Online and face-to-face guest lectures: graduate students' perceptions

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Abstract

Using guest lectures can provide graduate students with the opportunity to link theories with practice. This study aims to investigate perceptions towards online and face-to-face guest lectures among graduate students specialized in Curriculum and Instruction of Computer Science. Data was collected via reflection logs, semi-structured interviews and observations, revealing mainly positive experiences of both types of guest lecture. The participants acknowledged the flexibility and accessibility of an online guest lecture; on the other hand, they found that a face-to-face guest lecture facilitated better interaction and discussion. It is recommended to consider three issues for a successful guest lecture: guest speaker selection, teaching strategy of guest speaker and the role of the course lecturer. Future research based on identified gaps is recommended.

Introduction

The learning process is expected to link theoretical and practical knowledge together: as stated by Swan (2009, p.41) "A major expectation of students is to learn about real-world/practical applications"; therefore, it is highly recommended to use teaching strategies that facilitate the link between theories and practice; involving guest speakers is one example. Costello (2012) indicated that guest speaker events may link theory with practice by sharing guest speaker experience with students. Kamoun and Selim (2007, p.82) confirmed that a "guest speaker event can provide a means to supplement conventional teaching to expose students to recent trends and emerging technologies and practices". Reviewing the literature, it was found that some authors (Butler & Wielligh, 2012; Costello, 2012; Duening & Markiewicz, 2013) used the term 'guest speaker' and others used the term 'guest lecturer' to refer to the same term; in this study the term 'guest speaker' is used. Involving guest speakers is a teaching strategy that requires consideration by educational practitioners and researchers.

Clarke and Flaherty's (2002) study investigated the impact of nine different teaching strategies, including guest speakers, on students' perceptions of learning in the United States, United Kingdom and People's Republic of China (PRC). They found that

> [participating students in] the PRC and the United Kingdom considered practitioner readings, Internet communications, and guest speakers to be of less importance than [those in] the United States. (p.235)

Clarke and Flaherty reported that students have differing perceptions, by country, of the impact of guest speaker strategy as one of the investigated nine strategies. They also pointed to the impact of culture on students' perceptions:

> The PRC rated academic journals high and guest speakers low. This may be partially explained by a Chinese culture that mandates that academics be held in the highest regard; therefore, exposure to academic thought is often considered more important than practitioners' ideas. (p. 238)

Perceptions are formulated as a result of social experiences and interaction within school, family and religion (Covey, 1989). Students' perceptions are a key source of data for quality assurance processes in teaching program assessment (Alebaikan, 2010). Studies emphasize the significance of understanding students' perceptions of their learning environment, which is highly influenced by teaching approaches and which in turn affect their learning outcomes (Goh, 2005). There is insufficient research on the pedagogical impact of the guest speaker (Duening and Markiewicz, 2013; Costello, 2012) and culture is one of the significant factors that influences people perceptions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The uniqueness of the Gulf Region's culture offers opportunities for research on students' perceptions of guest lectures; thus, this study aims to understand the students' experiences and perceptions towards guest lectures in the Gulf Region.

Moreover, a review of the literature revealed no previous studies on online and face-to-face guest lectures in one study. This study is unique in exploring the perceptions of one group of students who have experienced both online and face-to-face guest speaker events. Specifically, the study investigates the experience of computer science teachers, enrolled in a masters program in Curriculum and Instruction of Computer Science, with the teaching strategy of involving guest speakers in online and face-to-face environments. Didactic, lecture-based classrooms have been the standard pedagogical approach in Saudi Universities (Alebaikan, 2010). Since lecture-based classroom lacks interaction and engagement, it is recommended by Castello (2012) to invite a guest speaker as one possible way of increasing interaction and engagement among learners. The teaching of subjects that are constantly evolving, such as that in the program studied here, will be enhanced by using effective teaching strategies. The results of this study will provide insights into the use of face-to-face and online guest lectures in graduate programs and will contribute to the literature on successful guest speaker events from graduate students' points of view.

Literature Review

Guest speaker strategy

Using effective teaching strategies in graduate courses can enrich students' experiences by exposing them to new pedagogies to deliver quality education:

> Using multiple teaching methods and strategies that complement the traditional lecture method can enrich the classroom experience and can assist to successfully reach the maximum proportion of students. (Butler & Wielligh, 2012, p.48)

The aim of using a specific teaching method should be to facilitate quality learning. Van Assche and Vuorikari (2006) point out that the learning experience depends not only on the quality of the learning resources, but also on the right teaching strategies for effectiveness in delivery and usability in meeting course objectives. Payne, Sumter and Sun (2003:329, cited in Butler & Wielligh, 2012) suggest that if educators "are serious about delivering quality education" they should begin to focus on methods other than merely providing students with textbook content information.

Using guest lectures is one teaching strategy that provides opportunities to enrich students' experiences and to link theories with practice. Butler and Wielligh (2012) indicated that various studies have confirmed the advantages of inviting guest speakers. They emphasize the role of guest speaker pedagogy in linking theory with practice and providing students with networking opportunities. Clarke and Gibson-Sweet (1998) stated that students suggested the use of guest speakers to balance between theory and practice. Mullins (2001) pointed to the role of guest speakers in sharing up-to-date, realistic information and presenting their own distinctive experiences on a subject to support textbook

materials. In addition, three main goals for inviting guest speakers were reported by Kamoun and Selim (2007):

Student will demonstrate an understanding of real-world practical knowledge

Student will identify new practical facts related to their professional orientation, and

Faculty will get exposed to real-world IT practices and trends and will demonstrate their integration into their courses. (p.87)

The guest speaker approach can contribute to "a successful authentic learning approach in on-campus learning communities" (Costello, 2012, p. 482). However, the integration of teaching strategies and technology provides the curriculum designer with new opportunities to use effective teaching strategies that increase learning motivation. For example, an online event can enable interaction or engagement with a wide range of speakers (Costello, 2012). It is time to redesign teaching strategies using the online environment. Hemphill and Hemphill (2007) indicated that an online (virtual) guest speaker experience is a richer and more interactive way than face-to-face guest speakers if asynchronous online discussion is enabled for a few days, a week or even a semester. Similarly, the study of Eveleth and Baker-Eveleth (2009) used online discussion for guest speaker visits and found it fostered students' acceptance and understanding of the material and a positive attitude to the courses.

Kamoun and Selim (2007) state that inviting a guest speaker can enable students to be introduced to best practices and lessons learned from experience. Kamoun and Selim's study investigated the merits of inviting Information Technology (IT) professionals to the classroom as a pedagogical technique, and revealed that the guest speaker event can, "provide students with invaluable real-world and practical IT knowledge" (p.81). IT is rapidly changing; therefore inviting guest speakers who are experts in the field can enrich the content and applicability of IT courses, "to keep up-to-date with the latest technologies and changes" (Kamoun and Selim, p. 82). Zorek et al. (2011) concluded that

using guest speakers in a professional development seminar series demonstrated a positive impact on multiple aspects of student development. (p.5)

and would assist students in developing their career plans. In addition, for students who are themselves teachers, inviting guest speakers exposes them to this teaching method, helping them engage with new pedagogical options for their own students.

Planning for an effective guest speaker event

Planning for an effective guest speaker event requires consideration of several issues by the course lecturer. Some of these issues are: the procedure for guest speaker selection, the preparation of the guest speaker and the students for the guest speaker event, the relationship between the course objectives and the guest speakers' experiences, the teaching strategy to be used by the guest speaker and the delivery mode of the guest speaker. Lang (2008) states that guest speaker events have to be closely related to course objectives and be well planned and prepared. For example, the effectiveness of linking academic courses and curriculum with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education (STEM) professionals as guest speakers was confirmed by Villasenor and Movahedzadeh (2010):

students will have a more grounded understanding of what scientists do and have a better understanding of the real world applications of what they are learning. (p.46)

According to Barrett and Wuetherick (2012), a successful guest speaker event involves attention to four key guidelines:

preparing the speaker by giving them the context of the course and students in terms of interests and preparedness; preparing the students by explaining the connection to

course's goals and by setting clear expectations for the students; actively moderating the discussion and discussing the presentation with the students after the speaker departs to ensure that the conversation stays on target and the speaker's contributions are contextualized with learning objectives. (p.10)

Selecting the right guest speaker is a critical issue. A successful guest lecture is affected by the experiences discussed in the event. Inviting an internal guest speaker is recommended by Swan (2009), who states that

Universities have a wealth of academic expertise from a wide range of disciplines that can be utilized for students in the form of guest presentations. (p.36)

There are some colleges that encourage course lecturers to invite guest speakers to their classrooms through official guidelines. Li et al. (2014) emphasize the role of the students in a guest lecture event, arguing that

if we design the guest lecturing in a way that students can be actively involved, they will not only learn better, but also be more engaged in the class. (p.2)

Zorek et al. (2011) recommend engaging the students in the planning for the guest speaker event by considering their suggestions and requests in selecting guest speakers.

The delivery of guest lectures can be either online or face-to-face; online guest lectures offer flexibility and availability with no geographical restriction for the invited guest speaker or students. The course lecturer is responsible for organizing the delivery mode of the guest lecture based on the location of the guest speaker. Given the technology available today, online guest lectures have become more accessible and flexible as a delivery mode. In the literature, online guest speaker events (Hemphill & Hemphill, 2007; Costello, 2012) and face-to-face guest speaker events (Kamoun & Selim, 2007; Butler & Wielligh, 2012) were investigated separately.

Teaching strategies used with a guest speaker have received some attention in the literature. According to Barrett and Wuetherick (2012),

students expressed a desire to have more time to engage with the individual guest speakers and, in particular, to have time to ask more questions of the speakers as well as to engage in discussion about the rest of the course materials with the speakers. (p.10)

When utilizing discussion pedagogy with guest speakers it was suggested that the discussion be structured in a face-to-face guest speaker event (Duening & Markiewicz, 2013) and unstructured in asynchronous online guest speaker event (Hemphill & Hemphill, 2007). Duening and Markiewicz's (2013) study found a problem with a guest speaker approach where there was "a lack of control over what they say" (p.2). Therefore, they recommended the structured interview method for entrepreneurial guest speakers in order to enable a more reliable learning approach. It was proposed to have the instructor or other qualified person as the interviewer, in order to maintain the conversation and keep it related to course objectives. They refer to the event of the guest speaker as the "speaker-learner interface"(p.2). They note that the unstructured approach could result in bias by recalling positive memories: "Among these are the positivity bias, in which speakers are more likely to recall positive memories in autobiographical storytelling"(p.8), which may reflect an unrealistic picture of the guest speaker experience. In contrast, Hemphill and Hemphill (2007) recommend a more interactive guest speaker event, whereby

> students can question an expert at specified points of an activity or read a guest facilitator's articles and then ask questions and participate in a discussion with the guest. (p.288)

Although this suggestion is related to asynchronous online discussions, it can be also employed in a face-to-face guest lecture as reading guest facilitator's articles before the lecture would facilitate rich discussions with the guest speaker. In addition, encouraging the students to discuss guest speakers' articles would enhance their critical thinking skills, as indicated by Hemphill and Hemphill (2007).

Teaching context

As a lecturer on the course "New Trends in Teaching Information Technology", which is part of the Masters program in Curriculum and Instruction of Computer Science at King Saud University, Riyadh, it was decided to utilize a new teaching strategy to provide students with a greater range of experiences. The participants were a group of ten graduate students who were computer science teachers at public schools with a minimum two years teaching experience. Since "guest lectures can make courses more dynamic, show additional perspectives, and also real-life applications of subject matter" (Smucny, 2006, p.2), the guest speaker strategy was chosen. As well as exposing these teachers to new content learning opportunities, introducing face-to-face and online guest lectures to the participants would provide them with the opportunity to understand students' perceptions towards a guest speaker event. It also would help them understand how they as teachers could use a guest speaker strategy.

Preparing for the guest speaker events, two professionals were invited to be guest speakers in activities related to course objectives. It was proposed for one of them to present her lecture face-to-face while the other was planned to give her lecture online. The online guest speaker was located in Europe. The guest lecturers were informed about the general course objectives, the course syllabus and the objectives of the lectures. The students were informed about the guest speakers' backgrounds and the subjects of the lectures, and were asked to prepare questions for class discussions. Students as well as the online guest speaker were familiarized with the virtual classroom tool *Elluminate* which is embedded in the University's Learning Management System.

Research methodology

An exploratory methodology enables researchers to uncover the perceptions, values and cultures of participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this case, qualitative research was used as it facilitates understanding participants' experiences through looking closely at their words, actions and documents.

The main research questions underpinning this study were:

1. How do graduate students perceive an online guest lecture versus a face-to-face guest lecture?

2. What are students' perceptions regarding successful online and face-to-face guest speaker experiences?

The qualitative approach is more effective in exploring subjective meanings within a culture, understanding perceptions and attitudes and interpreting the culture and social traditions (Creswell, 1998). This study utilized qualitative research to provide the participants with the opportunity to describe their learning experiences from their point of view. Qualitative methods are appropriate to this study to better understand the phenomena (in this case the online and the face-to-face guest lectures in graduate courses) where little is known or when a researcher aims to identify the variables that might be later tested quantitatively (Hoepfl, 1997).

Three methods were used to collect data: reflective logs by all the students after the guest speakers' events; four semi-structured student interviews; and researcher's observations. The reflective log required responses to five main points: the impact of guest speaker experiences on learning in graduate courses; the impact of such an experience on learning in the current course; suggestions for improving a guest speaker event; advantages of using face-to-face guest speaker; advantages of the online mode for a guest speaker; and further comments. Analysis of the reflection logs revealed further questions that were used to develop the semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth data. All of the semi-structured interviews were recorded in Arabic, transcribed and translated into English.

Maintaining trustworthiness of this qualitative study, credibility was addressed through triangulation (Silverman, 2001; Creswell, 1998). Triangulation of sources was used with the assumption that the

> use of different sources of information will help both to confirm and improve the clarity, or precision, of research findings. (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 275)

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis. A word-based approached was used to identify codes, categories and themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Themes were not predetermined, but rather emerged from the data, i.e. they were data-driven. Significantly, data was analyzed early in the research cycle because this can shape future data collection as pointed out by Wellington (2000). Observational data was used in this study to discover elements that were further discussed in the interviews and the reflection logs, and to cross-check the information. During the analysis, it was found that some data required further investigation. Consequently, the available participants were contacted to obtain further explanation for clarity.

Shenton (2004) cautions that

> Since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. (p.69)

Transferability, which depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred (Hoepfl, 1997), was supported by providing detailed descriptions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Thus, this study provides information about the context of the research, the research design, the results (including quotes of participants) and the analysis processes to allow the reader to judge its transferability to a similar situation.

Findings

In response to the research questions, collected data were coded and recurring themes were developed. Following are the results and interpretation that emerged from the analysis of the research questions.

Students' responses to online and face-to-face guest lectures

The data analysis revealed four codes associated with one main theme in the responses to research question one. Codes varied according to the delivery mode of the guest speaker, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Identified themes and codes from research question 1.

Research question: How do graduate students perceive online and face-to-face guest lecture?			
Themes	Codes	Example quotes	Delivery Mode
Positive experience	Helpful, effective strategy	"I realized how helpful it is using guest speaker strategy for the master degree Instruction and Curriculum of Computer"	Face-to-Face & Online
		"I know and use various teaching strategies but now I believe that guest speaker is an effective strategy"	Face-to-Face & Online
	New research ideas	"graduate studies entail new research ideas and broad knowledge"	Face-to-Face & Online
	Creative e-learning environment	"Online guest lecture has helped me to understand the creative e-learning environment".	Online
	New practical experiences, increase students experiences	"as a student totally engaged in the studying environment focusing on books, grades and GPA, therefore, attending a guest lecture with great practical experiences was a surprise to all of us. It opened new horizons for new practical experiences"	Face-to-Face & Online
		"this strategy facilitates the increase of students experiences as they are introduced to other new experiences"	Face-to-Face & Online

All of the students revealed a positive experience of the guest speaker events. They acknowledged the significance of a guest speaker strategy in graduate courses. Referring to her field, one of the students said:

> I realized how helpful it was using guest speaker strategy for the master degree
> Instruction and Curriculum of Computer. (Interview)

Another stated: "graduate studies entail new research ideas and broad knowledge" and that the guest speaker strategy supports these studies. Having guest speakers who are working in the field enables further discussions about the relationship between theories and practice. The participants had the opportunity to experience a practical application of the guest speaker strategy. This is consistent with the findings of Costello (2012) and Butler and Wielligh (2012) that confirmed the advantages of inviting guest speakers in linking theory with practice.

Moreover, another student acknowledged in her reflection log the positive impact of guest lectures on the graduate students and regretted that this approach is absent in higher education in this region. This absence of guest speakers in graduate studies was confirmed by two other students in their reflection logs. During the interviews, another student said: "we have never experienced guest lecturers at any level in our education". She described herself as

> a student totally engaged in the studying environment focusing on books, grades and
> GPA, therefore, attending a guest lecture with great practical experiences was a surprise
> to all of us. It opened new horizons for new practical experiences. (Interview)

This is consistent with Payne, Sumter and Sun's argument (2003, cited in Butler & Wielligh, 2012) for consideration of other methods to deliver quality education other than focusing on textbook content information.

Participants' perceptions showed the various perceived advantages of both online and face-to-face guest speaker strategy. In a reflection log, a student reported that guest lectures "introduce students to different experiences and culture" in particular regarding the online guest speaker. Similarly, in the interviews a student stated that it was an exciting experience to have a live presentation by a guest speaker from abroad. Viewing the online guest speaker strategy as a creative learning environment, a student said: "the online guest lecture has helped me to understand the creative e-learning environment"; while in another interview, a student said: "employing technology to enable a guest speaker event assisted students to experience professional online communication and created positive perceptions towards these innovative practices". These comments indicate a high positive experience of the online guest lecture.

Although both online and face-to-face guest speaker events were perceived as strategies that increase learning motivation as stated in some of the students' reflection logs, the face-to-face guest lecture had an advantage in promoting social interaction. For example, one student reported that "a face-to-face guest speaker facilitates interaction and discussion and thereby it promotes social interaction". This finding is consistent with the findings of Costello (2012) and Hemphill and Hemphill (2007). Interaction was emphasized by another student, who stated that guest lectures assisted in enhancing students' skills in asking questions. Experiencing the two modes of guest speaker events in one course, the face-to-face guest lecture was preferred over online guest speaker by only one student as she claimed better interaction in the face-to-face event. Briefly, acknowledging the flexibility of online guest speaker event by all of the students, the social interaction aspect can be promoted by utilizing flipped classroom within the online guest speaker event. The use of flipped classroom is further described in the next section.

As a result of the positive experience of being a student in a guest speaker event, two of the students reported in the interview having cooperated to employ a guest speaker strategy in teaching one of their own high school classes. During the interview, the student who was the guest speaker interestingly described her participation and observation in her friend's class:

> the students were very excited and the supervisor who attended the class acknowledged the positive impact of guest speaker strategy. […] I know and use various teaching strategies but now I believe a guest speaker is an effective strategy. (Interview)

Confirming the positive experience of the guest speaker event, one of the students said in the interview: "I had a great experience, I will use guest speaker in my classes in future". Employing guest speaker strategy in graduate classes can have a long-term influence because, as noted above, graduate students are using it in their teaching, and a school supervisor acknowledged its effectiveness. With all of the positive experiences, the students reported many suggestions for successful guest lecture events.

Students' suggestions for successful online and face-to-face guest speaker experiences

The data analysis revealed ten codes and three main themes in the responses to research question two. Codes varied according to the delivery mode of the guest speaker, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Identified themes and codes form research question 2.

Research question: What are students' perceptions towards a successful online and face-to-face guest speaker strategy?			
Themes	**Codes**	**Quotes**	**Delivery Mode**
Guest speaker selection	Students participate	"I would suggest that students participate in selecting guest speakers and provide their bios to the course lecturer as a justification for selection"	Face-to-Face & Online
	Graduate students as guest speaker	"the idea of graduate students participation as a guest speaker would be very beneficial if they have excellence in particular field"	Face-to-Face & Online
Teaching strategy of guest lecturer	Discussion time	"enabling time for discussions and exchanging ideas and views would enrich the lecture topics as we had experienced in the online guest lecture"	Face-to-Face & Online
	Flipped learning	"I suggest using flipped learning by offering the students a recorded lecture of the guest speaker prior to the event to enable more time for discussion and questions"	Face-to-Face & Online
	PowerPoint presentation	"The PowerPoint presentation of the face-to-face guest speaker was great! It was supported by various multimedia elements and that has increased the interaction and motivation for learning among students".	Face-to-Face
	Academic advising role	"graduate students as researchers need further consultation and new perspectives that assist them in determining their thesis or final project topics"	Face-to-Face & Online
Course lecturer role	Recording guest lecture	"it is recommended to record the face to face guest lecture to enable the advantages of traditional and distance lectures"	Face-to-Face
	lecture topic	"Students have to be informed about the guest lecture topic and objectives to be prepared with informative questions"	Face-to-Face & Online
	Back-up plan	"internet connection problems could be encountered in online guest lecture therefore back-up plan has to be considered by the course lecturer".	Online
	Evaluation	"creating an evaluation form for guest lecture events would be beneficial for improving future guest lectures"	Face-to-Face & Online

Students looked at successful guest speaker events from different angles. One of them suggested three factors for successful guest lectures: a topic related to the course's theoretical content, the selection of an expert who is related to the course aims, and informing the guest speaker about the course

requirements in order to be well prepared. This is consistent with the recommendations of Kamoun and Selim (2007).

Guest speaker selection

One of the students recommended students' participation in selecting guest speakers by enabling them to nominate a speaker. She added that the nomination should be justified. This result agrees with Zorek, Katz and Popovich's (2011) recommendation that the selection of guest speakers needs to be influenced by students' suggestions and requests. In addition, one of the students wrote in her reflection log that students can be invited as guest speakers to enable the exchange of experiences. This suggestion was also discussed during the student interviews, when two students stated that students selected as guest speaker must have credible qualifications and experience. This finding suggests that the participants did not consider inviting speakers with a similar level of expertise to their own, confirming Swan (2009) result that inviting internal guest speakers is not common.

Teaching strategy of the guest speaker

The participants' perspectives indicated that the guest speaker teaching strategy is an important factor for a successful guest lecture. Most of the students stressed the need to allow discussion time with guest speakers. One student stated she would appreciate more time for discussion with the online speaker and this could be enabled through asynchronous online discussion as reported by Hemphill and Hemphill (2007). Two other students agreed with her as they appealed for more discussion time in both online and face-to-face guest lectures. Confirming the need for discussions, another student recommended the use of a 'flipped classroom' approach to allow time for discussion. The student suggested that using such an approach for a guest speaker event has the potential to be as effective as online courses that provide students with recorded lectures then allow for discussions synchronously and asynchronously. Another student explained the purpose of using flipped learning by saying:

> I suggest using flipped learning by offering the students a recorded lecture of the guest
> speaker prior to the event to enable more time for discussion and questions. (Interview)

It was observed in the guest speaker events that creative PowerPoint presentations by guest speakers are appreciated by students. In one of the interviews, a student emphasized the significance of the guest speaker's PowerPoint presentation by saying:

> The PowerPoint presentation of the face-to-face guest speaker was great! It was
> supported by various multimedia elements and that increased the interaction and
> motivation for learning among students. (Reflective log)

In addition, participants suggested inviting guest speakers to be available for an academic advising role – an idea used in Zorek et al.'s (2011) study in a professional development series. One of the students recommended involving the guest speaker in an advising role:

> Graduate students as researchers need further consultation and new perspectives that
> assist them in determining their thesis or final project topics. (Reflective log)

Course lecturer role

The course lecturer has a critical role in guest speaker events. Usually the speaker and the delivery mode of the guest lecture (e.g. online or face-to-face) is decided by the course lecturer. Most of the participants stated a number of suggestions that reflect on the role of the course lecturer in successful guest lecture events. For example, two students suggested that the online guest lecture be recorded as well as the face-to-face guest lecture. One student said: "it is recommended to record the face-to-face

guest lecture to have the advantages of traditional and online lectures". Other students indicated that recorded lectures provide flexibility and accessibility. In addition, being well prepared for the guest lecture was also considered by the students, as one stated:

> Students have to be informed about the guest lecture topic and objectives in order to be well prepared with informative questions. (Reflective log)

Another student put the responsibility on the course lecturer for a back-up plan in case of failed internet connection for online guest lecture as she said:

> internet connection troubles could be encountered in online guest lecture therefore a back-up plan has to be considered by the course lecturer. (Interview)

Furthermore, two students emphasized the significance of getting feedback from students about guest lectures. The suggestion was to get feedback via evaluation forms: "creating an evaluation form for guest lecture events would be beneficial for improving future guest lectures". The effectiveness of guest lecture events in classes should involve receiving feedback from students as well as from guest speakers.

Conclusions

The results of this first use of a guest speaker approach reveal a positive experience of face-to-face and online guest lectures. The students acknowledged the flexibility and accessibility of an online guest lecture; on the other hand, they found that a face-to-face guest lecture facilitated better interaction and discussion. This study concludes that a successful guest lecture event should consider three issues: guest speaker selection, teaching strategy of guest speaker, and the role of the course lecturer. The participants recommended the use of a guest speaker strategy in Curriculum and Instruction graduate programs to provide the students with the opportunity of experiencing the positive impact of guest speakers.

It seems that involving guest speakers is not a common teaching strategy in graduate studies in the Gulf Region. Using the qualitative research method, the goal of this study is not to generalize findings but to enable transferability according to the given context and phenomena; and the results of this study confirm the possibility of a positive experience with guest speakers in a graduate course of Curriculum and Instructions programs. Therefore, it is recommended for future study to investigate the impact of guest speaker seminars in other programs or contexts. Also, future investigation of faculty perceptions of using guest speaker as a prominent feature of higher education teaching and learning strategies in the Gulf Region is highly recommended. Future investigation of using a flipped classroom in guest speaker teaching would also provide valuable data.

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