CƠ HỘI VÀ THÁCH THỰC CỦA CÁC CHƯƠNG TRÌNH HỌC TIẾN ĐỘ NHANH: TỔNG QUAN TÀI LIỆU

Nguyễn Ngọc Hương Giang*, Vũ Thị Hồng Duyên**, Lê Thị Phương Anh**

Ở Việt Nam hầu như chưa có một nghiên cứu nào tổng hợp và hệ thống những cơ hội, thách thức cũng như dịch vụ hỗ trợ của các chương trình học tiến độ nhanh. Để thu hẹp sự thiếu hụt này, bài báo hiện tại lọc ra được 11 nghiên cứu thực nghiệm về các chương trình học tiến độ nhanh trên thế giới, sử dụng phương pháp phân tích chủ đề để phân tích và tổng hợp tài liệu. Kết quả phân tích cho thấy các chương trình tiến độ nhanh mang lại nhiều lợi ích và cơ hội cho sinh viên về mặt học thuật, tâm lí, xã hội và hành chính cả trong ngắn hạn và dài hạn. Bên cạnh đó, sinh viên cũng gặp khó khăn về các mặt trên nhưng nhận được hỗ trợ tương ứng từ bạn bè, thầy cô, nhà trường và gia đình. Kết quả của nghiên cứu này đặc biệt hữu ích cho các chương trình tiến độ nhanh còn non trẻ và có thể được sử dụng làm khung phân tích dữ liệu ban đầu cho một nghiên cứu sơ cấp về chủ đề tương tự.

Từ khóa: học tiến độ nhanh, chương trình học tiến độ nhanh, chương trình vào đại học sớm

There is a paucity of literature synthesing and systematically categorising fast-track programs' opportunities, challenges, and support structures in Vietnam. To close this gap, the current study offers such a synthesis via thematically analysing 11 carefully selected journal articles about different fast-track programs worldwide. Findings show that students gained short-and long-term benefits, experienced difficulties, and received peer-teacher-institution-family support in academical, emotional, social, and administrative aspects. Recommendations are then made for successful implementation of fast-track programs as well as for further research. This study's findings are particularly useful for newly executed fast-track programs and can be used as baseline analytical framework of a primary research investigating similar topics.

Key words: fast-track learning, fast-track programs, accelerated learning, accelerated programs, acceleration, early college entrance.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ARISING FROM ACADEMIC FAST-TRACK PROGRAMS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Email: giangnnh@hanu.edu.vn

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^{*} TS, ThS., Khoa tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Hà Nội *** Sinh viên Khoa tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Hà Nội

1. Introduction

Fast-track learning, an educational process where students "progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than their peers" (Pressey, 1949, p. 2), is also referred to in the literature as acceleration or accelerated learning. Dr. Halbert Robinson and his wife, Dr. Nancy Robinson, contributed to making it more popular by initiating early entrance programs in 1977 (Hertzog & Chung, 2015). Since its inception, many more similar programs have implemented all over the world, resulting in the quest for numerous investigations into the outcomes and students' experiences of the programs (Jett & Rinn, 2020), all the dynamics surrounding them 2012), (Marques, stakeholders' perceptions of them (Favor & Kulp, 2015), and more. Although these examinations are various, there is a need for more thorough research into different aspects of fast-track programs given the fact that fast-track learning has been a growing trend worldwide and is diverse in forms and implementation due to the programs' cultural and geographical differences (Jett & Rinn, 2020).

This paper offers a review of literature about fast-track programs where fast-track learning, or accelerated learning, is conceptualised with regard to "time", involving either courses completed at a shorter time than normally regulated or students entering institutions at an earlier age. The focuses are on students'

experiences in and perceptions of fast-track programs, from which challenges and opportunities resulted from these programs as well as support offered by them are critically synthesised. This review's findings might be helpful for newly implemented fast-track programs to take into account. It also seeks to determine gaps in terms of topics and methodology for further acceleration studies.

2. Methodology

This literature review was mainly sourced from fast-track learning literature using Google Scholar. Key words used for searching included: challenges of fasttrack learning, benefits/opportunities of fast-track learning, perceptions of fasttrack learning, experiences in fast-track learning. In the following searches, fasttrack learning was replaced with fast-track accelerated programs, learning, accelerated programs and acceleration. These searches resulted in 35 publications including journal articles, school or organisational body reports, an editorial commentary, conference papers, theses, and book chapters.

These 35 publications were further shortlisted based on the following selection criteria.

- (1) Articles from well-established and international peer-reviewed journals were selected.
- (2) Only articles researched and written in English were selected.

- (3) Only studies on fast-track learning/programs defined based on a timeframe was chosen.
- (4) Empirical research was prioritised. Some secondary studies were considered due to their systematic review or meta-analysis nature that was well methodically justified and the relevant topics they addressed.

The final shortlist was composed of 11 journal articles whose fundamental facts are shown in Table 1 and whose publication dates, authors, titles, aims, research geographical places,

methodologies, main findings, implications, and recommendations are summarised in Table 2. These 11 articles were then inductively thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nguyen, 2021) in Nvivo 11 with three initial central categories: benefits and opportunities resulted from fast-track programs, challenges posed by them, and the types of offered support for successful implementation of the programs. Most discussions and conclusions in this current literature review were drawn upon these 11 shortlisted articles.

Table 1: Extraction protocol with 11 selected studies as data

	Extract	Data	Count
	Research setting	USA	5
1		Australia	3
		China	2
		UK	1
2		Mixed methods	3
	Research	Qualitative	3
	design	Quantitative	1
		Review	4
	Participants	Students	6
3		Teachers (and professionals)	0
3	Farticipants	Both students and teachers	1
		Reviewed articles	4
4	Brief description of fast- track programs	University/college early entrance programs	3
		Special Class for Gifted Youth in China	2
		Shortened intensive fast-track courses at a university	2
		Fast-track programs in higher education	1
		Advanced Placement at the University of Florida	1
		Early Admission for Exceptionally Talented Student Scheme at the University of New South Wales	1
		Early College Entrance Program at the University of Washington	1

Table 2: Studies included and their findings

Authors and date	Title	Research questions/aims	Research methods used	Participants	Country	Country Key findings/ conclusions/ recommendations
Lee and Horsfall (2010)	Accelerated learning: A study of faculty and student experiences	to explore experiences of faculty and students following introduction of 6-week terms	Mixed methods: questionnaire + semi- structured interviews	114 students surveyed 11 faculty member interviewed	Australia	 generally positive experiences (76%) factors affecting learning experience: motivation, degree of diversity student workload: overloaded concern about absences assessment practice: multiple methods organisational issues:
Marques (2012)	The dynamics of accelerated learning	to find answers to recurring questions about accelerated formats (purpose, trend, concerns & advantages, strategies for success, & rigor)	Meta analysis	N/A	Australia	- Cons: faculty struggled with mixed feelings & hesitant to admit validity of courses, lowering academic standards to meet time constraints, lack of clarity on how to structure accelerated courses differently from traditional ones, topics not suitable - Pro: faster pace toward degree completion - Institutions: financial windfall, fulfilment of call for more flexibility from students, greater compatibility; increased sense of community, greater frequency of feedback, greater opportunity to focus on a topic

Key findings/ conclusions/ recommendations about academic achievement, family, friendships, work, and romantic relationships - opportunity to learn in a new distinctive way - educational outcomes: satisfactory PHUONG PHÁP GIẢNG DAY happy - taking learning risk/s - reconsider learning majority: - feeling safe (how, what) financial, Country USA UK **Participants** adult jo 'alumni' students program 192 12 phenomenogra і. semi- web-based methods used interview (45questionnaire Qualitative Research structured interviews structured dn-wolloj (Phase 1) Phase 2) methods: 60 mins) Mixed depth Semiphic with about long-term on personal compare experience in a to know more questions/aims student learning experience in an their learning of Research professional, accelerated university academic, context program impact setting student and lives Nguyễn Ngọc Hương Giang và cộng sự versus their for students fast to of learning Variation in ECEP at the Washington accelerated experience experience University raditional Outcomes Title students' on a college: setting track and Authors and date MacKenz Pritchard Hertzog (2013)Chung (2015)and 4

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Country Key findings/ conclusions/ recommendations	- Students: well-adjusted, competitive, intellectually independent Able to self-direct at a young age and tend to have acceleration experience before enrolling in the program	 Students struggled to balance academic achievements with social and emotional development while making mature decisions about career and identity. positive versus negative experiences with curriculum active versus passive academic coping positive and negative big fish-little pond effect intrinsic motivation to learn versus lack of motivation. 2 themes: academic growing and academic coping; hence Cope-and-Grow model
Country	China	China
Participants	N/A	34 graduates out of 51
Research methods used	Meta analysis: summary of studies on the Special Class for Gifted Youth	Qualitative: semi- structured interviews Grounded theory Thematic analysis
Research questions/aims	to introduce Special Class for Gifted Young and its students	to understand how accelerants responded to academic, social, developmental opportunities & challenges and to explore longterm and shortterm consequences of program
Title	Special class for gifted young: A 34-year experimenta tion with ECEP in China	Cope and Growth: A grounded theory approach to early entrants' lived experiences and changes in a STEM program
Authors and date	Dai and Steenber gen-Hu (2015)	Dai et al. (2015)

Key findings/ conclusions/ recommendations factors, & classification of coping strategies - Stressors: overwhelming workload, efforts - Straits perceived to influence success: hard performance - Accelerated students may need same type of assistance, coaching, and interventions as - High or low achievers: similar in perceived stressors, coping, traits, environmental - Coping strategies: manage time & tasks, take breaks & relax, seek support, redirect work and high expectations, peer networks, effective, caring teachers, parental support workload alignment and challenges: PHUONG PHÁP GIẢNG DAY traditional undergrads as (in)effective to balance time Common and home life expectation distribution thoughts Country **USA** USA **Participants** 30 students successful; 15: struggling) business students adult (15: methods used online surveys Quantitative: Research Qualitative: interviews structured semi-To investigate stressors faced success; social, 8 compare student learning teams questions/aims students, coping contributing to B in accelerated online & offline perceptions of characteristics Research influencing educational strategies; personal supports familial, barriers saccess courses adult their Nguyễn Ngọc Hương Giang và cộng sự and factors contribute to high school perceptions accelerated accelerated Academic Students' Title programs learning saccess courses teams risk adult that Jo Favor and Authors and date Shauness Dedrick (2015)(2015)Kulp et

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Country Key findings/ conclusions/ recommendations	- Students have a very positive, intellectually stimulating, and socially satisfying experience during programs - Challenges: lack of life skills, an unwillingness to seek help, and issue with procrastination	- Majority of participants reported to be cared and actively taught by instructors - Four qualitative themes: authentic and empathetic communication, timely and respectful feedback, faculty interaction, and investment in student success	- ECE is academically challenging but rewarding - ECE provides unique social, emotional, and psychological experiences, which student tend to reflect on positively - Relationships with same age peers, with older students and adults, and family - ECE outperform unaccelerated counterparts academically - Regrets are rare but not unheard	early college entrance program(s) (in general)
	Australia	USA	USA	
Participants	N/A	138 nursing students	26 articles	of Washington),
Research methods used	Meta analysis	Mixed methods: survey with both qualitative and quantitative items		the University
Research questions/aims	to provide a review of Australian current literature on ECE	to examine student perceptions of faculty roles in accelerated courses	to illuminate Systematic multiple aspects review omes related to early research on and A educational c practice of early college opportunities	Early College Entrance Program (at the University
Title	Early college entrance in Australia	Student perceptions of faculty presence and caring in accelerated online courses	Student to experiences multipl and outcomes related of early researc college: A educati systematic practic review college	College Entra
Authors and date	Jung et al. (2015)	Zajac and Lane (2020)	Libett and Rinn (2020)	ECEP: Early
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3. Findings

Numerous themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the shortlisted journal articles, but this current review focuses on presenting and discussing four main topics: types of fast-track programs, opportunities, challenges, and support with regards to fast-track learning/programs.

3.1. Types of fast-track programs

Fast-track learning is also referred to in the literature as acceleration or accelerated learning, the definition of which has been inconsistent due to a wide variety of fasttrack program types existing. Within the scope of 11 selected articles outlined in Table 2, fast-track programs have been implemented in the following pathways:

- (1) Early entrance to college/university where institutions execute programs that prepare young students for an earlier entry to tertiary courses such as the Early College Entrance Program (ECEP) at the University of Washington in the USA (Hertzog & Chung, 2015) and the Special Class for Gifted Youth (SCGY) in China (Dai et al., 2015; Dai & Steenbergen-Hu, 2015). Where students are allowed to skip 2 or more years/grades, acceleration is referred to as rapid acceleration (Jett & Rinn, 2020). As a result, these programs' participants can enter university earlier than age peers.
- (2) Advanced Placement (AP) programs allow high school students to earn college credits in advance so that AP

eligible graduates can get into a college of choice and do away with some introductory college courses. A study on this type of program was conducted by Shaunessy-Dedrick et al. (2015).

(3) *Individual course acceleration*, or 'condense' courses. Examples include a series of 6-week courses (originally 12 weeks) offered by Swinburne University of Technology in Australia (Lee & Horsfall, 2010), a 4-week term at an institution in the UK (MacKenzie & Pritchard, 2013) and other programs reviewed by Marques (2012).

Except for being specifically spelled out in such programs as the Special Class for Gifted Youth or Early Admission for Exceptionally Talented Student Scheme, students signing up for these programs are not necessarily 'gifted' or 'exceptionally talented' who possess "above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity" (Reis & Renzulli, 2004, p. 119). However, most early college entrants and other fast-track students have been generally characterised as highly motivated, hard-working, and academically curious (Dai & Steenbergen-Hu, 2015; Jett & Rinn, 2020).

3.2. Benefits and opportunities arising from fast-track programs

Fast-track programs have been found to be beneficial and rewarding in many ways for different stakeholders both in the short term and long term. Cutting down on course seating time, a faster race toward the completion of the degree, and generally lower cost tend to be their most frequently reported advantages (Jung et al., 2015; Marques, 2012). Although intensive, fortunately, the condense format or time constraints do not probably hinder courses' quality; however, instruction and the alignment between learning outcomes and assessment needs to be closely monitored (Marques, 2012). Early college entrants tend to have extra transitional post-graduation time compared to their age peers which was reportedly spent on enjoying further study, detouring if needed, and moving forward (Jung et al., 2015).

In addition, fast-track programs have provided students with positive academic, social and emotional experiences (Dai et al., 2015; Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Jett & Rinn, 2020; Lee & Horsfall, 2010; Marques, 2012). Academically, student learning performance was improved (Jung et al., 2015; Lee & Horsfall, 2010; Marques, 2012) and those who graduated from early college entrance programs reported to be academically successful higher education (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Jett & Rinn, 2020). Likewise, there was a positive association between fast-track learning and standardised achievement tests university grades (Hertzog & Chung, 2015). Additionally, the majority of student participants (76%) in Lee and Horsfall's (2010) analysis rated their learning experience as positive, which was then confirmed by both student and teacher qualitative responses that students were

highly motivated and confident about learning.

Psychologically and emotionally, the fast-track journey appears to have added students' personal development and team development (Dai et al., 2015; Favor & Kulp, 2015; Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Marques, 2012). For example, early college entrants' reflections in Dai et al.'s (2015)study indicate that their psychological and emotional experiences during acceleration were unique and satisfying. From a developmental perspective, they saw acceleration as an opportunity to learn to 'cope and grow' (Dai et al., 2015, p. 1), finding their identity and becoming more and more emotionally mature. Part of the reasons might be what Jung et al. (2015) referred to acceleration to university being chances of validating themselves, being treated as adults, and having new-found multiple freedom.

Socially, early college entrants report to have developed good relationships with peers (Hertzog & Chung, 2015) and teachers (Jett & Rinn, 2020). They see acceleration as an opportunity to make friends and establish connections with same age intellects and senior academics (Jung et al., 2015). This is in line with Lee and Horsfall's (2010) teacher participants' observation that students quickly formed their learning groups, echoed by student participants in the same study that they developed sense of accountability for fellow students and learning. Similarly,

many participants in Hertzog and Chung's (2015) study were content with being part of a group of like-minded and highly stimulated students, as one of the participants said.

Having a community of bright peers your age during the college experience was helpful; it can be difficult to relate to older college students in the early and it's motivating to know others are there who aspire to learn or achieve more earlier. (p. 47)

Furthermore, long-term outcomes of fast-track programs have also been investigated in the literature. Hertzog and Chung (2015) surveyed 192 alumni of the Early College Entrance Program at the University of Washington and offered interesting findings. First, acceleration was not only positively connected to the reputation of the college or university the participants went to, but also to their employment outcomes. A vast majority of participants (roughly 94%) had satisfying jobs with good income. This is echoed by Shaunessy-Dedrick et al.'s (2015) that many fast-track graduates gained high positions in prestigious companies and organisations. This might partially result from the comprehensive support services offered to students (Hertzog & Chung, 2015) and the practical approaches to teaching that prepares students better for real-world profession (Marques, 2012). Also, many of the program graduates reported to pursue or gain higher degrees and most of them (71.9%) appeared to have a well-balanced social life with different

relationships (Hertzog & Chung, 2015).

3.3. Challenges of fast-track programs

When asked why they applied for the program offered by fast-track the University of Washington, an overwhelming majority of student participants (94.5%) rated "Needed a challenge." as very important or important. This indicates the students themselves understood that the fast-track journey was full of challenges. In fact, the challenges for different stakeholders involved have been reported by both teachers and students in the fast-track literature.

The challenge frequently most mentioned by both teachers and students is the high level of stress that students have to experience (Jett & Rinn, 2020; Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). Jett and Rinn (2020) synthesise previous studies and find that when asked whether alumni had been under pressure to academically achieve from different stressors as well-performed students tended to experience, several informants indicated parents, the program's staff, and peers as sources of pressure.

Nearly 50 percent of informants in Lee and Horsfall's (2010) study said such stress came from self. This accords with findings of the project by Hertzog and Chung (2015) that an overwhelming majority of informants (95.3%) said it was very important or important to live up to one's expectation while roughly 38 percent, to live up to their parents' expectations.

Another stressor might originate from heavy workload for both students and teachers (Lee & Horsfall, 2010; Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). Teachers also raised concerns about an inadequate amount of time students had in order to prepare for the assigned tasks, which was in agreement with students reporting to be overloaded with assignments assessments to be completed in a narrow timeframe. There were also workload issues for teachers such as excessive teaching hours and not having enough time for lesson planning due to the intensive nature of fast-track courses (Lee & Horsfall, 2010). In addition, students had problems with balancing time for study and other recreational and social activities (Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015).

Several researchers reached out to examine stress handling strategies used by fast-track students (Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). These strategies include learning how to manage time effectively, knowing when to take breaks and relax, redirecting thoughts, and seeking help from different sources such as peers, teachers, and parents.

Socially, it was difficult to mingle in the wider college academic community, as one of the participants accounted, "The peer group was overly insular. Not enough effort is made to get the students to integrate with the other University of Washington students." (Hertzog & Chung, 2015, p. 47). This may be partly due to their lack of life skills and unwillingness to seek

assistance (Jung et al., 2015). In terms of dating life, male accelerands, especially ones in rapid accelerated programs, found it awkward to date while at university because some were even four years younger than most classmates (Hertzog & Chung, 2015).

Administratively, some institutions face risks of lowering standards of fast-track programs so as to maintain competition with similar programs at other institutions (Jett & Rinn, 2020; Marques, 2012). Students also claimed that they were not clearly informed of how the fast-track courses were differently structured from the traditional ones (Marques, 2012).

Finally, there are other concerns in reference to issues with procrastination (Jung et al., 2015), students being unready in terms of language skills and unaware of the required amount of work (Lee & Horsfall, 2010).

3.4. Supporting factors for a successful fast-track program

For successful execution of fast-track programs, numerous efforts have been made in supporting students.

Hertzog and Chung (2015) provide quite a detailed description of support services for those students attending a fast-track program offered by the University of Washington, which has been around for nearly 50 years. Support structures are characterised as academic counsellors, student and parent orientation programs,

and student support. Counselling services' responsibility is to enhance relationships among students and between students and teachers. What academic counsellors do sometimes is to get students engaged in self-reflections. In addition, the program frequently hold events to facilitate both existing and new students. For example, there is an occasional picnic hosted by an early entrant's parent to connect students and families together socially. More events are parent and student orientation and camping excursions which help bonding new accelerands together and with former ones. Students appeared to be less distant and more open both to learning and to socialisation after such experiences with mentors leading getting-to-know activities (Hertzog & Chung, 2015). Other events include major fair, where representatives from departments are invited to introduce courses and majors to newcomers, and parent conferences, where application officers and program faculty inform parents of registration process, their children's academic planning and choices, funding, etc. A series of alumni speaker and annual open house are available for both new and existing students and parents as well.

In addition to being well supported, there are other enablers to academic, emotional, and social satisfaction for early college students. Significant factors are emotional growth, self-motivation, and subject matter mastery (Hertzog & Chung, 2015). Likewise, in their summary of

research investigating highly gifted students' experiences and attitudes toward early college entrance programs in Australia, Jung et al. (2015) identified a number of factors that the participants believe may have contributed to their success at university: personal factors (a high level of motivation, their enjoyment of the study experience, diligence), enthusiasm and support from faculty and other college staff members, newly made friends, and family. Jung and his highlighted colleagues considerable support from parents in their study who tried to do a great deal of reading on gifted education and accelerated learning or even moved to where it was more educationally useful for their children. Parental support and family life, together with students' diligence, high expectations, and thoughtful teachers, are also emphasised as characteristics among perceived influence successful acceleration (Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015).

In a more recent study (Zajac & Lane, 2020), teachers were described as very supportive. The three supporting points respondents quantitatively ranked the highest were "Provide timely "Offers academic communication", support", and "Present an empathetic presence". These findings were confirmed by some student interviewees that teachers provided authentic empathetic and communication as well as timely and respectful feedback.

4. Conclusion and implications

The purpose of this study is to review studies on the fast-track programs defined with reference to a timeframe so that their benefits, challenges, and support services can be systematically categorised. The results of reviewing 11 selected articles show that fast-track learning has been considered awarding and challenging learning experiences by both fast-track students and teachers. Fast-track programs have brought about multiple benefits and opportunities in terms of academic achievements, psychological and emotional growth, and social relationships for students, both short-term and long-term. Similarly, students attending these programs reported to have encountered academic. social. emotional. and administrative challenges some of which are such stressors as time, parent, peer, and self-pressure. It was also found that largely fast-track students were sufficiently academically, financially, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and administratively supported by peers, institutional staff, and family. Notably, both successful and not so successful accelerands experienced and observed similar enabling and inhibiting factors as well as coping strategies.

Although limited in the number of articles reviewed, this current analysis reveals several gaps from which recommendations for further studies can be made. First, as can be seen from Table 1, there is an obvious lack of studies on fast-track programs in Asia in general in

Vietnam in particular despite the fact that acceleration has been around in Western society for nearly half a century and has worked its way to almost all over the world. In the context of Vietnam, little to no primary research has been conducted on any type of fast-track programs. Second, out of the seven empirical studies in Table 1, in-depth semi-structured interviews appear to be most frequently used research methods in both solely qualitative and mixed methods studies. This implies that semi-structured interviews should continue to be used in future studies that explore different aspects of a fast-track programs, especially for the first time. Third, almost all the reviewed primary papers looked at the issues under investigation from students' perspectives only, which implies a quest for inviting more stakeholders in a study like teachers, leaders, administrative staffs, advisors, mentors, etc. Multiple sources of data would add multidimensional views of the investigated phenomena and thus deeper insight to a study's findings. This is also to ensure the triangulation of data and, therefore, enhance findings' reliability (Creswell, 2015).

In conclusion, this literature review offers an overview of the dynamics of fast-track programs in reference to their positives and negatives, which can inform to-be or newly implemented similar programs about what to include and what to avoid. There is evidential indication that fast-track programs need to prepare

students not only academically but also socially and emotionally (Hertzog & Chung, 2015). Apparently, a successful completion of a course, a program, or a degree parallels students' outcomes gained as expected, positive feedback about it, and the level of support it can provide. However, institutions should consider what works and what does not work in their cases. As Jett and Rinn (2020, p. 92) put it, fast-track programs "are quite different... in terms of objectives, implementation, focus, and culture. Therefore, applying results from one or a few studies to all early college entrance is an imperfect procedure."

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