



**GUIDE FOR ENHANCING
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT THROUGH
TEACHING, LEARNING AND
LANGUAGE**

Overview

This guide has been developed as part of the Best Practice International Student Engagement project, funded by the Australian Government through the International Education Innovation Fund (IEIF). The core aim of this project is to develop a series of guides and resources to enhance international student engagement.

The evidence-based guides and resources have been developed through:

- Desktop analysis of existing literature and examples of innovative practice.
- Three surveys, capturing over 6,000 responses from international students, graduates, education providers, government, community and professional organisations.
- 11 consultation workshops with 213 stakeholders.
- Interviews with 40 key stakeholders.

This research has identified the key themes involved in international student engagement and examples of innovative practice.

This guide is part of a series of six guides and a Guiding Framework intended to improve policies, practices, and programs to enhance international student engagement.

A complete list of the guides is below:

- Guide for enhancing international student engagement through teaching, learning and language
- Guide for enhancing international students' intercultural and community engagement
- Guide for enhancing international students' mental health and wellbeing
- Guide for enhancing international student engagement in work integrated learning and their employability
- Guide for supporting international students with accommodation
- Guide for supporting international students with crisis navigation
- A framework for developing innovative programs to enhance international student engagement.

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Introduction

This guide is designed to assist teachers, English language instructors, academic skills advisors and staff working for education providers and organisations who are involved in supporting international student engagement through teaching, learning and language.

The quality of teaching and learning is one of the top three factors that international students consider when choosing their study provider and destination.

Effective engagement with teaching and learning is critical for international students and supports a positive student experience.

Good English language proficiency enables international students to successfully undertake their studies and assignments, and have a positive overall experience studying and living in Australia.

This guide outlines key guiding principles and practical strategies to support international student engagement through teaching, learning and English language proficiency.

The guide builds on research findings from desktop analysis, consultation workshops, surveys and interviews with international students, graduates, and staff working for education providers, and government, community, and professional organisations.

While this guide focuses on international student engagement, the principles and strategies presented can also enhance domestic student learning.





What do we know?

Education providers play an important role in supporting international student engagement through teaching, learning and language.

The *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*¹, Standard 6, states that education providers must support students to adjust to studying and living in Australia. This includes providing information about:

- support services available to assist international students to help them adjust to studying and living in Australia.
- English language and study assistance programs.

Education providers also have the responsibility to facilitate access to learning support services consistent with the requirements of the course, mode of study (face-to-face, online, or blended) and the learning needs of international students.

¹ National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018. Australian Government Department of Education.

What helps international students with face-to-face teaching, learning and language acquisition?

■ International student commitment

International students put a lot of effort into their learning and strive for high achievement to ensure a good return on investment for themselves and their families.

■ Peer interactions

Engagement inside and outside the classroom with proficient English speakers nurtures a sense of connectedness and belonging which improves international students' English language and communication skills.

■ Teachers' positive attitudes

Teaching international students is an opportunity to transform teaching, engage in reciprocal intercultural understanding, and enrich learning for all.

■ Innovative strategies

Many teachers and their institutions have adopted strategies and initiatives to internationalise their curriculum, enhance teaching to international students and optimise engagement through learning.

■ Effective professional development

Schools, ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education institutions have recognised the importance of providing professional development to teachers and developing their capacity to engage and teach international students more effectively.

Effective professional development for teachers and staff focuses on improving their cross-cultural understanding, as well as increasing their capacity to use culturally appropriate and inclusive pedagogical approaches.

■ Preparation and orientation

Many education providers offer orientation and academic skills support programs to international students to help them develop their English language skills, learning approaches and cultural understandings.

What helps international students with blended and online learning?

■ Flexibility and convenience

Online and blended delivery gives flexibility to the time and location of classes and learning materials, enabling international students to engage from anywhere.

■ Motivation and capability for digital learning and engagement

International students can be active participants in multimodal digital platforms and may have previous experiences in technology-rich environments. Those with less experience may want to develop the skills and attributes required to embrace blended learning.

■ Options to engage in multimodal learning experiences

Online and blended delivery provides international students with a range of possibilities to overcome some of the challenges they face in traditional classrooms. The use of digital technologies in recorded lectures and tutorials allows students to watch these as many times as they need, giving them time to process their learning, especially with unfamiliar topics that require them to learn discipline-specific terminologies.

■ Accessible technology

Technology and online platforms, such as lectures and videos with features that include automated captions and transcripts, can support comprehension of digital content.

■ EdTech² organisations

EdTech organisations play an important role in enhancing the quality of blended and online learning. There is growing collaboration between education providers and the EdTech industry.

² EdTech is a commonly used term to refer to Educational Technology.

What hinders international student engagement with face-to-face teaching, learning and language?

■ Lack of awareness of available learning and language support services

International students may lack awareness of the resources available to help them with their learning, English language proficiency, and other support programs within and outside their institutions.

■ Cultural differences in approaching teaching and learning

Teaching and learning systems in an international student's home country may be significantly different to what they experience in Australia.

■ Lack of cultural awareness

Australian teachers and staff who lack intercultural capabilities and cross-cultural awareness may not understand the specific needs, learning characteristics or cultural backgrounds of international students. Accordingly, they may be unable to tailor their pedagogical approach to help these students learn.

Below are some examples of practices which detract from effectively teaching international students and may negatively affect student engagement with learning.

- The use of colloquial language or culturally-bound language in teaching and assessment tasks.
- Teaching and learning content and approaches that are 'western-centric' and ignore the potential for all students to learn from the experiences and knowledge of international students.
- Prejudice against non-standard and non-dominant variations of English and the different English accents of international students.

■ Biased perceptions

A widespread issue is a deficit narrative where any problems encountered in the teaching and learning of international students are seen to mainly arise from the international students themselves, rather than considering using different pedagogical approaches.

It draws on stereotypes that view international students as a homogenous group of passive learners who lack the capability to effectively engage. Such a view limits the design of effective support, and teaching and learning programs.

This biased perception can also be evident in learning support services which are often geared towards remedying problems, rather than leveraging opportunities and resources to optimise international student capabilities and experiences³.

³ Tran, L. T. (2013). Teaching international students in vocational education: New pedagogical approaches. ACER Press.

■ English language support outside the curriculum

English language support programs delivered by academic and language advisors mainly provide remedial support for English language outside the curriculum⁴. As a result, these programs rarely meet the language or study needs of international students and often fail to attract students in need.

■ Lack of confidence

International students may underestimate themselves (i.e. believing their English is not good enough) leading to them developing a lack of confidence, and anxiety when communicating in English.

⁴ Arkoudis, S. & Doughney, L. (2014). Good Practice Report – English Language Proficiency. University of Melbourne.



What hinders international student engagement with blended and online learning?

■ Differences in digital literacy and capabilities

Varying levels of digital literacy, experiences and familiarity with digital technologies and online platforms among students and staff can negatively impact learning and engagement.

■ Unreliable or inconsistent access to internet and online platforms

Students' diverse socio-economic circumstances, locations and national policies in their home countries can restrict their access to digital platforms and limit their engagement in blended and online learning.

For example, many Chinese international students learning remotely during COVID-19 could not access the same online materials and platforms as their peers overseas due to internet restrictions in China. They were also frequently reliant on accessing materials through VPNs (Virtual Private Network) or external internet hosts.

■ Challenges delivering hands-on experiences

While some disciplines are easier to deliver in an online format, certain technical disciplines and fields of study require hands-on experience, labs, or workshops and these are mainly offered on campus.

■ Student disconnectedness, isolation, and uncertainty

Feelings and experiences of disconnection, isolation and uncertainty can arise from a lack of face-to-face interaction or from fewer opportunities for interpersonal communication among students, or between teachers and students in blended and online classrooms.

■ Opportunities for English language development

The English language skills of international students can be negatively impacted if they study online and live in a non-English speaking country, as these offer fewer opportunities for them to use English outside the classroom. In such instances, teaching staff should consider strategies to support students' ongoing development of English language skills.

Teachers may consider providing recorded lessons or access to translation software for their online lessons.

■ Insufficient cross-cultural awareness and experience in digital design

Staff may lack experience in online and blended learning design and in cross-cultural awareness, especially in digital environments.

What can we do?

Guiding Principles

Teachers, English language instructors, academic skills advisors and staff working for education providers and organisations could consider adopting the following principles to enhance international student engagement through teaching, learning and English language development.

These principles are based on research findings from desktop analysis, consultation workshops, surveys and interviews.

Programs and initiatives supporting international student engagement with teaching, learning and language should be focused on the following principles based on the findings of surveys, interviews, and consultation workshops.

They include:

1. Understanding international student needs
2. Utilising students' cultural knowledge and embracing diversity
3. Integrating English language and academic skills support
4. Internationalising content and pedagogy
5. Designing pedagogies for flexible and supportive environments
6. Enhancing engagement in online and blended learning



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1:

UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT NEEDS

Understanding international student needs

To nurture a conducive and supportive environment, it is crucial that teaching and learning content and approaches are designed and delivered to address international student needs, expectations, characteristics, aspirations, and cultural norms.

The following strategies have been identified for academics, teachers, English language instructors and academic study skills advisors to help them tailor their pedagogy accordingly:

■ Identifying needs

It is important that teachers and support staff develop ways to better identify the learning needs, motivations, and characteristics of international students. These could include:

- ice breaking activities at the start of the course to encourage students to introduce themselves in a welcoming and safe environment.
- teaching staff producing an introductory video or message about themselves, including their expectations for the course at orientation. This may encourage students to be more open about their needs and expectations throughout the course.
- diagnostic testing by education providers and teaching staff at the pre-arrival stage to identify student needs and assess the level of support they need.

■ Open and regular communication

Teachers should regularly communicate with their international students to identify challenges, need for support, and to consider how cultural differences affect how they seek help. Strategies could include:

- having regular conversations with individual students about their background, interests and needs builds trust over time. It would be helpful to have these regularly scheduled.
- encouraging students to openly discuss the differences between teaching and learning approaches in their home countries and Australia, and providing strategies to navigate the differences.

Understanding international student needs

■ Boosting student confidence

International students may lack confidence when participating in group work which can negatively affect their study experiences and outcomes. Teachers should aim to create an inclusive, guided, and supportive learning environment to boost their confidence and motivation in class participation. This involves:

- making students feel comfortable, connected, and valued.
- encouraging students to speak about the teaching and learning issues facing them to create an environment that encourages them to ask questions and share their concerns.
- creating a system that rewards and encourages participation as a classroom management technique.

■ Being aware of cultural stereotypes

Some international students might associate seeking help or using support services as a sign of weakness and inadequacy.

Teachers need to be aware of cultural stereotypes such as international students being passive, spoon-fed, or rote learners. Teachers could consider:

- providing students with a private space to voice their individual problems where they can receive personalised support without the risk of embarrassment.
- giving students ways to non-verbally communicate their needs, frustrations or dissatisfaction. For example, students could place an object or sign on their table to alert their teacher that they require additional support.

Good practice example:

Meeting international students' English language proficiency needs: A personalised approach

The [Personalised English Language Enhancement \(PELE\)](#) program developed by Associate Professor Mira Kim aims to support international students to thrive by enhancing their English language proficiency. Students take PELE as a credit-earning course at the University of New South Wales. It guides students to personalise their own learning journey through a series of steps that include analysing their communication context, identifying language needs, designing a personal project, implementing the project, and reflecting on their progress.

The program assists students in identifying the aspects of English language proficiency they wish to improve, whether in an academic or everyday context. It guides them in designing a personal project with effective methods and useful resources to achieve their goals. Throughout the implementation phase, students share their progress and any challenges they encounter, either in class or during consultations. Students feel safe to share their experiences in the supportive PELE learning community with peer mentors running social clubs and leading small group discussions in tutorials. At the end of the term, students reflect on their learning during the “Learning Festival,” a student-led conference.

The framework offers students flexibility, choice, and an approach to sustainable language development – key elements lacking in existing English Language Proficiency models. Both quantitative and qualitative data collected over the five years from 2016 to 2020 show the course significantly impacted on students' proficiency, confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging.

More information about the Personalised English Language Enhancement program is available at:

<https://www.unsw.edu.au/arts-design-architecture/our-schools/humanities-languages/student-life/resources-support/personalised-english-language-enhancement>



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2:

UTILISING STUDENTS' CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Utilising students' cultural knowledge and embracing diversity

Encouraging intercultural interaction is at the heart of teaching international students from diverse cultures. This provides the benefits of reciprocal learning to all students and encourages everyone in the classroom to learn from cultural differences.

To effectively engage and teach international students, teachers need to understand, recognise, and build on cultural knowledge and differences, using the following strategies:

■ Using an intercultural approach to leveraging students' cultural knowledge

International student engagement in teaching and learning will be enhanced if teachers design activities that encourage intercultural learning.

Teachers could consider the following actions:

- validating students' cultural knowledge and prior experience.
For example, teachers could use reading prompts and reflective questions to elicit responses from international students highlighting their educational experiences and cultural values.
- designing teaching and learning activities that require all students to engage with others from diverse backgrounds to gain the information necessary to complete a task⁵.

For example, teachers could arrange students in small groups and ask each group to prepare a case study about the professional practice in a country of their choice other than Australia.

⁵ Arkoudis et al. (2010) Finding common ground: Enhancing interaction between domestic and international students. ALTC.

■ Embracing diversity

International student engagement in learning is optimised when it is centred around an inclusive and responsive strategy that embraces diversity. This can be achieved by:

- explicitly communicating to students that teachers themselves benefit from learning about other cultures in their own personal and professional development.
- building trust and connection from day one of the course by valuing the cultures and backgrounds of international students.

For example, teachers could select culturally appropriate materials from diverse sources, including from students' home countries - these could include videos, images, case studies and texts for workshops and lectures.

- being trained in the skills needed to communicate with international students who use English as a foreign language.

For example, many international students have difficulties understanding Australian accents. Therefore, staff should be trained in how to speak clearly and appropriately to international students, how to moderate their language and avoid the use of slang.

- being aware of students' different expectations, religions, and cultural norms to be able to respond to these in the classroom.

For example, time out for prayers.

- having the courage to re-examine our own cultural beliefs and values and how these shape our teaching practices and expectations of student learning.
- moderating the use of humour in the classroom since some forms of humour can be offensive to certain religions and cultures. Also, some humour can be difficult for non-English speaking students to understand.
- explaining different meanings of slang and jargon when used, as they may be difficult to understand by students from other cultures.
- re-examining the topic or area being taught before each class to try to anticipate the culturally sensitive issues that may arise.
- providing clear and easily understandable information. Even when a range of support is available, it may be fragmented, overwhelming or lack cohesiveness. This can mean that students do not know how to seek help or where it is available.

Good practice example:

Parents as Partners at Deakin College, a member of Navitas

Deakin College implemented an initiative to build positive relationships with both students and their parents from the subcontinent so they can learn first-hand about the supportive programs and resources available to help students realise their learning and engagement aspirations.

Students and parents are informed of the College's learning and welfare support structure which shows that learning skills, intercultural communication, academic success, and welfare are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. The sessions include a qualified Student Counsellor and U18 Student Guardian, together with Student Learning Advisors, and staff from Student Services and Academic Services.

Following these briefings, students and their parents had a deeper understanding of the College's support structures. Students from the subcontinent also increased their attendance in class and onsite activities.

Following on from the Parents as Partners online sessions, key support staff prepare thoughtfully curated presentations and activities to create a platform of familiarity encouraging students to seek support.

By highlighting institutional support structures early in their educational journey, students felt encouraged to reach out and work through any of their concerns. This helped improve both their learning skills and wellbeing.

The College received positive feedback from parents and students in evaluation surveys, with the briefings being seen as informative and a great opportunity to seek clarity and to ask questions.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3:

INTEGRATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC SKILLS SUPPORT

Integrating English language and academic skills support

Research has demonstrated that English language and academic skills support programs are more effective when they are embedded within the curriculum⁶.

Teachers and institutions could consider the following strategies to embed English language and academic skills support programs within the curriculum.

⁶ Arkoudis, S. & Doughney, L. (2014). Good Practice Report – English Language Proficiency. University of Melbourne.

■ Raising students' awareness of the importance of English language and academic skills

Education providers should inform international students prior to their studies of the importance of developing English language and academic skills, including Australian education providers' expectations of academic integrity.

■ Early assessment of academic and English language skills

Where practical, a student's academic and English language skills should be assessed soon after they join the institution. Progress should be regularly checked, for example every few months, to determine specific goals and allocate appropriate support to them if required.

■ Investing in providing comprehensive language and learning support to international students

Comprehensive support involves collaboration between teachers, English language advisors, academic skills advisors, and other ELICOS support staff within the education providers themselves and with related organisations. This means:

- collaborating with language support advisors to develop diagnostic language assessments that identify the English language needs of international students.
- recognising that international students may speak non-standard or non-dominant variations of English and have different approaches to learning.

■ Embedding the development of English language skills in content teaching

It is important to embed English language support and development within subject-specific teaching and learning as this more effectively enhances international student engagement in learning. This could include:

- involving international students in the development of a glossary of key terms and concepts relevant to their discipline⁷.
- enhancing oral and written communication skills through classroom activities including discussions, group work and task-based activities.
- avoiding the use of Latin words and phrases, slang expressions or complex new terms without first explaining them.

■ Using level-appropriate language in teaching, learning and assessment

To assist international students to understand content and assessment tasks, it is important that teachers moderate their language to match their students' English proficiency level. Suggested actions include:

- reviewing textbooks and assessment tasks to ensure language and concepts will not be ambiguous to students.
- seeking feedback from both English language support advisors and students.
- making discipline-specific concepts and terminologies more transparent to international students by using plain English and concept-checking tools, such as self-assessment sheets, to ensure students understand the required conceptual knowledge. This may prove useful for domestic students too.
- providing support services in the international students' own language, where possible.
- ensuring scoring and marking guidelines are appropriate to the outcomes being assessed. For example, in a mathematics question, if the answer is correct and comprehensible, students should not be marked down for English language inadequacy.

⁷ Tran, L. T. (2013). Teaching international students in vocational education: New pedagogical approaches. ACER Press.

Good practice example:

Wesley College English Language Preparation Program

The [English Language Preparation Program \(ELPP\)](#) is Wesley College's in-house intensive English program for international and local students. Learning takes place within the framework of the International Baccalaureate curriculum with students learning English in addition to undertaking language focused classes in Art, Mathematics and Science.

The full suite of extra-curricular activities available at the College further enables students to engage with peers and build friendships.

- The ELPP program is flexible and adapts to meet the needs of the student cohort and their year level. The program focuses on five key skills – reading, writing, listening, speaking and vocabulary – to help students achieve an adequate level of English for a successful transition to mainstream classes.
- The program collects feedback from the student evaluation surveys conducted at the end of each term, and ongoing feedback from subject teachers. This feedback is used to provide further refinements to the program.
- In addition to developing a relationship with the student prior to their arrival, the program provides ongoing progress meetings with families. Bilingual communication through translators and bilingual staff helps to involve families in their child's education. These activities contribute to meaningful engagement for both students and their families.

More information about the English Language Preparation Program is available online at:
www.wesleycollege.edu.au/enrol/englishprep



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4:

INTERNATIONALISING CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

Internationalising content and pedagogy

An internationalised curriculum enriches learning for all. Internationalisation of content and pedagogy is ideally an intentional process and should be implemented in a holistic manner⁸.

International students will be more engaged with teaching and learning if they feel meaningfully connected with the content which has been internationalised and made relevant to their professional aspirations.

Some strategies to internationalise course content and pedagogy include:

■ Using materials from international contexts

Using materials from diverse contexts develops a global mindset in all students based on a recognition of diverse cultural perspectives.

For example, consider incorporating international examples, case studies, resources, and stories in lessons.

■ Integrating global or international elements into class activities

Embedding global or international elements in group tasks encourages intercultural interaction. This also provides international students with opportunities to bring their own cultural knowledge and experiences into the classroom as a valued contribution to class learning.

⁸ Leask, B. (2015). Internationalizing the curriculum. Routledge; Zou, T. X. P. et al., (2020). University teachers' conceptions of internationalisation of the curriculum: a phenomenographic study. *Higher Education*, 80(1), 1-20.

■ Designing reflective internationalised activities

Reflective internationalised activities can create opportunities for students to explore and connect with diverse cultural perspectives.

Teachers could consider:

- posing guided questions that require international students to compare and contrast the practices in their home country with those in Australia or other countries.
- asking students to examine practices from cross-cultural contexts to consider how they might adapt these to their own local contexts.

■ Organising activities that help students experience intercultural interactions

Activities that create opportunities for students to experience intercultural interactions assist them in developing intercultural understandings and empathy.

For example, ask students to imagine themselves speaking another language while in another country. This should be followed by a discussion of the barriers, the benefits, and the learning challenges they might experience.

■ Designing and implementing assessment tasks with global perspectives

Embedding global perspectives in assessment tasks will help international students feel a connection to the assessment while encouraging domestic students to work collaboratively with international students. This also creates opportunities for international students to add value to the task and have confidence in meaningfully contributing⁹.

⁹ Tran, L. T. (2013). Teaching international students in vocational education: New pedagogical approaches. ACER Press.

A group of four diverse students are gathered around a table in a bright, modern classroom or study area. They are looking at a laptop screen together, appearing to be in a collaborative learning environment. The students are of various ethnicities and are dressed in casual attire. The background shows large windows with a view of a building and some greenery.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 5:

DESIGNING PEDAGOGIES FOR FLEXIBLE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Designing pedagogies for flexible and supportive environments

When teachers use strategies to help international students feel at home and facilitate activities that encourage student interaction, a sense of belonging is created which promotes classroom participation and an ideal environment for engagement.

The following strategies can be used to promote flexible and supportive environments for enhanced engagement:

■ Diversifying pedagogical approaches

Teachers could increase international student engagement and support their understanding of content through diversified teaching approaches. An example is using visual images including diagrams, tables, maps, or digital technologies.

■ Adopting inclusive pedagogical strategies

Developing inclusive pedagogical approaches could mean:

- structuring activities to develop students' interest in each other's cultural backgrounds.

For example, design a paired work activity that requires a domestic and an international student to share their personal and cultural backgrounds. This could be followed by a group activity in which each group shares their discussion with the whole class.

- encouraging students to interview a peer from a different country, learn about each other's home country and culture, and discuss the value in understanding such contexts.

For example, teachers develop a seating plan that facilitates discussion and mixes international students with their domestic peers.

■ Providing ongoing and flexible support

Different types and levels of support may be required depending on the individual student's needs and their changing circumstances. Students flourish in safe and welcoming environments.

Forms of ongoing and flexible support could include:

- where possible, assigning teaching assistants or tutors to support students in need or those who struggle with English language communication.
- inviting English language and academic skills advisors to the classroom to provide integrated language support.
- providing tutorials after class to ensure students understand what is being taught.
- facilitating peer interactions to support language development by encouraging international and domestic students to get to know each other and to form friendship groups.

- using experienced international students as mentors for newly-arrived cohorts.
- providing support that addresses the learning needs of auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic learners.



Good practice example:

Enriching the student experience through Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling is used in Information Systems and Technology courses at the [University of New South Wales](#) taught by Dr Pranit Anand. This inspires and motivates students by recognising and promoting diverse ideas, modes of expression and by developing engagement across increasingly diverse student cohorts.

Digital Storytelling involves getting international and domestic students to create reflective videos consisting of the work they have done in class and how they apply those ideas. Students can choose the style, topics, and format of these 'digital stories'. Through sharing their stories, students improve their appreciation for diversity and how stories are socio-culturally contextualised.

Students value the opportunity to showcase their own strengths and interests. Significantly, Digital Storytelling enables international students to embed their own identities in these assessments which enriches learning for all.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 6:

ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT IN ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING

Enhancing engagement in online and blended learning

Online and blended learning can offer flexibility, convenience, and accessibility while providing interactive real-life experiences for international students.

The online environment can be helpful for international students who may feel uncertain as they adapt to new settings and need time to process information to feel confident. Features like online discussion forums can help them engage more easily than in person, especially during their first few weeks.

Strategies to enhance international student engagement in online and blended learning include:

■ Early diagnosis of students' technological capabilities

Understanding students' current capabilities and confidence using technology helps teachers and education providers tailor digital and blended learning approaches to cater for their backgrounds, needs and characteristics.

■ Designing for diverse needs in blended learning

International students may have different access to digital technologies, varying levels of digital literacy and different preferences for self-regulation that affect their engagement in digital learning. Teachers should be aware and inclusive of students' diverse backgrounds and needs when designing digital and blended learning.

■ Personalised approach

There is no 'one size that fits all' and what proves to be a positive approach to online learning for one group might be an impediment to others. A learner-centred approach to blended learning seeks to support independent learners with their own learning style.

Teachers could assist and empower international students to create their own personalised approach in online and blended learning based on the students' level of digital literacy, skills, needs, learning styles, and access to digital devices and materials.

■ Communication and engagement in blended and online learning modes

Online modes can make communication and connection with students more challenging, especially if students are silent or turn off their cameras during class. Suggestions for teachers to facilitate online learning include:

- presenting information clearly, using plain language and limiting use of slang and figures of speech to avoid confusion.
- being culturally sensitive when working with a diverse cohort of students as would be the case for face-to-face learning.
- allowing anonymous submissions (e.g., using Mentimeter or other polling tools) to help students build confidence to speak up and engage in the classroom. After contributing, they may feel comfortable being more visible and vocal in the class, for example, by turning on their camera or by participating in the chat space.
- providing clear and detailed instructions for activities, without overloading students with information. ‘Scaffolding’ tasks in clear and structured ways helps students to navigate their course and focus on the learning, especially in online spaces which may feel unfamiliar.

For example, teachers could consider establishing a class routine, providing clear expectations, guidance and scaffolding for effective international student engagement.

■ Making learning resources more accessible

Making learning resources more accessible can improve student engagement in online and blended learning. This can be done by allowing students to turn on captions on Zoom and Teams, for example, and making transcripts available for video and audio media.

■ Monitoring and evaluating engagement in online and blended learning

Without in-person support, it can be hard for international students to maintain motivation and engagement in online and blended learning. It is crucial to understand their ongoing learning needs and to regularly track their engagement and learning progress. Timely intervention can ensure students remain motivated and engaged in online and blended learning.

For example, teachers can conduct a small-scale survey with students at the beginning of the semester to gather information about their learning needs, including personal, cultural, and structural issues that may support or hinder engagement in digital learning. These insights can facilitate early intervention, if required, by helping teachers to tailor their teaching approaches and work with students to personalise the use of technology in their learning.

■ Clear expectations about the use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI), including AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, is developing at a fast pace and changing the teaching and learning landscape. The use of AI may be encouraged, restricted, or banned in certain learning contexts. Institutions should have explicit guidelines on the use of AI that seek to explain its impacts. It is important to regularly work with students to ensure these guidelines are understood.

■ Ongoing and targeted professional development for teachers and learning designers

Good practice in blended and online learning relies on the evolving capabilities of teachers and learning designers who can leverage the diverse strengths of digital technologies and design for effective use in online and blended learning. Professional development for teaching staff is essential to continually build this capability and harness the benefits of digital technology in education.

For example, equipping teachers with adequate digital literacy and readiness for online teaching (such as how to use the Learning Management System and digital tools in teaching) is crucial to ensure sustained engagement in online and blended learning.



Good practice example:

Online orientation to enhance student engagement with teaching and learning at Scots English College (SCOTS)

SCOTS is a Sydney-based ELICOS provider that offers English language courses to adult international students.

SCOTS believes that a robust orientation program is fundamental to students' success in their English learning journey. When SCOTS switched to online delivery during the COVID lockdowns, it invested a significant amount of time, money, and energy into developing an orientation program that was both online and student-led. This meant the program needed to be extremely clear, highly visual, and user-friendly.

The online orientation program is hosted on the college LMS (Learning Management System) and is supported by manuals and video tutorials. These cover the key stages of a new student's journey from online self-registration and self-enrolment in the orientation program to finding courses, joining class via Zoom and introducing themselves to their teachers and classmates. The college also invested in UX (User Experience) and UI (User Interface) design, to minimise potential frustration and the likelihood of students losing interest and dropping out of their learning.

Student feedback collected from monthly surveys and data provided by Student Services and IT showed a gradual decrease in the students' questions and complaints as a result of the orientation program. It also improved student engagement and interaction between the students and college as well as between students themselves.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Consider your everyday teaching and learning practices and ask yourself the following questions about facilitating international student engagement.

- ▶ What routines and/or communication and collaboration norms can we establish in class to encourage engagement, mutual respect, and intercultural understanding among students from different backgrounds?
- ▶ How can we provide opportunities for international students to share their cultural experiences and knowledge with the class without putting them on the spot or making them feel uncomfortable about being representatives of their cultural background or home country?
- ▶ What strategies can we employ to support students in overcoming the potential challenges of online and blended learning so they can take charge of their learning and design their own personalised routine?
- ▶ What resources do we have available to assist with the implementation of these activities in nurturing international student engagement with teaching and learning?
- ▶ What are the biases about international students that may influence existing practices in our classroom and institution?
- ▶ How can we identify students who are struggling with English language, intercultural communication, or their learning skills? What strategies can we use to support this?
- ▶ What can we do to create an inclusive and safe environment that encourages international students to contribute to classroom discussion, makes them feel connected and supports them to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds in English?

