

## **Language Barriers Encountered by Georgian Students While Studying Abroad**

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### **Abstract**

Language barriers encountered by Georgian people while studying abroad is highly prevalent in university students and has a negative impact on their overall success. Despite the numerous articles written on why studying abroad is important, there is a scarcity of studies addressing language dissonance, perceived stress, misunderstandings, and depression severity. Therefore, this paper aims to raise the awareness of Georgian students about the problems connected with the English language that are either due to lack of proficiency or difference between cultures. The quantitative study, which was conducted with 44 university students in Georgia, examine students' language usage experience abroad. In particular, the research dealt with the problems of understanding various English accents, which was their main concern, pronunciation difficulties, and limited fluency in informal conversations. By examining these areas, the study revealed understanding and addressing cultural, social, and linguistic differences is crucial. Additionally, the article includes useful suggestions for enhancing language learning settings that would solve issues and facilitate the familiarization of Georgian English language learners overseas. It also highlights the importance of readiness, because in most cases, merely knowing the language is not always a guarantee of a successful exchange year.

*Keywords:* language barriers, cultural differences, Georgian students, study abroad

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## **Introduction**

Cogo (2009) states, English has become an international language worldwide and many people use it as a Lingua Franca. Georgia is no exception, despite Russia's long-term domination over this country, English has been successfully occupying the status of a second language for Georgian people for the last decades, and demand for it has begun in services and educational institutions. Crystal (1997) also argues that in order to better master the language, many people go to English-speaking countries to deepen their knowledge and have a spiritual connection with the language. Traveling to foreign countries is one of the interesting ways to master the language and overcome the language barrier. The number of Georgian students who go abroad for education has increased. For them, a high-quality experience is a priority and they are ready to adapt to an environment where the Georgian language is not primarily used, they have to use English for communication, and the numerous language barriers emerge. There are many causes, however, the most significant is the intercultural difference that causes clashes. Such inconveniences delay the process of progress.

## **Literature Review**

### **Factors Associated With Language Barriers for Georgian Students**

The main target of this research is Georgian students. Georgians have been fighting for independence, and it is very important for this country to preserve the purity of its language, therefore, Georgians value the language of their country as well as others'. Among the Caucasian people, Georgians are distinguished by their desire for change and transformation. The number of Georgian students studying abroad rose by 239 in the 2023 academic year, totaling 723 (Durrani, 2023). Georgia participates in the globalization process, in order to enter the European Union, meeting the level of education is necessary along with other basic values. Despite the fact that Georgia joined the Bologna Process which helps the countries create more compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe, many people go abroad for a better education to learn English as a second language because this level of education is not sufficient in Georgia (Lezhava, 2016).

### **Georgia's Educational Path**

Georgia has always served as a link between the East and the West. Trade routes that connected the various regions of Georgia throughout history carried a variety of cultural traditions with them. The Georgian language was undergoing changes, although this was largely due to the conquering Turkey and Russia (formerly known as the Soviet Union). Their influence over the century was quite large and bitter, the impact of Turkey as an eastern country on the vocabulary of the language is clearly felt, and the Georgian language still has dozens of basic words of Turkish origin. A recent study conducted by Brown (2008) concluded that the annexation of Russia to a certain extent caused great damage not only to Georgian culture, but also to the language. While the world began to say "thank you" because English became the Lingua Franca, the phrase Spasibo (in Russian "thank you") still existed in Georgia.

## Unraveling Sentence Structure

All languages are different from each other, therefore it is not fair to compare them directly on the basis of anything, if they have the same root, it is much easier to investigate the common signs, but there are frequent cases when the signs different from the native language become confusing and cause many difficulties in language acquisition. One of the studies conducted by Totibadze (2018) from the State University of Georgia with 22 representatives of four countries reveals many interesting facts concerning language dissonances. Georgian, Lithuanian, Mandarin, and Hindi speakers who learned English as their L2 or some of them had very little knowledge participated. The research resulted in that some of them, for example, Lithuanian felt very comfortable, because the alphabet was the same and grammatical structures did not create obstacles, while Mandarin said that the presence of their first language made it tremendously harder to learn the language as in their source language everything happened upside down (Totibadze, 2018). Georgians admitted sentence structure complexities and cited the example. Since in Georgian subject comes first, then the object and the verb, it is unusual for them to formulate word combinations correctly in English. I meet friends should be said respectively in English but if this sentence is directly translated “Me megobrebs shevkhvdi” in Georgian seems to be “I friends meet” in English. Henceforth, despite the fact that the Universal Grammar (UG) proposed by Chomsky (1986) plays an extremely big role in the language acquisition process, sometimes it is more difficult to find the problem, address and solve it. Presumably, Georgian students, who do not have a high level of English competence, in conversational dialogues first arrange sentences in their native language and accordingly translate in the same order, which in some cases is a prerequisite not only for confusion but also for lagging behind the topic.

## Calque Errors

Along with all the grammatical nuances, calque, functions as a loan translation of words, and creates the most fatal linguistic clash in conversation. Demetradze (2018) states, that Georgian and English belong to different families, therefore words sometimes do not mean the same thing rationally and are not used in that context, as it happens in L1. For instance, frequent errors of Georgian learners are connected with the usage of “what” instead of “that”. e.g. “Everything what I have read” (cf. Georgian ყველაფერი, რაც წაკითხედი მანქანს “k’velaferi, rats ts’akitxuli maqvs/). This error is caused due to the fact that Georgian “რა”/ra/”რაც”/rats/ are the correlates of the English “what” (Demetradze, 2018). The term “ერთ-ერთი” (/ert-erti/), which means “one of them,” is followed in the Georgian language by a single noun. This is not the case of English. As a result, Georgian students frequently say “one of the girl” rather than the proper form “one of the girls” because of the negative interference of this structure into English. Furthermore, the construction “as for” is often associated with common blunders. Due to the influence of Georgian, students often translate the Georgian equivalent “რაც შეეხება” (rats šeexeba) word for word and begin a new topic with “what about.” (What about George, he was busy). This common mistake made by students who finish discussing a topic and start a new paragraph in front of a native speaker causes confusion. Another significant cause of mistakes is the phrase “That’s why.” Georgians speak “და ამიტომაც” /da amitomats/ in comparable situations. The word “და” /da/ has an English correlation of “and,” whereas the word “ამიტომაც” /amitomats/ has an English correlate of “because.” As a result, the English translation of the provided construction is “and because.” As a result, the following mistakes are common: “I was sick, and because I didn’t go to school,” instead of saying the proper phrase “I was sick, that’s why I didn’t go to school.”

## Idioms

Another complexity international students face is understanding idioms and phraseology, which are integral to daily English conversation (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). “A Chip on Your Shoulder: - does not necessarily mean that a piece of something has fallen on someone's shoulder. “To have a chip on one's shoulder” means a grudge left due to a past failure, which a person remembers for years. A Georgian student can come across an idiom of which the counterpart does not have an analogue in its own language, but it has a different wording. A clear example of this is “Black Sheep”, which refers to a different person in a negative way. There is a similar analogue in the Georgian language, which is represented in the form of a red egg. Ideologically, these two sayings are similar, the sheep are mostly white, although there is also a black one in the flock, and the color of the egg is defined likewise, the red egg in the Georgian language has a more religious meaning, although the ideas are absolutely the same. Moreover, it is difficult for a newly arrived student to perceive “breaking a leg” as a symbol of success, which in fact is different from its real meaning (Idiom: Break a leg- translated as wish you good luck!) The idiom “Cost an arm and a leg” which means extremely expensive is difficult to guess as in many cases there is a low logical connection between the words. Some idioms have folk roots, nevertheless, there are also a lot that are biblical, mythical, and author-specific. Understanding the literature, customs, and cultures of particular nations will enable an exchange student to converse effectively with a native speaker. In this sense, an idiom serves as the key that opens doors to other people's country cultures, histories, customs, and beliefs (Medved et al., 2013). Lee (2014) emphasizes that when learning a language, it is important to communicate with a native speaker before departure, since everyday English differs significantly from literary or general English.

## Participants

Forty-four students took part in this research. They were asked to recall what linguistic barriers hindered the process of learning and communication in their exchange year. Individuals who had access to the survey link were invited to participate and their contribution to the research is invaluable. Participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

## Methodology

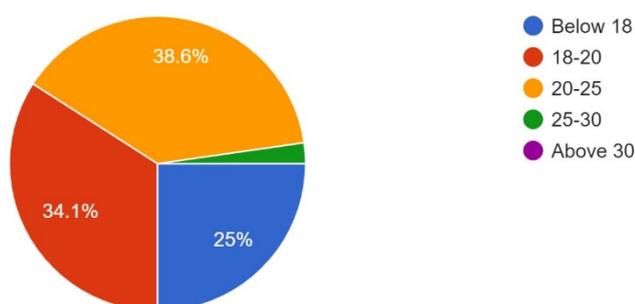
The survey conducted in this study aimed to gather information on what language barriers Georgian students encountered and how they addressed problems. Nowadays, many students go to study both in the USA and Great Britain, as well as in other European countries where their communication language is English. When the language is not native and one does not have much practice in communicating with the natives, barriers naturally arise that strain relationships and create an inconvenient situation. The survey consisted of questions related to gender, age, proficiency of English, skills that were challenging, language hindrances, acceptance of them, frequency of problems, effects of cultural differences, factors that helped them overcome problems, impact and result of obstacles within situational examples of theirs. That is why this survey was divided into several parts that each addressed various aspects of the research questions. This method makes it more straightforward to spot patterns, find connections, and come to logical conclusions. The usage of multiple-choice grid, open-ended, and multiple-choice questions offered a strategic approach to gathering and evaluating numerical and quantitative data to understand students' perceptions of language hindrances that come along with immigration.

### Findings

Out of the 44 respondents, the majority of them were identified as female (81.8%), while a certain number were male (18.2%). They all indicated that they had been abroad for education purposes. Regarding the age distribution as it is shown in the chart, the survey predominantly captured responses from participants in the age group of 20-25 (38.6%). Students aged 18-20 (34.1%) below 18 occupy 25%. 2.3% is the number of people under the age of 25-30. There were no respondents from the age groups above 30.

**Figure 1**

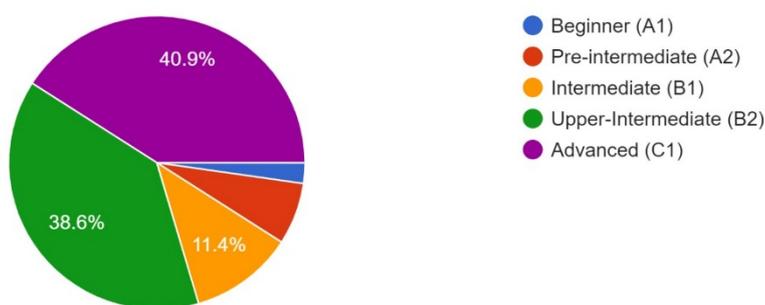
*Respondents' Age During Their First Visit to an English-Speaking Country*



The responses of the participants regarding their level of language proficiency were quite interesting, as 40.9% indicated Advanced (C1) when they first went to study abroad. For a person at this level, facing many types of challenges in learning and life cannot be many and difficult to overcome, but their responses were particularly meaningful and realistic. The results revealed that 38.2% of the participants were at Upper Intermediate level (B2), followed by Intermediate (B1) at 11.4%, Pre-intermediate (A2-B1) at 6.8%, and 2.3% were at the Beginner level.

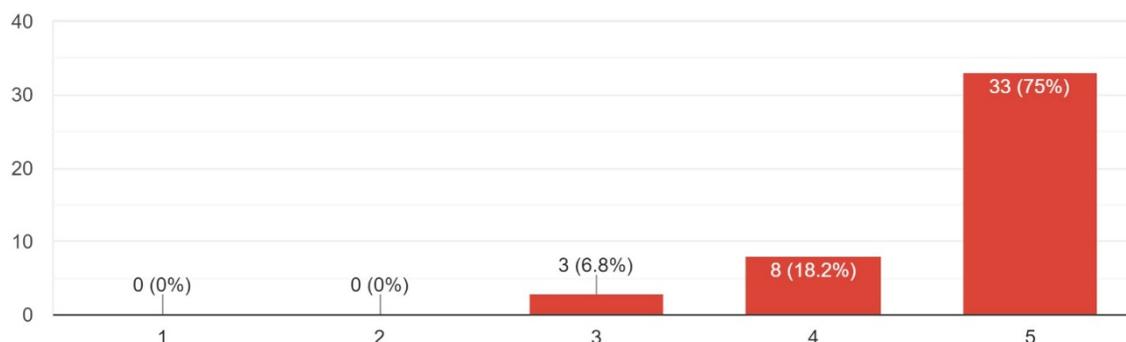
**Figure 2**

*English Proficiency Level During Stay in an English-Speaking Country*



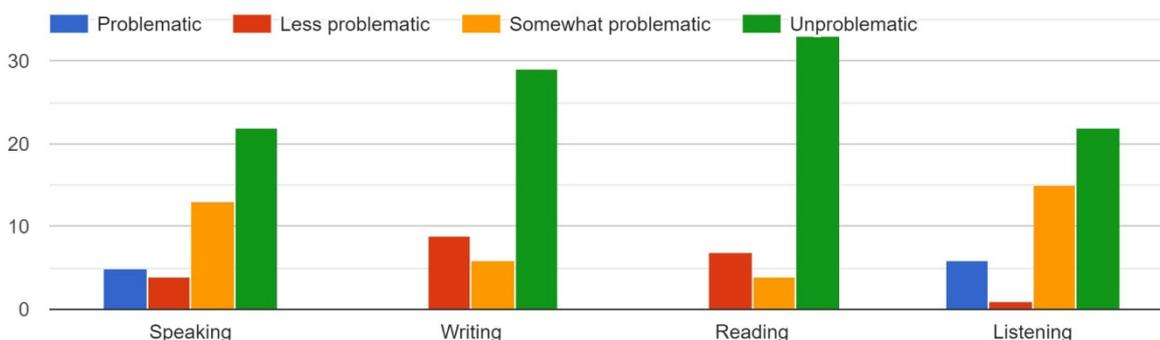
How important is knowing English when you go to a foreign country is debatable, so its essence lies in how the participant views language as a means of communication, part of culture, or both. No one chose the language proficiency part as less important. The vast majority considered it to be very important (75%) followed by important (18.2%) and moderately important (6.8%).

**Figure 3**  
*Importance of English Knowledge Abroad*



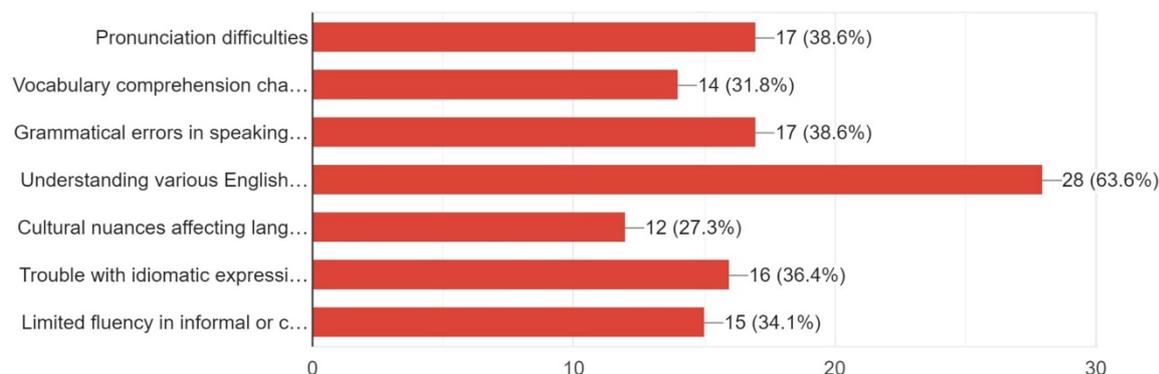
The survey inquired about specific skills that presented challenges during students' residency in an English-speaking country. The majority of respondents expressed positive perceptions of all aspects. However, listening and speaking skills were prone to being problematic among students, followed by writing, which was somehow problematic. The majority actually stated that writing and reading were not problematic at all or, at least compared to other skills, did not hinder the process of learning.

**Figure 4**  
*Language Skills That Posed Challenges While Living in an English-Speaking Country*



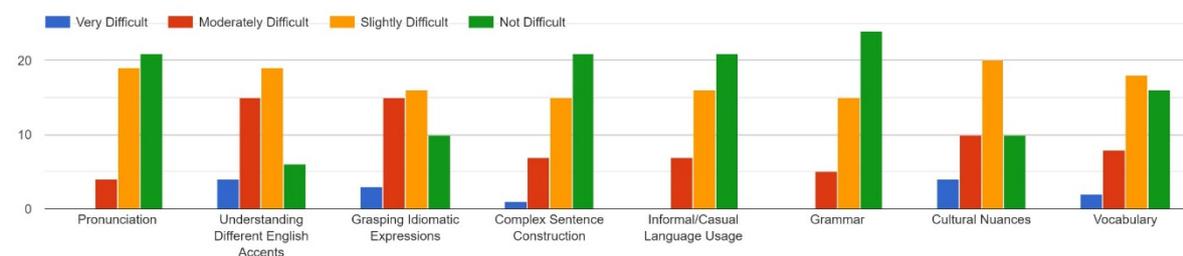
Obstacles that Georgian students encountered throughout their exchange experience provides a picture of a large part of this research. Since the problems are many and varied, the question has tried to offer composed possible answers. This question revealed that 63.3% of the surveyed students had a problem with understanding various English accents and it was their main concern, which, as pointed out, hindered and strained the adaptation process. Algeo John (2006) argues that the problem of accents is interlinked with pronunciation difficulties, that is why it was expected that the second largest percentage would be addressed to pronunciation, 38.6%. At the same time, the rate of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms were high. The problem with this is the lack of prior knowledge, there are many Georgian equivalents of English idioms, however, they are not studied in the classroom, and as soon as you use English in real life for communication, a vacuum of misunderstandings appears, the problem of understanding idioms is presented as 36.4% in the chart. Statistics is followed by limited fluency in informal or casual conversations (34.1%), vocabulary comprehension challenges (31.8%), and cultural nuances affecting language usage (27.3%), and the reason of is that students initially tried to avoid culture shock as much as possible and only talked about everyday news.

**Figure 5**  
*Language-Related Challenges Faced During the Exchange Experience*



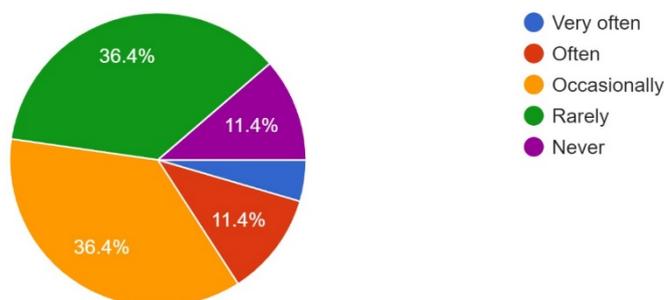
In order to gain a broader perspective, it was necessary not only to extract the skills but also to distribute the problems created by the skills and to present them uniquely in terms of their intensity. Such a detailed description reminds the reader of the past period and makes them more concrete and precise. The degree of intensity included a scale from Very Difficult to Not Difficult, although Moderate Difficulty, Moderately Difficult, and Slightly Difficult were also given. As it has been demonstrated, the issues once more begin with Understanding Different English Accents and end with grammar, which is the least problematic, correspondingly there is almost no imbalance caused by this norm.

**Figure 6**  
*Intensity of Difficulty Experienced Across Selected Language Challenges*



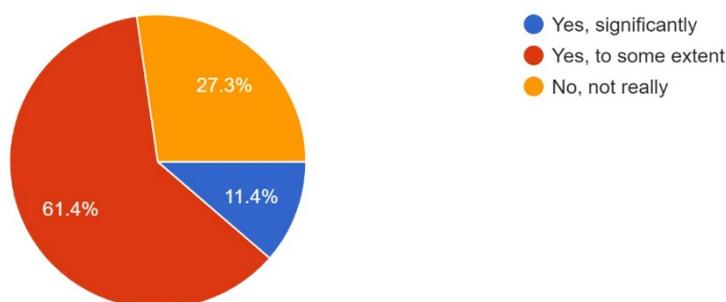
The UG hypothesis states that since there is only one human language (Chomsky, 1986), there is one method to understand grammar. Despite this, students still struggle to accurately apply grammar rules to speech because of linguistic deviations. 11.4% reported having both never or frequently, whilst 36.4% reported finding it tough just sometimes. Additionally, often- gained 4.5%. Therefore, grammar cannot be regarded as the frightening measure that worries Georgian students.

**Figure 7**  
*Frequency of Grammar-Related Difficulties in Spoken and Written English*



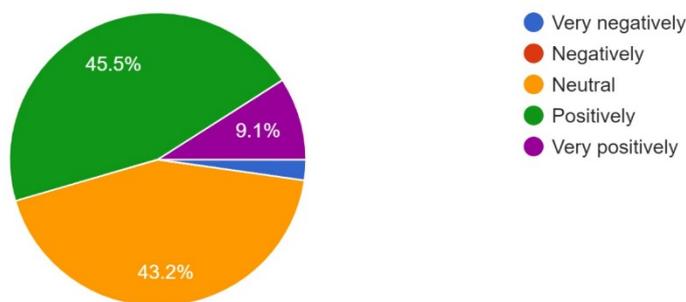
There is this generation gap and different cultures growing up, our values are a bit different from our parents (Ben C. H. Kuo, 2014) that is why the cultural difference is due to the interaction of different languages and years. Language exists without culture. Every language is shaped by culture, diversity, and particularities. In order to better understand the essence of the question, the participants were given a written explanation that Cultural differences are the ways people from different backgrounds do things differently. For example, in some cultures, it's common to greet with a handshake, while in others, people might bow instead. Based on these data, 61.4% believe that cultural differences to some extent can create hindrances, this date is followed by 27.3% of students who find it less problematic unlike 11.4% who considers it as a significant aspect of being aware of it beforehand.

**Figure 8**  
*Impact of Cultural Differences on Residency in an English-Speaking Country*



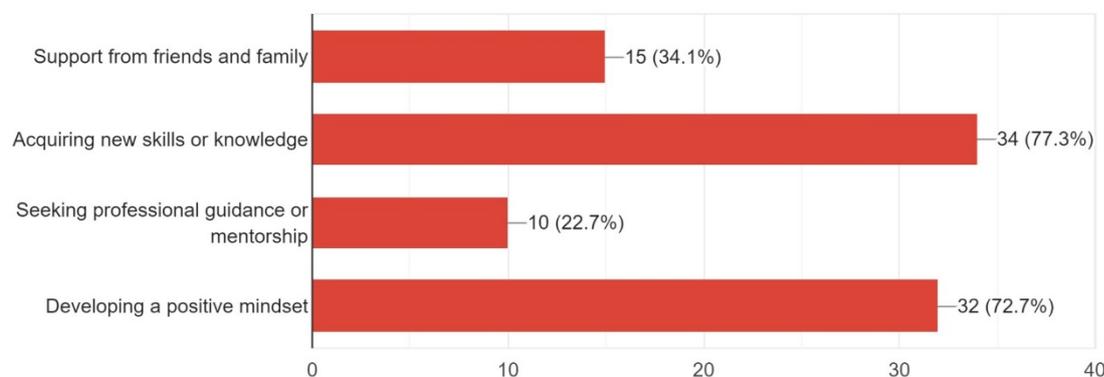
The fact that the number of Georgian students is increasing in terms of participation in exchange programs clearly shows that although they have language barriers at the initial stage, this does not prevent them from creating a negative attitude about this unique experience called studying abroad. They share their experiences with each other, there are a lot of meetings about methods on how to fill out applications, and at the same time, there is constant support from the lecturers and their willingness to give advice even during the leave period. This is confirmed by the fact that no one from the interviewees gave a negative answer to the mentioned question, everyone evaluates it either positively or very positively, which gives a total of 54.5%, and 43.3% also have a neutral attitude. These numbers illustrate Georgian students' true desire and strong character that they are more or less ready for upcoming challenges.

**Figure 9**  
*Perceptions of Language Barriers Experienced During Time Abroad*



There are many ways to find a way to solve problems. Several means were mentioned which the participants should mark which one worked the most: Support from friends and family, acquiring new skills or knowledge, seeking professional guidance or mentorship, Developing a positive mindset. As a result, the percentage distribution was proportional and there was no imbalance because people's readiness, situation, environment mindset are different. Preference was given to Acquiring new skills or knowledge and developing a positive mindset (77.3-77.7%), ideally both represent one prototype and both have one path. Also, family support was chosen as a way of salvation by 34.1% while seeking professional guidance or mentorship was chosen by 22.7%. In general, there was no one who lagged behind in the adaptation process and was unable to solve the problem and follow the trends.

**Figure 10**  
*Key Supportive Factors in Overcoming Language and Cultural Challenges Abroad*



**Discussion**

The examination of the survey data reveals a number of important implications about the language barriers encountered by Georgian students while studying abroad. The data indicate the level of English language proficiency, most of which are identified as Advanced (C1) or Upper Intermediate (B2). Despite their strong language skills, many students still faced significant challenges that hindered them at some point during their exchange program. This inconsistency of pretending to have advanced English and then having problems highlights a critical aspect of language learning: even students with strong academic language skills can have less than perfect communication because language is a living organism and cannot be planned and calculated. Difficulties in listening and understanding different English accents

were particularly high (63.3%), followed by difficulties in pronunciation (38.6%) and idiomatic expressions (36.4%).

Knowledge of the English language is not only a means of communication, but a fundamental component of academic success in English-speaking countries, as an internationally recognized language requires the student to be able to express and understand the meaning of the language. The results of the survey showed that although grammatical issues were not much of a problem, with only 11.4% reporting frequent difficulties, the nuances of using English in an academic context are still an obstacle and matter of debate. Although basic grammatical competence may be sufficient for general communication, the complexity of academic English requires a higher level of knowledge and adaptation.

Socially, the ability to communicate effectively in English is vital to participating in the cultural and social life of the host country. The survey revealed that students have difficulty distinguishing between informal or casual conversations. If a student cannot participate in daily conversations and it will be difficult to establish communication, then self-criticism, exclusion and loneliness will begin, and the consequence is disastrous for the student because they already feel alone in a foreign country. The impact of these challenges is significant, and they need special assistance and attention.

Perceiving cultural nuances and drawing a parallel with the culture of one's own country is one of the decisive factors in how a student will be realized in a new society. Cultural differences significantly affect language use and understanding. The results of the survey show that 61.4% of the respondents think that cultural differences hinder functioning in English-speaking countries to some extent. These differences are not only related to language, they include certain values, behaviors, sign language and norms. For example, understanding idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms that are deeply rooted in the cultural context was a significant challenge (36.4%). These linguistic elements often do not have a direct translation or equivalents in different languages, unlike the Georgian language, which is rich in phraseology and people's sayings, however, what causes misunderstanding and communication breakdown is a learning gap that cannot be filled by students, because culture is not taught as part of the language.

The ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences is essential to reducing communication barriers. Students' experiences point to the need for greater cultural sensitivity and preparedness before and during time abroad. The fact that none of the respondents consider cultural differences to be completely insignificant highlights the pervasive influence of cultural factors on their experiences, even inevitable for the children of a country called Georgia. By keeping these aspects in mind, more effective communication can be established and the integration process becomes easier.

### **Recommendations**

Predominantly, teachers must develop students' ability to perceive reality, must show that the English being taught is part of an important communicative language but does not give the whole picture until they are in an English-speaking environment. Students often do not even know their own English language level, and grossly understate their knowledge based on invalid material, making it difficult to perceive potential obstacles.

Secondly, students should see language as a part of culture and not only as a subject of practical use. Language is created by culture, and vice versa, so understanding idioms and phrasal verbs is much easier when culture features are given equal attention along with language.

Moreover, there is a lack of native speaking people in the regions of Georgia. In fact, students don't get a chance to interact with a real person, it's like taking only the theoretical part of a very practical subject.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that being prepared requires a lot of reading and understanding of information before flying, learning both important parts of their language and culture, and even taboos that people refuse to talk about, to minimize misunderstandings.

Last but not least is the recognition of the difference between two countries and two languages, globalization has facilitated the perception and adoption of such differences. Complexity needs to be put aside and the student should ask someone for help, because there is nothing to be ashamed of if the languages do not match each other meaningfully during conversation.

Implementing these recommendations will contribute to a positive exchange experience that Georgian students might have in the future.

### **Conclusion**

One of the most significant problems during migration is explored in this paper, and it has an immediate impact on the adoption process. Since language and culture are intrinsically connected and must be correctly understood by international students to avoid conflict and misunderstandings, the study highlights the importance of the issues raised by this relationship. For this reason, it looked at the primary issues related to. It dealt particularly on sentence structure, vocabulary, grammar, and other related topics.

The results of this study offer useful suggestions for students to be prepared that English learnt at school is much different from everyday spoken English and also highly qualified teachers cannot be equal to the natives, because they have arbitrarily mastered the peculiarities of the language. Overall, this thesis advances both theoretical knowledge and practical vision.

### **Research Limitations**

The present study has a number of limitations. One of the concerns is the small research sample which comprised 44 university students across Georgia. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population in the education sector. Moreover, the present paper presents a small-scale study into language barriers encountered in academic settings, aiming at assessing students' perspectives on how such barriers affect their educational experience. Longitudinal research into the issue can provide a more comprehensive insight into the problems and challenges that emerge during everyday conversation.

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