empowering students with the confidence they need to say, 'I am ready, I am prepared, and I have got what it takes to succeed.'**

The lasting confidence gained through strong English language skills is a hidden advantage that continues to benefit students throughout their academic journey and beyond.

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