278 Coaching - The Missing Link in Authentic Assessments for International Students?

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Research Domains

Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract

Authentic assessments increasingly play a pivotal role in developing students' key employability skills (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). However, the authors observed international students struggling to connect theory to practice and develop employability skills required for an authentic assessment. Therefore, this paper focuses on the role of 'blended coaching', particularly expert industry coaching, as a learning intervention to develop and enhance students' employability and practical skills alongside authentic assessments. The author has extensive marketing industry experience, therefore, expert industry coaching was blended with facilitative coaching, to connect theory to practice and develop key soft skills including problem solving and creativity (Bloom et al., 2005). A case study from the MSc Digital Marketing module will be used to demonstrate the role of coaching to support international students with an authentic assessment.

This working paper contributes to research and practice in coaching and employability of international students in higher education.

Full paper

Overview

With the evolving role of AI, authentic assessments are increasingly pivotal in promoting the development of key employability skills (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). The author observed many of the international student cohort struggling to connect theory to practice and develop key soft skills required for an authentic assessment. With extensive industry experience, the author saw an opportunity to provide coaching, specifically expert marketing coaching, as a learning intervention to develop students' employability and practical skills alongside their authentic assessment. Coaching can facilitate the transfer of soft skills and enhance graduate employability (Jones et al., 2022). This working paper aims to provide insights on coaching within the context of supporting and enhancing employability for international students in authentic assessments, as there are currently limited insights on this within the literature (Heinrich et al., 2021).

Literature review

Coaching is distinct from mentoring (Mullen and Klimaitis, 2021). They are on the same continuum, but coaching is associated with the practical rather than theoretical side (Fletcher, 2012). There is no universal definition of coaching within higher education, but instruction and facilitation tend to underpin coaching practice, which is influenced by an instructor's pedagogy (Jones, 2015).

Coaching is recognised as a central component in student experience, which can accelerate learning and student success (Andreanoff, 2016). It can be a learning intervention, helping to enhance a student's employability and develop their knowledge and skills (Jones and Smith, 2022). This is pertinent for international students who face challenges developing key transferable soft skills (Shaheen, 2016). Coaching can provide opportunities for students to share ideas and receive guidance on how to develop these key skills, which can be particularly valuable for international students who have no experience of studying at a British institution (Shaheen, 2016). Hence, international students often require more tailored support and resources (Lewis and Brown, 2021).

There are several approaches to coaching including peer coaching; cognitive coaching; literacy coaching; and instructional coaching (Cornett and Knight, 2008). However, Bloom et al's (2005) blended coaching model provides a holistic and fluid approach. It acknowledges the diverse needs of students and the level of expertise of coaches, allowing the respective coaching approach to be adapted accordingly. Coaching follows an instructional or a facilitative approach, or a combination of these strategies (Bloom et al., 2005). The flexibility and fluidity of this approach complements student-centred teaching and learning (Stavrou and Koutselini, 2016).

Methodology

By using a case study from the MSc Digital Marketing module, this working paper will demonstrate the role of coaching to develop students' employability skills while undertaking an authentic assessment. The assessment was based on a live marketing problem an organisation wanted the students to solve, aiming to mirror industry practice and connect theory to practice, developing students to be 'work ready' (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014).

The cohort were all international students, with little or no marketing experience and knowledge. The author observed the students experiencing difficulties connecting theory and practice and developing critical analysis, problem-solving and creativity skills. Some students were unfamiliar with authentic assessments, with one student describing it as "impossible". Additionally, the transfer of key soft skills required for authentic assessments are not automatic (Jackson, 2013). Therefore, the author felt the students would benefit from coaching to support the authentic assessment as a learning intervention to bridge the gap between theory and practice and build the key soft skills required to make them 'work ready'. The author adopted Bloom et al's (2005) blended coaching model as the fluidity and flexibility of this approach acknowledged the diverse needs of the international student cohort.

Utilising the author's extensive marketing industry experience, practical and expert industry advice was provided to the students through consultative coaching (Fletcher, 2012). This was blended with facilitative coaching, building on the student's existing knowledge and developing problem solving and creativity skills (Bloom et al., 2005). Qualitative student feedback will be shared at the conference.

Contribution

This working paper has demonstrated the originality and value of supporting and developing international students' employability skills with a blend of expert industry and facilitative coaching alongside authentic assessments. This contributes to research and practice in both coaching and employability of international students in higher education.

Key take-aways for academics:

- How to implement blended coaching alongside authentic assessments within their modules.
- How to build a supportive and inclusive learning environment, enhancing international students' employability skills in higher education.
- How to support international students with authentic assessments and be 'work ready', which is vital post-pandemic (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2022).

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