Towards a Successful Postgraduate Life and Beyond: The Construction of a PG Transition Module

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Abstract

This paper is about the construction of a multidimensional Transition Support System (TSS) for postgraduates in XJTLU. As the university keeps expanding and the PG programme is enlarging, the need to facilitate postgraduates' transition in this Sino-British EMI University emerges. The postgraduate students may face a multitude of challenges before and after they join XJTLU. Thus, it is of necessity and urgency to build up a system to aid postgraduates in their transition to XJTLU. This system is embodied in a PG Transition Module and is currently at its piloting stage. This project will implement action research in the iterative process of constructing and modifying the TSS, while investigating the effect of the TSS on postgraduates' development of self-directed research-led learning skills. This project is highly significant as it will increase the prospect of a successful XJTLU life for postgraduates, and enhance the profile of XJTLU in the international arena as a pioneer in offering an extensive support system for postgraduate transition. After the first iteration of this PG Transition Module, there is feedback from multiple stakeholders including students, practice mentors and academic advisors, with their varied perceptions and experiences of the project-based learning in one semester. Postgraduate students mostly described how learning in authentic real world projects have helped their development of self-directed and self-regulated learning skills although they have also raised their expectations for the relevancy of these projects to their disciplinary areas for the enhancement of employability.

Keywords: PG module, project-based learning, transition support

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Introduction

The construction of a PG transition system was initiated against the backdrop that the postgraduate programme in XJTLU is developing rapidly and there has been a dire need for facilitating postgraduates' transition in this university. After much consultation with key stakeholders including external partnership institutions outside XJTLU and programme directors within XJTLU, it was decided that the transition system would be embodied in a PG Transition Module to be piloted in one semester, before it would be further refined and made ready to be rolled out across the whole university.

Previously, the significance of supporting students' transition has been very often undervalued. In reality, students who haven't been accommodated well in the early stages of their postgraduate studies might experience difficulties in their later academic studies. In the worst scenario, they might drop out in their first year of study if they do not feel adequately supported by their institution (Wilcox et al., 2005). Postgraduates' challenges may be associated with the curriculum, their social roles, and generic life challenges (Tsao, 2020). To meet the demand for assistance with postgraduate students' transition in universities, various pre-sessional courses have been offered to help students overcome the aforementioned challenges in universities across the globe. Typically, these courses focus on preparing students academically (Hultberg et al., 2008).

However, a more comprehensive, coordinated, and student-centred approach may serve best to support students' transition (Timms et al., 2022), because transition needs to eventually enable students' integration into their academic environment (Wilson et al., 2016) and prepare students for their future employment. It was therefore hoped that the construction of the Transition Support System in the form of a PG transition module would make it possible that support for postgraduates' transition would be delivered in a multifaceted manner with a long-term positive impact on postgraduate students and the university.

The Construction of the PG Transition Module

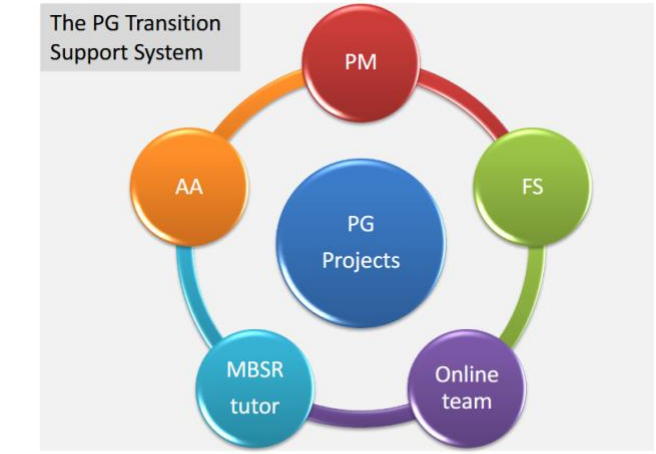
The aim of constructing this PG Transition module is to provide students with learning resources and guidance that will help students to develop self-regulated learning skills and 21st century soft skills including communication skills, leadership skills, and self-management skills, which will in turn enhance students' development of employability so that they may have a successful academic life in XJTLU and beyond.

Early in 2025, it was decided that a multi-dimensional support system for postgraduate transition would be established in response to the university-wide initiative of "research-led and project-based learning". The module would be counted as 80 Co-curricular Activity hours, and would be a prerequisite for students to proceed to dissertation writing stage. There were five components in the module: 1) there was an online team preparing online resources for students' self-study on Learning Mall; 2) there was onsite supervision from practice mentors for students' field work on the 4 practice bases including 3 practice bases in external partnership institutions and one home base in XJTLU, 3) there was academic skills supervision from Academic Advisors to give students tutorials in the university, 4) there were field supervisors to help administer students' onsite engagement and project progress, and 5) there was a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course tutor to help relieve students' stress by offering MBSR course to be held at the university. In addition, students would carry

out teamwork and self-reflection on their own. The PG Transition Support System embodied in this module is shown below.

Figure 1

The PG Transition Support System in XJTLU



PM: Practice Mentor FS: Field Supervisor AA: Academic Advisor
MBSR: Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction

The Delivery of the PG Transition Module

In line with the 5 components of the module as listed above, each of its componential teams started work to support new postgraduates' transition into XJTLU in September, 2025. The module was delivered in one semester in the academic year of 2025–2026.

On 5 September, postgraduate induction activities were held to introduce the launch of this new initiative and this new module. Students met with their academic advisors and practice mentors at a "speed-dating" event and exchanged initial information on the real-world projects to be selected. After that, surveys were conducted to investigate students' interests and the matching process was completed within 2 weeks, to form project teams that were comprised of a practice mentor from a practice base, an academic advisor from within the university, and a student team of 3–5 postgraduates.

In the initial couple of weeks, students accessed online contents for self-study at their own pace to get a general comprehension of the module and their upcoming field work on practice bases. The online materials were divided into 5 mini-courses in 10 weeks. There was also an MBSR section on the university learning management system, which was called "Learning Mall" that was moodle-based.

Next, students conducted field work on practice bases from W3–W10. Students' onsite supervision was provided by their practice mentors, which was conducted on a project-by-project basis. Field Supervisors helped to gauge students' onsite engagement, ensure students' health and safety, and coordinate between students, AAs, and PMs on base. Meanwhile, students were expected to take their own initiative to start communications with AAs for help with the development of their research skills and academic skills. In addition, students attended MBSR course to learn how to relieve stress and regulate emotions.

Achievements and Challenges From the PG Transition Module

The PG Transition Module has been the first of its kind, encompassing various elements ranging from academic study skills, to problem-solving skills, and self-regulatory skills. There were 22 projects on 4 practice bases, covering various educational levels. As such, the achievements from the PG Transition Module were multifaceted, so were the challenges encountered.

First of all, the majority of students demonstrated strong interest in experiential learning through projects at the outset, and some of them have expressed their achievements in skills acquisition towards the conclusion of the module. In the Induction survey, it was revealed that 70.37% of the student respondents demonstrated strong interests in the new module. After the module was concluded, some students expressed in the follow-up survey that they have indeed acquired "leadership skills", "communication skills", and built up their self-confidence in teamwork in the problem-solving process. It was acknowledged by the student respondents (52/78 respondents) in the survey that communications skills (77%) and teamwork skills (70%) were developed through doing projects in this module.

Secondly, there were at least 6 project teams (out of 22) that have completed their project proposals without traditional classroom instructions. These students divided workload among themselves, self-studied Module Handbook and proposal sample, before they produced their own proposals centering on the projects they have completed. In their proposals, they have explained in detail the problems they identified in the real-life situations, the process of their research, and the solutions to these problems and corresponding action plans, including milestones to be achieved.

Nevertheless, there were also various challenges arisen from the module. One of these challenges was the alignment of goals, expectations and routines for the various parties involved. This was due to the diversity in participating parties' backgrounds, interests, and expected outcomes. Moreover, how to make the projects closely relevant to students' disciplinary areas was another challenge because the projects were decided by the Practice Mentors' backgrounds and the hosting institutions' interests.

Recommendations for Future Actions

After the piloting of the module, it became clear that there are several areas that can be further improved despite of the achievements made.

First and foremost, in order to make all the projects of values for the postgraduates in their learning journey in XJTLU and beyond, much more communications and discussions will be needed prior to the start of the module in its next iteration. The purpose for this is multifold: a) this may help to ease/avoid possible tensions between different stakeholders when their expectations/goals are misaligned; b) the formation process for project teams will be facilitated; c) possible changes in projects and teams may be minimized/avoided.

Secondly, in order to provide sufficient scaffolding for the newly recruited postgraduates, it is recommended that onsite workshops will be organized and more lines of communications will be opened to promote the module and enhance participants' understanding of the module and the projects. The interactions in these workshops for students may also help to open up

opportunities for their socializing and networking, which will also help their formation of project teams and facilitate their future communications in conducting projects in the fields.

Last but not least, it is recommended that certain charters for standards of practice will be outlined and resources will be co-shared between XJTLU and its partner institutions, so that the module is sustainable and there will be the win-win situation achieved for all the stakeholders involved.

Conclusion

The construction of the PG Transition Module is an adventurous endeavor. I, as the Module Leader, have led the team to venture into the unknown and we have embraced risk-taking. Yet there was no guarantee that it could be an instant success despite of the achievements made. In order for it to generate an enjoyable and productive experience for all the parties in this multi-lateral collaboration, there is still some distance to go and more challenges to overcome. But in the foreseeable future, I am confident that this module will have far-reaching significance for the changes made in students' mindset in problem-solving and their approaches to lifelong learning.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Appendix

Projects in the PG Transition Module

XJTLU AI-empowered PBL innovation for primary schools
Exploring AI general education courses at Wenjing School
Little craftsman of science and innovation: “Big Hands Holding Small Hands” Tool Workshop
Children's creative laboratory: Action plan for the development of the science and innovation toolbox
Student clubs and the transition from primary to lower secondary school
Student mental health empowerment resources and navigation
Optimization of Drama & Music Curriculum in Primary Schools of Foreign Language
How to optimize the bilingual reading atmosphere in integrated classes
Intangible cultural heritage literacy from the perspective of family-school-community collaboration: Building a practical model
Constructing industry-education integration communities in the Suzhou classical garden architecture sector
Applying artificial intelligence technology in educational evaluation in vocational education
Optimizing APP adaptation for digital learning resources in adult education
Student mental health empowerment resources and navigation
How to foster university students' ethical awareness and promote their character development via PBL?
How to promote Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in diverse classrooms through contextualized and culturally responsive practices?
How can we improve the research-oriented competency of basic education students via an organized activity?
How can Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) be systematically implemented in XJTLU Alliance Schools？
Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): Incorporating Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Competencies into Educational Curricular
How to optimize campus tours to provide clients with a customized, immersive exploration space?
How to optimize the workshop sessions in teaching-related training programmes to enhance interaction and communication among participants and improve learning achievements?
How can we know if faculty development is effective in changing teaching practice?
How can actors from the digital education industry and programme better meet one another at an event centred on research projects?

How does the integration of research-led PBL and AI impact students' learning experience and academic achievement?