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Virtual guest speakers to an online CLIL course: A study in mobility and impact

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Research Domains

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

Abstract

This paper reports on-going action research in a course taught online since April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Leveraging the mobility afforded by ZOOM and the benefits of guest lectures, I invited guest speakers to my classes to share their research, insights, and/or experiences relating to the issues covered in the module, The Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE): Impact and Challenges. The course is read by freshmen in a Singapore university as a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) course. In Semester 1 of the past academic year, the guest speakers invited were international academics; in Semester 2, they comprised international students. Students' feedback over both semesters indicate that the guest lectures had mostly positive impacts on their learning experiences. The sole negative comment was guest speakers' choice of research terminology that limited comprehension. Thus, this teaching strategy will be continued in the coming academic year.

Full paper

Research indicates that guest lectures (GLs) positively impact student learning in many disciplines. The opportunity to study this teaching strategy's impact on a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) course arose when COVID-19 moved my module, The Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE): Impact and

Challenges, online. The mobility afforded by ZOOM allowed international academics and students to join the classes virtually. The module covers the contexts, case studies, challenges and controversies of IHE while assignments include a reflective summary, a research pitch and an expository paper. The teaching strategy is aimed at providing students with opportunities to interact with international experts and counterparts of IHE. Furthermore, it is hoped that this concrete experience (Kolb, 1984) will motivate learners towards deeper engagement with IHE issues.

Benefits to GLs in higher education include filling knowledge gaps (Zheng et al., 2018; Zou et al., 2019), enhancing student outcomes (Robert & Hanton, 2021) and bringing first-hand career accounts (Belser et al., 2018). Guest speakers (GSs) also provide career-pathway counselling and highlight the value of networking and maintaining an open mind (Zorek et al., 2011). The positive impact of GSs has been studied in disciplines as diverse as accounting, chemical crystallography, natural resource management, nursing, pharmacy, real estate, STEM, and technology, but not in a CLIL course.

Research also examines the use of technology as “virtual GSs are becoming prevalent in university teaching” (Zou et al., 2019, p. 175). In an online technology course, after they had interacted with GSs, students’ critical thinking skills and interest levels were enhanced (Hemphill & Hemphill, 2007). A study on an online graduate level course shows that a student-centred approach to GLs positively engages students (Li & Guo, 2015). Some researchers explicitly advocate virtual GLs (Robert & Hanton, 2021), citing the geographical and time mobility of the Internet (Holtzblatt & Tschakert, (2011).

After I became conversant with ZOOM, I invited GSs to the module for Semester 1 of Academic Year (AY) 2021-2022, proceeding as follows:

1. shortlisted and emailed five international academics involved in IHE; ensured a diversity of origins: China, Japan, Singapore, S Korea and the UK. Four accepted my invitation to speak on the IHE of their country/university, one each for the four sections (each with 16 freshmen) I was teaching in the course

2. worked with GSs to confirm the format for their lectures (30 mins of speaking and 10 mins of Q&A); provided a summary of my course, objectives, student profiles
3. informed each section of students on the GLs: the speaker to their section, the topics and the biodata of all the speakers. They could attend other sections' GLs besides their own
4. hosted the GLs on ZOOM
5. requested students' voluntary feedback based on one question: "How did you benefit from the Guest Lectures? OR What is one takeaway?"; analysed and coded comments thematically
6. repeated the above in Semester 2 with GSs comprising four international students in Australia, China, S Korea and the UK; the international student is another important stakeholder and major theme in IHE.

16 of the 64 students in Semester 1 emailed their feedback; 13 in Semester 2. The qualitative comments were overwhelmingly positive on the GLs except for one on difficulty with terminology. The table below summarises the recurring themes from both semesters with sample comments.

In summary, this experimental study indicates that virtual GLs positively impact this CLIL course. Thus, the teaching strategy will be continued in the next AY despite limitations of a small sample and low feedback response rate.

Theme	Example
New knowledge	The idea of using partnerships as a model ... something that I had not encountered ... a novel concept ... decolonisation...
Experience versus readings	... research papers, there is a certain research gap that can only be filled by other sources, in this case, ... C's experience.
Answers to questions	It is also a good opportunity for us to ask any burning questions ... and have a live response...
Emotional experience	Besides being an educational experience, her lecture was also an emotional one as it made me feel hopeful ...
Inspiration to	This caused me to ponder about which of Japan's

reflect/research	policies were effective... I will ... research on this.
Appreciation for delivery	I like how the sharing wasn't too structured ...
Exposure to wider field	it is a very nice holistic exposure to the wider subject that is IHE.
Personal touch/story	...they share valuable stories that really does show how IHE in other countries work and ... impacts students.

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