

Chapter 10

Educational Symbiosis: Designing English Language Learning Courses to Support Syntegrative Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers how practitioners at a Sino-British institution have developed English language learning pathways and courses for students enrolled on industry-themed programmes to support a new syntegrative educational model. The chapter considers some of the challenges these educators have faced, not only because of the need to create offerings from the ground up, but also because of the difficulties COVID-19 and broader institutional provisional evolutions have presented. With this in mind, how the staff overcame the challenges they faced in responding to the foundation year developments, creating year two modules and business courses, whilst also providing ongoing continuing language and study skills support for students, along with administrative support, will be presented in the form of solutions and recommendations. It is hoped that others can learn from these experiences and reflections.

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INTRODUCTION

The future of language learning in higher education has rarely been as turbulent and exciting as it is currently. The technological age of education has arguably been emerging for some time, but the current global pandemic has ushered it in at a speed which many institutions and education providers were simply ill prepared for and are still struggling to adapt to (Owaineh, 2020). Another developmental feature of education present is the drive towards more collaborative working relationships which extend beyond independent institutions and the traditional boundaries and communities in which they typically operate (ELSEVIER, 2021). Given the challenges from COVID-19 and the uncertainties and opportunities presented by these developments, it is essential to be prepared and plan ahead (Manfuso, 2020; Xi, 2020). This may require provisional overhauls and shifting workplace dynamics and necessitate adopting new perspectives towards education (Orazbayeva, Meerman, Galan Muros, Davey & Plewa, 2020). This chapter will consider how the impact of some of these global developments led to an evolving institutional landscape, and more specifically an English language pathway designed to support syntegrative educational designs (Malik, 2019), a new model of education (Yang, 2019). The syntegrative education model builds on the concept of ‘syntegration’ as developed by the Austrian economist and management consultant Professor Fredmund Malik. Initially developed to assist large business organisations in decision-making, leadership, and governance, it brings together a range of knowledge(s), creating something that is completely new and important. The university, seeing the value of synergy and integration (syntegration) brings the core essence of Malik’s theory into the educational arena. The chapter will begin by providing an overview of the context and then focus on a newly created English language and study skills pathway, designed to support the academic ambitions of students enrolled at a ground-breaking new college established to be at the forefront of twenty first century education. It will also consider the challenges faced, solutions adopted, and recommendations going forward before concluding by highlighting some possible future research directions.

BACKGROUND

Xi’an Jiao Tong-Liverpool University (XJTLU)

XJTLU is the largest educational joint venture in China, opening in 2006 (XJTLU, 2019), and is situated within the city and broad metropolitan area of Suzhou within the Yangtze river delta. It is independent of its founding institutions, enabling the university to develop at a faster rate than other higher education providers. Located within Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP), it has grown exponentially in the intervening fifteen years and in 2022 will open a second campus in a satellite city, where the recently established Entrepreneur College (Taicang) will be situated. XJTLU is an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) institution, and English is an essential feature of academic success at the university, with the English Language Centre, a part of the School of Languages, tasked with providing language pathways and courses to support students academically and to facilitate their English language learning endeavours. Recent years have seen a number of challenges arise within the ELC (Morris, 2021). Some of these have been caused by global developments, such as COVID-19, whereas others are the result of institutional provisional advances. Some of the subsequent changes have included the overhaul of the first

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