

ELI STUDENT VOICES

Volume 30, Issue 2



UF | English Language Institute
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

Thank You

Thank you to all who contributed to this edition of the *ELI Student Voices*. To the students who submitted their writing, thank you for your hard work and for having the courage to allow your work to be read by others. To ELI instructors and staff, thank you for always encouraging and supporting ELI students to develop not only as writers but also as people. To the Student Voices Judges: Daryl Bish, Patricia Moon Tapper, Christine Voigt, thank you for your time and consideration in reading the submissions.

Winning Pieces

First Place

“Why Many Young Women Think Becoming a Pilot Is Impossible”

Dasha Vásquez

Second Place

“A Book I Enjoyed”

Norah Alghamdi

FIRST PLACE

Dasha Vásquez, RW 50

Why Many Young Women Think Becoming a Pilot Is Impossible

As a child, I traveled often with my mother. She would sometimes ask the flight crew if I could meet the pilots after the flight.



One day, when I was twelve years old, I met a woman pilot for the first time. My mother was so excited because it was the first woman pilot she had ever met. I remember standing there, looking at the pilot in her uniform, and thinking, "I didn't know women could be pilots." That moment changed everything for me.

Before that day, I had never seen a woman flying an airplane. I traveled a lot with my mother, and we sometimes met the pilots after our flights. But they were always men. So when I saw that woman sitting in the cockpit, something clicked in my head. For weeks after that flight, I couldn't stop thinking about her. I kept asking myself, "Could someone like me really do that?"



Today, when I tell people I want to become a pilot, they often look surprised. Some say, "Isn't the training very hard?" Others say, "Are you sure you want that lifestyle?" But the question that bothers me the most is, "How will you have a family if you are always traveling?" That question made me doubt myself. For a while, I started to wonder if I was being silly. Did I really have to choose between the sky and having a family of my own?

Then I noticed something interesting. Flight attendants travel just as much as pilots. They are away from home just as often. But nobody ever asks a flight attendant that question. That made me realize it's not really about the schedule. It's about what people expect to see. Society is so used to seeing women serving coffee on a plane that it has a hard time imagining them flying it.

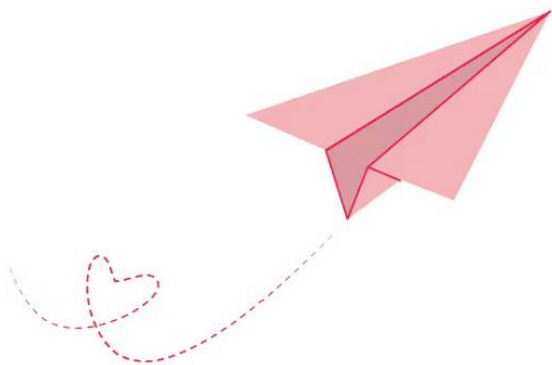
Did you know that only about 5 or 6 out of every 100 pilots in the world are women? That number really shocked me. It means that for every hundred pilots you see, only five or six are women. No wonder girls like me grow up thinking this career is not for us. Many talented young women give up before they even start. They are afraid of failing, afraid of what people will say, or afraid they won't be able to balance work and family. But I decided I didn't want fear to make the decision for me. I wanted to find out if my dream was real. So I started researching flight schools and talking to pilots. I also did two discovery flights in a Cessna 172 Skyhawk, one in Miami and another in St. Augustine.



The first time I flew the plane, I was nervous. My hands were shaking a little. But the moment we lifted off the runway, everything became quiet. Looking down at the world from thousands of feet above the ground, I felt completely calm. At that moment, I knew this was exactly what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It felt like home.



One woman pilot I spoke with gave me the best advice. She said, "Dasha, flying is hard work. The training is long and the schedule is tough. But if you truly love the sky, never give up." She also told me she had one child at home. Hearing that made me feel so much better. She was proof that I didn't have to choose.



I was recently accepted into Embry-Riddle's English program, which is the first step toward studying Aeronautical Science there. For the first time, I feel like I am walking toward my future instead of just dreaming about it. Boeing says the world will need about 660,000 new pilots over the next twenty years. That is a huge number, and it means there are many opportunities for women like me. But if young women keep believing this career is impossible, we will miss out on filling those seats.



I want you to imagine two different futures. In the first future, a young woman dreams of flying, but she lets fear stop her. She stays on the ground. Years pass, and she always wonders, "What if?" In the second future, a young woman has the same fears. But she takes a deep breath and takes the first step anyway. She does the research, she saves money, and she gets into the cockpit. Years later, she is sitting in the captain's seat, looking at the clouds, knowing she made the right choice. The only difference between these two women is the decision to try.

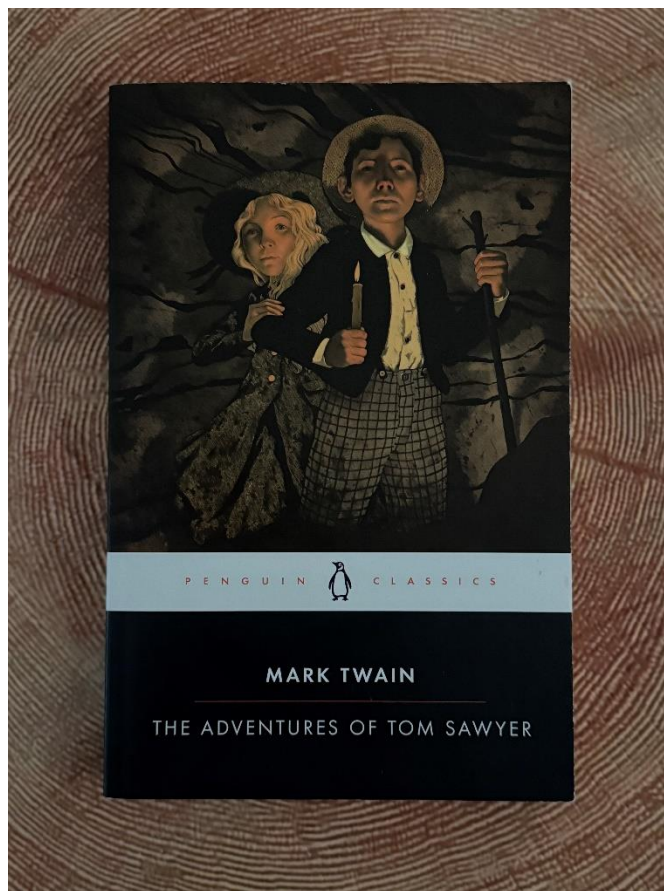
I don't want to be the first woman pilot. And I don't want to be the last. I want to be one of many. I want a future where little girls looking through the cockpit door don't feel surprised when they see a woman pilot. I want them to just smile, knowing they can be her too.

When I was twelve years old, I never imagined I would be here, telling this story. But meeting that one woman pilot changed my life. She showed me that the sky isn't just for men. It is for anyone brave enough to chase it. Today, I no longer believe I have to choose between my career and my family. I believe I can have both. More importantly, I believe every young woman deserves the chance to decide for herself—not let fear decide for her. If we stop letting fear control our decisions, more dreams will take flight.



SECOND PLACE

Norah Alghamdi, RW 30



A Book I Enjoyed

One of the first books I bought after I arrived in Gainesville was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. I wanted to read this book because I like adventure stories. At first, I thought it might be difficult, but it was interesting and fun. The story is about a boy named Tom Sawyer and his friend Huck Finn. They have many adventures together and learn important lessons. My favorite part was when they found the hidden treasure. I also liked Tom because he was smart and brave. While I was reading, I learned some new words and enjoyed the story. I am happy that I finished this book. Next, I want to watch the movie and see how it is different from the book. I hope to read more English books like this in the future.

Jiwon Kang, RW 60

Bilingual Education in the United States

Have you ever seen someone who is bilingual? Have you imagined speaking both languages fluently like them? You would be a bilingual now if you had received a bilingual education from an early age. In bilingual schools, instructions are provided in one of the two languages which changes by the classes. There is a controversy about whether or not bilingual education should be banned in the United States. Some people believe that the instruction in all levels of public education ought to be English. **However**, bilingual education is an effective model of education for children in the United States.

First, bilingual education offers distinct cognitive advantages. This means that people who have learned to listen and speak properly in two languages have priority with brain activities different from those who have not. Bilinguals' brains tend to work harder and more actively than monolinguals. According to the research from Bialystok, Craik, and Luk (2012), bilinguals performed better than monolinguals on tasks that include switching between activities and inhibiting previously learned responses. **In particular**, they showed higher levels of attention, improved learning efficiency, better memory, greater awareness of the language, and better summarizing skills over monolinguals. This cognitive edge slows down the beginning of Alzheimer disease around 5 years. **Also**, bilingual infants and toddlers have cognitive superiority. Specifically, a neuroscience research study done by Janet Werker (2007) clarified that babies who learned two languages simultaneously from their home could naturally recognize the difference between English and French. Considering these significant cognitive

benefits, bilingual education has positive impact on both children and adults. **Therefore**, scientists now agree that these brainy merits about bilingualism improve the performance of human brains.

Second, bilingual education enhances the likelihood of social success. Society has a greater demand with candidates who are fluent in multiple languages. According to Patrica Gandara & Kathy Escamilla (2017), bilinguals displayed a lower dropout rate. **Similarly**, Mihaly et al. (2023) found that students who gained the Seal of Biliteracy have a higher probability of enrolling in a 4-years university and attending college. Acquiring necessary knowledge during their young age will act as an important foundation for their future career. Spontaneously, this makes them more likely to obtain an upper-level income job. **To illustrate**, multilingual individuals earn from \$2,000 to \$3,000 more on average (OELA, 2024), compared with monolingual individuals. **Furthermore**, as globalization progresses, an increasing number of prospective employers seek candidates who can speak foreign languages proficiently. The number of people who speak a language besides English has risen to over 68 million people in the United States (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). This number underscores the demand for bilingual employees is growing. **Additionally**, bilingualism efficiently enables employees to interact with people from different backgrounds, search for information from various sources, and invent products that can satisfy larger population of consumers. Their excellence across a variety of aspects in their workplace allows them to be widely valued and rewarded in the labor market, especially in the banking, healthcare, and telecommunications, and translating sectors (OELA, 2024). **As a result**, bilinguals generally gain better employment opportunities than monolinguals because of their working ability and the following demand.

Some will argue that bilingual education causes language delay. It is true that bilingual children know fewer words in either of their languages. **On the other hand,** that point is not important because bilingual education is not directly associated with linguistic deficit, but instead, it leads them to deeply understand the function of languages. While language postponement can occur in monolingual and bilingual children alike, this is not related to how many languages children can speak (PEaCH Project, 2020). **Equally as important,** bilinguals' total vocabulary knowledge across the two languages is comparable to that of monolingual children. In other words, they possess a sufficient vocabulary size and have a capability to cross-use them. Olson (2014) explored that they can appropriately choose and convert words from the appropriate language at the right time. This research confirms that people who attended bilingual schools objectively discover the structure and essence of languages. **Thus,** the concern about the language learning lag of bilinguals is a misconception and rather bilingual education is advantageous in linguistic facet.

In conclusion, bilingual education is a proper method of education for the U.S. children. This is because bilingual education is beneficial to both young learners and adults. The brains of bilinguals are often more developed than those of monolinguals and this development delays neurological disease. **Moreover,** this kind of education facilitates the attainment of higher social status. Typically, bilinguals' opportunities to get a job and the amount of income exceed those of usual people. With the world more strongly connected, the ability to speak more than just one language is a huge advantage. **For the effect of this is,** for the United States to become a truly leading nation in the globalized future, they should prepare their young generations for the internationalized world by implementing bilingual education. Now it is time for educators

and policymakers to develop and utilize pragmatic bilingual curriculums, online materials, and language immersion programs, which will best support tomorrow human assets.

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Harumi Uyejara, RW 60

Studying English Abroad is a Big Decision

According to Institute for Statistics of UNESCO survey, 6.3 million people leave their comfortable homes, families, and friends to learn English in countries such as United States, England, and Canada. Why do they choose to study English abroad? More students choose to learn English abroad because it has many opportunities for a better life. Also, this choice gives them a type of prestige in own country when they return to their countries. Therefore, I think that studying abroad to study English as a second language is an important decision that you should be aware of the difficulties and the benefits that you will experience when you make this decision.

First, studying abroad can be hard. Therefore, many students who feel sad and worried when they try to adapt to live outside their home, and they usually miss their family, friends, local food, and tradition that their countries. This type of studying is more expensive than learning English in your own country. For example, Peruvian students pay the equivalent of a manager's salary for two or three months of classes at universities in US and Canada. In the end, students overcome the first shock cultural and money. Consequently, they will be independent, strong and this experience allow them higher earnings in the future.

Second, studying English abroad significantly improves English skills. Students have more options to practice English with native people, and they surrounded by English everywhere, such as traffic signs, newspapers, television, and letters. As a result, they might access better opportunities, such as an excellent job and salary in their countries and other nations around the world. Thus, foreign students enrich their English quickly that they learn English in their countries.

Another benefit is that students will increase their understanding of new cultures, places, and people. Therefore, students open their mind about different cultures worldwide. For example, I study English in the English Language Institute (ELI) in the University of Florida, and I know Arabic, Korean, Venezuela, Brazilian, Ecuadorian, Moldovan, and Taiwanese people. Also, students can visit amazing places, such as the natural springs in United States, Whistler in Canada, and Big



Ben in England. These students can participate in the Culture Immersion Program, which aims to facilitate cross-culture experiences, connections, and relationships among learners. As part of this program, universities usually offer the Conversation Partner Program that help students practice English outside the classrooms. However, the ELI at University of Florida stands out for the Language Assistants (LAs), who organize trips and events that immerse students in US culture. During my English studies at ELI, I regularly attended activities organized by the two professional, outstanding, supportive, and dedicated Language Assistants. These Language Assistants, whose names are Lexa and Jack, made conversation sessions, gave me the opportunity to practice my



English in a relaxed environment. Through them, I learned about US culture and gained confidence when I speak with people from different cultures. As a result, students choose to study English abroad because this action generates many friends, and they build confidence about their English skills outside their countries.

For these reasons, more students make the big decision of study English outside their countries. This decision generated a positive changing of my life and the lives of 6.3 million students. Therefore, I have sound reasons to believe that number of students that study abroad will increase in many years. Also, my advice to future students is that they should take the opportunity to study abroad, especially at University of Florida's English Language Institute (ELI) because they will never regret making such a significant decision.



Julio Uyejara Bustamante, RW 50

Social Media and You

Excessive screen time is usually associated with teens or children, but it affects adults too. Most of us scroll on our phones in bed for an hour out of habit. This can be dangerous behavior, as Marissa Loeffler, MA, a licensed marriage and family therapist, explains. Nowadays, people use technology to relate to others, but they feel more alone than in the past. As René Monteagudo, executive director of the University of Miami's Counseling Center, said, "Students may report feeling connected to each other online, but lonely in real life." Also, most people who like to spend time on social media have sedentary habits and do not want to go outside or interact with others. These habits can result in physical hazards if people do not stop spending too much time indoors. People's excessive use of social media causes an increase in screen time, and this leads to physical, mental, and emotional hazards. To address this growing problem, there are solutions focused on good habits and tools to manage screen time.

One of the causes of excessive social media use is the fear of feeling "off" or not knowing the latest trend. Social media helps us stay connected, but these connections can create invisible pressure to know what is happening every minute. This does not affect only teens; many adults experience it too. Many of them have a smartphone addiction and do not want to keep their phones away from their faces. Consequently, excessive screen time can more easily lead to depression, anxiety, and burnout because the brain keeps working longer and cannot rest well at night. In addition, looking at social media in the morning can trigger the fight-or-flight response in your brain. This causes you to react quickly without having all the information.

Another cause of this behavior is that people are becoming more sedentary and want to stay at home. They prefer to stay home and not go out to meet other people because all they need is to stay “on” social media. As a result, these habits can lead to health problems such as eye strain, back pain, and weight loss or weight gain. They can also contribute to mood disorders such as depression or anxiety and prevent people from having “real” relationships with others. As Khumukchan Devi and Sudhakar Singh explain in the *Journal of Education and Health*, people who spend excessive time on screens lose opportunities for face-to-face interactions. These lost opportunities can lead to social isolation and loneliness. Luckily, it is possible to address this problem with the following solutions.

First, people can create schedules to reduce the time they spend using their phones to look at social media. They can start with small steps, such as doing a “digital detox.” A digital detox is a process in which people take short breaks from screens, set time limits for apps, or put devices away during meals and study sessions, as Monteagudo and Ahn, professionals in education, recommend. Doing a digital detox does not mean taking away our phones completely; it means taking time away from social media. Also, doing outdoor activities, such as going out with friends, exercising, visiting new places, and more, can help people spend less time on their phones and tablets.

Second, people can talk to friends and family or seek professional help to deal with this problem. If they cannot put their phones away, they should ask for help from friends, family members, or a psychologist. Not everyone is the same; some people need to make more effort to change certain behaviors. Also, institutions and workplaces can help prevent excessive screen time. As Khumukchan Devi and Sudhakar Singh recommend, institutions and workplaces should

implement health policies to promote the healthy use of technology instead of focusing only on performance.

In conclusion, excessive screen time and social media use can affect people's physical, mental, and emotional health. Although social media can help people stay connected, it can also create pressure, isolation, sedentary habits, anxiety, depression, and other health problems. For this reason, it is important for people to recognize when technology is controlling their daily lives. Creating schedules, practicing digital detoxes, doing outdoor activities, and asking for help from family, friends, or professionals are useful ways to reduce screen time. If people, institutions, and workplaces promote healthier technology habits, society can use social media in a more balanced and positive way. Therefore, people should start paying attention to how much time they spend on their phones and should spend more time with family and friends because life is too short to be spent on a screen.

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