Students' Perception of Effective Part-time Lecturers

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Abstract

Recruiting part-time lecturers (PTLs) has been a common strategy adopted by universities to cut personnel expenses; more commonly by self-financing institutions which are highly sensitive to financial viability. Students' perceptions of ideal PTLs' characteristics differ from those of school administrators and researchers. The present study surveyed 225 students from various business courses of a Hong Kong self-financing institute. Students were asked to rate how the statements in a 31-item list compare to the traits or behaviour of an effective PTL in their minds. The result identifies that good presentation skills, good subject-related knowledge and good language skills are what students perceive to be preferable traits. The study also discovers a range of behaviour of PTLs which students appreciate. Based on the findings and implications of this study, recommendations are made for policy makers, university administrators and faculty members for improvement of teaching and learning quality.

Keywords: student perception, commercializing higher education, effective teacher, part-time lecturers, self-financing institute

Introduction

Among all the strategies which universities have used to cut personnel expenses, recruiting more part-time lecturers (PTLs) has been a popular strategy being adopted by universities all over the world. Keels (2005) suggests that shifting economic conditions in the academic institutions accounts for the increasing number of graduates from graduate schools teaching in part-time or adjunct roles rather than full-time tenure-track positions. A report from Southern Regional Education Board (SREB, 2005) in the United States also suggests that public colleges and universities are responding to a decrease in funding by hiring more part-time faculty and teaching or research assistants than full-time faculty. In 2004, PTLs and teaching or research assistants outnumber full-time faculty at public four-year colleges and universities in nine SREB states.

In Hong Kong, universities have employed PTLs for various purposes. PTLs are cast frequently to provide the flexibility in staffing for programmes that have high fluctuation in their enrolments. Universities also use part-time employment to access some lecturers who, because of their other obligations, would not be possible to be hired as a full time lecturer (*Hong Kong Economic Times* 2003/May/15, p.A24). Special talents may also be recruited on a part-time basis to teach special subjects or for the sharing of their special experiences (*Hong Kong Economic Times* 2004/Apr/23, p.D01).

One main force behind this trend is the increasing need to save money (*Sing Pao*, 2003/Sep/10, p.A12). PTLs are paid only on an hourly basis; money for employee fringe benefits and other personnel expenditure are saved. A common application of this concept is to rehire 'downsized' or retired lecturers on a part-time basis and pay them a reduced salary.

In short, universities in Hong Kong are employing more lecturers on a contract or part-time basis. Financial consideration is likely to be the main cause for this commonly observed practice in higher education. This is even more a case for the self-financing institutions which are even more sensitive to the 'bottom line'. Thus, accommodating PTLs is becoming a more and more important component of the institutions. Hence, it would be important to look at what types of PTLs are considered suitable for these self-financing institutions. Besides, it would also be worthwhile to explore what are the selection criteria for these PTLs.

PTLs as Effective Lecturers

For self-financing institutions (SFIs) which have to rely on tuition fees as their predominated source of income, students' perceptions are the most critical element pertinent to attracting and retaining students. Students' perceptions of effective PFLs, nonetheless, are shown to be noticeably different from that of the researchers and administrators.

On one hand, researchers usually would focus on various attributes of PTL that show a correlation with students' performance and academic result (Gappa & Leslie 1993; Jacobs 1998; Fenwick 2003; Sophos 2003; Thorsteinson 2003; Toutkoushian & Bellas 2003). On the other hand, university administrators, usually would assess the effectiveness of PTL via their impact in the operation of the school (Monroe & Denman, 1991).

In contrast, students being one of the most important stakeholders of SFIs, usually would judge PTLs with more emphasis on the PTLs' characteristics. It is revealed that students would focus mostly on their experience from interacting with the PTLs. The following literature review will discover how different students of higher education would look at PTLs. The literature review will also explore and analyse the various factors accounted in judging the effectiveness of a PTL. Finally, the key factors which are adopted by students in their perceptions in identifying an effective PTL will be discussed, which will ultimately serve as the objective of this section in conjunction to the data presented later on in this paper.

PTLs employment status

Sprinkle's (2008) study discovers that students are almost neutral on whether

adjunct faculty to be not as effective at teaching course material as professors are. However, Lundy and Warme (1989) find that students are generally unaware of the employment status of instructors and lacked a clear understanding of the nuances of faculty rank. Another study by Bippus et al. (2001) suggests that students are generally unaware of the employment status and rank of their instructors. In fact, they report that students' perception of their teacher's rank is inversely related to their actual rank. Thus, it is unclear to what degree students' perceptions of their teachers are accurately affected by the employment status of their teachers.

Accessibility

Other scholars focus on the differences in availability between PTLs and full-time lecturers (FTLs). 'Availability' can be conceptualized in two dimensions (Bippus et al., 2001). The first dimension, physical accessibility, is defined as the degree to which students view instructors as being physically present and available for outside-of-class interaction. The second dimension, social accessibility, is defined as the degree to which students view instructors as being interested in social or informal interaction with students. The reason why this is considered to be important is students may need to interact with teachers for informal interaction as well as consultation in various issues.

It is generally believed that PTLs are less **physically available** than FTLs. It is due mostly to factors like limited access to office space, computer equipment, and secretarial support on campus, as well as the need of many PTLs to work on multiple campuses. Scarff (2000) suggests that it is more difficult for students to contact the PTLs within the campus. In fact, Lundy and Warme (1989) found that students report a general perception that part-time instructors are unreliable about office hours, and full-time faculty are available on a more regular structured basis. Lundy and Warme (1989) also found that students revealed differences in their perception of the accessibility of part-time and full-time faculty in general, without any reference to a specific instructor.

There is less evidence to suggest differences between PTLs and FTLs in terms of their **social accessibility**. However, it is generally believed that the factors (such as limited office space and limited time) that make the PTL less physically available will also make them less likely to encourage students to interact with them beyond class time. In other words, a PTL is probably less available socially. A research conducted by Bippus et al. (2001), however, suggests rather surprising result: no significant differences between PTLs and FTLs in terms of students' perceptions of their physical and social accessibility.

On the other hand, Wilson, Wood, and Gaff (1974) found that physical accessibility during office hours had little effect on **informal interaction**. Actually, teachers' behaviour in class which encourages such informal interaction had a more significant influence on the amount of informal interaction that takes place between students and teachers. These findings suggest that, other than physical accessibility, instructors' social accessibility exhibits a distinct influence on students' interaction with them. So,

as far as informal interaction is concerned, social accessibility may be more important than physical accessibility.

Ability to Provide Consultation

If students perceive their teachers to be accessible and have the ability to provide students with valuable assistance they need, then students are likely to be motivated to seek out these teachers for assistance. So the question is, *"Do these teachers have the ability to provide consultation to students?"*

Kram (1983) suggests that consultation is usually needed with two main functions: career and psychosocial. Career consultation generally involves assistance in learning the basic skills of organizational life and in preparing for advancement opportunities, whereas psychosocial consultation may include role modelling, counselling, and friendship. Students may seek consultation in a variety of potential concerns regarding coursework, academic programme choices, or simply establishing a sense of belonging in the impersonal environment at many large institutions of higher learning.

Some scholars suggest that PTLs may be less useful to students in two different ways. Firstly, part-time faculty members often lack any protection in job stability (Scarff, 2000; Stephens & Wright, 1999), and hence do not typically have much chance to stay long enough to be socialized by the organizational culture of the school (Roueche, Roueche & Milliron, 1996). Krier and Staples (1993) argue that part-time college teachers tend to be physically isolated from tenured/tenure-track faculty due to the limited or lack of office space offered to them. In fact, most of the PTLs do not have much chance to communicate with students or their colleagues outside the classroom hours. Also, unlike FTLs, PTLs seldom participate actively in the administration of the institutions, and they can express very little about how their working environment should be. These tend to suggest that PTLs will be less useful to students as sources of insider information regarding the operation of the university. Secondly, PTLs are usually not invited to serve on committees or advise students (Monroe & Denman, 1991), and consequently they lack the 'legitimate power' (French & Raven, 1960) of FTLs to help students in a more formal way.

The question is to what degree teachers' employment status may affect students' perception of their teachers' ability to provide consultation. Lundy and Warme (1989) found that students generally perceive part-time instructors to be unknowledgeable about university administrative procedures. As a result, students may perceive FTLs as being more capable to provide valuable consultation because they are more active in the discipline, more experienced, and more connected to the department and college. However, Bippus et al. (2001) reported that students perceived no significant difference between the abilities of PTLs and FTLs in providing consultation in career and course related issues. Actually, students even rated PTLs slightly higher in their abilities to provide psychological consultation. Again, students' view on this issue is not conclusive.

Informal Interaction with Students

Jaeger (2008) suggests that instructor-student interaction leads to positive outcomes, including increased cognitive and affective development, improved academic performance, increased likelihood of persisting, and increased overall satisfaction with the college experience. Hence it is important to ensure students can have the opportunity to establish this kind of informal interaction with their teachers.

However, the most significant difference between the conditions under which tenured/tenure-track and part-time instructors work are in the expectation associated with their appointments and the support they receive from their departments and administration. For example, part-time teachers often face limited support in terms of office space (Stephens & Wright, 1999), secretarial support and computer services (Hickman, 1998) which may make them more difficult to be contacted via telephone or emails. Part-timers also tend to receive low wages and hence they need to work at multiple institutions (Scarff, 2000). These suggest that they may have less opportunity to have informal interaction with their students. The study by Umbach (2008) tends to suggest that PTLs actually have less interaction with students on both course- and non-course related issues. If so, PTLs can contribute less to the students as PTLs generally spend less time on campus and hence have less chance to interact with students.

However, Lundy and Warme (1989) note that students recognize that part-time instructors may compensate for the lack of structured availability on campus by making themselves available in other ways, such as by giving them their home phone numbers or arranging meetings outside the office. With the development of the web-based communication channels like ICQ, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, it is not surprising to realize that teachers and students establish informal contact outside traditional channels (*Current event*, 2008/Sep/15). Bippus et al (2001) state that no significant difference in students' reported likelihood of pursuing informal contact with PTLs as comparing to their likelihood of pursuing informal contact with FTLs. Therefore, the actual impact of faculty employment status on instructor-student interaction is unclear.

Furthermore, a qualitative study by Cotton and Wilson (2006) investigates student-faculty interaction. Their focus group result indicates that students have minimal contact with faculty outside the classroom, and do not appear to be aware of the importance of interaction with the faculty. This then suggests even if PTLs may actually have less chance to interact with students, students may not view this as a negative factor against PTLs.

Grade Leniency

Cavanaugh (2006) investigates whether the increased use of part-time instructors may result in grade inflation. Using a multiple regression analysis on grades accumulated over a ten years period, Cavanaugh finds that part-time instructors give higher grades to students even after accounting for many alternative explanations for grade differences. This kind of grading practices may affect students' preference for PTLs.

Response to Students' Needs

Schuster & Finkelstein (2006) believe that contingent faculty may be more responsive than tenure-track faculty to the needs of diverse student population, especially students who work full-time and attend college part-time.

Teaching Approach

Students' perceptions towards a PTL may be indirectly affected by the teaching approach of the lecturer. Lei (2007) surveyed 400 instructors in two US community colleges and found that PTLs tend to use more lectures, and FTLs tend to use more laboratory teaching, class/discussion/participation, slide/PowerPoint slide presentation, and distance learning. On the other hand, according to the study of Sander et al (2000), university students prefer interactive lectures and group-based activities. This tends to suggest that students may prefer FTLs just because more diversified teaching approaches are more commonly adopted by FTLs.

Hong Kong Students' View on PTLs

Research study related to PTLs of Hong Kong is limited. As the higher educational institutions have shifted more and more towards the self-financing mode, it is logical and predictable to evaluate the behaviour of their PTLs from the point of view of its most important stakeholder—its students. Nevertheless, there have been very few research studies related to PTLs of Hong Kong (Poon, 2008). Besides, there have been even fewer studies on students' view of PTLs (Poon, 2009).

Informal data can be found in the internet and local discussion forums, but they are mostly negative. For example, in the record of a student-staff meeting (University of Hong Kong, 2005), a student complained that: "*The part-time teacher provided very brief and not well-organized notes to students and hence they found it difficult to follow the lectures*". A similar complaint was, "*Due to the copyright problem, the part-time teacher could not provide his PowerPoint file to the students*". These examples point to the fact that students expect the instructor to provide them with "*powerpoint file*" and "*well-organized notes*", and they will be very disappointed if those items are not available. However, very little information on the desirable traits and behaviour of a PTL is available in any kind of media. Therefore, the intention of conducting this study is to add a bit more to this small pool of knowledge.

Methodology

Research questions

The key research questions for this study are:

Research Question One "*What are the preferred traits (Formal qualifications, Social desirableness, and Teaching related competences) of an effective PTL?*"

Research Question Two "*What are the preferred behaviour (Relationship related behaviour and Task related behaviour) of an effective PTL?*"

Research Methods

In this study, quantitative data were collected by survey. The self-administrated questionnaire used was constructed according to the process described in Rememyi et al. (1998). The draft of the questionnaire was designed with reference to basic information collected through literature review and informal survey of the students. The draft questionnaire was then pre-tested in a pilot study, and the result of the test was used to construct the final version.

This study focuses on the self-financing branch of a university in Hong Kong. The topic of interest here is how the students of this institution look at their PTLs. It covers just one organization.

Source of Data

Data were collected via anonymous questionnaires from the students of the self-financing branch of a government funded university. The branch offers programmes at many different levels. The most popular programmes are Diploma programmes, Associate Degree programmes, and Top-up programmes that are equivalent to the last two years of a Bachelor Degree programme. At the time of the study, the student population was about 3500, and nearly 2000 students were studying in business related field.

In the main study, eight groups of students (totalling 343) from different courses of the self-financing branch of the above university were invited to participate in the survey. The courses were all business related. 259 questionnaires (75.5%) were collected from these groups. These returned questionnaires were then scanned for errors. 34 questionnaires were rejected because the respondents showed signs of mechanical answering (for example, selecting choices from only one column); or the respondents did not answer a significant portion of the questions. Finally, 225 questionnaires (92.6%) were accepted after the screening process.

Description of the Research Instruments

The instrument that was used in this study was a questionnaire which asked the students to rate how well 31 traits and behaviours match a PTL whom they considered effective. This list of the traits and behaviour was constructed based on the samples of traits and good behaviour identified by students in a pre-pilot study. The students who attended classes taught by the researcher were asked informally to describe a very good PTL that they had encountered during their years of study. Those terms students used to

describe their good PTL were collated and compiled into a list. Information collected from other publications that describe good teachers (Hong Kong University of Science and technology, 1998; Tam, 1999) was also used to supplement this list. The traits and behaviour in this initial list were compiled into a questionnaire with four parts.

Part A asks students to indicate whether they have ever met an effective PTL during their years of study. This is to obtain data of whether the students' answers to the following parts in this questionnaire are based on their experience or expectation. Part B of the questionnaire asks students to think of an effective PTL when they ranked, in a Likert scale, how close the statements in a 31-item list matched the traits or behaviour of the effective PTL they have in their minds. Part C of the questionnaire asks students to suggest three of the above 31 items that should be used as the selecting criteria in the recruiting process for PTL. This is basically a way to triangulate the results of Part B. Part D of the questionnaire asks students to provide some basic background information of themselves, namely their gender, the years they have studied after secondary five, the mode of study, and the level of their study programmes. The questionnaire was then tested in a pilot study (Poon, 2008).

Presentation of findings

In this section, students' preference for different Traits and Behaviours of a PTL is presented in Exhibit A. The key data presented are the Mean of the rating, and its Standard deviation; the Skewness of the data and the Percentage of students who give a positive rating to that item. The answers for each item are coded in a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 represents *Strongly Agree* and 1 represents *Strongly Disagree*. A mean score of 3 will indicate that, overall, students show no strong preference for this item. The Skewness measurement is used to indicate how one-sided the opinion is. The percentage for positive answer is obtained by adding the total percentages of students who choose either *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* as an answer.

Exhibit A: Traits and Behaviours of an Effective PTL Ranked According to Mean Scores

Traits* / Behaviours	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Skewness	% of positive answer
Good presentation skills	4.43	.755	-1.349	90.2
Use real-life example in teaching	4.32	.638	-.505	91.5
Interesting class	4.29	.752	-.860	86.7
Share experience in studying	4.18	.711	-.650	86.6
Good subject-related knowledge	4.16	.764	-.833	82.7
Provide prompt reply to questions	4.16	.684	-.470	86.2
Give students chance to speak	4.15	.634	-.236	87.1
Spend additional time to help students	4.12	.729	-1.019	86.7
Good language skills	4.09	.802	-.947	84.4
Encourage students to study	3.99	.710	-.283	77.8
Provide opportunity to communicate	3.95	.652	-.822	82.7
Modify course to fit students' needs	3.94	.797	-.857	77.3
Lots of teaching experience	3.90	.831	-.513	72.0

Keep Smiling	3.83	.772	-.060	66.1
Give tips/hint for exam.	3.81	.917	-.428	64.9
High academic qualification	3.77	.745	-.787	70.4
Work experience	3.77	.769	-.411	67.4
High professional qualification	3.73	.722	-.641	68.1
Recognize good performance	3.68	.783	-.372	61.3
Use new approach in teaching	3.66	.805	-.518	61.9
Provide career consulting	3.65	.769	-.157	59.7
Easy pass	3.54	.988	-.055	46.9
Using Cantonese in teaching	3.41	.870	.044	43.5
Good computer skills	3.39	.789	-.309	45.8
Strong research record	3.37	.807	-.292	45.2
Provide psychological consulting	3.36	.858	.044	40.4
High career achievement	3.30	.867	-.247	42.2
Applying IT in teaching	3.25	.752	-.184	37.2
Physical appearance	3.07	.908	-0.70	29.6
Social status	2.88	.802	-.052	20.3

* Items related to Traits are marked with shading.

Students' Preferences related to Traits of a PTL

In terms of **Teaching related Competencies,** 90.2% of the students surveyed agreed (answered either *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*) that *Good presentation skills* fits the description of an effective PTL. The high rating score (4.43 out of 5.00) also indicated that "*good presentation skills*" is a very important factor. The opinion related to *Good presentation skills* tends to be very one-sided, its Skewness: -1.349. (For simplicity, the Skewness will only be used to illustrate some key points in the following discussion). The high importance placed on teaching skills supports the study of Rodger, Murray & Cummings (2007) and they find that teacher's *clarity* affects both learning and motivation. As students' emphasis on teaching skills of their instructors in general is also observed in the studies by other researchers (Miron & Segal, 1978; Sander et al, 2000; Okoye, 2008), this tends to suggest that students had a very high expectation toward the teaching related competencies of their lecturers, regardless if they are FTLs or PTLs.

This emphasis on teaching skills is also supported by the learning tradition of Chinese students. Pratt, Kelly & Wong (1999, p.246) suggest that "... *Chinese students were expected to learn the foundational knowledge in forms that reproduced or closely resembled that knowledge contained in text or delivered by the teacher*". Paine (1990) also suggests that Chinese view the "*teacher as text*", and they expect the teacher to constantly work toward better representations of the content, and toward a "*virtuoso*" performance of that knowledge. Hence teachers must be able to present the idea clearly so students can "*reproduce*" or "*closely resembled*" the materials.

In order to enhance the presentation skills, it is necessary that teachers should have good language skills. 84.4% of the students agree that *good language skills* fits the

description of an effective PTL. This is understandable as universities in Hong Kong adopt English as the medium of instruction. Unfortunately, English is not the native language for a lot of teachers and students, so communication problems are not unusual in classrooms. Hence, students prefer teachers with good language skills.

It is interesting to note that the ability to present something clearly is considered to be more important than fluency of language (mean score: 4.43 vs 4.09). This finding is also in line with the result obtained by Okoye (2008) who finds students rate *Lucid expression of ideas* much higher than *Fluency of speech*. It suggests students realized that being very fluent in one language does not grant one the ability to present well.

A majority of students (82.7%) reported that their effective PTLs have *Good subject related knowledge*. The skewness score (- 0.833) demonstrates that this is a very consistent opinion among the students. The high (4.16) mean score also indicates that this is a very important factor. This can be explained by the fact that Chinese students usually rely on their teachers to transmit knowledge and skills to them (Morris, 1996). Also, Pratt, Kelly & Wong (1999, p.246) reported that, in Hong Kong, "*Effective teachers were to be experts and, therefore, authorities in their discipline*". Hence, only teachers who are perceived to be with "*good subject related knowledge*" can be trusted to supply "*accurate*" information.

Almost 70% (67.4%) of the surveyed students agreed that *Many years of work experience* is one of the traits of their effective PTLs. The mean score (3.77) also indicated that this factor is of intermediate importance. However, the importance of *Many years of work experience* is considerably lower than that of *Good subject related knowledge*, and this indicates that students do not emphasise from where the instructor acquires his or her knowledge as long as he or she possesses such knowledge. As such, FTLs who enter teaching profession right after graduating from graduate schools can also be accepted by students if they possess *Good subject related knowledge.*

Similarly, 72% of the students agreed that *Many years of teaching experience* is one of the traits of their effective PTLs. However, the ranking score (3.90) is much lower than that of the item *Good presentation skills.* Again, students tend to believe that the good presentation skills is not necessary acquired through the experience of working as a teacher. With proper training, even relatively inexperienced person can be a good instructor. This echoes the suggestion of Powell and Andresen (1985). In discussing the ways of improving teaching skills with the use of humour, they argued that the activity of teaching requires "*a sense of timing and an alertness to the response of the learners*", and these are skills which can be developed through practice. Similarly, both teachers and professional performers alike should be competent in the use of voice and bodily movements and skills such as these should be part of professional development programmes for both PTLs and FTLs (Murrary and Lawerence, 1980).

In terms of Formal Qualification of a PTL, 70.4% of the surveyed students gave positive answers to the statement with *High Academic Qualification*. Similarly, 68.1%

of the students surveyed agree that the statement with *High Professional Qualification* describes the effective PTL in their mind.

When comparing those two items — *Academic qualification* and *Professional qualification*, we can conclude that more students think that *Academic qualification* is slightly important. The result is indicated by the higher mean score of the *Academic qualification* (3.77 vs. 3.73) as well as the higher percentage (70.4% vs. 68.1%) of students who gave positive answers to the question related to *Higher Academic qualification*.

In terms of **Social Desirableness**, less than half of the students surveyed indicated that *High Career Achievement* (42.2%) or *Strong Research or Publication Records* (45.2%) fits the traits of an effective PTL. The rankings of these factors are also not too high as the mean score are 3.30 and 3.37. This tends to indicate that even a person without high career achievement and a lot of research output can also be rated as an effective PTL by students; fewer students reported that *High Social Status* (20.3%) fits the description of an effective PTL - indicating that this is not an important trait for an effective PTL. The low mean score (2.88%) also supports this point. This result is in line with the findings of Miron and Segal (1978) and Okoyo (2008) which both found that students place little importance on the research and publication achievement of the instructor. This view is highly different from the traditions of the academic arena. Researchers indicated that higher education teachers (mostly FTLs) get prestige and promotion not because of his or her teaching abilities, but usually as a result of research impacts and academic positions of authority (Feldman, 1986).

Only a very small portion (29.6%) of the students surveyed indicated that the description *Good Physical Appearance* matches the traits of their effective PTLs. Also, the mean score of this factor is also relatively low (3.07), indicating that this is a relatively minor factor. This result is very different from that obtained by Felton et al (2004) which shows a strong correlation between physical attractiveness (hotness) of professors and their ratings — suggesting that students are very concerned about the "*sexiness"* of their professors.

It is possible that Chinese students tend to follow the traditional roles and hierarchy of relationship that are very pervasive in social structure of Hong Kong (and traditional Chinese) (Pratt, 1991). Teachers and students follow a hierarchy of place and duty which framed each person's role and relationship, as well as their reactions. Under this framework, students should give teachers their due respect and treat thinking of teachers as sex-objects as highly improper.

Students' Preferences related to Behaviour of a PTL

In this section, the **Relationship Oriented Behaviour** is to be discussed. This behaviour is involved in building a good relationship between students and teachers. Showing friendliness by using humour and smiling; helping students in their career or

personal problems are all the gestures that can improve relationship. Sharing one's own personal experience with students, and paying attention to students' needs, and communicating with students in and out of the class can be signs of being psychologically open to students. They can be considered as indications the teacher is not looking down upon the students - students are "*at par"* with the teacher and they are not being ignored.

Students highly rate factors related to relationship oriented behaviour. *Making the class interesting* by proper use of humour; *Shares his/her past experience in studying* and *Provides prompt reply to questions or e-mail messages*; and *Provide students with opportunity to communicate with lecturers or tutors* are all rated very highly by the students. This finding is in line with the traditional Chinese notion of a teacher. "*Effective teachers are expected to care about students as individuals, to understand their difficulties and to guide them in their learning and personal development"* (Pratt, Kelly & Wong 1999, p.247)

It is noted that students do not rate these items high for pragmatic reasons. They do not emphasise the importance of the instructors providing career and personal consulting assistance. On one hand, this may suggest that students do not expect too much from their PTLs in these areas. Being not physical available all the time, PTLs may be less effective than the more professional student counsellors in satisfying student's needs in these areas. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as students are concerned more about the attitudes of the PTL. Students value the warmth and friendliness they experience during their interaction with the PTL much more than the actual assistance they can get from the PTL. It should be noted that the above discussion only refers to assistance in issues not related to the course materials. Data from the following section will show that students treasure opportunity in which they can get help in class.

The following paragraphs cover the **Task Oriented Behaviour** of a PTL that is directly related to the task environment of the class. The behaviour affects the teaching process—the approach, the system, the routines and the techniques used. The behaviour may also affect the practical consequence - the student can pass or complete the course. Actually, it is more like the teaching system adopted by the instructor. This system is not necessarily personalized and it can be copied by other instructors, if necessary.

The three items that are rated very highly are related directly to the teaching process. 91.5% of the students agree that their effective PTLs tend to *Apply updated real life examples in teaching.* The most important function of updated real life examples is that they reduce anxiety and empower students (Willett & Singer, 1992). The example links concepts to something that are familiar to students and it helps them in understanding the theories. Research shows that students are more likely to retain the knowledge gained through familiar examples (Muweesi, 2009). Using real life examples also makes the teaching more "*alive"* and "*accessible"* (Hoffmann, n.d.).

About 87% students indicated that the two factors: *Spends additional time after class on helping students, Give students chance to speak and to ask questions in class* match closely to the behaviour of their effective lecturers. It can be observed that both items are linked to the assistance that are related directly to the learning process — students can ask for helps from the PTL, both during and after class, if they need any clarification or explanation. This finding is in line with the traditional expectation of teacher described by Pratt, Kelly & Wong (1999, p.247) "*... effective teachers are often characterized as having a close, protective relationship with students, similar to that of a coach or even a parent"*. Effective teachers should always be there to help the needed students.

77.3% of the students reported that an effective PTL is willing to "*modify course content to suit the needs/interest of students"*. The rating score of 3.94 also indicates that this factor is considered to be quite important by students. This finding is in agreement with the study of Pratt, Kelly & Wong (1999, p.246) in university students of Hong Kong. They find that an effective teacher is expected to "*...have a comprehensive knowledge of their field and be able to adjust that knowledge to the circumstance of teaching"*. Specifically, an effective teacher should "*...be thoroughly prepared and organized for lectures, and able to manipulate the structures of the content to fit the level of their students*." It is expected that the expert (the teacher) should be able to adjust their teaching and the content of the course to fit the students.

It is interesting to find that items that are commonly believed to be important are deemphasized by the students. Behaviour that tends to make the course easier is not commonly observed behaviour of an PTL who is considered as effective: *Gives Tips or hints for examination or test* (3.81); *Gives easy pass* (3.54) and *Conducts class in Cantonese* (3.41) — indicating that the students are not so concerned about passing the course and obtaining the credit that they will accept anything ("*alms"*) from the instructor. On one hand, it could be interpreted as the chance of students who fail a course in the self-financing institution is not very high (usually not more than 10%), and hence students do not worry much about it. On the other hand, it can also be explained as students do not treasure an easy pass. According to Goal Setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2005), they are motivated by a more challenging goal — learning the materials and then attempt passing the course with their own efforts and abilities.

Finally, students do not link their effective PTLs to two items that are emphasized by university administrators: *Uses new teaching approach* (3.66) and *Applies information technology in teaching* (3.25). This is in conflict with the idea of Oblinger (2005) who suggests that students from the "*net generation"* should embrace learning environment that are fully supported by information technology. It is possible that either the instructors in Hong Kong are not as well vested with information technology as their students so they tend to use less information technology in their teaching. Or the students in Hong Kong tend to be more passive, they will wait for an explanation from their professor rather than "*Google"* for an answer.

Summary

A ranked list of the traits and behaviour of an effective PTL is presented in Exhibit A. The top ranking items are those selected by a high percentage of students for being highly associated with an effective PTL. Data from this section can be used to answer **Research Question One** "***What are the preferred traits (Formal qualifications, Social desirableness, and Teaching related competences) of an effective PTL?***" The following **traits** are indicated by a high percentage of students for being associated with PTLs whom students consider as effective:

! Good Presentation Skills;

! Good Subject-related Knowledge; and

! Good Language Skills

Similarly, data can also be used to answer **Research Question Two** "***What are the preferred behaviour (Relationship related behaviour and Task related behaviour) of an effective PTL?***" The following types of **behaviour** are indicated by a high percentage of students for being associated with PTLs whom students consider as effective:

! Applying updated real-life example in teaching;

! Make the class interesting;

! Share his/her past experience in studying;

! Provide prompt reply to questions or e-mail messages;

! Give students chance to speak and to ask questions in class;

! Spend additional time after class on helping students;

! Encourage students to study;

! Provide students with opportunity to communicate with lecturers or tutors; and

! Modify course content to suit the needs/interest of the students

Conclusions and recommendations

The results based on the mean score yield a list of characteristics of preferred PTL. The top listed characteristics in this list are mostly related to teaching activity such as good presentation skills and good subject related knowledge of the PTL. The result is found to match with the result obtained from the pilot study (Poon, 2008), indicating a good reliability of the result.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have several significant implications for policy makers, university administrators, and faculty members.

Recommendations related to Traits of PTLs

1. University administrators should realize that different criteria should be used to select or evaluate FTLs and PTLs. The job of FTLs and PTLs are different and criteria that are used by universities like The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2003) to evaluate teachers in general may not be transferrable to PTLs. For example, all lecturers should "Communicate clearly with students" and "Mark work diligently and fairly, and give useful feedback to students". However, as most of the PTLs have other obligations during their non-teaching hours, it is much more difficult for PTLs to "Be available, and approachable, for consultations by students". By the same token, PTLs are usually not invited to serve on committees or other administrative functions (Monroe & Denman, 1991). Hence it will be difficult for them to perform well "*...in subject/programme development and administration"* and "*Anticipates and takes a proactive role in meeting changing conditions so as to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning"*.

2. In choosing a proper PTL, university administrators should not believe that *high academic qualification* and *high professional qualification* are necessary and sufficient conditions for an effective lecturer, as students only find loose connection between these factors and an effective PTL. University administrators should also reconsider their emphasis on social desirableness factors like *high social status*, *high career achievement* and *high research activity.* Students do not perceive these to be important, and it may not affect their decision in choosing a desirable institution.

3. The lecturer's teaching related competences are very important. Students emphasize the ability of the instructor to organize and transmit the information to them. Researchers like Okoye (2008) and Sander et al (2000) have long suggested that teaching skills is important to teacher in general. University administrators should use it as part of the selection criteria in recruitment for both FTLs and PTLs. University management should also consider providing more training for the PTLs who are less experienced in this area.

4. Students also show strong preference for a lecturer who has the ability to make the class interesting, and the proper use of humour which can be an effective way to create such an interest. While these skills can be improved through practice (Powell and Andersen, 1985), PTLs have less access to these practices than FTLs. Policy makers of professional training programmes for instructors should also consider adding presentation or staging skills (Murray and Lawrence, 1980) to the training and development programme.

Recommendations related to Behaviour of PTLs

1. University administrators should reconsider the emphasis they place on new teaching approach or new technologies. According to the study of Sander et al (2000), university students prefer interactive lectures and group-based activities. This tends to suggest that students may prefer FTLs just because more diversified teaching approaches are more commonly adopted by FTLs (Lei, 2007). In the current study, items related to Teaching style like *applying new teaching approach* or even *applying IT* are of lesser importance to students.

2. PTLs should ensure that their own teaching effectiveness matches the demand they place on the students. Even though Cavanaugh (2006) finds that PTLs give higher grades to students than FTLs even after accounting for many alternative explanations for grade differences, *Easiness of the course* is not of prime importance. Students surveyed in this case actually want to learn something from the course. Students are ready to accept challenges as long as they perceive that the lecturer is effective in "*transmitting"* the knowledge to them.

3. Lecturers should try to accommodate the needs of their students by being prepared to share with them *experience in learning*, spending *additional time* with their students and, providing *reply promptly to their mails.* Applying *updated real life examples* in teaching will help to increase a student's interests for the course. PTLs who are also holding employment in the commercial fields will have more chance to accumulate *updated real life examples* than the FTLs. Lecturers should also know that students emphasize the *approachability* of a lecturer. Students indicate their desire to receive *career and psychological consultation* from their lecturers.

4. While students desire for opportunity to communicate with the lecturers, PTL is generally more difficult to contact than FTLs. Management of the self-financing institutes should consider establishing some mechanism that can facilitate interactions between PTLs and students. For example, allotting office space for PTLs or even pay them for non-teaching hours when students can contact them either in their offices or through telephone or internet for formal and informal interaction, and this should be beneficial to the school and students.

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