

Factors Influencing the Immediate Graduate Study Enrollment of English Language Teachers

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing immediate graduate study enrollment among English Language Teachers (ELTs) at Eastern Samar State University, Borongan Campus. Anchored on Self-Determination Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, and Human Capital Theory, the research employs a descriptive–correlational design to examine the roles of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, financial capability, and program accessibility in shaping ELTs' decisions to pursue postgraduate studies within three years of completing their undergraduate degrees. A structured survey questionnaire was administered to 44 respondents selected via convenience sampling. Results indicate that intrinsic motivation significantly drives personal growth, intellectual fulfillment, and professional mastery, while extrinsic motivation, particularly career advancement, salary increase, and qualification requirements, strongly influences enrollment decisions. Financial capability, including tuition affordability and availability of resources, affects access to graduate programs, whereas program accessibility, encompassing quality of faculty, program specialization, flexible schedules, and online learning options, was identified as a very high influencing factor. Demographic analysis shows significant associations between timing of enrollment and age, year of bachelor's graduation, and employment status, highlighting that younger and recently graduated teachers are more likely to enroll immediately. The study concludes that immediate graduate study enrollment is shaped by a combination of personal, financial, and institutional factors, and recommends enhancing program accessibility, financial support mechanisms, and institutional policies to facilitate timely graduate education. Findings are particularly relevant for policy-making, institutional planning, and career guidance for early-career ELTs. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), supporting sustainable teacher professional development and career advancement. Its sustainability impact includes fostering educational and socio-economic sustainability through enhanced access, professional competency, and institutional support for early-career educators.

Keywords: Career Advancement, English Language Teachers, Extrinsic Motivation, Financial Capability, Graduate Program Accessibility, Immediate Enrollment, Intrinsic Motivation, Professional Development, Self-Determination

1. Introduction

Teachers are increasingly expected to update their knowledge and pedagogical competence in response to the expanding demands of education. In the Philippines, educational policies and institutional standards have intensified the need for teachers, particularly English Language Teachers, to pursue graduate-level qualifications. Many schools now prefer applicants or faculty members who have completed graduate units or possess postgraduate credentials. This has encouraged early-career teachers to proceed directly to graduate education after finishing their undergraduate degrees. A tracer study by Pardo and Pichay (2020) found that 64.71% of seventeen alumni from a College of Teacher Education in Northern Philippines later enrolled in graduate programs, while Hernandez (2020) reported that many graduate students were pursuing master's and doctoral courses in applied linguistics and English Language Education. The increasing accessibility of postgraduate education has also contributed to this trend. Flexible learning modalities, such as online, modular, and weekend classes offered by institutions like the University of the Philippines Open University and Polytechnic University of the Philippines Open University, have made graduate education more feasible for young professionals who need to balance work and study. In addition, enrollment decisions are shaped by personal motivation, financial resources, and program availability. Intrinsic factors such as personal growth, intellectual development, professional mastery, and the desire to contribute meaningfully to English language education are important motivators, as emphasized by Gao et al. (2025). Extrinsic factors, including promotion, salary increase, career advancement, and qualification requirements, are also strengthened by the (Department of Education, 2017) and promotion-related policies (Department of Education, 2025). Gepila (2020) likewise highlights continuing professional advancement as part of teachers' lifelong learning.

The literature shows that graduate education has become an important means of professional development in English Language Teaching. Educational reforms, global competitiveness, and the K–12 curriculum have increased the demand for teachers with advanced degrees. Globally, higher academic qualifications are increasingly valued in knowledge-based economies and evolving education systems (Altbach et al., 2009). In the Philippines, CHED Memorandum Order No. 46, s. 2012 reinforces the value of postgraduate degrees in ensuring quality assurance and professional competence in higher education. Pardo and Pichay (2020) showed that 64.71% of alumni pursued graduate programs after college, suggesting that more teachers are entering postgraduate education early. Graduate degrees have also become essential for career mobility, specialization, and institutional compliance (Aquino et al., 2023). Intrinsic motivation is a major factor in teachers' decisions to pursue graduate study. It refers to the internal desire to engage in learning because of personal interest, curiosity, and growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers who value intellectual challenge, self-improvement, and professional fulfillment are more likely to invest in graduate education even without immediate external rewards (Fernet et al., 2008). In the ELT context, this motivation is evident among teachers who want to strengthen their content knowledge and contribute to disciplinary discourse (Bernardo, 2004). Tang et al. (2025) emphasized that early-career teachers are driven by aspirations for growth, competence, and satisfaction from skill development. According to Teves and Ubayubay (2024, as cited in Cuervo, 2025), self-motivation also contributes to teachers' quality of life, job security, financial stability, and job satisfaction.

Extrinsic motivation is also central to graduate enrollment decisions. It involves external rewards and pressures, such as salary increase, promotion, recognition, tenure, and qualification requirements (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Teachers often pursue graduate education to improve employability, secure tenure, and meet credential expectations (Day & Sachs, 2004). In the Philippine ELT profession, extrinsic motivators include school accreditation standards, career progression requirements, eligibility for higher teaching ranks, and alignment with government reforms. Teves and Ubayubay (2024) note that advanced degrees enhance teachers' professional identity and capacity for leadership and mentorship, while Aquino et al. (2023) report that teachers pursue postgraduate credentials for long-term career goals, financial advancement, and alignment with Department of Education (2017). Financial capability remains a significant determinant of access to graduate education. Tuition fees, academic materials, transportation, and opportunity costs can become barriers, especially for early-career teachers who are still building financial stability (UNESCO, 2015). Perna (2006) emphasizes that socioeconomic status influences participation in advanced education. In the Philippine setting, limited teacher income and increasing graduate school expenses may hinder enrollment and completion. Financial difficulties, thesis-related problems, and health concerns were identified as barriers by Rungduin & Miranda (2018), while financial problems appear to be a pressing factor affecting graduate degree completion (Rungduin & Miranda, 2018). Teachers may also rely on loans or credit arrangements to sustain graduate education costs (Casingal & Ancho, 2022). Entice et al. (2024) further found that tuition, living expenses, thesis expectations, and lack of research confidence contribute to delays or discontinuation.

Program accessibility and availability also influence whether teachers pursue graduate study immediately. Accessibility includes campus location, schedule flexibility, learning modality, program specialization, and institutional support. Online, blended, and modular programs have expanded opportunities for working professionals (Allen & Seaman, 2013). However, challenges remain, especially for teachers in rural or remote areas who face limited program options, inflexible schedules, and insufficient academic support (Castulo et al., 2025). Chin et al. (2022) found that online learning improved access during the COVID-19 pandemic, but digital infrastructure problems, workload demands, and limited support continued to affect participation. For ELTs, the availability of specialized language education tracks can directly influence the timing and feasibility of graduate enrollment. Empirical studies also show that motivation, career aspirations, and institutional support shape teachers' graduate enrollment decisions. Tolentino et al. (2023) found that interest, effort, and personal satisfaction predict teachers' engagement in professional development. Tang et al. (2025) similarly emphasized professional growth and well-being as personal resources that help early-career teachers manage challenges. Flores et al. (2024) reported that civil status, career aspirations, promotion requirements, and salary considerations influence graduate enrollment. Institutional support such as scholarships, mentoring, and flexible scheduling can further encourage early participation (Romorosa & Ugang, 2025). Romorosa & Ugang (2025) also emphasized the importance of professional collaboration in helping educators learn from one another. Cho-Baker et al. (2022) identified professional development, alternatives to direct employment, and improved earnings or career opportunities as reasons for considering graduate school. Macapagal & Ricafort (2023) likewise showed that teachers' aspirations for career advancement influence their pursuit of graduate education.

Locally, the study focuses on selected English Language Teachers enrolled in the Graduate School of Eastern Samar State University, Borongan Campus, who pursued graduate study within one to three years after completing their undergraduate degree. This context is important because regional access to graduate education may be shaped by school location, available programs, institutional support, financial resources, and socioeconomic conditions. Nationally, the Philippine educational system continues to promote teacher professionalization, career progression, and continuing professional development. Policies and standards increasingly encourage or require teachers to pursue postgraduate education to remain competitive and qualified. The literature also shows that flexible delivery modes have become important for Filipino teachers who

balance employment, graduate study, and personal responsibilities. During the pandemic, improved access to professional development was reported, although schedule concerns and cost-related constraints remained (Chin et al., 2022). A broader needs analysis also identified financial hardship, time management, and institutional support as challenges among Filipino graduate students (Castulo et al., 2025). Globally, the growing importance of advanced qualifications reflects the demands of knowledge-based economies and changing educational standards (Altbach et al., 2009). Graduate education is increasingly viewed as a mechanism for building professional expertise, strengthening instructional quality, and supporting teacher development. Although online and flexible programs have made graduate education more attainable for young professionals (UNESCO, 2021), barriers such as financial constraints, academic pressure, workload demands, and limited institutional support may still cause teachers to delay or abandon postgraduate studies.

This study is anchored on Self-Determination Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, and Human Capital Theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2000) explains how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influence decisions such as graduate enrollment. Motivation has been identified as a key determinant of academic and professional decisions. According to Yıldız et al. (2021), intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation also affect professional performance. In this study, intrinsic motivation refers to teachers' internal desire for personal growth, intellectual fulfillment, professional mastery, and continuous learning, while extrinsic motivation refers to external considerations such as promotion, salary increase, recognition, career advancement, and qualification requirements. Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) by Eccles & Wigfield (2002) explains that individuals' choices are influenced by the value they attach to an action and the perceived cost of pursuing it. This theory supports the study's focus on financial capability and program accessibility because ELTs may weigh the benefits of graduate education against tuition costs, workload, program availability, and institutional support. The financial burden of postgraduate education can discourage teachers from continuing advanced studies and affect their career development (Entice et al., 2024).

Human Capital Theory (HCT) by Becker (1993) views education as an investment that can improve skills, employability, career opportunities, and earnings. This theory supports the idea that teachers may invest time, money, and effort in graduate studies because they expect long-term professional and economic returns. Together, these theories provide a multidimensional lens for understanding how motivation, resources, and accessibility influence immediate graduate study enrollment. The study's conceptual basis proposes that intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, financial capability, and program accessibility influence the likelihood of immediate graduate study enrollment among ELTs. The conceptual framework also recognizes that early-career English Language Teachers are those in the early years of teaching, with Reid & Reid (2016) describing early-career teachers as those in the first two years of their teaching careers without permanent contracts or permanent teaching certification. Intrinsic motivation is understood through Ryan and Deci (2000), while extrinsic motivation is defined by Ryan and Deci (2000) as an activity done to achieve instrumental value or separable benefits. Financial capability is understood through World Bank (n.d.) as the internal capacity to act in one's best financial interest within socioeconomic conditions, while graduate program accessibility is contextualized from (Northeast ADA Center, n.d.) and adapted in this study to refer to convenience, modality, schedule, location, and support services.

Although many studies discuss teachers' motivations and challenges in pursuing graduate education, most focus on general teacher populations rather than English Language Teachers specifically. There is also limited research distinguishing teachers who enroll in graduate school immediately from those who delay enrollment. Existing literature has examined intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, financial constraints, academic pressure, institutional support, and program accessibility, but there is still limited understanding of how these variables interact in shaping immediate graduate study enrollment among ELTs. This gap is important because early enrollment may reflect changing professional expectations, stronger career competition, increasing qualification standards, and expanded access to flexible graduate programs. At the same time, teachers may still experience barriers related to finances, workload, thesis requirements, program availability, and institutional support. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the multifaceted factors influencing immediate graduate study enrollment among selected ELTs enrolled in the graduate program of Eastern Samar State University, Borongan Campus. Specifically, it examines intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, financial capability, and program accessibility as factors shaping the decision of ELTs to pursue graduate studies soon after completing their undergraduate degrees.

This study aligns most strongly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on teacher professional development, graduate education, instructional competence, and the continuous improvement of English language teaching. By examining why ELTs pursue graduate studies immediately, the study contributes to understanding how teachers can strengthen their qualifications and improve the quality of education they provide. The study also relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth because graduate education is connected to career advancement, employability, promotion, salary improvement, job security, and professional mobility. Since extrinsic motivation includes career progression and financial advancement, the study supports the broader goal of improving teachers' professional opportunities and economic stability. SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure is also relevant because the study recognizes the role of online, blended, modular, and flexible learning modalities in expanding access to graduate education. Program accessibility is linked to educational innovation, digital learning infrastructure, and institutional capacity to support working professionals.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals is applicable because the study highlights the roles of graduate schools, teacher education institutions, the Department of Education, and support systems such as scholarships, mentoring, and flexible scheduling. These partnerships can help strengthen teacher professionalization and make graduate education more accessible to early-career ELTs. SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being may also be indirectly connected because some literature identifies workload, health issues, academic pressure, and quality of life as factors related to teachers' graduate study experiences. Although health is not the central focus of the study, teacher well-being is relevant to sustaining participation in graduate education.

This study contributes to educational sustainability by providing insights into the factors that encourage ELTs to pursue graduate education early in their careers. Understanding these factors can help graduate schools design programs that are academically relevant, flexible, and responsive to the needs of early-career teachers. It can also help English Language Teachers reflect on their own goals, readiness, and possible challenges before entering graduate study. The study contributes to socio-economic sustainability by examining how graduate education is connected to career advancement, promotion, salary increase, financial capability, and long-term professional stability. Since financial constraints can affect enrollment and completion, the findings may help institutions and policymakers consider support mechanisms such as scholarships, financial assistance, and manageable payment options. The study supports technological and innovation sustainability by emphasizing the importance of online, modular, blended, and flexible learning arrangements. These modalities can expand access to graduate education, particularly for working teachers and those from geographically distant areas. However, the study also recognizes that digital infrastructure, academic support, and workload management remain important considerations. The study also contributes to institutional and policy sustainability by offering localized data that may guide graduate schools, the Department of Education, and other education stakeholders in improving teacher professional development programs. By identifying the motivations and barriers influencing immediate graduate study enrollment, the study can support more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable systems for teacher advancement. Finally, the study contributes to community sustainability because better-prepared English Language Teachers can influence the quality of English instruction, learner development, and educational outcomes in their local contexts. Supporting ELTs in graduate education strengthens not only individual career growth but also the broader educational community they serve.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

A descriptive–correlational design was used to provide a comprehensive understanding of ELTs' decision-making regarding early graduate study. The descriptive component outlined demographic characteristics including age, gender, year of undergraduate graduation, time gap between degree completion and graduate enrollment, and employment status. The study also quantified the influence of intrinsic motivations, extrinsic motivations, financial capability, and program accessibility. The correlational aspect examined the strength and nature of the relationships between these factors and ELTs' decisions without experimental manipulation, facilitating observation of naturally occurring phenomena to identify patterns relevant for policy and program development.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The research was conducted at Eastern Samar State University, Borongan Campus, chosen for its role in fostering academic and professional development among ELTs in the region. The campus provides a relevant context for understanding the challenges, motivations, and institutional support affecting early graduate enrollment.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study involved 44 English Language Teachers enrolled in the Graduate School of ESSU–Borongan who pursued graduate studies within one to three years after completing their undergraduate degrees. Respondents were selected based on their current enrollment status and immediate progression into graduate programs, aligning with the study's objective to identify factors influencing early enrollment.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Convenience sampling was employed to quickly gather relevant data from teachers directly involved in teaching and enrolled in graduate programs. While this limits generalizability, it ensured that the responses came from the target population and provided insights into their experiences and decision-making processes.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire adapted from validated instruments in previous studies on graduate enrollment and teacher motivation (Gao et al., 2025; Kallio, 1995; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1990; Arar & Abramowitz, 2017). The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first gathered demographic data, while the second assessed intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, financial capability, and program accessibility using a 5-point Likert scale to measure respondents' agreement with statements regarding their motivation to pursue graduate studies.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Respondents were informed about the study's ethical considerations through an informed consent process. Surveys were administered both in printed and digital formats (Google Forms) to accommodate preferences. Respondents were given 3–5 minutes to complete the survey. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique codes (ELT 1–ELT 44) to all participants, and all personal information was securely stored throughout the data collection process.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize respondents' demographics and assess the influence of the studied factors. Inferential analysis, specifically the Chi-Square Test of Independence, evaluated relationships between variables. Likert-scale responses were analyzed via mean scores to rank the significance of each factor, with a significance level set at 0.05. A standardized 5-point Likert scale categorized each factor's influence: "Very High" (4.21–5.00), "High" (3.41–4.20), "Moderate" (2.61–3.40), "Low" (1.81–2.60), and "Not Influencing" (≤ 1.80), providing a nuanced understanding of factor impact on immediate graduate enrollment.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Extent of Influence of Factors on Immediate Graduate Study Enrollment

3.1.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Respondents rated intrinsic factors as highly influential in their decision to pursue graduate studies immediately, with a general mean of 4.036. The highest-scoring statement was the pursuit of personal growth and intellectual fulfillment (mean = 4.204), followed by keeping up with trends in language education (mean = 4.159), improving teaching competence (mean = 4.113), developing research skills in English language teaching (mean = 3.886), and serving as a role model for students and colleagues (mean = 3.818). These results indicate that internal drives such as personal and professional development strongly motivate ELTs to enroll in graduate programs promptly. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing that intrinsic motivation, including intellectual curiosity and self-improvement, significantly affects teachers' engagement in professional development and continuous learning (Fernet et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2025; Gao et al., 2025).

3.1.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic factors received a very high influence rating (mean = 4.231). The highest-rated statements were related to meeting qualification requirements for higher teaching ranks and increasing income/salary (mean = 4.772 each), followed by career advancement opportunities (mean = 4.704), recognition and respect (mean = 3.659), recommendations from colleagues or mentors (mean = 3.909), and building professional networks (mean = 3.568). These findings suggest that ELTs' decisions are strongly shaped by external considerations such as career advancement, institutional expectations, and financial benefits. This supports studies highlighting those extrinsic motivations like promotions, salary increases, and alignment with professional standards are pivotal in influencing graduate study decisions among early-career teachers (Day & Sachs, 2004; Teves & Ubayubay, 2024; Aquino et al., 2023).

3.1.3 Financial Capability

Financial capability factors were rated as highly influential, with a general mean of 3.616. Respondents indicated that the cost of tuition and related expenses (mean = 3.886) and the availability of financial resources (mean = 3.704) strongly affected their enrollment decisions, whereas availability of scholarships or financial assistance had a moderate influence (mean = 3.227). This indicates that while ELTs are motivated to pursue graduate studies, financial constraints remain a notable barrier. The findings reflect the Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), as the perceived cost of pursuing a graduate degree affects teachers' decisions, corroborating prior studies emphasizing the importance of socioeconomic factors and financial stability in advanced education enrollment (Perna, 2006; Rungduin & Miranda, 2018; Entice et al., 2024; Casingal & Ancho, 2022).

3.1.4 Program Accessibility

Program accessibility was the most influential factor, with a general mean of 4.401. ELTs highly valued quality of faculty and instruction (mean = 4.636), availability of online/remote learning options (mean = 4.454), availability of desired programs and specializations (mean = 4.431), accessibility of campus location (mean = 4.363), and flexibility of class schedules (mean = 4.363). This indicates that logistical and institutional support, including flexible delivery modes and program availability, critically affects ELTs' decisions to enroll immediately. The results are consistent with literature that highlights the role of accessibility, flexible schedules, and quality instruction as enabling factors for early-career teachers pursuing postgraduate studies (Castulo et al., 2025; Chin et al., 2022; Cho-Baker et al., 2022; Vural & Başaran, 2021).

3.2 Profile of ELT Respondents

The majority of respondents were aged 22–25 years, with a mean age of 24, confirming that younger ELTs pursue graduate studies more immediately. Female teachers comprised 70.5% of the sample, consistent with literature showing female

dominance in graduate education in the Philippines (David et al., 2020). Most respondents graduated between 2022 and 2024, and the predominant time gap between bachelor's graduation and graduate enrollment was 2 years (36.37%), followed by 3 or more years (29.54%), less than a year (18.18%), and 1 year (15.91%). In terms of employment status, 36.4% were contractual, 27.3% part-time, 20.5% permanent, 11.4% unemployed, and 4.5% self-employed. Approximately 70.5% were immediate enrollees (less than 2 years) and 29.5% were non-immediate enrollees (3 or more years). These results illustrate that early-career, predominantly female ELTs with recent undergraduate degrees tend to pursue graduate programs promptly, often balancing employment obligations with educational aspirations. Contractual and part-time teachers, despite lower income, are motivated to secure career advancement through early enrollment.

3.3 Relationships Between Profile Variables and Influencing Factors

Chi-square analyses showed significant associations between timing of enrollment and age ($p = 0.027$, Cramer's $V = 0.405$), year of bachelor's degree graduation ($p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.148$), and employment status ($p = 0.007$, Cramer's $V = 0.566$). Gender and time gap were not significantly associated with enrollment timing. Further tests revealed no significant associations between age and intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, financial capability, or program accessibility (all $p > 0.05$). These findings suggest that demographic factors such as younger age, recent graduation, and employment type are critical determinants of immediate enrollment, whereas gender and individual factor ratings have less predictive power. The results align with prior studies indicating that early-career status, professional ambitions, and institutional requirements strongly guide graduate study decisions among ELTs (Reid & Reid, 2016; Teves & Ubayubay, 2024; Flores et al., 2024).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that immediate graduate study enrollment among English Language Teachers (ELTs) is highly influenced by intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, financial capability, and program accessibility. Intrinsic factors such as personal growth, intellectual fulfillment, and the desire to enhance teaching competence significantly drive early enrollment, while extrinsic factors including career advancement, salary increase, and meeting qualification standards are very highly influential. Financial capability, though slightly less influential than intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, remains a critical determinant in accessing graduate education. Program accessibility, encompassing quality of faculty, availability of desired programs, flexible schedules, and online or remote options, strongly affects ELTs' ability to pursue immediate graduate studies. Additionally, demographic variables such as age, year of bachelor's degree graduation, and employment status show significant associations with the timing of enrollment, highlighting that younger, recently graduated, and contractual or part-time ELTs tend to pursue graduate studies promptly (Reid & Reid, 2016; Tang et al., 2025; Teves & Ubayubay, 2024; Aquino et al., 2023).

Based on the findings, it is recommended that graduate schools and educational institutions enhance program accessibility by offering flexible, high-quality programs that accommodate working ELTs. Financial support mechanisms, including scholarships and affordable payment options, should be made more available to assist early-career teachers. Institutional policies should recognize and incentivize immediate enrollment to strengthen teacher professionalization, career progression, and instructional competence. ELTs are encouraged to leverage intrinsic and extrinsic motivations while strategically managing financial and logistical challenges to pursue graduate education without undue delay (Entice et al., 2024; Rungduin & Miranda, 2018; Castulo et al., 2025).

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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