



# CAREER TALK

- 2021 -

**Interviews conducted  
by “Careers, Cultures,  
& Languages” students**



# XIANG YU 余翔

**Xiang Yu has more than ten years of experience teaching ESL to students in China, and he is also an expert in GMAT/GRE training. Yu is TESOL certified; he has published several books on ESL education methodologies and GMAT analysis. He was invited many times as a guest speaker in overseas language programs on the Shanghai Foreign Language Channel and was interviewed by Forbes China International Education Special in 2019. In addition, Yu is one of the few ESL teachers with IT product development capabilities in the language education industry in China.**

**1) What was your major in college, and why did you choose the language services industry?**

I studied business in undergraduate school and then graduated from an Executive MBA program. Before starting the EMBA, I needed to take the GMAT and it turned out that I got a high score that year which made me consider taking a part-time job related to ESL education. So, I entered New Oriental, which was the largest English training company in China at that time, and have been working in this industry since then.

**2) Please briefly introduce your past work experience. What were you engaged in before? Were there any other career fields that you wanted to be in?**

Because I have a business background, I used to think about going to a consulting company like McKinsey and working in marketing. The work I do now is completely different from what I dreamed of doing after graduation, but anyway, I don't want to work in other industries anymore. I started

as a GRE and GMAT tutor, and my business background has gradually allowed me to acquire a group of clients who need to learn business and financial English. I have not done any work outside the field of language education.

**3) I heard that you and your team have made an IT product, and you wrote the logical framework for it. Could you please talk about this in detail? Why did you make this product?**

Solely relying on the content of the course, students will not learn how to apply the course concepts; if, say, a student is going to the GMAT test, they will not get high scores only by taking classes. They need to learn the concepts mentioned in the course and also practice applying course concepts beyond the classroom, and this is what our product provides to students. It simply provides better conditions that facilitate learning.

Well, the product now has a system for memorizing vocabulary combined with Big Data technologies. Users can not only search for video clips of a word appearing in movies, TED talks, online courses and documentaries, but also check the context of the word in novels and textbooks. This can help students figure out the actual usage of vocabulary and strengthen memory by repeated retrieval. In addition, users can choose from a variety of word mnemonics. One of the newly developed mnemonics combines words with cartoons, making users intuitively associate words with meanings.

**4) There are many practitioners in the language training/language education industry. What is the secret to success?**

I don't think I'm successful yet; me and my team, we are just getting started. We are making plans with bigger moves. In terms of the company's revenue, we surpassed some other companies probably because of my product model. All my products are in-depth integrations of IT technology and

teaching methodologies. I have also been studying GMAT and reading about the latest business and finance news; these fields are constantly changing and information is updated frequently.

**5) I often see you sharing material incentive policies on social media. For example, I remember once you gave the most improved student a luxury bag. I have not seen similar policies in other English education/training companies, and this kind of incentive policy almost seems like a special feature of your company. Some people think that such combination of material incentive and education is strange or even wrong. What do you think?**

I wouldn't say it's a feature of our company; it is just my own preference. I like luxury goods, so I would use them to motivate students who successfully enter the project they want to study/work in, or students who pass a test with flying colors. Although sometimes the price of a gift is higher than the tuition paid by the student, but you can't think of it like this. I believe that if you really want to do this thing well, your efforts are not just measured by money because you like what you do. I enjoy working in the whole process, so I didn't really think much about the cost. I would say it's just one of the ways to make me enjoy my job more. A student achieves their preset goal, which makes me feel happy; I give them a gift so that they also feel rewarded.

**6) In the language training industry, there are countless companies and organizations, large or small. As a manager and the former vice-principal of a language school, how do you think your company has built a solid foundation in terms of marketing?**

So far, I haven't even used the WeChat official account for publicity. The cost for advertising is almost zero. It's essentially word of mouth marketing. Because the market segment of L2 education related to studying/working abroad is a small market, a niche market, word of mouth marketing is very important. Large and small study abroad

programs, former students and their parents would recommend me to others. This is currently the main strategy for attracting new clients.

**7) How does your company evaluate the effectiveness of a newly recruited teacher?**

First of all, if the teacher is a test preparation tutor, they must get a high score themselves. But I do not hire “new” teachers anyway. I only hire teachers that have been verified and have a certain reputation in the industry.

**8) Has the company been affected by the pandemic? I feel that studying/working abroad is a big trend right now in China. What do you think of the industry trends in the next three to five years?**

Yes, the company was affected by the pandemic last year. Things are much better this year. And yes, if the United States takes a friendly and active attitude in the relations with China, then this trend will definitely continue in three to five years-- more and more students will consider studying/working abroad. On the one hand, in the job market, students graduating from domestic universities are generally considered less competitive than students returning from famous universities or programs abroad. So it's certain that the industry is thriving in three to five years, with the assumption that the U.S. policy towards China should not be particularly bad.

*This interview was conducted by Sabrina (Xuci) Mei.*