

The Impact of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) on Communication Strategies And Cultural Awareness in Academia

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Abstract: This study examines the role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in academic communication, with particular attention to communication practices, academic success, and cultural awareness in multilingual and multicultural higher education contexts. As English increasingly serves as a common language among students, researchers, and faculty from diverse linguistic backgrounds, understanding its opportunities and challenges has become increasingly important. Data were collected through a 15-item online questionnaire completed by 36 participants from six countries, including undergraduate and graduate students and faculty members. The findings indicate that ELF is widely used for academic activities such as coursework, academic writing, presentations, meetings, and communication with international colleagues. Most participants reported confidence in using ELF and perceived it as beneficial to the quality of their academic work, international publication opportunities, and cross-cultural academic collaboration. However, participants also identified challenges related to linguistic accuracy, academic writing, communication anxiety, and comprehension. Notably, 91.7% of respondents perceived English proficiency as a factor in academic evaluation, while 97.2% supported greater institutional language support for non-native English-speaking scholars. Overall, the findings suggest that ELF functions not only as a means of facilitating academic communication and international collaboration but also as an important factor in shaping intercultural awareness and experiences of linguistic equity. The study highlights the need for inclusive academic practices and institutional support that recognize the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of ELF users.

Keywords: *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Academic Communication, Intercultural Awareness, Linguistic Equity.*

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Introduction

In an increasingly globalized academic landscape, English has emerged as the dominant medium of instruction, research, publication, and international collaboration (Bayyurt & İnal, 2026; Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2022). The growing internationalization of higher education has brought together students, researchers, and faculty members from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, creating a greater need for a shared language through which academic knowledge can be communicated and exchanged. As a result, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has taken on a pivotal role in facilitating communication within multilingual and multicultural academic communities (Jenkins, 2011; Mauranen et al., 2010; Ou et al., 2023; Patel, 2023). ELF enables individuals who do not necessarily share the same first language to participate in academic discussions, exchange ideas, collaborate on research, and engage with international scholarly communities.

Unlike approaches that primarily measure English use according to native-speaker norms, ELF places greater emphasis on mutual intelligibility, communicative effectiveness, and flexible language use (Björkman, 2014). Within academic environments, successful communication therefore depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the ability of speakers to negotiate meaning, adapt their language, and respond appropriately to individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This flexibility is particularly important in international academic contexts, where English users may have different levels of proficiency, communication styles, cultural expectations, and academic experiences. ELF can consequently function as more than a common language; it can provide a communicative space in which individuals from diverse backgrounds interact and contribute to academic knowledge.

The widespread use of ELF, however, also presents a number of challenges. Although English can increase access to international education, research, and collaboration, differences in language proficiency may affect how confidently and effectively individuals participate in academic activities. Students and scholars may experience difficulties related to academic writing, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, presentations, or communication with international colleagues. Furthermore, the strong position of English in academia raises questions concerning linguistic equity, particularly when academic performance or scholarly work is evaluated partly according to English proficiency. These concerns highlight the importance of examining whether ELF provides equal opportunities for participation or creates additional linguistic pressures for individuals who use English as a second or additional language.

ELF is also closely connected to cultural awareness and intercultural communication. Academic communication involves

more than the exchange of information, as language carries culturally embedded meanings, values, expectations, and social practices that may not always be fully transferred across languages (Aksoy, 2026). This is particularly relevant in multilingual academic environments, where individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds may interpret and communicate meaning differently. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of cultural awareness and intercultural competence when individuals use English to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Hossain, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024; Zhang & Lütge, 2023). Therefore, understanding ELF in academia requires consideration of both its linguistic function and its role in shaping communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Your published article supports this statement through its findings that cultural, emotional, religious, and pragmatic meanings may not be fully reproduced when expressions are transferred between languages.

Against this background, the present study explores how the use of ELF in academia influences communication strategies and promotes or challenges cultural understanding among international academic communities. By combining perspectives from existing literature with original data collected through a targeted questionnaire, the study examines participants' use of ELF, their confidence and communication challenges, and their perceptions of its relationship with academic success, international publication, research collaboration, and institutional language support. In doing so, the study seeks to provide a broader understanding of the evolving role of ELF in intercultural academic communication and to consider its implications for linguistic diversity, cultural awareness, and equitable participation in contemporary higher education.

Background

The increasing use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in academic contexts has significant implications for how students, researchers, and faculty members from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds communicate and develop cultural awareness. As higher education becomes increasingly internationalized, English often serves as a shared language among individuals who do not have the same first language. ELF therefore supports academic interaction, knowledge exchange, and international collaboration while requiring speakers to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences. Research on academic ELF increasingly emphasizes communicative effectiveness, flexibility, and mutual understanding rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2011; Mauranen et al., 2010).

The role of ELF is particularly evident in multilingual universities and English-medium instruction environments. The expansion of English-medium education has increased opportunities for international academic participation while also creating linguistic and pedagogical challenges for both students and instructors (Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2022). Björkman (2014) highlights the relationship between ELF, academic communication, and language policy in international universities, while Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović (2025) further demonstrate the importance of ELF within multilingual university classrooms. These studies suggest that successful academic communication depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on speakers' ability to adapt their language and communicate effectively across linguistic differences.

Nguyen et al. (2024) examined the impact of virtual exchanges using ELF on students' linguistic and intercultural competence. Their study included participants from several cultural backgrounds who engaged in online academic discussions. Students reported increased confidence in their communication skills and greater awareness of cultural differences and nuances. These findings suggest that ELF-mediated interactions can provide opportunities for developing both linguistic and intercultural abilities and can help individuals adapt their communication strategies when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Similarly, Zhang and Lütge (2023) investigated how home culture influences ELF communication among Chinese students at a university in the United Kingdom. Their findings showed that cultural backgrounds influenced participants' communication preferences and strategies, particularly in relation to hierarchy and respect, indirect communication, collectivism and individualism, politeness and face-saving, and formal and informal language. These differences also encouraged participants to reflect on and adapt their communication practices. The study therefore demonstrates that ELF is not merely a linguistic tool but also a context in which cultural identities and communication practices can be negotiated.

Cultural awareness is consequently an important component of successful ELF communication. Hossain (2024) emphasizes that effective English communication requires sensitivity to cultural differences in addition to linguistic proficiency. Similarly, Kantamas et al. (2024) highlight the challenges associated with intercultural communication competence when English is used as a lingua franca. More recent perspectives also view intercultural ELF communication as a dynamic process in which individuals continuously negotiate cultural and linguistic differences (Mendes de Oliveira, 2024; Victoria et al., 2025). Such perspectives are particularly relevant to international academic communities, where individuals regularly interact with people whose cultural expectations and communication practices may differ from their own.

Multilingual practices can further support communication in these environments. Ou et al. (2023) examine translanguaging in international higher education and demonstrate how multilingual speakers may draw upon their broader linguistic resources to construct meaning and facilitate intercultural communication. This perspective expands the understanding of ELF by recognizing that effective communication may involve flexible use of multiple linguistic resources rather than dependence on English alone.

ELF also plays an important role beyond classroom communication, particularly in international research and publication. Alhasnawi et al. (2023) demonstrate the importance of English as an academic lingua franca for scholars seeking to participate in international research publication. Although English provides access to broader academic audiences and international scholarly networks, it may also create additional linguistic demands for scholars who use English as an additional language. This raises important questions about linguistic equity and the influence of English proficiency on academic participation and opportunities.

Overall, previous research demonstrates that ELF facilitates academic communication, international collaboration, and intercultural interaction while also presenting linguistic and

cultural challenges. Studies have emphasized the importance of communicative flexibility, intercultural competence, multilingual practices, and awareness of linguistic diversity in international higher education (Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024; Ou et al., 2023). Building on this literature, the present study examines how ELF influences communication strategies and cultural awareness while also considering its relationship with academic success, international collaboration, linguistic challenges, and institutional language support.

Methodology

For this research, the data was collected by conducting a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions. The survey was distributed online via Google Forms.

The questionnaire was designed to explore the impact of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in academic contexts. All the questions except “country of origin”. were multiple choice. The questionnaire is divided into five sections: (1) basic demographic information of the respondents; (2) ELF usage in academic settings; (3) challenges encountered when using ELF in academia;

(4) the relationship between ELF and academic success; and (5) participants' perceptions of ELF within academic environments.

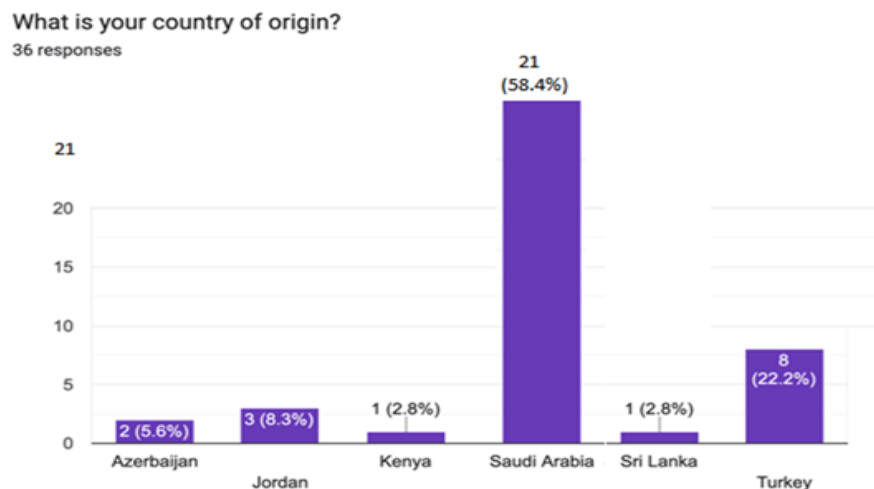
Analysis of survey

Participant Demographics

The study sample consisted of 36 participants hailing from six different countries, revealing a rich diversity in both nationality and academic background.

In terms of nationality, the results highlighted a significant representation from:

- Saudi Arabia (58.4%),
- followed by Turkey (22.2%),
- Jordan (8.3%),
- Azerbaijan (5.6%),
- Kenya (2.8%), and
- Sri Lanka (2.8%).



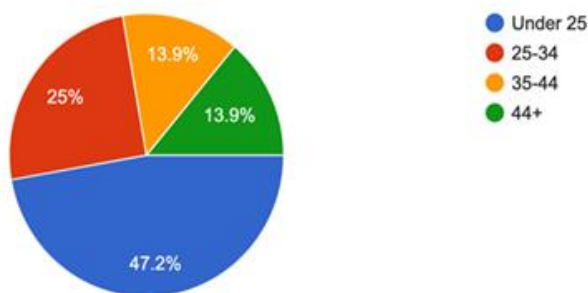
The predominance of Saudi participants could reflect the region's increasing focus on enhancing English proficiency within academic contexts. This distribution may also impact the perceptions and experiences shared regarding ELF, given the varying educational systems and cultural contexts from which these participants originate.

The age range of participants varied widely, with ages spanning from under 25 to over 45 years. This age diversity is reflected in the age distribution:

- 47.2% were under 25 years old,
- 25% fell between 25 and 33 years,
- 13.9% were aged 35 to 44,
- 13.9% were 45 years old and above.

What is your Age?

36 responses



Such a broad age range suggests varying levels of experience with English across different life stages, which could influence their engagement with academic texts and communication.

Educational Background

The educational background of participants further underscores the diversity of perspectives:

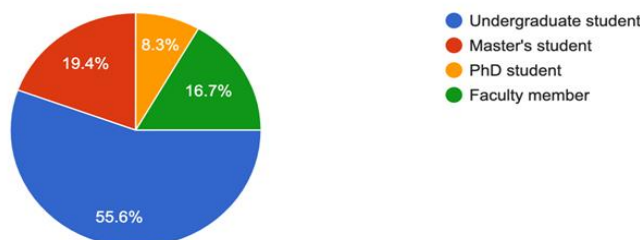
- 55.6% identified as undergraduate students,

- 19.4% as master's students,
- 16.7% as faculty members, and
- 8.3% as PhD students.

This mix presents a spectrum of insights, from those beginning their academic careers to those deeply engaged in research and teaching, providing a comprehensive view of ELF's impact across educational stages.

What is your academic position?

36 responses



Usage of English in Academic Settings

Most respondents reported using English in academic settings, with 91.7% indicating they use it occasionally. This frequency of use is significant and provides a foundation for examining the impact of ELF on their academic performance and communication effectiveness.

When exploring specific academic functions:

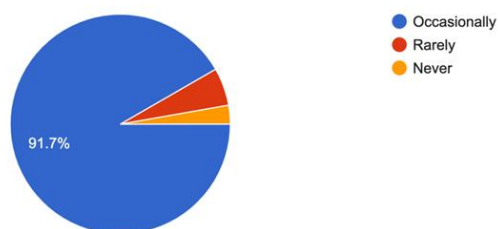
- 63.9% used English for writing academic papers,

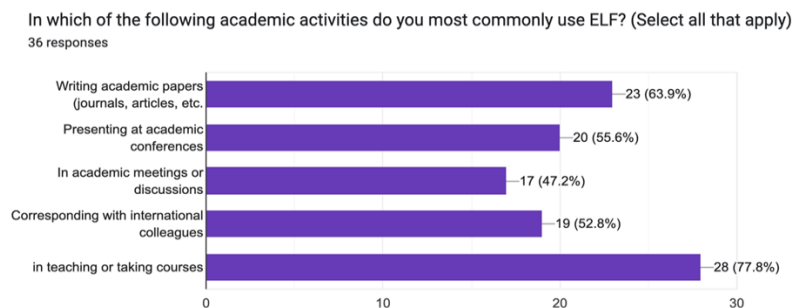
- 55.6% for delivering presentations at conferences,
- 47.2% in academic meetings or discussions,
- 52.8% for correspondence with international colleagues,
- 77.8% for teaching or participating in academic courses.

These statistics underscore the integral role that ELF plays in facilitating various essential academic activities.

How frequently do you use English as a lingua franca (ELF) in your academic work?

36 responses





3.1.4 Confidence and Challenges in Using ELF

The self-reported confidence in using ELF was notable, with:

- 47.2% feeling confident,
- 44.4% feeling very confident,
- and 8.3% holding a neutral stance.

Despite this confidence, challenges persist. Participants identified various barriers:

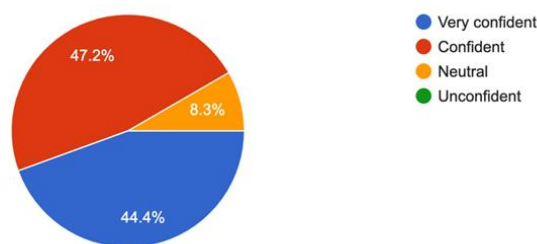
- 30.6% feared making linguistic errors,

- 27.8% experienced anxiety about writing in academic English,
- 22.2% faced difficulties in effective communication during presentations,
- and 19.4% expressed challenges in comprehending academic content delivered in English.

These barriers point to the emotional and cognitive load associated with using a second language in high-stakes settings.

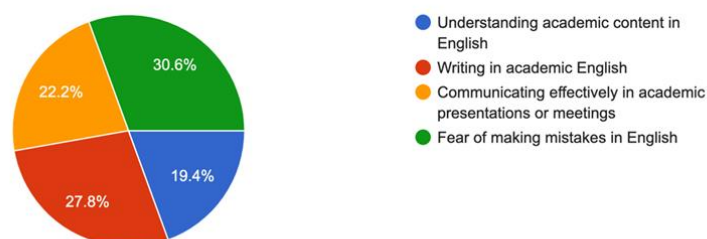
Do you feel confident using ELF in academic contexts?

36 responses



What are the biggest challenges you face when using ELF in academic settings?

36 responses



Perceptions of ELF's Impact

In assessing the impact of ELF on academic writing,

- 69.4% believed it enhances the quality of their work.

In contrast, 19.4% felt it had no significant effect, and 11.1% believed it negatively impacted their writing quality. This discrepancy suggests that while many recognize the advantages of ELF, others may struggle with its complexities.

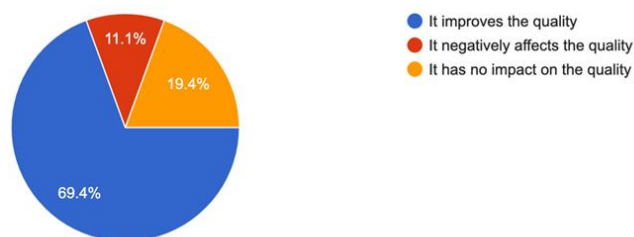
Regarding specific linguistic difficulties, challenges included:

- 27.8% with grammar and syntax,
- 25% in adhering to academic writing conventions,
- 25% struggling with complex expressions or jargon,
- and 22.2% with limited vocabulary.

These findings can inform academic support programs to focus on tailored language training that addresses these specific issues.

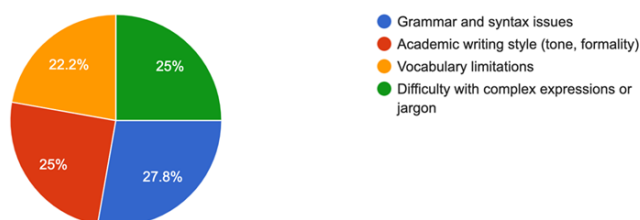
Do you think the use of ELF in academic writing affects the quality of your work?

36 responses



What specific language-related challenges do you face when writing academic papers, projects etc. in English?

36 responses



Importance of ELF for Academic Success

When asked about the perceived importance of ELF proficiency for success in academia:

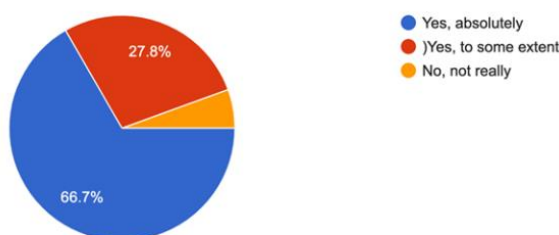
- 66.7% deemed it absolutely essential,
- 27.8% viewed it as contributing to success to some extent,

- and the remaining participants indicated ELF has no significant impact.

Such strong beliefs about ELF underscore its necessity in contemporary academic environments, underlining the importance of linguistic support in educational institutions.

Do you believe that proficiency in ELF is necessary for academic success in your field?

36 responses



Publication and Collaboration

Regarding perceptions on the likelihood of publication:

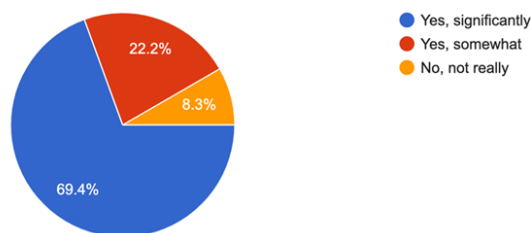
- 69.4% believed their use of ELF significantly increases their chances of getting published in international journals,
- 22.2% noted a moderate influence, while 8.3% indicated no impact.

These perspectives suggest that proficiency in ELF may correlate with academic visibility and opportunities, reinforcing the idea that effective communication is critical for academic advancement.

On the subject of academic collaboration, a significant 86.1% agreed that ELF facilitates collaboration among researchers from different countries. This supports the view that ELF serves as a bridge to connect diverse academic communities, fostering cross-cultural dialogues.

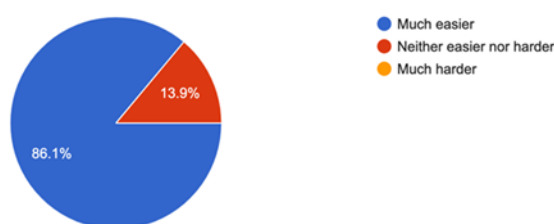
In your experience, does the use of ELF increase your chances of getting published in international journals?

36 responses



Do you think that ELF has made academic collaboration between researchers from different countries easier or harder?

36 responses



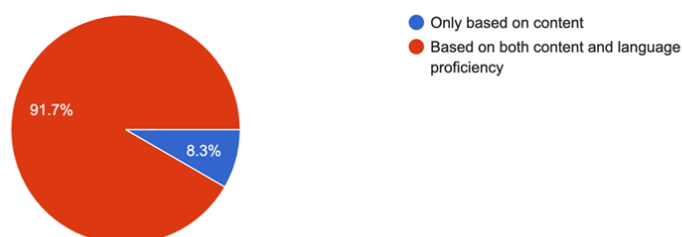
Evaluation and Institutional Support

The role of ELF in evaluation was also evident, with 91.7% believing their academic work is assessed based on both content quality and proficiency in English. This raises critical questions about the fairness of evaluation processes for non-native speakers.

Moreover, there is a compelling call for greater language support, as indicated by 97.2% of respondents advocating for increased institutional resources for non-native English-speaking scholars. Such support is essential in leveling the academic playing field and ensuring that all scholars can fully engage and be evaluated fairly in academic discourse.

Do you feel that your work is evaluated based on the content, or also feel that language proficiency in English is a factor in evaluations?

36 responses



Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) plays a significant and multifaceted role in present-day academic settings. Participants' regular use of ELF reflects its relevance to numerous academic activities, such as teaching, scholarly writing, presentations, meetings, and interactions with international colleagues. Participants also expressed relatively high confidence in their use of ELF, indicating that it supports effective communication and academic participation among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These results align with earlier studies that have identified ELF as an important means of supporting international communication and intercultural interaction within higher education (Nguyen et al., 2024; Ou et al., 2023).

Although participants generally viewed ELF positively, they also identified a number of linguistic and communication-related difficulties. These included challenges with grammar and sentence structure, conventions of academic writing, vocabulary, complex terminology, comprehension, and concerns about making errors. Such responses indicate that individuals who feel confident using ELF may still encounter linguistic difficulties and psychological pressure in academic communication. These difficulties can become more apparent when completing academic writing tasks, giving presentations, or participating in situations that demand clear and effective communication. Thus, being confident in ELF does not necessarily remove the challenges involved in using a second or additional language for academic purposes.

The data also indicate that participants perceive ELF proficiency as closely connected to academic achievement and professional development. Most participants regarded proficiency in ELF as important to their academic success, and 69.4% believed that it considerably improves their opportunities for publishing in international journals. Similarly, 86.1% indicated that the use of ELF facilitates research collaboration among scholars from different countries. These responses show that ELF can expand opportunities for individuals from various linguistic backgrounds to engage with international academic communities, share their research with wider audiences, and develop collaborative relationships with researchers internationally.

The results also draw attention to issues of linguistic equity within academic contexts. A total of 91.7% of participants felt that both the quality of their academic content and their level of English proficiency influence how their work is assessed. This perception indicates that scholars who use English as an additional language may face extra linguistic demands within academic settings. Moreover, 97.2% of participants favored increased institutional language support for non-native English-speaking scholars. This considerable level of support indicates that universities should acknowledge linguistic and cultural diversity and offer suitable academic language resources to their communities. Taken together, the results show that ELF can broaden opportunities for international academic communication and intercultural participation, while simultaneously creating linguistic challenges that call for increased institutional recognition and support.

Conclusion

Overall, these findings reveal a complex interplay between language use, educational background, and the perceived role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in academia. The results demonstrate that ELF plays an important role in facilitating academic communication, international collaboration, and intercultural interaction among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Participants generally expressed confidence in using ELF and recognized its value for academic activities, including writing, presentations, teaching, international communication, and research collaboration. However, significant challenges remain, particularly in relation to

The findings also emphasize the connection between English proficiency and academic opportunities. Most participants viewed ELF proficiency as important for academic success, while 86.1% believed that ELF makes international research collaboration easier. At the same time, 91.7% perceived English proficiency as a factor in academic evaluation, and 97.2% supported greater institutional language assistance for non-native English-speaking scholars. These results highlight the need for educational institutions to provide appropriate language support while developing more inclusive and equitable approaches to academic communication and evaluation.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of both the opportunities and challenges associated with ELF in contemporary academic environments. ELF functions not only as a shared means of communication but also as an important element of intercultural academic interaction. By recognizing linguistic and cultural diversity and providing appropriate support, institutions can help create academic environments in which individuals from different backgrounds can participate and collaborate more

effectively. Future research involving larger and more diverse samples could further investigate the relationship between ELF, academic success, intercultural awareness, and linguistic equity in higher education.

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