

The Benefits of GCI for Business Students

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〈Abstract〉

During the 1990s, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology shifted its focus in university human resource development from an initial emphasis on internationalization to a more robust focus on global competence. In response to this evolving demand, the Bunkyo Global Career Institute (GCI) was established in 2013 with the objective of nurturing globally competent individuals across all faculties in one Japanese university. The GCI program features a unique curriculum designed not only to enhance students' English proficiency but also to cultivate cross-cultural awareness to give students a global perspective. For this paper, a questionnaire survey and interviews were conducted with GCI undergraduate students, aiming to assess the tangible benefits of the program's global competency approach, primarily for business students. The results revealed that GCI business students have a significantly higher English language proficiency compared to non-GCI business students. Specifically, one distinctive English class offered in the GCI program appeared to enhance students' confidence in using the English language, their motivation in learning English, and their interest in other cultures. Additionally, by engaging with teachers from diverse foreign countries, GCI students have enriched their comprehension of various cultures and gained diverse perspectives. These findings suggest that the GCI program offers significant benefits for business students, who reported to be aware of mastering skills and competencies through the program that are required for successful global citizens. In summary, encouraging and supporting students to challenge programs similar to GCI can lead to greater academic success and better preparation for varied career opportunities. However, due to the limited sample size, further analysis is recommended to gain more detailed insights into the effects of the program.

〈Keywords〉

English language, business, GCI, globalization, global competence, motivation, and confidence

1. The Language of Business

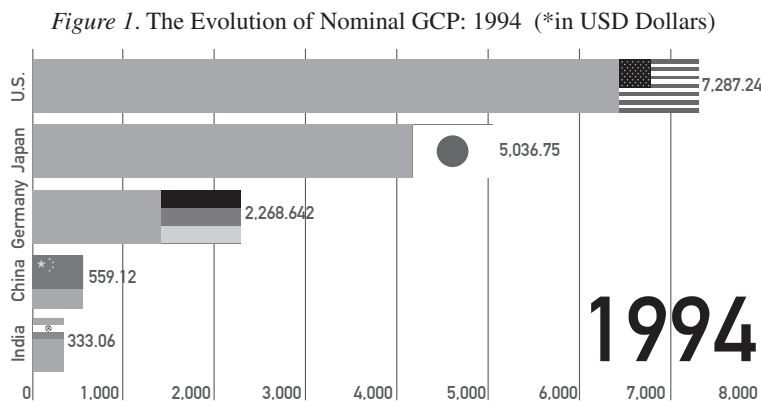
Like it or not, "English is now the global language of business" (Neely, 2012). English serves as a common language for international business communication (Honna, 2008, 2013; Seidlhofer, 2011; Kachru, 1992). Proficiency in English provides businessmen access to a vast global market and more

business opportunities. A survey conducted by IPSOS (2012) showed that more than sixty-seven percent of people who interact with someone in another country use English as the main language of communication; the second most used language was Spanish, at just five percent. Moreover, the survey also showed that those with a high level of household income were the ones with a high proficiency in English. This clearly shows that global business and successful people speak English. In other words, language is a form of power and status in the capital world (Bourdieu, 1991) and English is the language that wields the most power.

English is not only the language of business, but also the language of information. According to Bhutada (2021), the most common language used on the internet is English, which is used by more than sixty percent of the top 10 million websites. Second place is Russian, with less than nine percent; the third place is Spanish, at four percent. The prominence of English on the internet as the language of information highlights that English is a vital tool for accessing global information and opportunities.

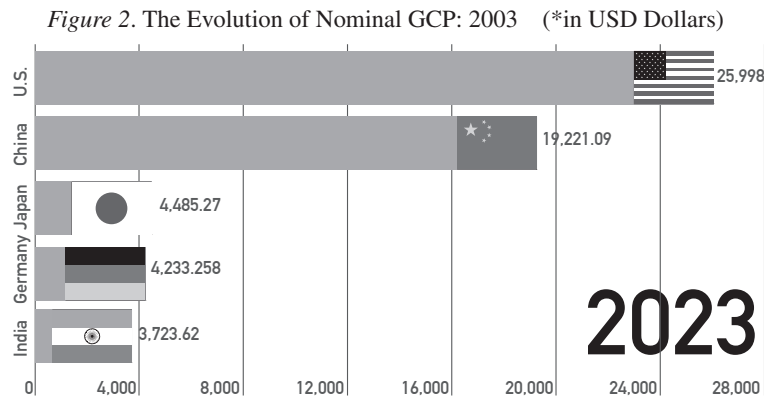
2. The Necessity for Embracing a Global Vision

The Meiji era marks the beginning of Western influence in Japan. After reopening to the outside world, Japan began to view Western countries as progressive models to emulate. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics had a significant impact on Japanese society because it marked the country’s emergence from extreme post-war poverty into a more prominent international role (Barbosa, 2010). For 42 years (1968 - 2010) Japan held the world’s second-largest economy, following the United States (see figure 1).



Source: The World’s Top 5 Largest Economies in 2026, 2023

However, in 2010 the positions changed. Today, while the U.S. is still leading the world economy, China has a strong second position and Japan has fallen to third (Hatwiko, 2023) (see figure 2).



Source: The World's Top 5 Largest Economies in 2026, 2023

This shift in economic rankings has significant implications for Japan's future, particularly in light of its aging population. According to National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2023), it is anticipated that Japan's population will decline by 30% by the year 2070, with individuals aged 65 and older expected to comprise approximately 40% of the total population. With a rapidly aging and declining population, it is essential for Japanese individuals to collaborate effectively with foreign co-workers, meaning that English will play a crucial role in various domains such as business, research, higher education, as well as science and technology in Japan (Morita, 2017).

Rakuten was one of the first Japanese companies to embrace English as a tool for business growth, requiring a TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) score over 800 for new hires (Rakuten, 2023). Not only Rakuten, but many other Japanese companies are switching to English as the official language (Ishiyama, 2023). Some Japanese universities are also adopting the *englishinazion*¹ era. The Institute of Science, which will be established by the merger of Tokyo Institute of Technology and Tokyo Medical and Dental University in 2024, plans to make English its second official language. The aim is to enable foreign faculty members and international students to work within the university without difficulty (Yomiuri Shinbun, 2023a).

In summary, the adoption of English as a primary or secondary language in various domains in Japan underscores the necessity of recognizing the importance of global communication and collaboration. This shift is not only driven by demographic challenges but also by the need to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly interconnected world. Embracing internationalization is crucial for Japan's continued growth and success. Universities and educational institutions play a key role in preparing students to thrive in a globalized world. This includes not only language proficiency but also cultural competence, international collaboration, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

¹ Term used by Rakuten (2023).

3. The Reality of English Education in Japan and The GCI Program

3.1 English Education in Japan

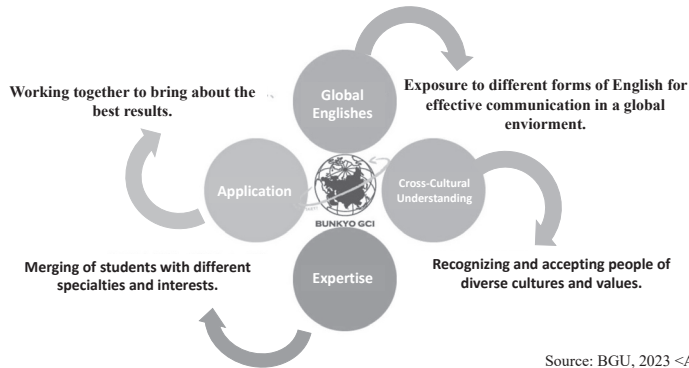
English is seen as a subject of major importance by the Japanese government, and, since April 2011, has been taught in all elementary schools across Japan (MEXT, 2008; 2013). Despite the government efforts to improve the English proficiency of Japanese students, the population remains stubbornly bad at learning it (Morgolis, 2020). The ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) released the results of the National Achievement Test for 2023, which was conducted in April of the same year. In English, which is for third-year junior high school students, the average correct response rate for the speaking test was only 12.4%. This result shows that the students do not have sufficient ability to express themselves in English (Yomiuri Shinbun, 2013b). This shows that there is a need for programs with different perspectives.

In other words, while the Japanese government has made significant efforts to try to promote English education, challenges remain in achieving high levels of proficiency. These challenges emphasize the need for innovative and effective approaches to language education, with a focus on practical communication skills, to better prepare Japanese students for a globalized world.

3.2 The GCI Program

Bunkyo Global Career Institute, hereafter GCI, is a virtual institute that brings together students from four different departments (the Faculty of Foreign Studies, The Faculty of Business Administration, the Faculty of Human Studies, and the Faculty of Health Science Technology) in Bunkyo Gakuin University to study together and to inspire one another. By allowing students with different strengths to work with each other, students develop new ways of thinking and learn new approaches to solving problems that are outside their areas of expertise. The program has four pillars (see figure 3) that promote advanced English, exposure to different cultures and values, and international career opportunities.

Figure 3. The Four Pillars of GCI



Here it is important to emphasize that GCI was designed to attract higher caliber high school students and to give them a challenging curriculum to improve students’ English proficiency, but also embraces an international perspective by offering special classes on international business and unique opportunities to study abroad.

Two of the unique opportunities offered to GCI students are the freshmen summer study abroad programs and overseas internships. Unfortunately, the COVID years suspended the overseas programs, but as of the summer of 2023, the study programs in Thailand and Malaysia were open again. These language programs are about a month in length and teach students about the culture of the countries they visit, as well as have them work with non-native English teachers from those countries. With luck, China and the Philippines will be options again so that there will be four countries that freshmen GCI students can choose from in summer of 2024.

Every English, including those Englishes spoken in the “core Anglosphere” (the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), has unique characteristics. However, the English taught to the GCI students and used by the GCI teachers is “plain English”, a term meaning that idioms and figures of speech are avoided to make the English as clear and easy to understand as possible.

4. The GCI Business Students

The data used in this study was collected from current GCI students at Bunkyo Gakuin University between August and November 2023. The main data collection procedures were a written questionnaire in English, oral interviews, and TOEIC scores collected by BLEC (Bunkyo Language Education Center). The written questionnaire contains six questions about subjective experience and two open questions about one required GCI English class. Here it is important to explain that questions about subjective experiences involve participants’ beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and opinions (Frackfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p.321). Questions about subjective experiences asked for students’ opinions towards

their experience in the course, and their level of confidence in speaking English.

Regarding the oral interviews, they were mainly conducted in Japanese. Although the main language was Japanese, some participants felt more comfortable in using English and sometimes mixed Japanese and English languages. The main questions in the interview were questions about why students joined GCI, the importance of GCI for business students, and students' experience studying abroad.

The data collected was analyzed through interpretative work on interviews conducted with students. All oral interviews were transcribed using "word-for-word" transcription (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 26). In other words, each utterance was transcribed as it naturally occurred in a spoken interaction in order to preserve non-standard utterances, repetitions, and code-mixing. Non-parametric tests were applied to analyze the non-parametric data obtained from the questionnaire.

4.1 Profile of GCI Business Students

The students who participated in this study are current GCI students of second, third and fourth year, with a total of forty-six students who answered the written questionnaire. Among the forty-five participants, five second-year business students were interviewed face-to-face, as shown in table 1. The five students randomly volunteered to be interviewed by the researchers. These students have been given fictitious names (listed below) to protect their anonymity.

Table 1. Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Enrolled Year</i>	<i>Studied Abroad</i>	<i>Observations</i>
Steve	2 nd year	No	Mixed English and Japanese during the interview.
Yuri	2 nd year	Yes	Spoke only in Japanese.
Ton	2 nd year	Yes	Spoke only in Japanese.
Mara	2 nd year	Yes	Mixed English and Japanese during the interview.
Riana	2 nd year	Yes	Spoke mainly in English during the interview.

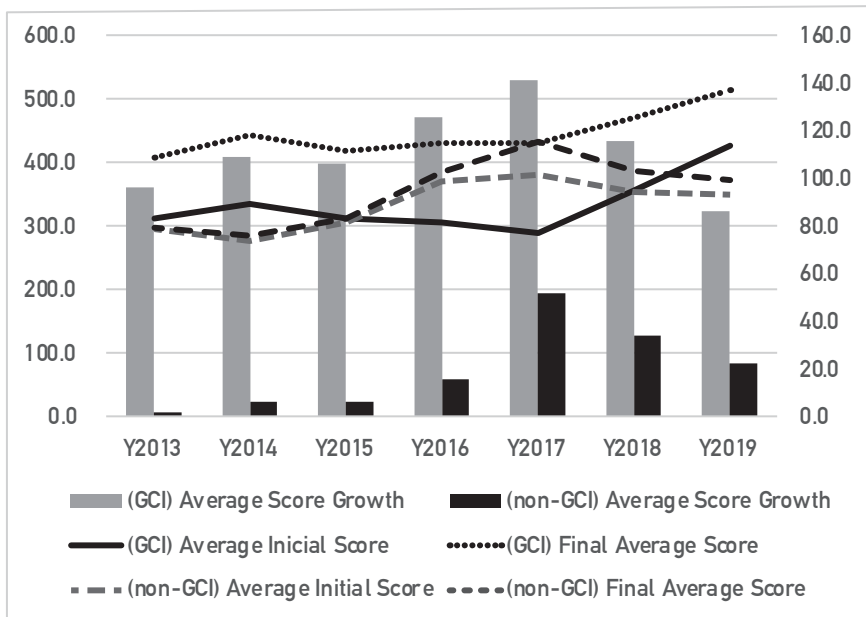
4.2 TOEIC Score

Figure 4 displays the average TOEIC scores of GCI and non-GCI graduates from the business department between 2013 and 2019. Overall, GCI students outperformed non-GCI students, indicating that GCI students possess significantly higher English proficiency compared to their non-GCI peers. As mentioned in previous sections, English is the language of business, and mastering it will be crucial for the development of Japanese businesses and the acquisition of better job opportunities for GCI students. During the interview Steve seemed really aware of the benefits of GCI program and how it will help him to have more advantages compared to other students.

今後、その英語が大事になってくる中で、経営学部として経営の知識・ノウハウを持ちながら、その外国語っていうか、英語とかを自然に使えるっていうのか、やっぱり、その会社に所属していながら、私は外国語がベラベラ話せますっていう人と、経営の知識もありながら英語も話せますという武器があるから。それは経営学部のGCI生として、なんか、とてもいいところだと思います。(Steve)

In the future, as English becomes increasingly important, business students are expected to not only possess knowledge and expertise in business but also to naturally use foreign languages, specifically English. Even while being affiliated with a company, having the ability to speak multiple languages fluently, including English, is an advantage. I think it's a great asset to be able to say, "I can speak foreign languages fluently," while also having expertise in business. This is why I believe being a GCI student in the Faculty of Business is truly advantageous (Steve) (Free-translation).

Figure 4. TOEIC Score Comparison of GCI and non-GCI Student Graduates from the Business Department: 2013-2019

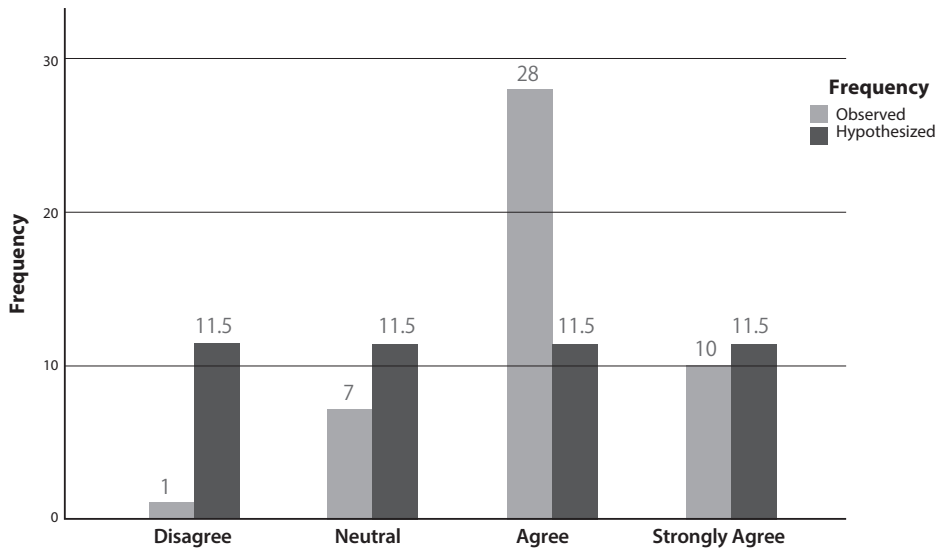


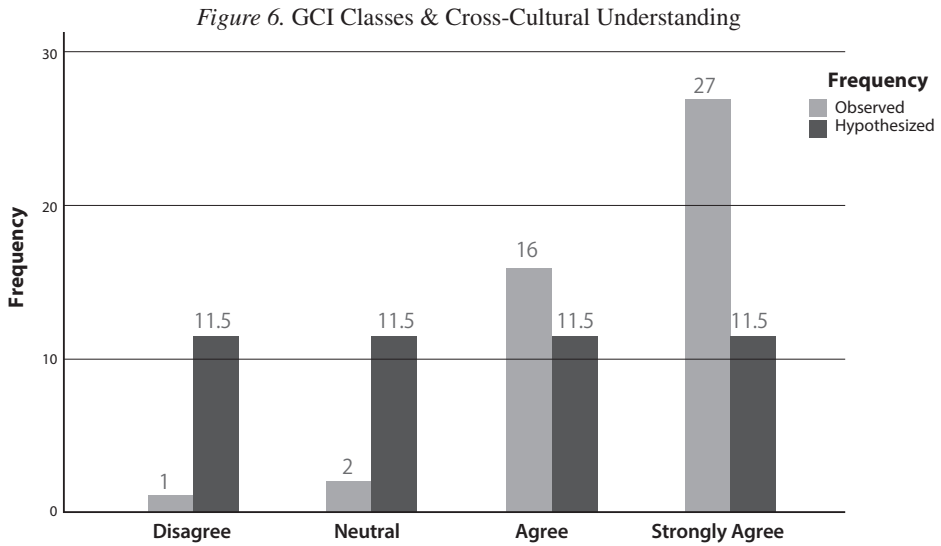
4.3 Students Opinions Towards English and Global Perspectives

Figure 5 shows the distributions of confidence in speaking in English. The informants were asked about their level of confidence when using the English language. Overall, the majority of the informants agreed with the sentence “I feel more confident in using English now”. During the interview, Riana mentioned that when she was a freshman, she lacked confidence in speaking English. She even admitted to feeling so nervous that she could not make eye contact with her foreign teachers during some classes. The interesting fact is that Riana did her interview almost entirely in English. Yuri also mentioned during the interview that despite he was not interested in studying English at the beginning, after taking GCI English classes he noticed improvements in his English which motivates him to keep studying more. The chi-square results also confirm the fact that after taking GCI English classes, students are more likely to feel more confident in using their English than non-GCI students ($X^2 (3, N =46) = 35.217, p <0001$).

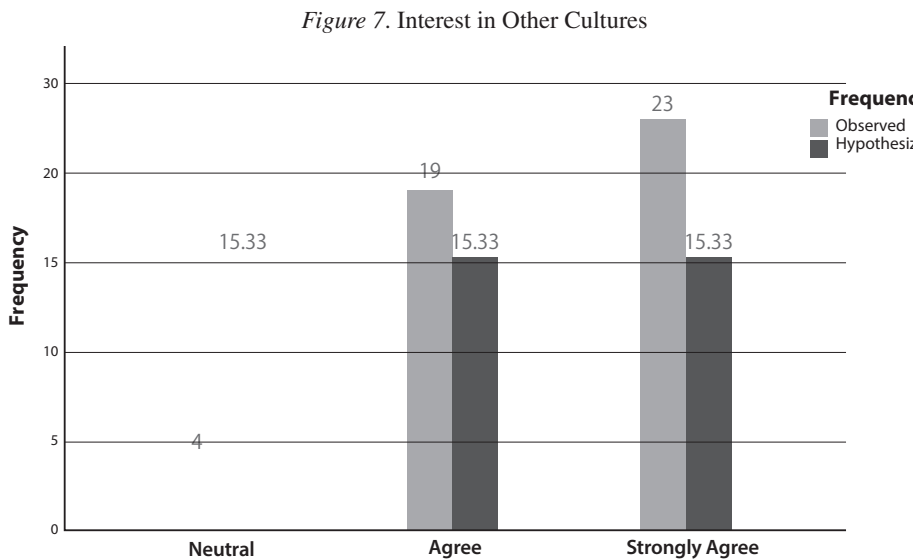
Figure 6 displays the level of cross-cultural understanding among the participants. The results show GCI classes indeed help students to be aware of different cultures and values. During the interview, Steve and Riana mentioned that having teachers from many parts of the world and being able to learn about these teachers’ backgrounds piqued their curiosity and broadened their knowledge of the world. The chi-square results also confirm the fact that students are more likely to better understand other cultures after taking GCI classes $X^2 (3, N =46) = 40.087, p <0001$.

Figure 5. Confidence in Using English





Finally, Figure 7 displays the level of curiosity toward other cultures. As the results clearly indicate, GCI students become more interested in other cultures than non-GCI students. GCI students have the opportunity to study abroad in their first year, and in their second year they are required to take a course called “Global Englishes”, which exposes students to six different countries and teachers from those countries who have various English accents. This exposure to other cultures clearly stimulates students’ curiosity about different cultures, values, and ways of thinking. The chi-square results also confirm the fact that students are more likely to be more curious about other cultures after taking GCI classes $X^2(3, N=46) = 13.087, p = 0.001$.



4.4 Career Perspectives

GCI's career program is designed to help GCI students develop into global human resources. As a required course in the second semester of the first year, the Global Stage class invites guest lecturers who are globally active and successful in various fields to share their experiences. These people – who have a wide variety of careers including businessmen, chefs, and musicians – talk about their lives from their education to their current work situation. After listening to these lectures, students discuss the life of global human resources through group work. By the end of the course, students define their own individual global human resources.

After lectures on the fundamentals of business administration and business theory, students work on case studies of global companies in the first semester of the second year. GCI career curriculum is designed to increase students' interest and awareness of global careers and participation in overseas internships.

GCI's overseas internship program is offered twice a year in the summer and spring. Students can participate from the summer break of their sophomore year. The program offers work experience in a variety of industries, including business and non-profit organizations, with a focus on Asia. GCI's career curriculum is based on a three-year mid-term PDCA cycle approach, with the goal of smoothly linking students' learning and experience to job hunting. The first step is for students to envision and plan their careers through lectures (Plan). In the second step, students participate in an overseas internship abroad (Do), reflect on the experience, redesign their career (Check). In the third step, the student implements the plan (Action).

Overseas internships are seen as crucial to the effectiveness of the PDCA cycle. Internships in Japan have a strong corporate social contribution aspect as a part of career education. On the other hand, overseas internships are based on the premise of future employment. Therefore, students who participate in such foreign internships return to Japan with more practical work experience, which may increase their motivation and ability to learn and improve their vocational readiness.

Post-graduation, GCI students start working at Japanese companies much the same as the graduates from other faculties at Bunkyo Gakuin University. However, GCI students tend to be placed in departments related to foreign countries or in positions that utilize language skills. However, a few students have found employment in foreign companies or foreign-affiliated companies. In the future it is hoped that students will pursue jobs overseas, especially those linked to the university established foreign internships.

GCI's career curriculum and programs are constantly being assessed to better develop the program. Currently a survey of graduates is being conducted to discover ways to improve career options for the GCI students who have job hunting in their future.

5. Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance of GCI for business students. GCI is a pioneering program designed not only to enhance students' English proficiency but also to foster cross-cultural understanding, thereby nurturing individuals with a global perspective. As shown in Figure 4, it is evident that GCI students have higher English proficiency when compared to non-GCI students. Riana mentioned during her interview that studying English in the GCI classes is fun and not a burden, as perceived by many non-GCI students. Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7 also provides compelling evidence of the positive impact of GCI on business students. Figure 5 demonstrates a notable increase in students' confidence in speaking English after taking GCI English classes. Figure 6 and Figure 7 reveals that GCI classes significantly contribute to fostering cross-cultural understanding, as evidenced by Steve and Riana's personal experience, the exposure to teachers from diverse backgrounds sparks curiosity and broaden students' knowledge of the world.

English's dominance in business and information is not just a matter of convenience; it represents a fundamental shift in the global landscape. Mastery of the English language and cross-cultural understanding is not merely a skill; it is the gateway to a world of possibilities, transcending boundaries and connecting people and businesses in an increasingly interconnected global environment. English has indeed become the universal bridge in our modern world, connecting individuals, organizations, and ideas on a global scale. Encouraging and supporting business students to challenge academic programs like GCI will help them to have academic success that will lead to better career opportunities. Students are aware learning English is essential for business students. Yuri and Steve also mentioned that mastering English will help to have better career opportunities.

Regarding the drawbacks of the study, we are aware that future studies and analysis are necessary in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between students' academic, professional, and personal success and the GCI program. To address this, we plan to conduct follow-up interviews with former GCI business students. These interviews will help us gain deeper insights into how we can enhance the program to align with the evolving demands of the globalized world and meet the specific needs of our students.

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