In the Classroom

Harnessing Multilingual International Students' English Academic Socialization through Asynchronous Interactive Online Orientation

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This online project was created to orient multilingual international students into the new academic context of a major Canadian university by offering them a set of asynchronous interactive self-paced modules. We drew on an academic discourse socialization framework to identify and scaffold areas in need of further development in students' academic practices. Prior to designing the modules, we conducted an informal focus-group meeting to understand views of recently admitted undergraduate and graduate students with regard to the areas where they felt the need for most support. Based on the students' comments and our own experiences as multilingual educators and international graduate research assistants, we designed modules centred on four key principles of comprehension, representation, multimodality, and accessibility. The designed modules were then shared with another cohort of new students in this Canadian university and their views were collected. Students' responses showed the potential effectiveness of this online orientation in their academic success in their target institution. We discuss the affordances (and limitations) of this project based on the analysis of the content of modules, the process of designing them, and our reflections on student views.

Ce projet en ligne a été créé pour soutenir les étudiants internationaux multilingues intégrant le nouveau contexte académique d'une grande université canadienne en leur proposant un ensemble de modules interactifs asynchrones à suivre de manière autonome. Nous nous sommes appuyés sur un cadre de socialisation du discours académique pour identifier et étayer les domaines nécessitant un développement plus poussé des pratiques académiques des étudiants. Avant de concevoir les modules, nous avons organisé un entretien de groupe informel afin de comprendre les points de vue des étudiants récemment admis dans des programmes de premier cycle et de cycles supérieurs en ce qui concerne les domaines dans lesquels ils ressentaient davantage le besoin d'être soutenus. Sur la base des commentaires des étudiants et de nos propres expériences en tant qu'éducateurs internationaux multilingues et assistants de recherche aux cycles supérieurs, nous avons conçu des modules centrés sur quatre principes clés : la compréhension, la représentation, la multimodalité et l'accessibilité. Les modules conçus ont ensuite été partagés avec une autre

cohorte de nouveaux étudiants dans cette université canadienne et leurs avis ont été recueillis. Les réponses des étudiants ont montré l'efficacité potentielle de ces modules en ligne pour leur réussite académique dans l'établissement cible. Nous discutons des possibilités (et des limites) de ce projet sur la base de l'analyse du contenu des modules, du processus de leur conception et de nos réflexions sur les opinions des étudiants.

Keywords: academic discourse socialization, asynchronous interactive orientation modules, self-paced learning, supporting international students

As a popular destination for post-secondary education, Canadian universities, including the site of this project, have been attracting a large population of international students (Statistics Canada, 2024). While the international student population certainly involves students from so-called English-speaking countries who may have relatively more lived experiences with educational practices and spaces in English, the majority of international students are also multilinguals, who may be totally new to, less familiar with, and thus potentially in need of support for linguistic, cultural, and discourse practices in English-speaking spaces and academic discourses. With the transition to emergency remote education during the COVID pandemic and the continued tendencies toward online teaching and learning after the pandemic, the need for online resources to support multilingual international students' academic success has been on the rise.

One of the main challenges for new multilingual international students upon entering English-speaking post-secondary institutions has been socializing into a new educational environment (e.g., Duff, 2010; Duff & Anderson, 2015). Upon admission/arrival, these students might feel overwhelmed or underprepared for the expectations of a different academic context. Orientation sessions play a key role in preparing incoming students for academic socialization and raising their awareness of available resources on campus (Surtees & Yamamoto, 2021). While these sessions provide helpful information for students, they typically happen only once during the first week of the academic year at a certain time and location, which can be easily missed by many students. Hosted on a university learning management system (LMS), asynchronous online modules can help overcome spatial and temporal constraints and issues of access, offering complementarity and supplementarity to the traditional in-person orientations and the practical versatility and flexibility for multi-access and self-paced learning.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of academic discourse socialization (Duff, 2010), this project aims to further scaffold multilingual international students' socialization during the transition to their academic life at a Canadian university. In this article, we demonstrate the affordances (and limitations) offered by this project based on our analysis and discussion of the modules and their design process. These modules were created to offer deeper levels of information and support resources to assist students' academic success in their target institution.

Academic Discourse Socialization as Pedagogical Praxis

The design of the online modules was guided by the theoretical principles of an academic discourse socialization (ADS) perspective (Duff, 2010; M. Kobayashi et al., 2017). It views multilingual learners' academic, sociocultural, and linguistic development as increasing participation in given academic communities (e.g., classrooms, institutions, disciplines). Students come to (further) develop socially and institutionally valued norms and ways of communicating as they engage in the community-shared

practices into which they are socialized. Key to academic development is language-mediated social interaction, and language is seen as the primary tool and expected outcomes of academic socialization.

In Canadian universities, common academic practices include oral classroom participation (Morita, 2004), digital communications such as emailing (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Reinhardt & Thorne, 2017), source-based writing, and academic integrity (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). These academic practices are socially situated and locally constructed in relation to norms and valued practices of a given academic community (classroom, university) and those of the broader discipline and society (see Duff, 2019).

Previous ADS studies have shown that multilingual international students often face challenges in various facets of their academic enculturation (e.g., Douglas et al., 2022; see also Duff & Anderson, 2015; M. Kobayashi et al., 2017; and Friedman, 2021 for state-of-the-art reviews). For example, students' English proficiency has been reported as a major source of perceived challenges, coupled with sociocultural differences and a self-directed deficit view (Morita, 2000; Yang, 2010). Importantly, these linguistic, sociocultural, and affective factors are interrelated and mutually constitutive of one another, influencing processes and ultimate outcomes of multilingual international students' academic socialization.

Although a great deal of language socialization takes place implicitly (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017), previous ADS studies have highlighted the educational benefit of explicit instruction on tacit and taken-for-granted communicative norms and practices in a given academic environment. For educators and institutions, this approach can be effective in raising students' awareness of ways of speaking, writing, and communicating that are deemed "appropriate" in a given academic community, especially if they are met with students' needs and desires. Explicit socializing strategies can take various forms in educational contexts, including overt teaching, feedback, and modeling of academic tasks, among others (both in verbal and written modalities). Arguably, this approach is particularly important for multilingual international students whose previously learned linguistic, communicative, and sociocultural repertoires do not always translate well in a new linguistic and sociocultural academic environment that may be officially monocultural, despite being increasingly more diverse.

Previous research has shown how explicit socialization through instructional intervention and in-the-process feedback can be effective in various kinds of written academic practices. For example, studies on post-secondary students' source-based writing highlight the significance of instruction and mentorship (Kowkabi, 2019) to familiarize and gradually socialize students into academic writing practices. In her study, Kowkabi (2019) advocated a pedagogical perspective on novice writers' constraints and dilemmas with source use practices and invited educators to scaffold their students' learning process with appropriate instruction. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) reported how multilingual university students' unfamiliarity with email pragmalinguistic practices in English led to their negative interpersonal evaluations from their correspondents. Previous studies have also demonstrated the importance of explicit assistance on oral academic discourse practices (e.g., in-class presentations), which can be implemented verbally as well as in combination with other modalities. Common strategies include provision of clear assignment descriptions (verbal and written; see E. Kobayashi & Kobayashi, 2018; M. Kobayashi, 2003) and modelling (M. Kobayashi, 2003), among others. More recently, Surtees and Yamamoto (2021) reported the potential utility of self-paced online modules in assisting various aspects and modes of multilingual students' academic engagement and socialization. Their module emphasized not only students' receptive understanding of the academic norms but also how they can transfer, enact, and possibly appropriate the learned knowledge and practices in creative and transformative ways to meet their situational needs inside and outside of the classroom through a series of explicit instructions and hands-on interactive activities. In summary, previous studies suggest the educational benefit of explicit guidance on the kinds of linguistic, academic, and sociocultural knowledge and practices expected in a new educational environment. Our online orientation for multilingual international students was developed based on the theoretical and epistemological tenets of ADS as the central thread that ran through the entire design of

the modules. The designed modules are characterized by heightened explicitness and abundance in concrete examples in the content, as discussed below.

Project Overview

With the large international student population in the faculty in which the authors are situated and the greater demand for support structures for international students, this project aimed at creating an inclusive online module-based platform for both graduate and undergraduate multilingual international students. Two main modules with four submodules each were developed on Canvas, the university's primary LMS used for various instructional and non-instructional purposes, including course content delivery and asynchronous orientations. The main goal of the modules was set to alleviate the impact of a host of stressors, including but not limited to differences in learning styles and academic expectations, and to provide the kinds of information and support that might be under-emphasized in other orientations and university resources.

For the purpose of this project and to guide our content design, we invited graduate and undergraduate students from the first author's course to an informal focus-group session, in which four multilingual international students participated and shared their educational experiences and needs with us (see Appendix A for prompt questions). Based on the participants' responses, we decided to focus on certain topics in the creation of the content for online modules. In light of ADS principles as pedagogical praxis, their insider voices helped us locate the areas students reported they needed most support with.

Upon completion of the module construction, the content was shared with students in another graduate-level course taught by the first author to see if the project had met its intended goal in supporting students to navigate a new educational culture and socialize into more effective ways to succeed academically.

As current and former multilingual international students ourselves, our individual and collective subjectivities and lived experiences also served as integral resources to inform our careful material development, content selection, and representation across the modules.

Design Principles for the Online Module

Asynchronous online learning provides learners with the flexibility to access the learning resources on demand, at their own pace, and without spatial and temporal constraints. Online learning modules further enrich the learning experience by integrating various multimodal resources including videos, pictures, and interactive activities to cater to learners' different learning styles and needs. Our collaborative endeavour was centred on four key design principles to maximize learning experiences and outcomes: comprehension, representation, multimodality, and accessibility.

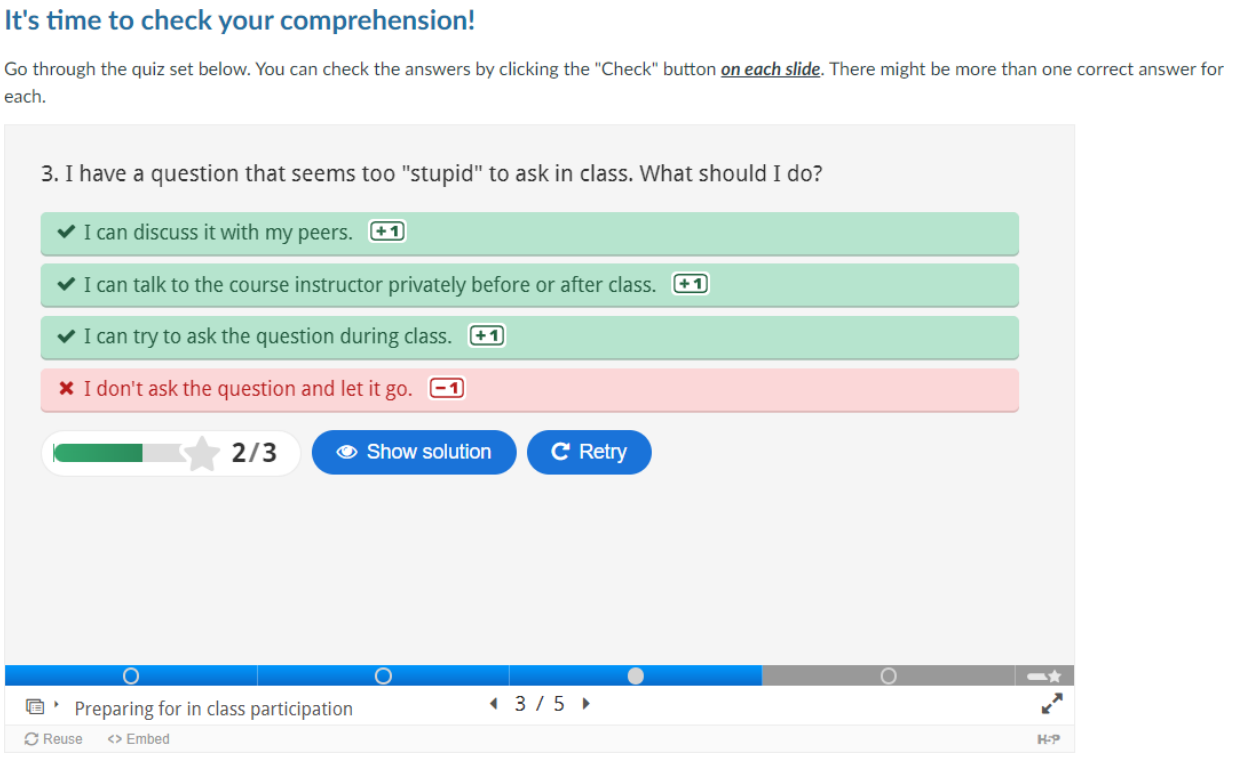
Comprehension

To ensure educational effectiveness and comprehension, multimodal interactive self-check quizzes and optional activities were provided at the end of each section throughout the modules. These interactive components were created by H5P (https://h5p.org/), an online tool for designing and creating various types of digital interactive activities (e.g. multiple choices, error detects), and Kaltura (https://corp.kaltura.com/), a media-platform software package integrated in university-hosted Canvas through which to create interactive videos. Our design allowed students to ensure and self-assess their comprehension and further engage with the material, maximizing their learning experiences and outcomes.

For instance, the "Preparing for Class Participation" section had a culminating activity with an H5P-powered multiple-choice self-quiz (see Figure 1). This selected example highlighted how the self-assessment questions and answer sheets were carefully designed for students to check their understanding of tacit academic norms while reinforcing them. Here, a total of four scenario-based questions were provided for students to consider what they would do (or be expected to do) in each of the situations described. It was hoped that this would help students to revisit and reinforce the already-learned content while equipping them with alternative strategies to adapt in the classroom.

Figure 1

A Sample End-of-Section Comprehension Question (designed with H5P)



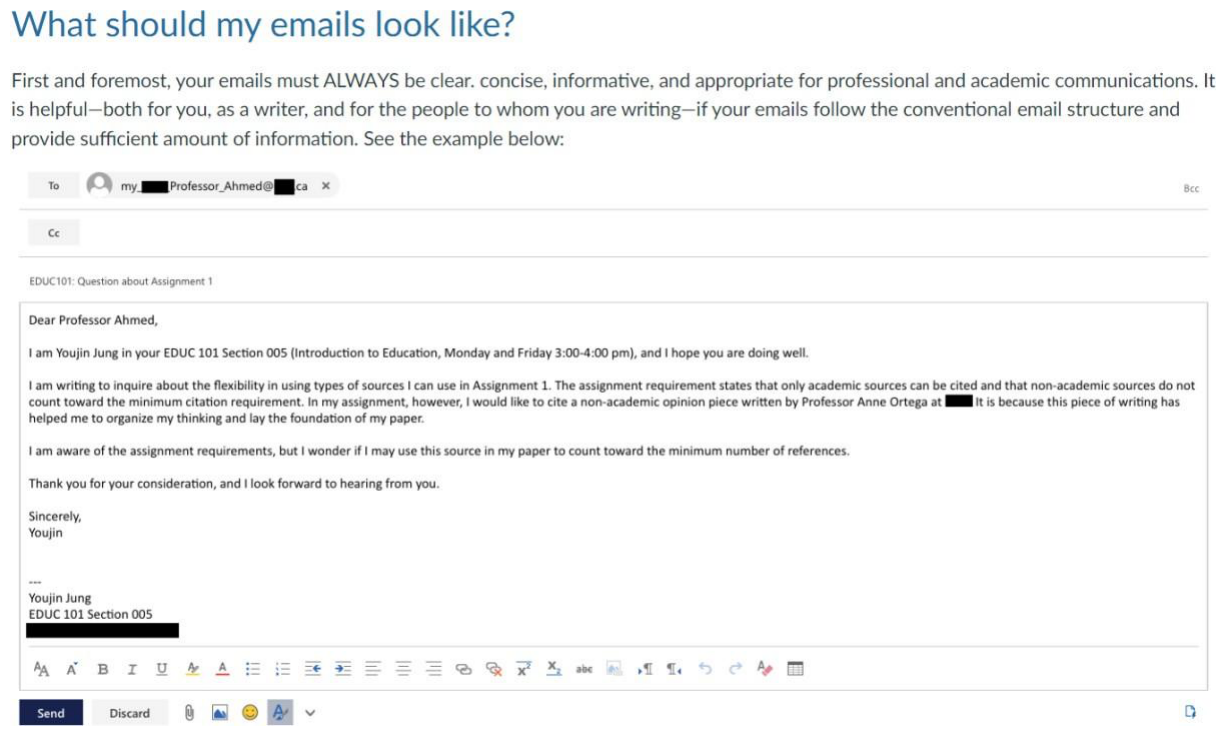
Representation

At the heart of our project has been our commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion principles as listed in our university's policies and guidelines (https://equity.ubc.ca). Our team carefully and intentionally included names and images of a wide variety of students and instructors from various lingua-cultural backgrounds throughout all the modules. This was done to ensure that the target users of these modules—namely, multilingual international students and their instructors—can see themselves represented as legitimate and valued members of the university community and not see just those from anglophone backgrounds.

For example, Figure 2 is a sample student–instructor correspondence taken from the "Writing Emails to University Instructors" section (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Here, the names of the

Figure 2

Sample Instructor–Student Correspondence, Representing Names of Historically Marginalized and Underrepresented Populations



hypothetical student and instructor were purposefully selected to intentionally represent names of historically marginalized and underrepresented student populations in Canadian higher education settings, especially in educational materials. Although the primary goal of this section was an explicit instruction on professional/academic email writing, we were also aiming to implicitly socialize students into the understanding of the university community as a lingua-culturally diverse and inclusive community.

Accessibility

While availability of university-provided resources is crucial for multilingual international students, enhanced accessibility (i.e., ease of access) to these resources is equally important. Our team created and organized various resources for academic support at the university based on the informal focus-group discussions. During the design phase, our team ensured the linguistic and informational accessibility of the content for multilingual international students by simplifying this information and providing step-by-step guidance.

Language barriers are one of the major obstacles that often hinder multilingual international students' learning and even lead to loss of confidence (e.g., Morita, 2000; Yang, 2010). Our team has carefully designed modules that prioritize linguistic accessibility to multilingual international students by applying accessible language that is brief and straightforward. We have endeavoured to use easily understandable terms, utilize bullet points, and remove unnecessary words or phrases to ensure clear and

comprehensible content. Recognizing the potential language barriers that may hinder students' learning, our team has made every effort to keep the sentences concise while maintaining clarity and simplicity.

Multimodality

To amplify the comprehension, representation, and accessibility of the modules, multimodality played a pivotal role in their design and delivery. According to Farias and Abraham (2017), "[m]ultimodal texts more effectively support second language reading by providing input that caters to different learning styles and that they are familiar, authentic, and contextualized to the learners' lives" (p. 66). That is, our modules were deliberately assembled and delivered not just through written instructions but also in combination with several other carefully selected modes, including spoken texts, still images, videos, and layout, among others (see Jewitt et al., 2016). As shown below, this multimodal principle was further amplified by the added interactivity enabled by online tools such as H5P and Canvas-embedded Kaltura, which we hoped would enhance students' engagement with the content. In anticipation of technological challenges experienced by students, we provided an easy-to-read written instruction for each interactive multimodal activity.

The interactive activity of the section "Writing Emails" was created by H5P and includes an email sample with inappropriate texts for students to review. For example, Figure 3 shows the sample email demonstrating a student emailing her professor about a potential delay in her assignment submission. Students are invited to click on sentences that can be improved for more effective communication. After clicking the inappropriate sentences, follow-up explanations and examples are provided to help them understand the changes. This activity helps multilingual international students who may be unfamiliar with these conventions to identify common mistakes made when writing emails in academic settings. Further guidance and examples to reinforce the already-learned content are provided as well.

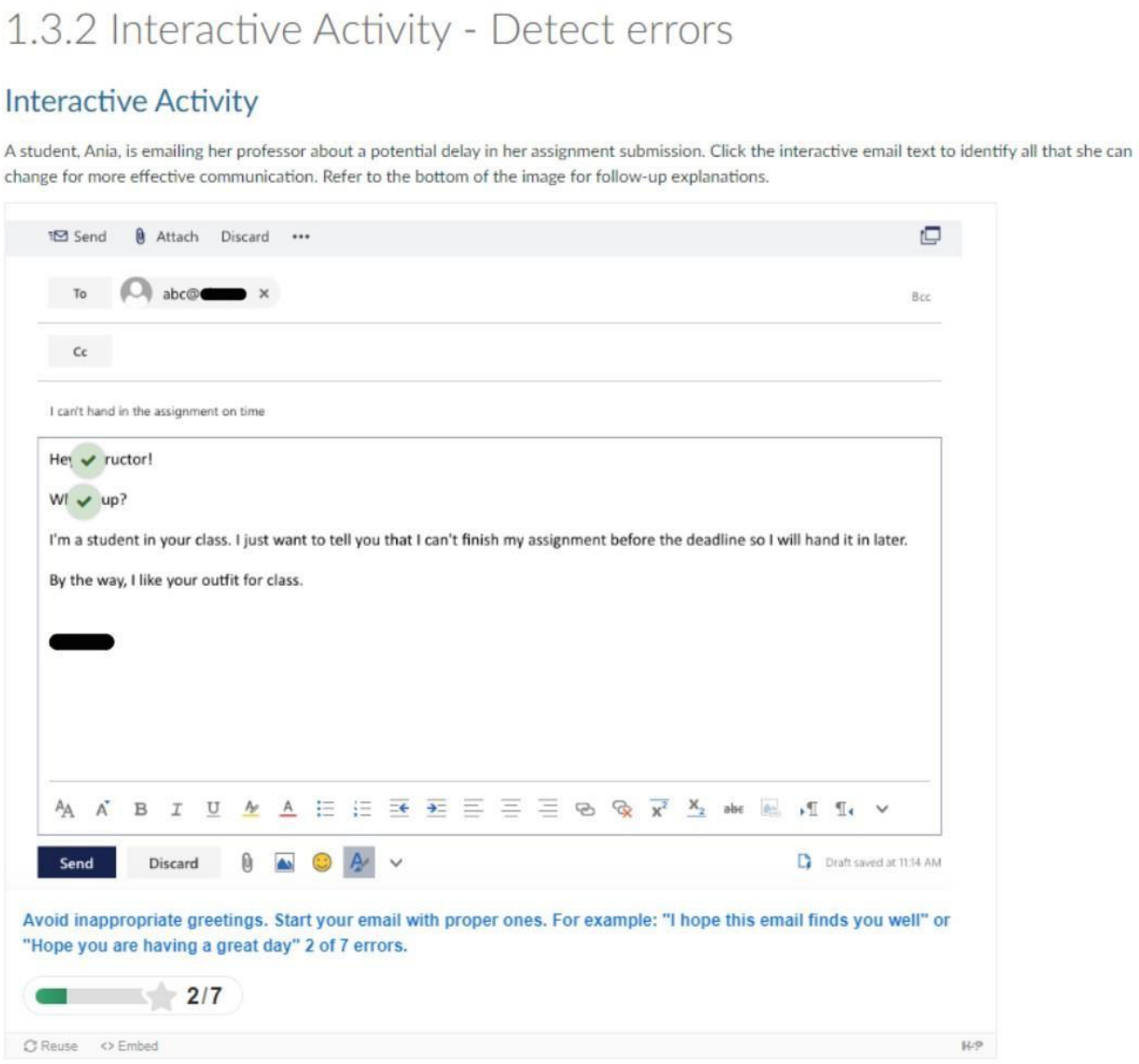
In the "Completing a Writing Assignment" section, we utilized Kaltura, a video-editing tool, to transform a non-interactive video (e.g., those available on YouTube or one's own) into an interactive one. For example, Figure 4 shows a screenshot of an interactive single-answer comprehension question embedded in the video in the "Completing a Writing Assignment" section. Students can first read the question floating at the top of the screen and select their answer from the three choices in the boxes. In this seven-and-a-half-minute video, a total of 11 simple comprehension questions were embedded to check and reinforce students' understanding within a short span of time. Students are also given a chance to revisit and review the same key points in the self-check quizzes at the end of each module. This combination ensures students' short- and longer-term comprehension of the content. By combining engaging multimodal elements with accessible instructions, our team aims to create an inclusive learning experience that caters to diverse learning styles and needs.

Pilot Implementation and Student Views

Upon completion of the content design and several rounds of edits, the orientation modules were shared with a different cohort of graduate and undergraduate students (many of whom were multilingual, with very diverse linguistic, sociocultural, and educational backgrounds) from the same faculty in a graduate-level course taught by the first author. They were asked to provide their informal feedback anonymously via a survey embedded in the Canvas course shell (see Appendix B) after viewing the modules. Nine out of ten students in the course chose to respond to the online survey questions. The highlights of the student responses will be presented and discussed in the same order in which questions were answered.

Figure 3

A Scenario-Based Sample Email Containing Inappropriate Sentences in an Instructor–Student Correspondence

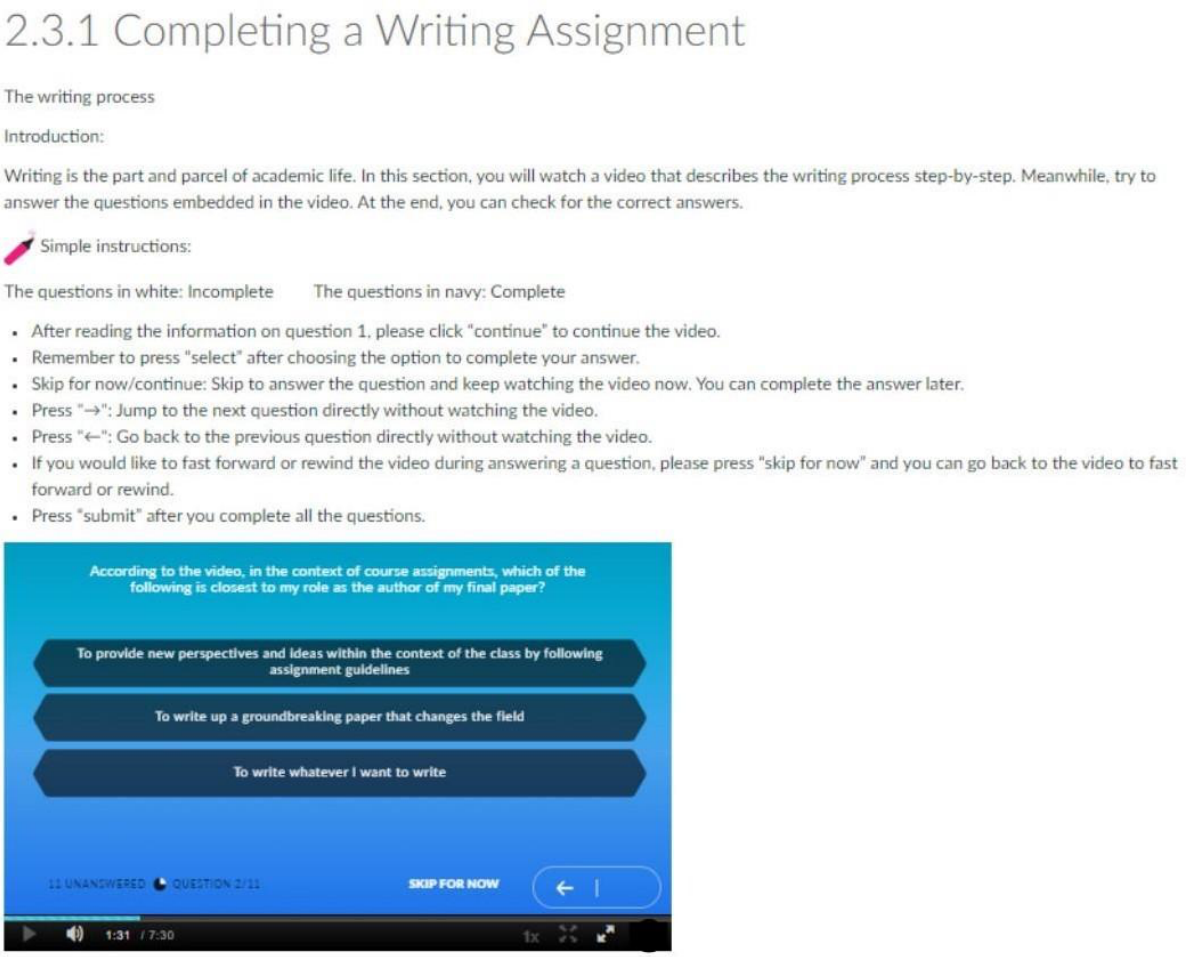


In response to the first question, participating students highlighted the useful selection of topics and content provided in the modules. The recurring comments in their responses included the importance of addressing topics that might be unfamiliar to international students, such as navigating online learning platforms like Canvas, search engines for research, avoiding unintentional plagiarism (Shi, 2012), and etiquette for email communications with instructors (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). The concise coverage of these topics in this online orientation was complimented by several participants. It is evident that they viewed the prepared modules as a potentially valuable resource for international students who

may be unsure of what or how to prepare for their academic journey. The responses to the first question also emphasize the value of demonstration videos and interactive content, which help new international students easily navigate through the modules. Additionally, students appreciated the comprehensive information on source-based writing for its significance in ensuring academic integrity (Shi, 2012). Overall, the content was viewed as helpful for multilingual international students, particularly those who are new to writing in English for academic purposes, and it was suggested that providing these modules in the students' native language could enhance their utility further.

Figure 4

A Single-Answer Question Embedded Within a Writing Process Tutorial Video



With regard to the organization of the modules, students' responses consistently showed their appreciation for the selection and organization of topics, highlighting their practicality and relevance to their needs. Once again, some commended the inclusion of videos and multimodal content that enable students to visualize situations and learn effectively. Participating students described the organization as

excellent, offering a comprehensive guide to academic work and student life in a Canadian university. The order of content in each module was deemed logical and user-friendly, with clear headings and systemic presentation from a macro to a micro level. The recurring positive feedback throughout the comments emphasized the effective and practical organization of topics and instructional materials. One student recommended more self-assessment activities at the end of each module.

The third question sought suggestions on any further addition of topics that could benefit their learning in the area of academic writing. The responses indicated further interest in the inclusion of resources like websites for citation practices to aid students with their academic writing in an additional language, and more activities on appropriate versus inappropriate textual borrowing. In addition, links to examples of recent theses and dissertations in the fields relevant to students' interests and scholars' areas of research in the respective faculty were among the top requests for future additions to the orientation. Samples of email communications between graduate students and their supervisors were also among the suggestions, given that this aspect of communication can be unfamiliar and challenging for many new students yet is often hidden and unaddressed.

Another recurring comment was the need for guidance on writing in other genres, such as immigration documents and job applications, which could be beneficial to international students. Overall, the feedback highlighted the need for more support that covers a wide range of potential academic and non-academic writing needs of international students.

Finally, responses to the fourth question were in regard to the students' suggestions for other academic and non-academic topics that are not covered in this online orientation but would be important for international students to know upon their arrival. Responses ranged from providing information on health-related topics such as insurance and finding doctors to job application assistance. In addition, the idea of introducing workshops conducted by local or more experienced students was suggested to help new international students address their questions and foster a sense of community and friendship among peers. Furthermore, the importance of helping students get involved in the available student communities by providing information about clubs, sports teams, and so on was emphasized as a way to enhance their adjustment to school life.

Overall, the feedback from participants underscored the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the current modules while suggesting the addition of other non-academic topics that can be valuable in supporting international students' well-being as well as their adaptation to and success in their new academic environment.

Concluding Remarks

The role of academic and non-academic socialization in the success of multilingual international students in English-speaking universities is significant (Duff, 2010). The increasing interest in Canadian universities by international applicants necessitates close attention to the challenges and expectations of these students upon entering Canadian higher education institutions. Given the turbulent political and socio-economic global climate, it is deemed crucial to create mechanisms not only to maintain and increase international student enrollments but also to safeguard and boost their success. Given today's highly digitalized and hybrid modes of education, offering online learning pathways that respond to the needs of multilingual international students should be viewed as a priority for universities. With this mindset, our team strove to initiate this project and design the online modules in response to the student-expressed gaps in the available support systems in our faculty. Informed by student-provided insights through focus-group conversations prior to the module design and our own experiences as multilingual educators with varying degrees of experience in the field, our content creation was centred on the four major principles of comprehension, representation, multimodality, and accessibility. These guiding principles allowed us to

address several academic and non-academic needs that have been identified as influencing the educational success of international students.

This ready-to-access online orientation serves as a complementary resource to offer much-needed support to international students in our faculty and scaffolds their socialization in the new academic context in multiple ways. Despite limited live interaction and the lack of physical access to instructors and peers in the faculty, the asynchronous nature of these learning modules breaks the limitations of time and space and offers the flexibility of unlimited access to materials when needed. Interactive multimodal resources created for this orientation, we hope, will enhance students' engagement and enable meaningful interaction with content. Clear and straightforward instructions via the use of multimodal tools and accessible language minimize linguistic and/or technological barriers for students. Moreover, by foregrounding the representation of socio-historically underrepresented and marginalized student populations across different material elements, the designers have strived to foster a sense of inclusivity and diversity throughout the material production process. However, we acknowledge that our modules (and any educational materials) inescapably inhere the possibility to contribute to the reproduction, inculcation, and perpetuation of Eurocentric and White-centric ways of academic communication and practices. This can be addressed only through constant critical reflection on our educational practices and critical re-examination and improvement of existing materials, which would lead to transformative interventions in the long run. Nonetheless, overall, these modules will facilitate access to required and reliable resources through increasing students' confidence and alleviating the anxiety of starting an academic life in a new learning environment.

Future Directions

The decision to pursue international higher education is heavily reliant on the perception of students regarding their academic experience and anticipated success. The quality of student learning experiences and the amount of support they have access to will be a determining factor in their academic achievements. In order for universities to continue to attract international students, they need to be well equipped with both human and digital resources to ensure that they are offering accessible learning support that creates inclusive environments for students, one of which would be multimodal online orientations like ours.

In the future, the same or similar content can be designed for international students in other higher education institutions. Moreover, in aiming to raise multilingual international students' awareness of present critical issues (e.g., Indigeneity, antiracism, anti-sexism, JEDI—justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion), future resources can be created. To be in line with these critical considerations, future content or materials can be made to accommodate the needs of students with different learning styles and abilities, for example through multimodal/multisensory options. Also, embedding translation tools or offering multilingual versions of the resources can make them even more accessible to the target audience. To create a sense of community, adding a discussion board can serve as a connection and interaction tool among peers. With social aspects of student life in mind, expanding the topics of learning modules beyond academics to include other topics relevant to the Canadian context would be an appreciated consideration.

Finally, at another level, by creating content for the instructors' access, we can bring awareness to instructors working with multilingual students regarding the complexities of the social and academic lives of these students and showcase their challenges and the kinds of scaffolding these students can benefit from.

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Appendix A: Discussion Prompts for Focus Group prior to Designing Online Orientation

1. How did you get prepared for your first classes at this university?
2. What challenges/concerns did you have that you wished were addressed during in-person orientations?
3. What information do you have now that would make your academic life easier if you had at the beginning of your program?
4. How is the teaching/ learning style different from your former institutions? What is your view of these differences?
5. What is the role of your advisor/supervisor to you during your studies?

6. Do you know how and when you are able to reach out to your advisor/supervisor? Have you ever reached out to your advisor/supervisor for academic advice or support?
7. Based on your experiences of studying in this university as an international student, what advice will you give to prospective international students to assist them transit smoother and lead to academic success?

Appendix B: Survey Questions for Newly Admitted Cohort upon Accessing the Designed Online Orientation

1. To what extent do you think the content of this orientation (e.g., selection of topics and sub-topics, the details in each section, etc.) is useful for the new international students in the Faculty of Education in this university? Please elaborate on your answer and include examples from your personal experience if possible/relevant.
2. How do you find the organization of the content (e.g., order of topics, amount of visuals, types of activities, etc.)?
3. If you want to add more information on Academic Writing for International Students in the Faculty of Education at this university (both graduate and undergraduate students), what are your suggested topics/areas?
4. Do you have other topics in mind (both academic and non-academic) that are not covered in this online orientation but would be important for international students to know upon their arrival?