

Innovative practice to support employability

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Abstract

Employability is an increasingly important part of students' experience in UK universities. Embedding employability knowledge within ordinary teaching offers the opportunity to combine students' employability development with subject learning but is disliked by educators since lecture time is usually only sufficient for the required subject knowledge. We present an embedded design that allows employability skills to be developed without requiring additional time. It has been adopted in an undergraduate module delivered to students at one of University of Greenwich's partners in China. It has helped them improve their employability skills and be better prepared for their study at UK universities.

Background of the initiative

In recent years, developing students' employability skills has been increasingly emphasized by the government and universities aiming to provide work-ready graduates (Dearing Report, 1997; Wilson Review; 2012). While the efforts have been made to deliver personal skills focused modules to all levels of students separately from subject courses (Knight and Yorke, 2004), it is reported that students found little benefit from such learning (Cranmer 2006, Speight, 2013). In addition, some students were not even able to reflect these skills in their reflective reports during their placement in real business environment. When we asked Chinese international students about their learning experience on employability development in the UK, most of them said they did not take the course seriously simply because such courses were non-credit bearing. Given the above, making direct links between students' employability and their subject learning might be more effective in delivering employability (Cox and King, 2006).

There are increasing number of Chinese students studying at universities in the UK. Western lecturers and instructors often express their frustrations when trying to interact with Chinese students due to receiving little response from them (Wozniaková, 2015). According to the literature, Chinese students are commonly characterised as passive participants and lacking independent learning skills (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001). Although the way of Chinese students' learning may be deeply rooted in Confucius cultural (Bush and Qiang, 2000), it is a critical obstacle between the lecturer and the students to achieving learner-centred teaching and learning. Delivering employability effectively to these students is even more challenging. Therefore, innovative teaching pedagogy is particularly needed to accommodate these students' employability learning (Cox and King, 2006; Cottrell, 2003).

Links to the conference theme and strand and how it is Innovative

In one of our UG modules- Financial Markets and Institutions, we have embedded employability learning within subject learning to address their employability development with a number of innovations. The rationale of this design lies on the belief that transferable skills

alone do not guarantee employment of graduates, but subject-specific skills would increase their general employment with their chosen profession (Nabi, 2003). We also believe that “interest is the best teacher” and “give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life time” (ancient Chinese saying). Therefore, it is the course designer’s responsibility to help the student to grow their interest in the subject by establishing a close connection between the knowledge in textbook and knowledge of employability from the real world.

First, we used a series of related TED talks to bring real world of business in front of students (See below). Videos of Ted talks are carefully selected and shared with the students with designed questions for discussions to stimulate high order learning. Second, we used WeChat to enhance students’ engagement during the lecture time. Thirdly, students were required to submit a group presentation filmed on video and these videos are peer-assessed.

This embedded course has been delivered twice to two groups of Chinese students who were studying on a 3+1 programme jointly provided by the University of Greenwich and one Chinese partner university in 2017 and 2018. These students are expected to study three years in China and come to the UK in their final year to complete their undergraduate degree.

This pedagogy design offers several benefits: first, it directly addresses the students’ employability development by translating subject knowledge via selected real-life experience in finance; second, it provides opportunities for high-order learning through group discussions; finally, since most of Chinese students have no experience on presentation, using video presentation helps Chinese students to “save face” and to build confidence in such activities. Making video also enhances students’ e-communication skills required for 21st century employment.

Figure 2

TED Talks Summary		
Course Topic	TED Talk Speaker & Title	TED Talk Description
Financial markets: Function and Structure	Tan Su Shan “The evolving nature of banking”	New technologies, more fluid interactions with consumers, and emerging alternative means of payment and even currency have challenged banks to adapt and innovate.
Money market and capital market	Paul Kemp-Robertson “Bitcoin. Sweat. Tide. Meet the future of branded currency”	What’s the world’s best performing currency? It’s actually Bitcoin. Is history repeating itself? Is technology making paper money feel outmoded? Are we decoupling money from the government?
Financial Institutions: Commercial banks and Investment Banks	Chris MckNett “The investment logic for sustainability”	Investors look at a company and decide whether to invest, they look at financial data, metrics like sales growth, cash flow, market share, valuation – but they’re not enough. Investors should also look at performance metrics in what we call ESG: environment, social and governance.
Insurance Companies and Pension Funds	Shlomo Benartzi “Saving for tomorrow, tomorrow”	Behavioral finance is a combination of psychology and economics, trying to understand the money mistakes people make and act upon
Financial Markets Regulation	William Black “How to rob a bank (From the inside, that is)”	A recipe for banks’ failure which leads to the financial crisis in 2008

Impact on the HE sector

According to UKCISA's report (2018), the number of students from China was much higher than from any other overseas countries. In 2016-2017, nearly one third of all non-EU international students were from China. As Chinese students' common learning style is different from home students, it is important to explore innovative pedagogies to meet these students' learning needs. Furthermore, Even though most of these students may not be looking for jobs in the UK after their graduation, no matter where they are going to be employed, their education background would be UK HE educated. Therefore, enhancing Chinese international students' learning experience on both subject and employability skills would positively affect the demand for the HE in the UK and UK HE's market share in the world market.

Intended audience and Learning outcome

Our practice has received positive feedback from the two groups of students. By using the embedded approach, the students have shown not only much improved engagement and motivation on leaning the subject, they have also demonstrated enhanced personal skills on e-communication, IT skills and critical thinking.

In our practice, we also found that using the App-WeChat app is particularly effective in engaging large group of students during the lecture. By adopting WeChat in teaching, an instructor is able to direct questions to a specific student or to a whole group of students. It also allows students to demonstrate their learnings under a competitive environment without losing their face, yet earning face when they responded correctly.

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