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To cite this article: Dennis Gabriel Pepple, Godbless Onoriode Akaighe, Aliyu Sambo, Ololade George-Aremu, Genevieve Bosah & Hana Trollman (2025) Using guest lectures to enhance student employability: pedagogical considerations, Cogent Education, 12:1, 2452076, DOI: [10.1080/2331186X.2025.2452076](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2452076)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2452076>



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Published online: 15 Jan 2025.



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Using guest lectures to enhance student employability: pedagogical considerations

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ABSTRACT

The quest to boost student employability remains a critical focus in higher education. Accordingly, employability is a fundamental yardstick for the performance of universities, which reflects the capability of the institutions to support students in getting and keeping roles suitable to their education while adding value to themselves and society. Although the literature underscores the importance of graduate employability, the significance of guest lectures in meeting this goal – and strategies for convening it – has received limited attention. This study draws on the Self-determination theory (SDT) and pedagogical considerations to propose a framework for setting up impactful guest lectures that bolster student employability. Therefore, we employ the framework to provide guest lectures for a diverse group of 495 postgraduate students in the UK and collect qualitative data for analysis. Through a qualitative deductive approach, we uncovered how using diverse presentation styles while linking theory and practice supports the autonomy needs of students, exposure to the future role supports their need for competence, and linking guest speaker sessions to assignment tasks and co-creative environment supports their relatedness need. Our study offers novelty through an SDT-based framework for implementing guest lecture sessions that engender high levels of participation and engagement.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 September 2024
Revised 3 January 2025
Accepted 7 January 2025

KEYWORDS

Blackboard; employability; guest lecture; pedagogical considerations; self-determination theory (SDT)

SUBJECTS

Business, Management and Accounting; Theories of Learning; Higher Education

Introduction

Broadly, employability refers to the skills and personal attributes students will use to gain and sustain employment (Tymon, 2013). García-Aracil et al. (2021) define it as the ability to seek, create, and maintain meaningful work across various contexts throughout one's career, and thus emphasize the need for integrating employability education into higher education to promote lifelong learning. The quest to enhance employability is receiving considerable attention in higher education globally. In the United Kingdom (UK), the government, employers, and universities are stakeholders with keen interest (Chadha & Toner, 2017; El-Sakran, 2024).

While the concern is global (Christiansen & Even, 2024), employability varies significantly by country. A global survey reported by The Times Higher Education (2023) underscores the interest in employability, the vital role of universities, and analyses trends. While some countries face challenges in providing graduate jobs, others, such as France, Switzerland, and Germany, have seamlessly integrated professional experience into their degree programs. France, Germany, China, the UK, and the US prominently feature in employability rankings. Notably, the UK's representation in these rankings is limited, which signals the need for significant improvements in employability initiatives within the country's higher education institutions.

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The UK government and non-governmental institutions recognise and prioritise the employability challenge. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI, 2015) considers employability a pressing issue in UK higher education. Furthermore, the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU, 2012), an independent UK and Republic of Ireland charity specialising in higher education and graduate employment, reported that nearly half of recent UK graduates were in non-graduate positions. Despite an environment of economic austerity and relevant initiatives, a significant skills gap remained between the skills companies demanded and those presented by graduates (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation to reveal two key issues. First, the anticipated economic recovery following the end of austerity measures in 2019 was not as robust as expected (International Labour Organisation, 2020). Second, in 2021, almost half (45%) of university students felt unprepared for securing jobs or apprenticeships (Prospects, 2021) due to a perceived deficiency in specific skills. The Institute of Student Employers (ISE) noted that employers reduced their hiring of placement students by 25% and interns by 29% (AGCAS, 2017). Prominent employers, such as Rolls Royce and the Civil Service Fast Stream, halted or considered halting their graduate recruitment efforts. This demonstrates that employability is a multi-faceted challenge with several key players. The key drivers of employability encompass industry involvement, digital performance, educators' expertise and specialisation, inclusive courses, institutional positioning, and students' employability skills (Fossatti et al., 2023). While universities can recruit industry experts to their faculty to drive employability (Kriel, 2020), current financial strain and job freeze impacting the university sector make this challenge persist despite the rise in tuition fees (Rhodes, 2024). Consequently, there is a need to explore ways to bridge the gap between industry and higher education institutions. Thus, inviting industry leaders and experts to deliver guest lectures is imperative and serves as a consequential avenue to support student employability.

While it is a given that universities must prepare students with the essential skills and qualifications specific to the field and targeted job roles, they must keep the job market in view to incorporate changes in the landscape (Amalu et al., 2023; Davim, 2014; Kwarteng & Mensah, 2022). By embedding up-to-date skill sets in education and working with industry experts, graduate employability can be enhanced effectively (Chartered Management Institute, 2021). Using guest lectures is a vehicle for getting valuable contributions from industry experts while enabling a win for the industry participants. Previous study indicate that many factors influence the effectiveness of guest lectures (Kong, 2018; Seals, 2024). Yet, the role of industry expert involvement through guest lectures remains insufficiently explored in research. Scholars, however, caution that industry leaders may not have the full knowledge and, more importantly, lack the theoretical basis underpinning the profession (Lindholm & Jensen, 2011; Rhodes, 2024).

Understanding that the current financial pressures that universities face, which make it hard to recruit and embed experts to promote employability, may continue for the foreseeable future (Rhodes, 2024), the overarching objective of our study is to develop a framework for maximising the impact of guest speaker sessions in the curriculum by addressing the pedagogic and practical concerns.

We rely on the Self-determination theory (a well-established theory of psychological needs and motivation) and pedagogical considerations to develop our framework for setting up impactful guest lectures that bolster student employability. To assess the conditions for successful guest lecture interventions, we take as our starting point Lindholm and Jensen (2011) three pedagogical concerns in this context to develop the research questions framing our study:

- To what extent do guest speakers contribute to students' employability by providing insights into contemporary work requirements from an employer perspective?
- How do the quality and specialisation of these guest speakers impact the employability process?
- How do guest lectures, as part of learning modules, affect teaching pedagogies, student participation, autonomy, competence, and overall employability?

We regard the measure of pedagogical success as students' ability to integrate relevant learnings from guest lectures into their practical and theoretical understanding, as reported by the students. Furthermore, being motivated to attend guest lectures is a necessary condition for this and an indicator of learner satisfaction. In the next section, we conceptualise employability and review existing literature

on the risks that a low-preparation approach poses to the quality of teaching and learning. We then outline the method for testing (in the findings and discussion) the effectiveness of guest lectures based on a co-creation approach.

Literature review

Conceptualizing student employability

Conceptualizing student employability is complex because of its multiple dimensions, and it draws from the perspectives of numerous actors, which include students, higher education institutions, and employers (Clarke, 2018). From a student perspective, employability is no more than simply an ability to gain employment when needed; however, it starts with getting a job and includes making progress throughout one's career (Tymon, 2013). Hence, employability refers to the ability of a student to find employment and retain such after completing their studies at undergraduate or postgraduate levels (Jackson & Dean, 2023). From the higher education standpoint, student employability is about identifying and delivering skills and experience. Thus, the literature defines it as a 'set of skills, understanding, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Yorke, 2004, p. 410)'. From an employer perspective, student employability is about filling job roles with workers with the right skills, characteristics, personality, and other job-specific attributes (Lowden et al., 2011; Rees, 2021).

Common to the different perspectives is that employability involves acquiring the relevant skills, understanding, and attributes (Cheong et al., 2021). However, each actor's expectations and process of ensuring student employability may differ. For example, students may expect work experience during their studies and gainful employment immediately after higher education (Grigal et al., 2019; Tuononen et al., 2024). Employers may expect ready-made employees with the right skills and attributes that match the job description of their vacant roles (Wolbers, 2003). The higher education sector is interested in providing the ideal pedagogical framework, resources, training and experiences to enhance employability and improve their status and ranking by improving student employability metrics (Donovan & Hood, 2021; Winberg et al., 2020). Thus, student employability is vital to all stakeholders. The pedagogical approach to enhancing employability continues to be at the vanguard of higher education debates, with research supporting student employability as a critical metric for university performance (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Rees, 2021).

Pedagogical considerations for guest lectures

Guest speakers, although they may not have the teaching pedagogies, are themselves the pedagogy (Kaishan, 2018). Connecting students with experts who can enhance their learning experience may be considered a dynamic and interactive pedagogical strategy (Børte et al., 2023; Kumari, 2001). Phan et al. (2024) highlighted how guest speaker programs, featuring alumni and industry experts, impact student engagement and skill development. It finds that alumni speakers significantly enhance students' perceived learning outcomes and communication skills due to their relatability and personal insights. Like this study, it emphasises the impact of strategic guest speaker selection. The effective use of guest speakers includes five stages (Payne et al., 2003) which include the preparation of the guest speaker, the preparation of the students, the presentation of the guest speaker, showing the guest speaker appreciation and establishing a connection between the ideas of the guest speaker and the course content.

Lindholm and Jensen (2011) underscore using a strategic approach when incorporating guest speakers in educational settings. They propose a comprehensive risk analysis encompassing three pivotal dimensions: (i) resources, (ii) framework, and (iii) pedagogical considerations. Within these considerations, three central pedagogical concerns emerge: (i) orienting students to their future professional roles, (ii) bridging the gap between theory and practice, and (iii) igniting student motivation (Healy et al., 2022; Lindholm & Jensen, 2011). The primary risks associated with guest speakers predominantly fall within pedagogical considerations, particularly concerning the content and its effectiveness during the guest

lecture. These risks can manifest as a lack of alignment with learning objectives, difficulty sustaining student engagement, or even unintentional information gaps in the curriculum Currie & Knights, 2003; Healy et al., 2022). For a more in-depth exploration of these risks and their potential consequences, see Table 1, which offers a detailed breakdown of these aspects.

One noteworthy limitation in Lindholm and Jensen's research pertains to the level of student participation in guest speaker sessions. It is essential to acknowledge that the degree of active student involvement can vary based on the specific context and objectives of the guest lecture (Shane, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial not to apply a one-size-fits-all approach. Both students and guest speakers must be clear about their roles and align learning to the context (Shane, 2022). Responding to these identified risks, Lindholm and Jensen (2011) provide two practical risk mitigation strategies. Firstly, they propose a meticulous design of learning activities before and after the guest lecture. This approach aims to integrate guest lecturer content into the curriculum in a way that closely aligns with the broader learning goals. Secondly, they recommend deploying guest speakers for more advanced students in later program years who possess mature critical thinking skills (Healy et al., 2022). This strategy recognises that the more mature students are, the better equipped they are to extract meaningful insights and apply them to their academic and professional development (Emblen-Perry, 2023).

Moreover, it's important to note that multiple guest speakers have been successfully employed at the graduate level, addressing a variety of stakeholders' perspectives on critical topics like sustainable consumption (Seidel, 2020). This practice, although beneficial, has often overlooked an in-depth analysis of its true impact on student learning and skill development. Findings have, however, indicated that students can benefit from real-world knowledge provided by guest speakers; it is especially so if they contribute to assignments. Furthermore, guest speakers may gain fresh insights from the students – insights into opportunities and challenges that may not have been recognised in the personal and professional spheres (Emblen-Perry, 2023). Fawcett and Fawcett (2011) found that, according to student feedback, poorly planned guest-speaker interactions may diminish the learning experience. Their investigation of guest speakers as storytellers reveals that the guest speaker's invitation should share the pedagogy's vision and commit them to participation in the case-writing process. A successful living-case pedagogy may highlight students' educational experience with as few as two such cases in a fourteen-week semester, accomplishing the aim. Furthermore, the 'living' cases are reusable so that guest speakers may return several semesters later, or the professor can continue the case due to their engagement in its preparation (Fawcett & Fawcett, 2011), thus amortizing the time investment. Accordingly, guest speakers should be selected carefully, especially for diverse populations (Craig et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a quantitative investigation by Merle and Craig (2017) found that a guest speaker from the industry who interacts face-to-face with personal examples and provides career tips is more valued than a formal slide-based lecture for a predominantly female and Caucasian undergraduate journalism and mass communication student audience. Other research supports online guest speakers (Costello, 2012; Grube et al., 2022; Katsavounidou, 2024) even when the guest speaker has a fluency disorder (Raj et al., 2017). More recent research highlights that the post-pandemic period has led to the realization that virtual guest speakers remain helpful and enlightening (Jablon-Roberts & McCracken, 2023). Moreover, studies show that the motivation for attending guest lectures varies by discipline. Consequently, the formulation and design of the pedagogy around guest lectures should reflect this (Mangan et al., 2016). Of Bloom's taxonomy's three factors of knowledge, skills, and attitude, Manukonda

Table 1. Greatest risks for guest speakers – adapted from Lindholm and Jensen (2011).

Risk	Explanation	Example consequences
Guest lecturer focuses on a limited part of the situation/problem	A guest lecturer may convey a personal interpretation of the situation and may be biased	Students get a simplified or skewed understanding of the professional role Students get mistaken expectations of the study programme and their own futures. May create a sense of false security or false anxiety in students.
The content of guest lectures has weak or no link to the study programme	Low degree of teacher control with little influence on content.	The guest lectures fail to motivate students in their studies. The activity is meaningless.

et al. (2019) found that skill improvement was the primary motivation for medical/pharmacy students. In contrast, attitude improvement was a key reason for attendance by both management and medical/pharmacy students. Technical/engineering students did not emphasize improving their attitudes or skills as much but sought knowledge as the only key motivating factor for attending guest lectures. Similarly, undergraduate business communication students rated guest speakers, group discussions, and case studies as more helpful than video and role-playing activities (Sexton & Garner, 2020). This is further substantiated by more recent studies that, using a guest speaker was the best way to demonstrate the applicability of learnt concepts to real-world contexts (Crick & Crick, 2021). Taken together, guest speakers can facilitate short-term experiential learning, emphasizing top-down knowledge dissemination and co-creating meaning-making (Addo et al., 2022; Belisle et al., 2020).

A self-determination theory approach to implementing guest lecture sessions

The lead author in this study was the module convener of a core Master of Science (MSc) module across different management programmes, while the co-authors were contributing researchers to the project. Our approach to deploying guest lecture sessions involved collaboration between the module team and career services. In addition, it ensured that the sessions linked theory and practice facilitated student motivation, and incorporated different learning styles. SDT underpinned our plans and actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000) which sought to uncover motivational mechanisms for why people act to support their career growth. From an SDT perspective, our study intentionally explores ways to develop their careers to fulfil three innate psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness; De Vos et al., 2020). Students strive for autonomy by taking steps to master their skills by controlling for internal and external challenges. They strive to develop competence by taking advantage of career development opportunities. The third need for relatedness underscores the importance of a supportive environment for students to thrive (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Supporting students' autonomy

Our goal in the study was to ensure that the guest lecture sessions helped enhance students' autonomy by making the topic integral to the module and seeing to it that sessions catered for different learning styles. We identified guest lecturers who were industry leaders in the UK with the help of our Careers team. Before contacting the guest lecturers, the module leader worked with the teaching team members to identify the critical work-related areas students find interesting. Following the meeting, the team decided that the guest lecture sessions focus on an understanding of the role of context in determining whether a business should take a Universalist (applying best practices across all subsidiaries regardless of their uniqueness) and best-fit (allowing subsidiaries the flexibility to implement policies and procedures differently based on their unique situations) approach to decision making. We also incorporated different learning styles by encouraging the guest speakers to use different presentation formats. Some of the sessions were conversational, while other speakers used PowerPoint presentations and were more formal. We recorded all sessions. The different presentation formats support students with diverse learning styles (Ellis, 2024; Payne et al., 2003).

Supporting students' competence

A key challenge in using guest speakers is ensuring the content is appropriate and links to the overall module debates (Laing, 2021). Our approach was to ensure that the guest lecture session provided a direct link to what students were learning so that they could connect theory and practice. This way, the students could appreciate how the session may improve their competence. We chose a topic after carefully considering our students' backgrounds and the assignment task for the module. As a core module, students were from different programs – management, international management, healthcare, and business. It was, therefore, vital to accentuate the role of context as decision-making approaches in the different sectors may differ (Laing, 2021). Consequently, we chose guest speakers from two sectors (local government associations and the private sector). This choice allowed the debates to appeal to a broad range of students. The second consideration for students' competence was how to help them gain insights into their assignment task of the module. Students critically explored a case of an organization

expanding their operations in different countries and evaluated the contextual factors that influenced the choice of universalism or best-fit decision-making approach. Then, the students reflected on the sessions as part of answering their assignment task. Third, we ensured that guest lecture sessions had elements of a co-creative environment involving students' active contributions to the debates. This format is especially important for the postgraduate level of study, where students already have some relevant work experience.

Supporting students' relatedness needs

Understanding students' motivation to attend guest lecture sessions is crucial. Current research suggests that motivating students to attend and engage with guest lecture sessions is problematic, especially for management disciplines (Manukonda et al., 2019). We considered three critical relatedness factors to motivate our students to engage with the guest lecture session. First, we ensured that the topic broadly appealed to the students across the degree programmes. Second, we rewarded students by linking the guest lecture sessions to the assignment task to motivate students to engage (Pepple, 2022). Third, we also considered other issues, such as the sessions' timing and the presentation format. Understanding that our students have busy schedules, we scheduled the sessions as follows: some in the morning and others in the evening. This flexibility was necessary to accommodate students' working schedules. Surprisingly, we had a full house in all sessions, and the attendance was impressive. We also found that over 80% of the students enrolled in the module utilized different aspects of the guest lecture session to support their assignment. Table 2 provides the proposed framework for developing student employability through guest lecture sessions.

Study context

The context of our study is significant. First, universities in the UK are facing the challenge of supporting students' employability (Prospects, 2021). For example, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2022 report found that about 20% of PG students did not feel that their courses prepared them for the future (PTES, 2022). There is also evidence that employers in the country are grappling with the increasing numbers of graduate students who understand little or nothing about what employers expect of them (AGCAS, 2017; Jackson & Dean, 2023). Second, postgraduate student-focused research – especially those studying arts and humanities-related programmes – is scarce in education pedagogy research (Pepple, 2022). Hence, our study provides more insights into improving education outcomes for students at this level of study.

Research methodology

We deployed a qualitative deductive approach (QDA) to investigate the students' views on how guest speaker sessions impacted their employability readiness. Opinions expressed by students were in response to questions framed to address the research questions. For example, could you describe how useful the guest speaker session was to you? How did the session help you to link theory and practice? How did having guests from different sectors help improve your knowledge? How did the guest speaker

Table 2. Self-determination theory framework for developing student employability through guest lecture sessions – pedagogic considerations and implications.

Risk analysis for implementing guest lecture sessions	Our approach	Implications for employability	Implications for student experience
Addressing students' learning needs (autonomy need)	Adapting presentation to different learning styles Flexible timing	Students appreciate the link to the real world of work and Session useful to current and future work practice	Improved student experience and improved engagement evidence through attendance
Linking theory and practice (competence need)	Use guest speakers from different sectors. Embed core concepts and models into content		
Motivating students (relatedness need)	Link session to assignment tasks Co-creative session		

sessions impact your overall module satisfaction? QDA enabled us to apply Self-Determination Theory to gain insights into three overarching student needs – autonomy (using different presentation styles), competence (linking theory and practice, exposure to the future role), and relatedness (supporting assignment tasks and co-creative environment).

Our study utilised comments posted by postgraduate students on the Blackboard discussion board (a feature of a learning management system). Four hundred ninety-five (495) students were enrolled in the module during the 2022/23 academic year. The MSc students were mainly international students with limited working experience in the UK. Research by Pepple (2022) utilised the discussion board to collect data and found that the comments posted by students about student engagement provided useful insights into the subject of discussion. Data from discussion boards provide a systematic way to uncover if the specific needs of students are met and thus can impact students' learning experience (Ringler et al., 2015). While discussion boards have been criticised because of the challenge of maximising the participation of all members (Moloney et al., 2003), we note that this was not the case for our study. More than 95% of the class responded to the questions asked about the views of the guest lecture sessions attended. This was because a co-creative approach was taken to design and implement the use of a dashboard for creating a sense of community and knowledge between the tutors and students (Pepple, 2022). We also note that responding to the questions about their views of the guest lecture sessions was not mandatory, thus reducing the chances of positionality bias. Our findings and conclusions are based on a large data set, making it significant for a qualitative study (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

To support the methodological rigour of our approach, we adopted the QDA five-steps of Fife and Gossner (2024). First, we reviewed the literature on the pedagogical considerations for utilising guest speakers and its challenges. This review enabled us to develop our research questions. Second, we relied on the literature review to operationalise our SDT framework, which uncovered the need for student autonomy, competence and relatedness. Thirdly, we purposively sampled the views of 495 students enrolled on a PGT programme at a UK university. Purposive sampling was adequate as the students had first-hand experience attending guest lecture sessions in their module (Bell et al., 2022).

In the fourth stage, we relied on the two-step coding process of Gioia et al. (2013) to manually code the transcripts of the views downloaded from the discussion board using Microsoft Excel. Before the coding, we repeatedly read through the transcripts to immerse ourselves in the data. Step one of our coding process generated phrases from the text extracts. We examined the phrases iteratively to generate themes highlighting how using different presentation styles supported students' need for autonomy while linking theory and practice, exposure to the future role supported their need for competence and linking guest speaker session to assignment task and co-creative environment supporting their relatedness need. We attained data saturation during our coding process as we observed that information became recurrent (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). We received ethical approval before conducting this study (*approval number 39153*) and gained consent from students before using their comments for this research.

Results

Need for autonomy – using different presentation styles

We posted a question to find out students' views of the usefulness of the guest lecture sessions. Interestingly, an initial comment was about how using different presentation styles was beneficial. Our students expressed strong positive views about the diverse presentation styles used by our guest speakers because they support the learning styles. One of the comments from the discussion board suggested the following:

The most beneficial thing about these courses is that they gave me insight into business management. The First Lecture was conversational and connected to the topic from our class and included actual expertise on the module. The second lecture used presentation slides and was quite educational, covering decision-making in depth (student 405).

The presentation styles from both sessions ensured that there was something for everyone. We all learn differently and this gives us the ability to use the information (student 116).

Need for competence – linking theory and practice, and exposure to future roles

Our approach to linking theory and practice focused on using guest speakers from different contexts and connecting the topic to the module assessment brief. We asked students to explain how the guest lecture session helped them to link theory and practice. It emerged that students appreciated the opportunity to put into practice the models learnt in class.

Practical application of models

While the regular lectures discussed several decision-making models in the content, the guest lecture sessions allowed students to see the practicalities of some of the models.

It was a helpful guest lecture session because the speaker gave a practical approach to the industry and the business model. Her experience helped to understand the decision-making in any business model decisions. The most valuable part was how the political views affected the decisions in any industry or business and the public views (student 51).

We had a chance to hear about the practical applications of both approaches in her domain. It was so kind of her to share her life experiences. She motivated us to use every opportunity that comes our way because we never know how life changes after taking up that small opportunity, and it could be a life changer. We also understood wider views on the universalist and best-fit approach and how to apply it in real life. She also spoke about how to overcome the challenges at work and how to apply our knowledge efficiently. Overall, we all had a great experience (student 9).

Exposure to future roles – the different sectors of the guest speakers

One of the questions on the discussion board asked students about their experience of hearing from experts from two different sectors. Their responses here showed that students saw the value of having professionals from multiple sectors discussing a similar topic.

It was a great chance to learn about how different employees from different cultures work together for the growth of any company. The guest speakers were also too good, as they made everything easy to understand (Student 83).

The guest lectures were highly educational. In addition to learning about a new technique known as a hybrid technique that combines both universalist and best fit, the first guest lecture gave us insights into the decision-making process; how their organisation rules and policies operate, their hiring procedure, how they operate both inside the UK and the US. The second guest lecture offered insights into the “key question test,” the controls that must be in place to control the organization, and how to evaluate and manage risks (student 11).

Relatedness needs: supporting assignment and co-creative environment

Supporting assignment task

Comments from students here showed that they appreciated the approach of making the guest lecture session content relevant to their assignment tasks.

The guest lectures were helpful as the speakers spoke in detail about critical thinking and decision-making in their fields. They shared with us their experiences and how they dealt with problems they came across in their path of career (Student 4).

... The lectures supported my assignments and clarified my doubts about the assignment concepts. I am very glad to be part of it (student 7).

It was a very helpful session. It clears so many doubts of mine. I understand how to implement theory into practice. For the assignment, having some clear points is very important. I had some doubts that were cleared in the guest lecture (student 101).

Co-creative environment

Our data showed that using different presentation styles and allowing a co-creative environment where students can share ideas motivated students to engage with the sessions. Co-creativity involves creating a learning environment that enables the learner and facilitator to share knowledge (Pepple, 2022). An essential characteristic of students at postgraduate study levels is that they have some relevant work experience and are happy to draw upon that during classroom interactions. Although we did not

explicitly ask students about this, their comments suggest that students appreciated the opportunity to ask questions and contribute to the sessions.

Overall, the session was really interesting and interactive. I will definitely use the information I got from the lecture in my assignment (student 97).

Thank you for a great session. Great presentation style with a lot of opportunities to ask questions and talk about assignments. There were also real-life examples that made it a really enjoyable and informative session (student 200).

Implications for students' employability

Real business world

We asked students how the guest lecture sessions supported their employability perception on the discussion board. The findings here showed how the session helped students to reflect on what happens in the real world of work.

The first speaker's talk was like a deep dive into the reality of the business world. They encounter different situations and downsides and make logical and sensible decisions to tackle them (student 33).

Relevance to current and future work practice

Students' responses also showed that the guest lecture sessions helped them reflect on improving their current practice and future work plans.

It was an amazing experience with the guest lecturers. It was easy to learn about the module and useful in the future. It was an amazing lecture (student 2)

This module gave me the best ways to find out risk analysis and management skills to solve problems, decision-making power, and how to collaborate with people. After completing this subject, I will make good managers and realize my manager's decisions (student 77).

This specialist module has been very rewarding for me; I have been able to participate in the discussions and gain different perspectives each time. It has enriched my knowledge and taught me the importance of teamwork and breaking out of my comfort zone (student 5).

I am elated to share my experience, which I attained during this learning. Although this module was unique as I did not have any knowledge about this, and it was challenging for me to understand, the way the session explained everything really made it easier to grasp management skills. It will surely be helpful in future endeavours (student 9).

Implications for students' experience

Improved student experience

We sought to understand how our approach influenced students' overall experience of the module by asking students to explain how the guest lecture sessions influenced their satisfaction with the module. Responses here showed that students had a great experience.

It was really a wonderful guest lecture sessions we had. It was really helpful that she shared her experiences, which motivated us to look forward. Thank you for the sessions (student 90).

It was a very inspiring session. I will never forget the emphasis that one of the guest lecturers put on her sentence, "Don't miss any opportunity that comes by" (student 44).

Thank you for providing informative knowledge about the guest lecture. This was an amazing experience and a correct method to enhance knowledge. It was a great way to enhance ideas and by providing sufficient knowledge (student 26).

Improving attendance

We also found that attending the sessions helped students understand the module better and influenced overall attendance. A comment from a student suggested that the guest lecture sessions made the lectures something for students to look forward to.

It was a very great experience and a very informative session. I got satisfied after attending the session. This session helped me to understand this module (student 60)

The practical implementation in real-life organizations influenced me to understand the concepts and tools in a better way. Such sessions are very useful and we also look forward to having more in the coming weeks (student 43).

Discussion

We present the discussion in line with the overall aim of our study of developing a framework for embedding impactful guest speaker sessions into the curriculum by addressing pedagogic concerns of academics. In line with SDT, we demonstrate that implementing guest speaker sessions within our framework supports students' need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

For autonomy, our findings show that students appreciate guest lecture sessions that address diverse learning needs. We purposely asked our guest speakers to present using different formats to support students with different learning styles. We also scheduled the lectures at varying times, giving students the choice of attending a morning or an evening session. We did this because studies found that the learning experience suffers when exposed to poorly planned guest lecture sessions (Fawcett & Fawcett, 2011). Our evidence shows that careful planning, which includes using different styles, improves student experience and engagement in the guest lecture sessions.

To address competence needs, which explored how to use guest speakers and link theory and practice (Lindholm & Jensen, 2011), we ensured that the guest speakers framed their sessions around a theory or model used within the module. This requirement enabled students to understand how the theories/models apply in the real world of work. In addition, while attempting to expose students to their future professional roles, we considered the background of the students enrolled on the module. As the programme is MSc Management, students were from different sectors. Consequently, we invited professionals from various work backgrounds to provide a broad range of diverse views. While using such guest speakers is not new (Craig et al., 2020; Lindholm & Jensen, 2011), our focus on multi-sector provides new insights into how to expose students to practical aspects of a theory. A common practice when selecting guest speakers is for academics to invite their peers who are experts in different fields to discuss their research (Fulton, 2020). While this is useful in some ways to enrich student experience, it often does not provide a practical link between theory and practice. Our study addresses this challenge.

Our findings underscore how to address students' motivation thereby addressing the need for relatedness. We found that by linking the topic for discussion to the module assignment tasks, students appreciated the practical information discussed and found it a viable resource for their assignment tasks. Thus, the students were considerably more engaged – this experiment worked on both extrinsic (assignment) and intrinsic motivations. Our students also appreciated the co-creative nature of the sessions attended. As postgraduate students with some work experience, the ability to share their opinions and ask questions helped them to develop deeper insights into the topic.

We have shown how our approach addresses the pedagogical challenges in extant studies. Although guest lecture sessions are introduced to support students' employability, there is limited research about how such sessions influence students' employability and overall experience. Findings from our study provide insights into this. We show that students' conceptualisation of employability was how the guest speaker session provided information about the real business world and how the session supported their current and future work practice. Our findings also showed that our approach to guest lecture sessions influences students' experience and overall engagement with the module. Strong positive emotional words like 'wonderful', 'amazing', and 'inspiring' were used to describe their experience. While we have not asked about attendance, our findings showed that implementing guest lecture sessions using our approach influenced students' engagement, autonomy, competence, and relatedness with the module, as evidenced by their expressed commitment to continue attending classes.

The lead author engaged in discussions with university partners about graduates' readiness for their careers. Feedback from these interactions revealed that students often struggle to connect classroom theories with practical work applications. This challenge is corroborated by existing research (Hugh-

Jones, 2008; Rae, 2005). Various interventions, including guest lectures, work placements, internships, and business simulations, have been implemented to bridge this gap (Clarke, 2018). Yet, a substantial portion of students still perceive a disconnect between what they learn and how it prepares them for the workforce (PTES, 2022). Furthermore, interventions like placements and internships may not be accessible to students from low-income backgrounds or those with family and life commitments (Chaudry et al., 2016; Timmis & Muñoz-Chereau, 2022). Thus, it becomes imperative to integrate employability-focused teaching and learning activities into scheduled sessions, ensuring that all students, including those facing such challenges, can actively engage with contemporary work-related topics within their respective fields (Donald & Ford, 2023).

Conclusion

In response to the need to enhance employability and the growing demand for universities to infuse work-related content into their teaching and learning practice, our research provides a practical approach to implementing guest lecture sessions firmly rooted in pertinent pedagogic considerations and psychological needs theory. Our SDT framework is novel for two reasons. First, we uncover actions specific to the different needs of students that engender an exceptionally high level of student participation and engagement with guest speaker sessions. Second, our framework addresses pedagogic and practical concerns by academics about embedding guest lectures into the curriculum. Our study has significant implications for universities struggling with supporting student employability by providing a framework for deploying impactful guest lecture sessions. Our framework helps identify appropriate guest lecturers, incorporates suitable content to meet the objectives, and mitigates risks.

By drawing on SDT, our framework aligns with fundamental human psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For example, students' engagement in guest lecture sessions, where they can directly observe and actively participate in the practical application of theoretical knowledge, fosters a sense of autonomy in their learning journey. Moreover, it enhances their perceived competence by bridging the gap between academic theories and real-world practice. The interaction with industry experts during these sessions strengthens the sense of relatedness as students establish connections with professionals – thereby enhancing their employability.

While we used a substantial sample size for qualitative analysis to support our findings (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015), we can extend the data and analysis by collecting quantitative data and responses to follow-up questions. In addition, our data predominantly pertains to postgraduate students. Future research may explore how this subject pertains to undergraduate participants, who are a significant segment of the student population and controlling for the inclusion of assignment tasks (which are associated with extrinsic motivation) within guest lecture content to study the impact of the different types of motivations – intrinsic, extrinsic and their combination.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

No funding received for this research.

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