STOP. . .YAMMER TIME: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO HELP INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TRANSITION TO MASTER'S LEVEL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

When transitioning from a familiar learning culture to a United Kingdom higher education (HE) culture, international students face a number of academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges. This paper considers the obstacles that international students experience and critically analyzes the use of social media to aid the academic transition of a group of postgraduate international students. Specifically, it analyzed the use of Yammer to support peer collaboration and communication to enhance academic development of a group of Southeast Asian international students undertaking an MA at a UK university in the North of England. The student feedback suggested that social support networks were important for academic engagement and development. This paper recommends more training on the affordances of Yammer, additional online tutor presence, and more scaffolded activities.

Keywords: social media, international student transition, Yammer.

INTRODUCTION

When international students transition from their familiar learning culture to a UK higher education (HE) culture, there are a number of academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges they must face (Andrade, 2006; Coates & Dickinson, 2012; Wang, Heppner et al., 2012). This article explores the use of social media in HE to aid in the kinds of academic transition that international students typically find challenging or troublesome. This case study, in considering the obstacles that international students experience, critically analyzes the use of Yammer, a social media platform, as one strategy to aid through peer collaboration and communication the academic transition of a group of Master's (MA) students. In order to investigate this further we considered the implications of transition on international students and reviewed the existing research on international transition and the role of broader social networks on decisions whether to participate or not in HE.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on two distinct areas. The first part considers the literature on international student transition, while the second part considers social media and how it can be used to help international students' transition.

International Students' Transition

Part of the impetus for this study arose out of the literature that suggests how international students transition, integrate, and adjust to HE participation is important. This is an under-researched area, particularly with regard to the kind of support needed to transition successfully (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Cross-cultural transition

presents a real challenge for international students and those who support them (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). International students, it has been argued, go through several academic, cultural, and linguistic transitions whilst studying abroad (Andrade, 2006; Coates & Dickinson, 2012; Wang, Woo et al., 2012). These transitions include the challenges of meeting people from different backgrounds and social classes with different genders and ethnicities (Leese, 2010). Students can become caught between the culture of their home and the foreign culture in which they study, and that foreign culture typically has markedly different values, assumptions, and ways of thinking. This can lead to cultural friction and potentially to culture shock (Steers et al., 2010). Adapting and acculturating to the new culture can, therefore, present a number of significant challenges (Fischbacker–Smith et al., 2015), resulting in dissonance between the home culture and the host culture (Poyrazli et al., 2004). Moreover, international students experience "gaps" in their knowledge, ability, and understanding that can produce discomfort and anxiety. At the same time, they often experience loneliness, which can be exacerbated by language and other cultural differences. These challenges are layered on top of the demands of grappling with complex and cognitively challenging subject knowledge as well as the exigencies of managing the social and study time all students face. It is hardly surprising that international students can be extremely apprehensive about their academic performance while studying in a second language. These challenges, in conjunction with a tendency not to engage socially, can lead to failing to develop the language skills they require to perform well, and this has the potential to make international students feel like they are floundering in an "alien" academic environment with nowhere to turn (Fischbacker–Smith, et al., 2015).

International students face a number of disorienting struggles in an environment that is strange to them, including but not limited to those of an academic nature (Fletcher, 2012). Successful academic progress has been linked to effective cross-cultural transition. In particular, effective supported transition can help international students navigate the local education system of the host country and the challenges of undertaking their studies in a second language. Peer support has been shown to be an important element in this process. If managed effectively, friendship formation can help to make the transition easier. Knowing that other people are interested in their well-being helps international students manage the stress of crossing cultures, particularly when meaningful communication is developed (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). These perspectives on international student transition, its vexed nature, and the potentially positive impact supported transition has on progress, motivated us to introduce the social networking platform Yammer as a way to foster the kind of frequent, low stakes interactions that promote a sense of belonging and help students succeed (Thomas et al., 2017). We envisioned that Yammer could support the development of new friendships, initially virtually, and offer international students social support so they begin to feel at home in their new academic environment.

Social Media

Social media is frequently defined in terms of its technical affordances. A basic definition, cited over 13,000 times in the literature, is that it constitutes,

> *web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211)*

However, our paper relies upon a broader conception of social media that moves beyond its technical affordances and grapples with the contested ground of its social implications, particularly with regard to education. This means not merely what social media can do but also what it is for and what it means to its users. Early commentators pointed towards this kind of wider, sociologically aware conception when they acknowledged that the user profile is a public representation of self through which one can "type oneself into being" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211; Sundén, 2003, p. 3). More recent research builds on these early conceptions of the social significance of social media by taking a more anthropological approach and arriving at a definition of social media as "scaleable sociality" (Miller et al., 2016, p. 9), i.e., a scaled-up potential for individuals to associate in social

groups. Similarly, Lambton-Howard et al. (2020) suggested "a more fine-grained understanding of the differences between individual features of social media and how they are perceived by learners" (p. 1). The contemporary literature illustrates attempts to develop approaches that are sensitive to learners' perceptions and help them develop productive strategies and positive dispositions towards social media learning platforms (Abney et al., 2019; DiFranzo et al., 2019).

This kind of pragmatic and sociologically informed approach is more congruent with our conception of the intended purpose of social media use in this curriculum design, since what we intended for our students was scaled up, supported, and enhanced opportunities to engage socially across time zones and geographical distance, both prior to and during their studies.

More broadly, the popularity of social media over the last 30 years has been mirrored by a rising tide of scholarship that explores its use within education. Luo et al. (2020), in their recent systematic review of social media in higher education, found that "research and practice on social media-supported professional learning is still in its infancy stage," (p. 1659) with challenges for learners to effectively navigate the social media space, especially for novice social media users. This is seen against the backdrop of the growing use of social media as an educational platform.

Much of the earlier literature is polarized into opposing utopian and dystopian camps of "tech evangelists" and "tech sceptics." Many researchers have reported that, where an appropriate pedagogy is adopted, there is enormous potential for social networks to be used by academics in productive ways as transformational sites for learning, (e.g., Cox et al., 2017; Green & Hope, 2010 Leonardi, 2017; Loving & Ochoa, 2011; Mazman & Usluel, 2010). However, others have expressed anxiety over the disruptive and potentially destructive power of social media sites and characterized them as lawless frontier-lands where groups jockey for supremacy and taunting and bullying is extended beyond the educational context and into students' home lives (Cox et al., 2017; Kwan & Skoric, 2013). This push-pull between positive and negative views of researchers is evident in the literature when they call either to adopt social media learning with enthusiasm (Guraya et. al, 2019; Mugisha,

2018; Wilkinson & Ashcroft, 2019) or to develop a more critical response that is cognizant of potential drawbacks (Adnan & Giridharan, 2019; Carpenter & Harvey, 2019).

Our paper endeavors to remain cognizant of both of those perspectives and be alert to both the beneficial and negative possibilities of social media use in education. In doing so, we align with the critically aware stance taken by Neil Selwyn (2014), who argued convincingly that technology does not exist in a vacuum but is socially constructed, uneven, contested, contradictory, participatory and deeply entwined with everyday life. Teaching is intensely political and defined by complex interactions between social actors and their context in its broadest sense: at the micro level of individuals and in classrooms, at the meso level of the institutions and regions within which they are based, and at the macro level of global economies and nation states. Awakening to a consciousness of these influences requires a tolerance of contradiction, ambiguity, and complexity when exploring people's online experiences. We therefore remained aware of such possibilities in devising our approach to the research, conscious of our hopes and expectations in introducing social media, but alert to findings that complicated or confused these hopes and expectations.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

The MA in Education is a full-time master's course aimed at both home (i.e., British national) and international students. Over one academic year students undertake five modules and a dissertation totaling 180 Master's Level credits. The Master's provision develops students' professional competence and critical reflective awareness. The students are called upon to rapidly acquire a practical and theoretical understanding of complex concepts, which places a range of academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges on international students. Academically, they need to acquire and deploy a range of independent learning strategies and engage in critical reflection, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Linguistically, they need to research and articulate often complex, ambiguous, and nuanced concepts in a second language, and culturally, they need to adapt to a new culture, both in general terms and in the particular context of the classroom, which frequently relies on unfamiliar

pedagogies. Though international students are inducted onto the course and into the school and institution, this typically emphasizes information-giving rather than developing a sense of belonging. Compelling, large scale and longitudinal studies in the United Kingdom (such as Thomas et al., 2017) have shown that student-tutor interactions and peer support are pivotal in developing this sense of belonging in ways that impact retention and success. Thomas et al. (2017) outlined the importance of bespoke induction packages, continued contact with students, and virtual learning platforms as ways to build identity and a sense of belonging to help students to succeed. To be successful, interventions between students and tutors need to have an academic purpose relevant to all students that facilitate effective collaboration between students and staff. Consequently, the pedagogical approach to the MA, both face-to-face and online, draws on the work of Garrison et al. (2002), who argued persuasively that supportive communities of inquiry require social, cognitive, and teaching presence. More recently, researchers have explored how Social Presence Theory can be effective in improving engagement and decreasing attrition in higher education (Kawachi, 2019; Oregon et al., 2018). Social presence enables participants to identify with the community, project their personalities, and form relationships by communicating with each other. Cognitive presence enables the coconstruction of meaning. Teaching presence regulates and mediates the whole so that the intended outcomes and the needs of the learners are met. We selected Yammer, with its Facebook-like social affordances, to support the vital social presence, without which, Garrison et al., (2002) argued, the cognitive and teaching functions cannot wholly succeed.

Yammer was one of a number of strategies put in place to help international students to develop knowledge, understanding, and skills that would make the challenge of transiting to Master's level study less daunting. We chose this platform because it has many of the features of Facebook, such as profile creation, "recent activity" streams, "feeds," "follow," "like," "reply," "share an update," "praise," and "tag" but without many of the distractions. It allowed us to create an advertisement-free, private network "that cut out the 'noise' from the wider world that is typically associated with Facebook and Twitter," (Reynolds et al.,

2013) that enabled international students to focus on course-related and academic issues. It was also readily accessible and useable through mobile devices and a downloadable desktop application, which allowed flexibility in mode of access. We felt this was important in encouraging student engagement, regardless of preferred device. The choice of platform was also a pragmatic one based on the suitable affordances of Yammer for our purposes. However, recent research suggests that students' attitudes towards social media are more dependent on gender, age, locale, experience, and interest than on the specific platform they use (Al-Qayisi et. al., 2020).

We used Yammer to supplement a weekly, compulsory academic skills class, led by an academic skills tutor, and a voluntary Academic Cultural Exchange (ACE) class, led by the international students, which gave international students the opportunity to spend time with native English-speaking students. Whether compulsory or voluntary, academic issues were foremost in the thoughts of the international students. The Yammer site was, in the first instance, led by the Academic Skills Tutor. The aim was to pass ownership and leadership of the site over to the international students as quickly as possible. To ensure that that the site was lively, the Academic Skills Tutor posted regularly and attempted to stimulate discussion. Academic issues and the advancement of the skill set of the international students were the focus of the site. Figure 1 offers a typical example of posts.

Figure 1. A Sample of Posts on Yammer

METHODOLOGY

This research followed a case study approach and was qualitative in nature. We conducted a case study because it allowed us to explore key themes and issues in a focused manner (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gray, 2014). Through this case, we provided description and analysis of a bounded unit within real-life situations and context (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, the "unit of analysis" was a group of Southeast Asian international students undertaking an education MA at a UK university in the North of England. We wanted to better understand whether the use of Yammer as an educational tool aided academic transition in this particular instance. In particular we wanted to answer the following research question:

What impact, if any, does the use of Yammer have on international students' academic transition?

Such an approach was appropriate as it allowed an in-depth study to be undertaken that provided exemplary knowledge 'that offered a particular representation of the impact of Yammer on international students' transition, to be understood in a specific context (Thomas et al., 2017). There is some suggestion that bias can be an issue when using a case study approach, with researchers glossing over contradictory information. To overcome this, we used the verbatim testimony of participants and key literature (Vennesson, 2008).

Data Collection

We chose purposive sampling, because this type of sampling fit the parameters of "the unit of analysis." We used focus groups to gather data from 16 international students (8 from China and 8 from Vietnam). The participants were carefully selected according to their ability to meet our research criteria, and each shared a similar perspective and relationship to the topic. When designing the focus groups, we were looking for common ground rather than shared backgrounds such as demographic variables. They were international students studying an Education-based Master's degree at the case university. They had academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges to overcome and needed to develop their critical reflection. Such common ground led to some interesting free flowing discussion in which participants were keen to share their experiences. Although demographics such as age and gender were not necessarily relevant to this type of homogeneity, we did give some thought to our participants comfort level (Morgan, 2019). We therefore ensured that each focus group consisted of a mix of Vietnamese and Chinese students (Morgan, 2019). Given that the number of participants (N=16) accounted for almost one-half of the international cohort on the MA program, having two focus groups with eight students in each allowed 48% of the overall population to take part in the study.

Within each focus group, participants were asked to think about their motivation, technical knowledge, and confidence when using Yammer. We also asked them to comment on the communicative benefits of Yammer and whether the site had encouraged them to support each other and develop friendships, and whether the experience had supported their transition to Master's level study. In preparing the specific focus group questions, we ensured that a reasonable number of questions were designed (14) because we were worried that the participants could lose interest if the discussion was overly long. We also ensured that questions were clear, understandable, and open ended. Probing,

Table 1. Interview Questions

Areas	Questions
Academic transition	What academic problems did you face when you started your course?
Preparation and improvisation	Did you feel that there was evidence of preparation to use Yammer? How did you prepare to use Yammer? What did you think of the tutors' approach?
Interaction and participation	What motivated you to use Yammer and was it what you expected? Did you feel that you were given the opportunity to participate and interact with the tutors and other students on Yammer (please explain your answer)? What were the social benefits of Yammer?
Usability and practical issues	Did you feel that you received enough training prior to the session? Were there any accessibility issues and if so, did they impact its usefulness? Were you confident using Yammer?
General	Did Yammer support your learning? Did it help you in your course? Did it help you make friends? Is there anything else that you would like to say about Yammer?

follow-up questions were used along with an exit question to give the participants an opportunity to illustrate their points of view (Gray, 2014. Table 1 shows the questions asked in the focus group:

The transferability of results within this qualitative study was ensured by providing thick descriptions of the processes and experiences within the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This allowed the reader to make decisions as to whether a "case-to-case transfer generalisation" (Treharne & Riggs, 2015, p. 63) was possible, i.e., whether our findings were transferable to their particular context/setting. Furthermore, we drew analytical generalizations throughout our discussion to establish transferability (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). In this process, the generalization did not happen from data to population; instead, as Treharne and Riggs (2015) explained, it was done "from some data to an extant theory" (p. 63).

Ethical Considerations

We ensured that the participants were treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice. The right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason at any time was recognized. They were also informed of this right prior to the focus groups taking place. Anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy were assured. Each participant was allocated a letter that had been used when reporting their viewpoints and opinions, and the specifics of individuals were not discussed with anyone (British Ethical Research Association, 2018).

Analysis

We used thematic analysis because it helped us identify, analyze, and report the themes that emerged from the data. We deliberately chose to make this research inductive, but to some extent the process was iterative—we moved back and forth between our data and the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As a general thematic approach was compatible with a case study methodology, we utilized it to analyze these data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to enable the relationships and contrasting variables within the case study to be investigated (Gray, 2014). As Braun and Clarke proposed, ". . . thematic analysis . . . seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and social conditions that enable the individual accounts that are provided." (2006, p. 85).

Following such an approach enabled data to be collected that aided our understanding of the impact Yammer had on international students' academic transition. We did not look for a predetermined list of specific themes, however, we did take account of concepts that might help to explain the impact that Yammer had on academic transition. Specifically, the following phases were undertaken:

- Phase 1: familiarizing yourself with the data
- Phase 2: generating initial codes
- Phase 3: searching for themes
- Phase 4: reviewing the themes
- Phase 5: defining and naming the themes and writing up the findings

Once the focus group transcripts (10 pages of transcribed data were produced by us) had been read through several times, we outlined the initial ideas (Phases 1 and 2 of the thematic analysis). From these initial codes (feeling ill-prepared, lack of understanding, unfamiliarity with processes, confusion, lack of technological know-how and confidence, limited tutor involvement, lack of coordination with other support mechanisms, convenience and efficiency of social media), the emergent candidate themes were developed (Phase 3). The emergent candidate themes were: (a) feeling ill-prepared, confused and unfamiliar; (b) lack of technological know-how and confidence; (c) lack of support mechanisms and tutor involvement; and (d) benefits and drawbacks of social media. Throughout Phase 3, when reviewing in Phase 4 and when arriving at the final themes after Phase 5, we highlighted quotations that best represented the themes. We chose not to use a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivio but undertook manual coding instead. If we had used NVivo, we would still have been the decision makers and interpreters as the software does not pull out major themes or apply research codes to the data (Glesne, 2011; Gray, 2014. We chose the quotations within the findings section because they best illustrated the participants' points of view as they related to the main themes that emerged from the data. The themes were: preparedness, interaction and participation issues, and support for learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

While we were not looking for a predetermined

list of specific codes and themes, we did take account of the literature discussed above pertaining to social media and international students' transition. For example, when reading the transcripts, we looked for codes and themes that might help to explain the academic problems that the international students faced. We also looked for codes and themes that might explain how the international students participated and used Yammer to interact with tutors and peers. We looked for evidence of Yammer supporting learning and whether Yammer helped our international students transition academically. The extent to which these experiences are congruent with or representative of those students making similar transitions remains an open question. As touched upon above, working through the coding process the following broad themes were identified:

- Preparedness
- Interaction and participation issues
- Support for learning

When discussing the participants' points of view as evidenced in their testimony, we refer to majority, significant, and minority views. Majority discourse refers to views expressed by eleven or more participants, significant between six and ten participants, and minority views refers to five participants or fewer.

Preparedness

Although the questions we asked referred to the use of Yammer as a tool to aid academic transition, all of the participants without exception took the opportunity to talk about their transitions more broadly, not just their use of Yammer. They referenced a number of academic problems that they faced when they began their studies in the United Kingdom. Participant A suggested that:

> *When I came here, I still got problems with understanding English accent. I could not understand what the teachers said . . . oh my god, I'm so stupid, I have felt like that. I couldn't understand anything at all . . .*

The majority of international students appeared to be unprepared for what they encountered when they began their studies. Reference was made to not being able to understand other classmates—including other international students and home students—and generally feeling "scared . . ."

(Participant M) throughout the whole transition process (Leese, 2010). Of particular interest were comments made about being unfamiliar with the approach taken by their tutor and that, to some extent, their own expectations were at odds with the environment in which they found themselves. They were not used to being able to speak freely in class and this approach seemed to disorient them. Participants D, F, and O powerfully conveyed this issue suggesting:

> *. . . the way we think about it [studying] is totally different to the ways my tutor . . . her opinion is different from me . . .*

> *. . . another problem that we all have a different education background, so we don't . . . we are not very familiar with the new course.*

> *I cannot get in touch when other students are speaking freely in a class, but it is not our class model to speak freely, and we need to raise our hands and wait for the teachers [. . .] to allow us to talk about the topics.*

There appeared to be evidence that a significant number of the participants had "culture shock" (Steers et al., 2010) as they transitioned to academic study at a UK university. There was some obvious discomfort and confusion on the part of the majority of participants, a cultural dissonance that made the educational approach taken seem alien to them (Poyrazli, 2015).

The majority of participants made reference to feeling that they were falling behind other students, particularly home students, and that, initially at least, they dealt with this by speaking to other international students. It seemed clear that they didn't feel particularly comfortable ". . . troubling their tutors" (Participant G) more than was absolutely necessary. This left them struggling with, but nonetheless beginning to adopt, acculturation strategies (Fischbacker–Smith et al., 2015) to help them to bridge the academic gaps that they seemed to face studying in the United Kingdom. Berry (1997) suggested a number of different acculturation strategies that international students might follow. On this occasion, there was a suggestion that the majority of international students were, in an academic sense, struggling to integrate (i.e., adopting cultural norms of the host culture

while maintaining their own culture), and that they were trying to develop strategies to assimilate (i.e., adopting the host culture's norms).

If the participants' views were to be taken at face value, it appeared that the majority evidenced a positive disposition towards Yammer (Abney et al., 2019; Difranzo et al., 2019) with its launch (week 2 of the MA) in this context being viewed favorably. The expectation was that Yammer would enable them to deal with their issues relating to their academic transition. In terms of feeling prepared to use Yammer, however, while the majority suggested that guidance was appropriate, there was, for a minority of the participants, a misconception about who could post on Yammer. Participant A stated that, ". . . at the time [. . .] so I just thought that it was for like teachers, only teachers can post on the Yammer."

Interaction and Participation Issues

Given that activity on the social media platform was not as extensive as had been hoped, it was not at all surprising that issues linked to interaction and participation were referred to by the majority of participants. A significant number of participants referred to feeling reluctant to post, even when they had something of note to say. Participant F was worried that her ". . . Yammer question might be stupid . . ." and therefore she was not confident enough to post anything significant. There was some suggestion that private messaging within Yammer should be encouraged by tutors as an alternative. There was also a worry (Participant I) that, "If I put the question on Yammer and my tutor, my curriculum tutor will see it, maybe she will think I'm not a good student." We are reminded of the work of Fletcher (2012) who alluded to the disorientating academic struggles that international students can face and just how challenging they can be. This appeared to resonate with the majority of participants.

In considering issues linked to participating on Yammer, and interacting with others on the platform, a significant number of participants offered advice and guidance on how better use could be made of the platform. Participants made reference to the fact that, with the exception of the Academic Skills Tutor, very few tutors posted with any regularity on Yammer. As participant P pointed out, "I think the tutor could participate more . . . I think maybe she just has the idea that maybe some other tutor could log on and offer some academic support or idea on Yammer."

Tutor participation was seen as being particularly important and there was a suggestion that because tutors were not posting as much as the international students had hoped they were not interested in it and did not value it as an educational tool. This acted a as disincentive for international students to participate. There were also some suggestions that Yammer could, and should, play a more prominent and central part of their MA course design. It appeared that unless it was viewed as an integral part of the MA, international students would not make full use of social media. This suggests a more sensitive approach is required (Abney et al., 2019; Difranzo et al., 2019) and that Yammer needs to be seen as integral to the MA course design to encourage further engagement (Stathopoulou et al., 2019). Participant D believed that Yammer should be used more within their academic skills classes as a vehicle to talk in groups about academic related posts. The suggestion was that this would help international students get to know one another early on in the course and that it would cement the use of Yammer and give it prominence in the eyes of the international students. Participant L suggested that all tutors should refer to Yammer during their classes and that:

> . . . *maybe after every class, the tutor . . . should tell the students that if you have any problem, you are not clear enough, just post on Yammer. We can help you like solve it.*

This was echoed by participant C who alluded to fact that:

> . . . *if we had made Yammer more of a central part of the course, linked it more directly, I would use it more. For example, I take my phone every day I click the timetable and the app, the link to the email . . . I can't do this for Yammer.*

The inference made was that while the university timetable and email were viewed as a central element of the MA, Yammer was not seen in the same way.

It has been suggested that in order for social media to be used productively an appropriate pedagogy needs to be adopted (Abney et al.,

2019; Difranzo et al., 2019; Green & Hope, 2010; Leonardi, 2017; Loving & Ochoa, 2011; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Miller et al., 2016). If the transformational possibilities of social media are to be utilized, then it appears that more attention needs to be paid to pedagogical reasons for using social media and how it can be integrated with other support mechanisms offered to aid academic transition. In conjunction with participant comments, the strong suggestion from these ideas is that the pedagogical purpose, style, frequency, and regularity of Yammer use be more expressly established, for both tutors and students, in order to encourage productive participation.

There was some discontent levelled at Yammer by a minority, with reference made to it not being user friendly and that posts were hard to follow and find. There were also some problems logging in, particularly if you used a different computer: ". . . actually, last two months maybe I frequently log in the different computer in the library, so I got the problems (Participant B)."

For the majority of participants, Yammer was just not as user friendly as they had hoped it would be. The international students discussed Facebook and why they thought it had greater potential to aid their transition both socially and academically. One of the key issues with Yammer was international students forgetting to access it—even when they were sent notifications. Yammer never became habitual in the same way that other social media had for them. For all of the participants, Facebook was a familiar educational tool, and even those international students who had not used Facebook prior to studying in the United Kingdom expressed this as a preferred platform. This was unexpected, as we chose Yammer because it was *not* Facebook. We felt that Facebook created too many distractions and was more of a "social" endeavor as opposed to an "academic" one.

Support for Learning

Being of help was a recurring theme. Participant C made some useful points when she explained her motivations for using Yammer. Yammer was used because she viewed it as being useful and necessary because interesting topics were posted. It was also viewed as being convenient and efficient. Interest and relevance were vitally important if the international students were to engage. Participant I was positive about Yammer; however, she referred to other support mechanisms that were offered to aid academic transition—specifically the formal academic skills classes that were given and the voluntary Academic Cultural Exchange program (referred to above). The perception was that there should be more coordination and that it would make " . . . a good three-way approach to helping us feel happy and at home" (Participant H). A significant number of the participants believed that there was the potential for greater synergy between different support mechanisms as part of an overall strategy. While they were viewed collectively in the eyes of staff—albeit informally—the fact that the international students did not see this in the same way is significant.

Yammer allowed some friendships to be developed, but it seems that it was viewed more as a repository rather than something that was social in nature. Therefore the participants used it to develop " . . . some skills about writing, speaking and paraphrasing" (Participant C), but they rarely engaged in discussion. It was seen as an individual endeavor and not a collective one. This suggests that a minority of participants had not developed strategies to positively engage with Yammer (Stathopoulou et al., 2019).

The international students were, once again, keen to offer ideas about how Yammer might be used more productively to support learning in both social and academic transition. For example, participant E suggested that more use should be made of video clips, made by both staff and international students themselves. The inference was that, when posted, they would help the students get to know the tutors better and that it would aid their own confidence, helping them to develop academically and socially. Participant J offered some particularly useful advice:

> . . . if I saw Yammer for the first time, I hope I could see like a post of a student like saying "hayya, hey friend!" [. . .] and international students can post on there and make friends with each other and we can form a group to share ideas like "what I learned today" or "I'm not really understanding, could you help me?" [..] and I want to see more student post on Yammer because when I log on, I just saw post of tutor and I don't have enough courage to post on there.

CONCLUSIONS: LESSONS LEARNED

When transitioning from a familiar learning culture to UK higher education (HE), there are several challenges that international students must face. This research utilized focus groups to identify the following themes:

- Preparedness
- Interaction and participation issues
- Support for learning

This research has highlighted several academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges that international students face. It has outlined the obstacles that international students experience and critically analyzed the use of Yammer to support peer collaboration and communication to enhance academic development of a group of Southeast Asian international students undertaking an education Master's at a UK university in the North of England. It has considered some of the obstacles that international students experience and outlined how Yammer was used, as one strategy, to aid the academic transition of a group of international students.

Specifically, this research enabled a number of lessons to be learned about the impact that Yammer had on international students' academic transition. There were clearly some positives to using Yammer, and to an extent it appears to have, in part at least, aided international students' academic transition; however, there were missed opportunities to "meld" the academic with the social. Although feedback suggested that Yammer can be important, more training on the affordances of Yammer as part of the induction process is clearly needed. There is also a clear need for additional online tutor presence and more scaffolded activities to build confidence in using Yammer. The international students only appeared to have accessed the site when they received notifications and their use of the site had not become habitual in the same way as their use of Facebook.

It seems clear that more needs to be done to make the most of the academic affordances of Yammer and social media more generally. If international students are to be enabled to transition effectively, then thought needs to be given to the various transition strategies that are utilized. An appropriate pedagogy needs to be adopted that brings together the relatively independent academic support activities highlighted above. If, as part of this triad Yammer can be more fully integrated, then there is potential for Yammer to be used more productively to aid transition and as a transformational site for learning.

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