

Rediscovering English for Academic Purposes in the Context of the UN's Sustainable Developmental Goals

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Abstract : In an attempt to use education as a way of raising a socially responsible and engaged global citizen, the YU-Bridge program, the largest and fastest pathway program of its kind in North America, has embarked on the journey of integrating general themes from the UN's sustainable developmental goals (SDGs) in its English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum. The purpose of this initiative was to redefine the general philosophy of education in the middle of a pandemic and align with York University's University Academic Plan that was released in summer 2020 framed around the SDGs. The YUB program attracts international students from all over the world but mainly from China, and its goal is to enable students to achieve the minimum language requirement to join their undergraduate courses at York University. However, along with measuring outcomes, objectives, and the students' GPA, instructors and academics are always seeking innovation of the YUB curriculum to adapt to the ever growing challenges of academics in the university context, in order to focus more on subject matter that students will be exposed to in their undergraduate studies. However, with the sudden change that has happened globally with the advance of the COVID-19 pandemic, and other natural disasters like the increase in forest fires and floods, rethinking the philosophy and goal of education was a must. Accordingly, the SDGs became the solid pillars upon which we, academics and administrators of the program, could build a new curriculum and shift our perspective from simply ESL education to education with moral and ethical goals. The preliminary implementation of this initiative was supported by an institutional-wide consultation with EAP instructors who have diverse experiences, disciplines, and interests. Along with brainstorming sessions and mini-pilot projects preceding the integration of the SDGs in the YUB-EAP curriculum, those meetings led to creating a general outline of a curriculum and an assessment framework that has the SDGs at its core with the medium of ESL used for language instruction. Accordingly, a community of knowledge exchange was spontaneously created and facilitated by instructors. This has led to knowledge, resources, and teaching pedagogies being shared and examined further. In addition, experiences and reactions of students are being shared, leading to constructive discussions about opportunities and challenges with the integration of the SDGs. The discussions have branched out to discussions about cultural and political barriers along with a thirst for knowledge and engagement, which has resulted in increased engagement not only on the part of the students but the instructors as well. Later in the program, two surveys will be conducted: one for the students and one for the instructors to measure the level of engagement of each in this initiative as well as to elicit suggestions for further development. This paper will describe this fundamental step into using ESL methodology as a mode of disseminating essential ethical and socially correct knowledge for all learners in the 21st Century, the students' reactions, and the teachers' involvement and reflections.

Keywords : EAP, curriculum, education, global citizen

Conference Title : ICETI 2021 : International Conference on Education and Teaching Innovation

Conference Location : Montreal, Canada

Conference Dates : August 05-06, 2021