

Revisiting students' perception of effective part-time lecturers: The impact of students' background

Ted T.H. Poon

Hong Kong Community College
Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Joseph W.C. Lau

Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education
Vocational Training Council

Abstract

A study conducted by Poon and Lau (2014a, 2014b) examined the perceptions of an effective part-time lecturer (PTL) of 225 students in a self-financing tertiary institute using a questionnaire of 31 items. As an extension of the study, the effect of students' background, as measured by their study experience, gender, study mode, and the level of their study programmes is further investigated. Salient background factors which may have a strong influence on students' learning experience are also identified. The results indicate that female students and part-time students have a more favourable impression of PTLs. Regarding the specific traits of PTLs, students with more studying experience prefer PTLs with a Higher academic qualification. Part-time students are considerably more concerned about PTLs' Teaching related competencies as measured by Good subject related knowledge, Many years of work experience, Many years of teaching experience and Good presentation skills. For Relationship-oriented behaviour, part-time students prefer PTLs who can Share experience with them, give Prompt reply to their messages and make the class Interesting. However, part-time students downplay or even dislike psychological consulting from PTLs. Concerning task-oriented behaviour, part-time students favour instructors who can use real examples in teaching, give students a chance to speak in class, modify course content to fit students' needs and interests, and use new approach in class. However, PTLs who can use Cantonese as medium of instruction are more desirable to full-time students. These findings indicate that students' background, particularly the various study modes of students, correlate with different preference sets for PTLs. Higher institutions are advised to modify their decision criteria according to the above findings when they select their PTLs.

Key words: Part-time lecturer, students' perception, students' background, learning motivation, classroom management

Introduction

Self-financing tertiary institutes in Hong Kong are employing more part-time lecturers (PTLs) to reduce personnel costs and provide flexibility in programme operation. In this light, selection criteria which can be used in recruiting effective PTLs have become an important issue.

The managerial administrators of educational institutions express their expectation for a good lecturer in many different ways. One of these ways is to publish their expectations in the form of a Behavioural Code or Suggestions for good practices. For example, the document "*Some Suggestions on the Criteria for Basic, Good and Outstanding Level of Teaching*", offered by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2003), lists the basic, good, and outstanding behaviour standards for teachers.

Administrators' views can also be identified by observing their behaviour towards personnel. Researchers have indicated that a higher education teacher gets prestige and promotion not because of their teaching abilities, but usually as a result of research impact and academic positions of authority (Feldman, 1986). Even when teaching evaluation takes place in universities, teaching is not considered important when selection, assessment, and promotion are considered (Poza-Munoz, Reboloso-Pacheco & Fernandez-Ramirez, 2000). This seems to indicate that being active in research is viewed as being very important by administrators of universities.

Another way to identify universities' teacher expectations is by examining the wording of their recruitment advertisements. Information collected through this way indicates that the management's viewpoint may be contaminated by various administrative considerations. Other than classroom teaching, lecturers are often expected to perform well in administrative duties such as programme management and student development activities (City University of Hong Kong, 2017).

Even though the criteria discussed above may be good enough as a standard of behaviour for full time lecturers (FTLs), those standards cannot be broadly applied to all 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 PTLs have other obligations during their non-teaching hours, it is much more difficult for PTLs to "*Be available and approachable for student consultation*". In other words, some requirements that can be easily met by full-time faculty can be quite difficult, or even impossible, for PTLs.

Similarly, PTLs are often hired to teach pre-packaged courses developed either by other full-time faculty of the same university, or by faculty of overseas universities that license their programmes to universities in Hong Kong. In either case, the PTL is not expected to come up with his or her own teaching materials. There is really not much room for the PTLs to "*Produce useful teaching resources and handout materials for students*", and because of this, it is not surprising that PTLs are sometimes considered as merely being technical deliverers of guidelines and schemes derived from elsewhere.

By the same token, PTLs are usually not invited to serve on committees or to perform other administrative functions (Monore & Denman, 1991). Hence, it will be difficult for them to perform well "*...in subject/programme development and administration*" or to "*Anticipate and take a proactive role in meeting changing conditions so as to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning*".

In short, most of the criteria (for example, research, course development, programme development) used to measure teachers' behaviour in universities is geared more toward full-time faculty members, and cannot be applied to PTLs. It is suggested that administrators of higher educational institutions should utilise a modified set of criteria for selecting their PTLs.

On the other hand, as students have become the major source of income for self-financing institutes, students' perception of effective PTL has been considered an important factor that should be taken into account and considered for more careful study. It is, however, vital to acknowledge that students are not a homogeneous body; different students may have very different expectations and preferences. This study focuses on how students' background may affect their perceptions of and requirements for an effective PTL.

The current study is an extended analysis of an earlier study by Poon and Lau (2014a, 2014b) on the students' perception of effective PTL. In that study, 225 tertiary level students in a self-financing tertiary institute were surveyed for their preference on part-time lecturers.

Effect of Students' Background on Teacher Preference

Beishuizen et al. (2001) find that students at different levels may have different preferences for a teacher. Primary school students perceive good teachers basically as *competent instructors* capable of transmitting knowledge and skills. However, secondary school students focus much more on *relational aspects* as being indicators of a good teacher.

Students' competence in a specific field may also influence their preference for the teaching approach used by the instructor. Sprinkle (2008) discussed that university students showed no significant preference for instructors who use *information technology* in their teaching. Sprinkle's (2008) study suggests that it may be due to the fact that while younger students embrace technology-based teaching, older students, being less familiar or comfortable with technology, showed a preference for lecture over technology-based medium. Sprinkle (2008) also found that students preferring to work alone would prefer technology-based activities as they decrease face-to-face interaction with classmates.

It should be pointed out that students' personal biases may have a strong influence on their perception of instructors' teaching effectiveness. According to Sprinkle (2008), university students' background and their preferences regarding instructors' traits, such as age, gender, teaching style, faculty ranking, personality, and grade awarded were directly correlated. Sprinkle (2008) discovered that while students' GPA, major, and academic classification (level of study) are not significant factors, students' age and gender do affect their preferences for instructors.

Students of different genders may prefer different learning styles. Keri (2002)

discussed findings from studies on men's and women's learning differences, revealing that men tend to be independent learners, while women tend to be relational learners. Keri (2002) further suggests that more men prefer an applied learning style, whereas women prefer a conceptual mode of learning.

Hong Kong Students' View

In assessing teaching quality, one interesting question is how the ethnic background of students affects their preferences. Hence, literature related to the preferences of Hong Kong students is briefly reviewed.

While higher education students, as 'stakeholders' of higher education could assume a myriad of roles, they may well have different focuses when evaluating the quality of higher education (Lau, 2014). In trying to develop measurement indicators as well as attempting to identify components of quality education, Hampton (1993) treated the university as a service institution while applying an instrument, SERVQUAL, generally used in studying the quality of services offered by professionals such as physicians. Kwan and Ng (1999) modified this SERVQUAL analysis and studied the quality of education in the eyes of university students in Hong Kong and mainland China. They found that both Hong Kong and mainland Chinese students are very practical. In particular, students emphasised study-related matters like course content and facilities rather than social activities. Hong Kong students are even more pragmatic, often focusing directly on how to get good grades.

As for what constitutes quality teaching, Watkins (1992) studied how Hong Kong graduate students evaluate quality of teaching. He used two American instruments designed to assess tertiary students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness, and asked students to complete the questionnaire for both a strong and weak lecturer. Watkins (1992) believed that all but the workload/difficulty items clearly differentiated between 'good' and 'poor' lecturer, which seems to suggest that students may not have a clearly defined view of how workload/difficulty is related to effective teaching.

In studying the effect of students' background, students' mode of study may also be an important factor to take into consideration. Ng, Murphy and Jenkins (2002) probed part-time students' perceptions of effective teaching and suggested that positive relationship behaviour (in terms of teacher availability for interaction, teachers' responsiveness to students and teacher-student mutual respect) would improve student satisfaction. For teaching behaviour, Ng, Murphy and Jenkins (2002) found that students' desire for certain behaviours would be affected by students' beliefs about knowledge. While learners with a didactic/reproductive orientation prefer 'transmissive' type teachers, students with a facilitative/transformational orientation prefer 'facilitator' type teachers.

The effect of student level and class level on (a) overall satisfaction with lecturing performance, (b) overall satisfaction with course design, and (c) a self-rated measure of effort devoted to studying was studied by Ting (2000). It was found that senior level

students and students majoring in a subject that was the same as their course tended to be more satisfied with course design, and subsequently worked harder than other students. Various aspects of course design and instructors' lecturing skills, as judged by students, have a strong impact on course rating. Most interestingly, students' perception of instructors' teaching attitude also affects their rating of the course design and the students' own effort in studying.

The view of younger secondary students may provide more insight: Chen (2006) surveyed 1063 Secondary 2 to Secondary 6 students on the important traits of an ideal teacher. The result is shown in Exhibit 1, which indicate that 78% of the surveyed students selected the relational aspect - *Caring for students* - as the most important attribute of an ideal teacher. Far fewer students, only 51%, selected *Use flexible and effective teaching methods* as an important factor. Other relational factors like being *Humorous* and *Treating students as equal* are of intermediate importance. The more pragmatic factors like *Can improve students' grade in examinations* and even *Give tips or hints for tests and examinations* are not considered as being very important. This result supports the theory proposed by Beishuizen et al. (2001), that secondary school students consider relationship as a much more important factor than others in determining the quality of a teacher.

Chen's study (2006) also investigated what factors students considered as 'having a strong impact in their study'. 68% of the students selected 'Ideal teacher' as the most important factor. It should be pointed out that older students (Secondary 6 vs. Secondary 2) assigned a higher importance (78% vs. 64%) to an ideal teacher.

A large majority (87.4%) of the students indicated that having an ideal teacher had improved their academic performance, as measured in their grades. This result is in line with the finding of Ting (2000), which indicated that perception of the instructor's teaching attitude can affect the effort of students. Tam (2002) also revealed that university students who perceive a positive relationship with teachers during their university years tend to state that they had a higher quality involvement in university life overall, especially in course learning activities. If the result of this study can be generalized to all Hong Kong students, then providing desirable teachers will greatly increase the attractiveness of the school in the eyes of students who are concerned about their studying.

Research Hypotheses

This study tested two hypotheses based on the background of the students and the attributes of the PTL:

Hypothesis 1: "Students' background has a significant correlation with their preferences for the *traits* of the PTL".

Hypothesis 2: "Students' background has a significant correlation with their preferences for the *behaviour* of the PTL".

Traits of a PTL are indicated by personal characteristics including *Formal Qualification*, *Social Desirability* and *Teaching-related Competencies* of the PTL. Similarly, behaviours of a PTL are defined by the *Relationship-Oriented Behaviour* and *Task-Oriented Behaviour* of the PTL. Definitions of the key attributes and their sub-attributes are shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Definitions of key attributes and sub-attributes

Key attributes	Sub-attributes	Items related to sub-attributes
1. Traits	1a. Formal Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Academic Qualification (e.g. PhD or DEd) · Professional Qualification (e.g. CPA or PE)
	1b. Social Desirability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Career Achievement (e.g. a well-known artist) · Social Status (e.g. member of Leg. Council) · Research or Publication Record · Physical Appearance
	1c. Teaching-related Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Subject-related Knowledge · Work (Non-teaching) Experience · Teaching Experience · Language Skills · Presentation Skills · Computer Skills
2. Behaviour	2a. Relationship-Oriented Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Shares Past Study Experience · Provides Prompt Reply to Questions or E-mail Messages · Keeps Smiling · Provides Psychological Consulting Assistance · Provides Career Consulting Assistance · Provides Opportunity for Communication · Makes Class Interesting
	2b. Task-Oriented Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Encourages Students to Study · Applies Updated Real-life Examples in Teaching · Recognises or Rewards Good Performance · Spends Additional Time After Class Helping Students · Gives Students Opportunities to Speak and to Ask Questions · Easily Passes Students · Gives Tips or Hints for Examinations or Tests · Conducts Class in Cantonese · Modifies Course Content to Suit the Needs or Interests of the Students · Applies Information Technology in Teaching · Uses New Teaching Approach

Methodology

The instrument used here was constructed and piloted in a different study (Poon, 2008). In this instrument, students were asked to rate, according to a 5-point Likert scale, how 31 descriptions of traits and behaviours of a lecturer match what they

perceive as the characteristics of an effective PTL. Descriptions that were chosen by most students indicate that they were the most important to the students. The result of that part of the study can be found in Poon and Lau (2014a, 2014b).

Information related to the participants' backgrounds, which include *Study experience, Gender, Mode of study, and Level of programme* were also surveyed in the instrument as supplementary information. In the current study, information provided with regard to students' backgrounds was used as the basis for a new investigation. The objective of this study is to identify any significant correlation between the background of the students and their preference for the characteristics of an effective PTL.

Sample population

In the current study, 343 students from eight different business programmes of a self-financing tertiary institution were invited to participate in a survey. 259 completed questionnaires (75.5%) were collected. Out of these 259 questionnaires, 225 questionnaires (92.6%) were eventually accepted and considered in all the following discussions. The details of the student groups can be found in Exhibit 2 below:

Exhibit 2: Student Groups Surveyed

Group	Full/Part-time	Level of programme	Number of students invited to participate	Number of questionnaires accepted	Percentage of accepted questionnaires
1	Full-time	Associate Degree	54	34	15.1
2	Full-time	Associate Degree	80	34	15.1
3	Full-time	Associate Degree	40	25	11.1
4	Part-time	Executive Diploma	28	27	12.0
5	Full-time	Top-up Degree	59	49	21.8
6	Part-time	Top-up Degree	28	20	8.9
7	Full-time	Top-up Degree	30	20	8.9
8	Full-time	Top-up Degree	24	16	7.1
Total			343	225	100.0

Descriptive Statistics

Using SPSS version 15, data from the questionnaires was analysed via descriptive statistics and the Pearson Correlation Test. In this section, the descriptive statistics of the data are presented in groups. The result for each group of the items related to traits and behaviours of PTLs will be discussed accordingly, followed by a presentation of the overall ranking of all the items.

Effect of Students' Background

The following section describes the background of students who participated in this study. Students were classified according to their study experience, gender, study mode and levels of programmes.

Prior Experience with an Effective PTL

At the beginning of this section of the questionnaire, the surveyed students were

asked if they had met an effective PTL during their years of study, to which 71.6% of the students claimed in the affirmative that they had. It was thus apparent that there is widespread use of PTLs in tertiary institutions because most of the sampled students had not only encountered PTLs during their studies but also had positive comments about at least one of them. As most Hong Kong secondary schools only employ full-time teachers, students were likely to have met part-time teachers only after they had entered tertiary institutions.

Years of Study after Secondary Five

This item indicates that close to 61.6% of the students surveyed have studied from 2 to 4 years since they completed Secondary Five. In the traditional Hong Kong education system, students normally study for two more years after Secondary Five before they enter a university or other tertiary institution. The data show that about 60% of the surveyed students are fresh to the university programme and hence, have less studying experience. Students with more studying experience occupy a smaller portion of the sampled population; 25.6% have studied 5 to 6 years and 12.8% have more than 6 years of studying experience. The data fit the expectation because part-time executive programme students are usually more mature working adults. Students who had studied for 2 to 4 years after Secondary Five are usually in the first half of the university programme, and those who had studied for 5 to 6 years are usually in the second half of the programme. However, directly correlating the years of study to the level of programme is somewhat problematic because some students may have repeated their Secondary Seven year and hence, had spent one or even two more years before they reached the same level of programme as their peers. Hence, this item more accurately reflects the total study experience than students' study experience at the university level.

Gender

Close to 60% (58.9%) of the students surveyed are female and only about 40% (40.5%) are male. On the one hand, dominance by female students is very common in the higher education institutions of Hong Kong: in 2011/12, 52.8% of the students who studied in undergraduate level programmes funded by the University Grants Committee were females (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). On the other hand, due to the traditional gender bias that boys are better in science or engineering subjects and girls are better in non-science subjects (Yip, Chiu & Ho, 2004), girls tend to avoid choosing science and engineering programmes, meaning that the business-related programmes are often populated by more female students.

Full-time or Part-time Students

72.0% of the students surveyed are from full-time programmes. Full-time students usually go directly from secondary school to university, and are younger than the part-time students who may have worked for a few years before they returned to university.

Level of Programme

46.7% of the surveyed students are in a top-up degree programme - the last year of a bachelor degree programme. 41.3% are in the associate degree programme, which corresponds to the first half of a bachelor degree programme. Only 10% are from the executive diploma programme. Students from this programme are mostly working adults who study in the part-time mode.

Analysis

In this section, the correlations between the students' background and their preference for various characteristics of an effective PTL are presented. For simplicity of discussion, correlations that are significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed) are already considered as *significant* in the following sections. Both 0.05 level (2 tailed) and 0.01 level (2 tailed) will be described as *significant*.

Background of the Surveyed Students

Data collected from students of different backgrounds can be used to investigate the effects of the students' background on their opinion of an effective PTL. The Pearson Correlation Test is used to analyse the relationship between the preferred traits and behaviours of the PTL and the *Students' Background*.

Exhibit 3: Correlation among Background Related Items

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
Years of study	1	.018	.595(**)	.411(**)
Gender	.018	1	.163(*)	.197(**)
Full/Part-time	.595(**)	.163(*)	1	.345(**)
Level of Programme	.411(**)	.197(**)	.345(**)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations can be found among *Years of study* and *Full/Part-time* and *Level of Programme*. It reflects that the more inexperienced (younger) students in the sample are usually those who study in full-time degrees or associate degree programmes; more experienced students are from the part-time executive diploma programme. As indicated in Exhibit 2, 41.3% of the sample population are students from the full-time associate degree programme; this kind of strong correlation was expected.

Background and an Experience of Having an Effective PTL

Pearson Correlation Analysis shows a significant correlation between two background items (*Gender* and *Full/Part-time*) and the chance that the students report that they had *Met an effective PTL*.

Exhibit 4: Correlations between Background and an Experience of Having an Effective PTL

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
Met an effective PTL	-.124	-.157(*)	-.196(**)	-.078

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The negative correlation coefficient (- 0.157) indicates that female students have a higher chance of having an effective PTL. Data from the crosstab Exhibit 5 shows that a higher proportion of *Female* students (78.9%) reported that they had *Met an effective PTL* than their *Male* classmates (65.3%), which suggests that the female students may be more gracious when they assess their PTLs, and hence report more PTLs as being effective.

Exhibit 5: Crosstab between Gender and Chance of Reporting "Met an effective PTL"

		Gender		
		Male	Female	
Met effective PTL	No	.Count	26	23
		% within Gender	34.7%	21.1%
	Yes	Count	49	86
		% within Gender	65.3%	78.9%
Total	Count	75	109	
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	

Similarly, the negative correlation coefficient (-0.196) between the mode of study (*Full/Part-time*) and the chance that the student reported that they had *Met an effective PTL* indicates that students from part-time programmes have a higher chance of reporting that they had met an effective PTL before. Again, crosstab data (Exhibit 6) supports this finding and shows students who study in the Part-time mode have a higher chance of reporting that they have met an effective PTL (85.7%) than full-time students (66.0%). This can be explained by the fact that most classes in part-time programmes are held in the evening, and are more frequently handled by PTLs.

Exhibit 6: Crosstab between Mode of study and Chance of reporting "Met an effective PTL"

		Full/Part-time		
		Full-time	Part-time	
Met an effective PTL	No	.Count	55	9
		% within Full/Part-time	34.0%	14.3%
	Yes	Count	107	54
		% within Full/Part-time	66.0%	85.7%
Total	Count	162	63	
	% within Full/Part-time	100.0%	100.0%	

Before more correlation data are presented, it should be noted that for the following discussions the data are coded in such a way with a *Positive* correlation coefficient to indicate that items are preferred by students who:

- study in higher level programmes;
- has more studying experience;
- are female; or
- are in part-time programmes.

For example, in Exhibit 7, a *positive* correlation coefficient of 0.143 between *High Academic Qualification* and *Year of Study* indicates that students with more study experience prefer PTLs with higher academic qualifications. Similarly, a *negative* correlation between the item *High Social Status* (in Exhibit 8) and all the background factors indicates that PTLs with a higher social status are preferred by male students who have less studying experience and are studying in lower level full-time programmes.

Correlation between Background and PTLs' Traits

For *Formal Qualifications*, only *High Academic Qualification* of PTLs (for example, having a doctorate degree) shows a significant correlation with *Year of study* for students (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.143). The result suggests that students who have more studying experience tend to prefer PTLs with higher academic qualifications. No significant correlation, on the other hand, can be observed between the item *High Professional Qualification* of the PTL (for example, being a professional accountant) and students' background. In other words, while higher academic qualifications may be valued by school administrators (Feldman, 1986) and students with more studying experience, students of less studying experience do not particularly value this qualification, viewing other traits as being more important. PTLs with high professional qualifications may find it necessary to utilise other means of impressing their students.

Exhibit 7: Pearson Correlations between Background and Formal Qualification

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
High Academic Qualification	.143(*)	-.048	.046	-.057
High Professional Qualification	-.004	-.002	.021	-.067

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In Exhibit 8, no significant correlation can be found between students' background and all the traits related to *Social Desirability* of a PTL. Social desirability is defined here as having *High Career Achievement* (e.g. being a well-known artist), *High Social Status* (e.g. being a member of the Legislative Council), *Strong Research or Publication Records*, and *Good Physical Appearance*. Data may suggest that there is *no clear pattern of preference* between students' background and the items that are related to Social Desirability. Again, while school administrators often prefer lecturers with strong research or publication records (Feldman, 1986), students do not share the same view.

Exhibit 8: Pearson Correlations between Background and Social Desirability

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
High Academic Qualification	-.050	.003	.051	-.111
High Professional Qualification	-.041	-.030	-.099	-.092
Strong Research or Publication Records	.023	.074	.041	-.034
Good Physical Appearance	-.102	-.031	-.039	-.106

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In Exhibit 9, the mode of study of the students (Full/Part-time) shows significant correlations with four items that are linked to *Teaching-related Competencies* *Good subject related knowledge* (0.281), *Many years of work experience* (0.254), *Many years of teaching experience* (0.149), and *Good presentation skills* (0.234). The correlation coefficients are all positive, indicating that these items are more preferred by part-time students. This can be explained by the fact that part-time students are mostly working adults, and they usually have much less time for preparing for their classes or reading, and have to rely on teachers to share their materials (by making clear explanations and identifying the key issues). As the teacher must have *Good subject related knowledge* to guarantee the quality of the information being imparted to students, they should also have *Many years of teaching experience* and *Good presentation skills* so information sharing can be both efficient and effective. Part-time students prefer instructors with *Many years of work experience* because they value sharing their own experience with their teachers in their learning process (Ng, Murphy & Jenkins, 2002).

Exhibit 9: Correlations between Background and Teaching-related Competencies

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
Subject knowledge	.097	.062	.281(**)	.006
Work experience	.230(**)	.117	.254(**)	.159(*)
Teaching experience	.060	.048	.149(*)	.030
Language	-.089	.110	.067	-.042
Presentation skills	.130	.050	.234(**)	.014
Computer skills	.046	.109	.096	-.052

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In terms of other background factors, a significant positive correlation can also be found between *Year of study* and *Level of programme* of students and the traits of having *Many years of working experience*. It suggests that students with more studying experience are more likely to appreciate the importance of the work experience of the PTL. This is expected as students with more studying experience are usually those in the part-time evening mode. As discussed in the above paragraph, part-time students can appreciate PTLs with more work experience as teachers can cite more examples of how the concepts discussed in class can be applied to real world life experience.

In Exhibit 9, the significant correlation between mode of study (*part-time and full-time*) and *Level of programme* can also be interpreted as indicating that a higher number of inexperienced students in the full-time programme do not mind if their instructors do not have much *Work experience*. The crosstab data (Exhibit 10) show only 61.4% students within the *2-4 years* range linked *Many years of work experience* with their effective PTLs. This should be encouraging to fresh PhD graduates who are teaching younger undergraduate students as almost 40% of these students would not look down upon their PTLs for lacking working experience.

Exhibit 10: Crosstab between Work Experience and Years of Study

		Year of study			
		2 to 4 years	5 to 6 years	more than 6 years	
Work experience	5	.Count	13	10	8
		% within year of study	9.7%	17.9%	28.6%
	4	Count	68	33	16
		% within year of study	50.7%	58.9%	57.1%
	3	Count	45	11	3
		% within year of study	33.6%	19.6%	10.7%
	2	Count	7	2	1
		% within year of study	5.2%	3.6%	3.6%
	1	Count	1	0	0
		% within year of study	.7%	.0%	.0%
Total		Count	134	56	28
		% within year of study	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

It is worth noticing that the existence of a significant correlation coefficient between the background factor *Full/Part-time* and the competency items *Subject knowledge*, *Work experience*, *Teaching experience*, and *Presentation skills* should not be interpreted as a representation of full-time students not preferring PTLs with these competencies. It only suggests that part-time students have an overwhelming preference for these PTLs. Again, data from the crosstab presented in Exhibit 11 can be used to illustrate this point. For example, a very large majority (86.3%) of full-time students linked good *Presentation skills* to an effective PTL, but an even higher percentage (100%) of part-time students indicated the same preference. As a result, a significant correlation is observed.

Exhibit 11: Crosstab between Presentation Skills and Full/Part-time

		Full/Part-time		
		Full-time	Part-time	
Presentation	5	.Count	81	45
		% within Full/Part-time	50.3%	71.4%
	4	Count	58	18
		% within Full/Part-time	36.0%	28.6%
	3	Count	15	0
		% within Full/Part-time	9.3%	.0%
	2	Count	7	0
		% within Full/Part-time	4.3%	.0%
Total		Count	161	63
		% within Full/Part-time	100.0%	100.0%

Correlations between Background and PTLs' Behaviour

In Exhibit 12, the background factor related to the mode of study (*Full/Part-time*) shows the highest correlation with the *Relationship-Oriented Behaviour* items. *Full/Part-time* shows significant positive correlation with *Share experience* (0.220), *Prompt reply* (0.202), and *Interesting* (0.1748) but has a negative correlation with the factor providing *Psychological consulting* (-0.170). This can be explained by the fact that those students who are from part-time programmes are usually working adults, who "tend to see their teachers as 'knowledgeable friends' on an equal footing, and therefore look for a relationship of mutual respect" (Ng, Murphy & Jenkins, 2002:467). They responded in a way that indicated a preference for an instructor who is willing to *Share*

with them the experience/skills of studying, give them *Prompt reply* when they ask a question via e-mail or other means, and can make the class *interesting* so that they can stay focused. However, being mostly working adults, these students tend to be more mature and less dependent on the PTL for *Psychological* advice. They may even dislike being given advice in this area (indicated by the negative correlation coefficient) as they may perceive this kind of behaviour as condescension, a peer treating them "as young students" (Ng, Murphy & Jenkins, 2002:467). Contrary to the philosophy advocated by some educators and school administrators (e.g. Noddings, 2005), PTL of part-time students should bear in mind that "Caring" is not appreciated by these more mature students.

A similar preference pattern is expected for the background factor *Year of study*. With most part-time students being mature students with more studying experience, their preference pattern may also affect the factor *Year of study*. The fact that *Year of study* shows significant correlations with *Prompt reply* (0.142) and *Psychological consulting* (-0.169) tends to support this similarity in pattern.

Exhibit 12: Correlations between Background and Relationship-Oriented Behaviour

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
Share experience	.086	-.008	.220(**)	.000
Prompt reply	.142(*)	.076	.202(**)	.183(**)
Smiling	-.117	-.046	-.072	.222(**)
Psychological consulting	-.169(*)	-.042	-.170(*)	-.119
Career consulting	-.056	-.005	-.089	-.060
Communication	-.033	.161(*)	.066	-.046
Interesting	.045	-.028	.178(**)	-.111

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The finding that *female* students prefer more opportunities to engage in *Communication* with lecturers or tutors is in line with studies that have found female students to be more relational learners whilst male students are more independent (Keri, 2002). Female students tend to appreciate opportunities to establish a closer relationship with their instructors.

The only background factor that shows a significant correlation with the item *Smiling* is *Level of programme*. The negative correlation coefficient (-0.222) indicates that the behaviour is more preferred by students in the lower levels of their programme of study. The example given in the questionnaire for this behaviour is being friendly: initiating conversation with students; knowing the students' names; and not talking down to students. Those are all factors that are related to close personal relationship. As no significant correlation can be found between *full/part-time* and *Smiling*, it can be concluded that the observed effect can only be attributed to the level of the programme. It suggests that, just like secondary school students (Chen, 2006), students in the lower level programme still tend to prefer an instructor who can keep a close relationship with them, whereas students from higher level programmes tend to be more independent, and forego this kind of relationship.

In Exhibit 13, the mode of study (*full/part-time*) shows significant correlations with *Task-Oriented Behaviour*, including *Real examples* (0.417), *Chances to speak* (0.153), *Cantonese* (-0.164), *Modify course* (0.132) and *New approach* (0.244). Again, the data indicates the differences in preference between the full-time and part-time students for afore-mentioned reasons.

Part-time students prefer instructors who can use *Real life examples* in teaching. This may be due to the fact that part-time students are working adults exposed to more real life problems in their work, thus resulting in a strong dissatisfaction with course materials that are "remote from practical/local situations" (Ng, Murphy, Jenkins, 2002: 469).

Students studying in a part-time mode also enjoy sharing their practical experience with others (Ng, Murphy, Jenkins, 2002) and appreciate instructors who provide them with the chance to do so. They consider this as an indication of being treated as being on equal footing.

Exhibit 13: Pearson Correlations between Background and Task-Oriented Behaviour

	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
Encourage	.032	.132	.068	-.106
Real example	.311(**)	.099	.417(**)	.093
Recognise/reward good performance	.007	.075	-.020	-.122
Additional time	.011	.017	.091	-.009
Chance to speak	.102	.086	.153(*)	-.096
Easy pass	.064	.061	.017	-.044
Tips/hints for exam	.125	.113	.084	-.061
Cantonese	-.198(**)	.018	-.164(*)	-.223(**)
Modify course	.069	.172(*)	.132(*)	-.026
Apply IT	.097	-.013	.116	-.092
New approach	.116	.123	.244(**)	.062

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It may be timely now to further expound on the factor of *Cantonese* (i.e. conducting class in Cantonese). The official medium of instruction for nearly all the higher educational institutions in Hong Kong is English, but a lot of students in the city, especially inexperienced youngsters freshly out of secondary school, are not proficient in English. A PTL who is willing to ignore the official regulations and conduct the class in Cantonese will make the learning process much easier for many students. However, part-time working adult students are likely to be more used to communicating in English in their workplace and thus have less preference for using Cantonese in the classroom.

Part-time students spend less time reading their textbooks and class materials and tend to rely on their instructor as the main source of knowledge. If information is transmitted to them in Cantonese, a potential problem may arise if examinations are given in English; students are likely to be unfamiliar with the relevant and necessary jargons. Students from lower levels of their programmes are not necessarily well

equipped with English, and would understandably prefer an increased use of Cantonese in class. It is thus apparent that the ability of students may affect their preferences.

Part-time students prefer teachers who can *Modify the course* to suit their interest or needs. In view of their tight schedule of study, part-time students prefer "more flexibility in their learning and appreciate teaching staff who understand their constraints and adjust course requirement accordingly" (Ng, Murphy, Jenkins, 2002: 468).

For the item related to using *New teaching approach*, crosstab data indicates that a higher proportion of part-time students (75.5%) than full-time students (56.8%) link using *New teaching approach* to the effectiveness of their PTLs. Again, this can be explained by part-time students' preference for flexibility in their choice of instruction, as well as their willingness to respond to variety in teaching approaches with openness.

Conclusion

Data obtained from this study are summarised in Exhibit 14, where only items with significant correlation are shown. The background factors have shown significant correlations with 16 out of the 30 items, indicating that various students' backgrounds tend to affect students' preferences for effective PTLs. The mode of the study (*full/part-time*) of students is the most distinctive factor as it shows significant correlations with 13 items. *Year of study* is a distant second showing significant correlation with only six items. The other two minor factors are *Level of study* (2 items) and *Gender* (2 items).

Exhibit 14: Pearson Correlations Summary, showing only items with significant correlation

Traits^ / Behaviour	Year of study	Gender	Full/Part-time	Level of Programme
High academic qualification	.143(*)	.143(*)	.046	-.057
Good subject-related knowledge	.097	.097	.281(**)	.006
Many years of work experience	.230(**)	.230(**)	.254(**)	.159(*)
Many years of teaching experience	.060	.060	.149(*)	.030
Good presentation skill	.130	.130	.234(**)	.014
Share past studying experience	.086	.086	.220(**)	.000
Provides prompt reply to questions or e-mail messages	.142(*)	.142(*)	.202(**)	.183(**)
Keep smiling	-.117	-.117	-.072	-.222(**)
Provides psychological or personal problem consulting assistance	-.169(*)	-.169(*)	-.170(*)	-.119
Provides students with opportunities to communicate with instructor	-.033	-.033	.066	-.046
Make the class interesting	.045	.045	.178(**)	-.111
Applies updated real life examples in teaching	.311(**)	.311(**)	.417(**)	.093
Give students opportunities to speak and to ask questions in class	.102	.102	.153(*)	.096
Conducts class in Cantonese	-.198(**)	-.198(**)	-.164(*)	-.223(**)
Modifies course content to suit the needs/interests of the students	.069	.069	.132(*)	-.026
Uses new teaching approach	.116	.116	.244(**)	.062

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

^ Items related to Traits are marked with shading

Significant correlations have been found in items that are related to both traits and behaviour, indicating that students' background tends to have a significant impact on all aspects of students' preference. Also, the data tends to indicate that part-time students have a preference set that may be very different from that of full-time students.

The result of the study partly supports **Hypothesis 1: "Students' background has a significant correlation with their preference for the traits of the PTL"**. In terms of items related to *Traits* of the PTL, the *Study mode* of the students (full-time/part-time) shows a significant correlation with four of the twelve traits analysed in this study. *Year of Study* shows significant correlation between two trait items and *Level of programme* shows a significant correlation with one.

The result of the study also partially supports **Hypothesis 2: "Students' background has a significant correlation with their preference for the behaviour of the PTL"**. Again, the students' *Study mode* shows significant correlation with nine of the eighteen items analysed in this study. *Year of study* shows significant correlations with four behaviour items, whereas *Level of programmes* shows significant correlations with three items. The last background factor, *Gender*, shows significant correlations with only two behaviours items.

It is worth noting that the most significant correlation found in other background factors may be due to their strong correlation with the *full/part-time* factor. In the students' sample currently surveyed, part-time students are usually those who have more study experience and are enrolled in higher level (executive diploma or top up degree) programmes, so similar preferences are expected in those factors. Moreover, five items also show significant correlations with *full/part-time* and other background factors.

Correlation between factors is only one measurement of the distinctive pattern of the relationship between two elements. A lack of correlation should only be interpreted as there is no clear pattern, and not whether items are preferred or not preferred by students. Finally, the correlation only considers the traits and behaviours as being independent of each other. Other tools of analysis such as factor analysis should further reveal if latent relationships exist among the items.

Recommendations

Given that students' background has a strong impact on their preferences for the traits and behaviour of the PTL, it is vitally important for administrators of universities to assign teaching duties to lecturers by delicately and carefully matching students' background and the traits and behaviour of the lecturer. Students can be streamed into precise categories matching their learning expectations and needs, taking advantage of a motivating learning environment in which students of comparable background can form a learning cohort. For example, while PTL with *Higher academic qualifications* are preferred by students with more study experience, PTL with lower academic

qualifications are acceptable to students with lower learning experience. Similarly, while students from part-time courses prefer PTLs who have higher subject knowledge, more work experience, more teaching experience, and better presentation skills, full-time students are less concerned about these traits. In other words, preference for these "desirable" attributes are not universal, and self-financing institutes can make better use of their resources by hiring more appropriate PTLs that are adequate and appropriate for the students they teach.

With regard to PTLs meeting the needs of students who are heterogeneous in nature, it is suggested that PTLs modify their teaching as well as social behaviours according to the background of their students. PTLs should be given the latitude to teach and interact with their students in a flexible manner. Students' background which encompasses students' conceptions of knowledge, learning, and learning orientations are, in fact, broad constructs which evolve within different learning environments (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). Thus, PTLs are likely to be strained by the demands of various groups of students under their care as they are expected to demonstrate professional and personal qualities to boost student motivation. Hence, empowering the teaching faculty enables the practice of authentic professional judgements on academic demands and student sentiment, instead of narrowly engaging in what Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) describe as "emotional labouring". The fundamental merit to this emphasis would be that a PTL would be able to feel confident and comfortable in carrying out their teaching duties. More ideally, they should be provided with the option of teaching classes which are properly streamed and appropriately organised.

With regard to the learning experience, students given the opportunity to engage in learning activities under PTLs who demonstrate students' identified desirable traits show an improved motivation to learn. Therefore, instead of making general assumptions about student expectations and learning needs, institutions could focus more on understanding the diversity of students' background, as discussed and illustrated in the present research. Finally, it is recommended that institutions should foster longitudinal research on students' background in order to provide more effective support for both students and PTLs.

Corresponding author: Dr. Joseph W.C. Lau, Email: josephlau.star@gmail.com

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