Community college students' perceptions of excellent teachers

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Abstract

Extensive research studies have examined the characteristics of excellent teachers in the belief that teacher quality is the main contributor to excellent teaching.   In this study, the characteristics of an excellent teacher from the viewpoint of community college students are investigated.   Consideration is given to what constitutes the salient attributes and behaviours of an excellent community college teacher using a mixed method approach.   In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire similar to the Teacher Behaviours Checklist (TBC) developed by the Auburn team (Buskist et. al. 2002; Kirby et. al. 2018) was adopted to identify the noticeable attributes and behaviours of *excellent teachers* as perceived by 468 students (74.8% return rate) from a basic business management course of a community college in Hong Kong.   The results obtained from the quantitative phase were supported with data obtained from the qualitative phase, which involved face-to-face interviews with 18 recent graduates of the same community college. This study has found that there are very clear criteria for a community college teacher to be considered 'excellent', among which *knowledgeable about subject matter* and *Creative and Interesting* have both received high ratings.   The present study sheds light on pedagogy in community colleges with relevance to fresh instructors who are uncertain of how they should present themselves before their classes.

Keyword: Effective teachers; good teachers; student satisfaction; education quality; teacher-student interaction; student learning experiences

1. Introduction

"What makes a good teacher?" is a question that produces a proliferation of definitions.   Cruickshank and Haefele (2001), for example, summarised that "good teachers" were referred to as ideal, analytical, dutiful, competent, expert, reflective, satisfying, diversity-responsive and respected by various scholars. Meanwhile, the terms 'effective' (Devlin, 2010), 'excellent' (Eison, and Stephens, 1988), 'mastery' (Buskist et. al. 2002), 'quality' (Okpala and Ellis, 2005), 'successful' (Higgins and Hawthorne, 1994) and many others have also made up the montage of a "good teacher".   In this light, the present study will use the term *good teacher* generically to describe any teacher who demonstrate teaching ability beyond the merely 'ordinary'.

2. Literature Review

Probing further into the etymology of *good teacher*, various stakeholders have different definitions to offer: Educators and theorists, based on their experiences and philosophical analyses, prescribe what characteristics good teachers should have, and how they should behave.   Such characteristics of an ideal, better-than-ordinary teacher as prescribed by these theorists (Boice, 1996; Buskist et. al., 2002; Eble, 1983; Gill, 1998; Lowman, 1995; McKeachie, 1999) are often linked to areas including proper knowledge, personality or classroom management skills.   Other authors (Higgins and Hawthorne, 1994) argue that success in teaching results in strong teacher-student interaction, along with the effective transmission of course content.   Scholars like Bain (2004) and Korthagen (2004) focus more on environmental factors,

proposing that the best teachers should have the ability to create a suitable classroom environment wherein they can embed fascinating materials in assignments and activities to enhance student learning experiences.

In contrast, school administrators often judge teachers and their performance by their total contribution to the school. Their view of a good teacher is often identified and channelled through the regulations they promulgate, as observed in the criteria they use to recruit teaching staff, or to select teachers for teaching awards.   In other words, administrators are usually more concerned with smooth operation in school; their views tend to be conflated by non-teaching issues such as research, school administration (City University of Hong Kong, n.d.), and even community activities in some cases (Cheung, Cheng and Pang, 2008).   Such emphasis on total contribution is monistic and fails to cater to the diverse needs of student learning against the complex classroom settings observed in contemporary higher education.

A number of researchers have attempted to define *good teacher* by their contribution to students' learning outcomes. These researchers explore the correlation between objective test results of students and various traits of their teachers, such as 'personality' (Kember, Kwan and Ledesma, 2001), 'instruction style' (Deci, et. al. 1991; Reeve, 1996), 'caring for students' (Demmon-Berger, 1986; Roueche, et. al., 1986; Wubbels et. al., 1997), 'knowledge and instruction skills' (Porter and Brophy, 1988) and 'management skills' (Demmon-Berger, 1986).   Other researchers shift the focus onto the demographic data of teachers, thus, attributes like teaching experience, race, and study of teaching methods were all found to be important traits constituting a *good teacher* (Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Leigh, 2010).   While learning outcome forms a strand of the complex notion of student satisfaction, the demographic data is valuable because of its direct extraction from personnel files of institutions to allow for *good teachers* to be easily identified.

Literature reviews should provide a sense of the scope of these definitions, from the institutional worldview (total contribution) to a utilitarian sense of student satisfaction (learning outcome).   In this study, a pragmatic definition which links *good teacher* and student satisfaction is necessary. Given the fact that the essence of students' perceptions is expressed through the authentic "voices" of students (Batchelor, 2008; Lau, 2018), such a definition must be carefully constructed: it must be versatile in eliciting students' perceptions on the wide spectrum of student satisfaction, and clear enough so that participating students could respond without gleaning meaning from other sources.   Buskist et. al. (2002) used the term *effective teacher* and defined it as a "teacher from whom students had learned a great deal and who made the learning process enjoyable" (Keeley, Smith and Buskist, 2006: 84).   We shall incorporate this definition in the present study as it bridges the gap between *good teacher* and student satisfaction, and defines education quality in a way that tallies with Oesch's (2005) concept where students are the users of services who want to be both enlightened and entertained. Furthermore, the definition originally used by Buskist et. al. (2002)

should facilitate an easy comparison between the present study and other studies, given that the definition is generic. Hence, for the remainder of the present study, the term *effective teacher* will be adopted to describe the cohort of teachers who are better-than-ordinary while meeting the definition delineated by Buskist et. al. (2002).

What would affect the perception of community students should then become an interesting topic to explore. Whilst students are the key stakeholders of higher education (Lau, 2014), they are also the most important source of revenue for self-financing community colleges (Poon and Lau, 2014). When an institution's financial condition is highly dependent on student admission, the notion of quality or student satisfaction reflexively arises. Therefore, what characteristics should community college teachers possess in attempting to meet the demands of services marketing? Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994) have proposed that the nature of an interpersonal interaction between customers and contact employees is essential to determine whether customers consider service delivery satisfactory. Other studies (see Chebat and Kollias, 2000) have indicated that human interaction elements often affect satisfaction. Pieters, Botschen and Thelen (1998) stated that the extent to which customers achieve their satisfaction depends partly on the behaviours of the servicing employees. Hartline and Ferrell (1996) further suggested that behaviours and attitudes of customers determine customers' perceptions of service quality. Therefore, with the salience of teacher-student interaction and teachers' behaviour being the premise, the purpose of the present study is twofold: First, to identify the attributes of teachers that are perceived to be important by community college students, and second, to identify the important behaviours of teachers as perceived by community college students. Thus, the two research questions steering the present study are:

- Research question 1 (RQ1): From the community college students' perspective, what are the attributes of effective community college teachers?

- Research question 2 (RQ2): From the community college students' perspective, what are the behaviours of effective community college teachers?

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study. In the quantitative phase, a survey was used to investigate the attributes and behaviours of the type of teacher that is perceived to be effective by students. A questionnaire, similar to the Teacher Behaviours Checklist (TBC) developed by the Auburn team (Buskist et. al. 2002; Schaeffer et. al. 2003; Keeley, 2006; Kirby et. al. 2018), was used to collect data from students.

The TBC defines effective teachers as teachers from whom students have learned a great deal, and who make the learning process enjoyable.   There are twenty-eight statements in the original TBC describing various characteristics and corresponding behaviours of college teachers.   In the current study, participants were asked to select the top 10 characteristics that were most important for a community college teacher to possess in order to be considered effective.

A convenient sampling was used for the purpose of this study: 626 students from three introductory management classes taught by one of the researchers were invited to complete the survey.   468 students (74.8%) completed and returned usable questionnaires.   The students surveyed were comprised mostly of first year students of a two-year Associate Degree (AD) programme offered by a community college in Hong Kong (the College).   The programmes of their studies were mostly business-related, including accounting, financing, management, and logistics.

Qualitative data was collected by face-to-face semi-structured interviews.   Both individual and small group in-depth interviews were used in this study.   Using snowball sampling techniques, 18 recent graduates from the same community college were invited to participate. These graduates had never attended class handled by the researchers and were not part of the 468 surveyed students. For the sake of impartiality and accountability, any students still studying in the College were not interviewed.

3.2 Data Analysis

In the quantitative phase, the questionnaires accepted were coded and the data obtained then compiled in a spreadsheet.   Data related to personal backgrounds (gender, year of study, programme of study) of the surveyed students was also collected from the Personal Data section, Section B, of the questionnaire.   Using the descriptive statistical tools of SPSS 15, data related to characteristics of effective community college teachers was extracted and tabulated.

In the qualitative phase, interview data was analysed using the qualitative data analysis technique of thematic analysis (TA).   All recordings of the interviews were transcribed and then analysed for theme.

4.   Findings

4.1 Characteristics of effective community college teachers

Research question 1 (RQ1) concerns students' perspective of the characteristics of effective community college teachers.   The ranking of the items selected by each student as the top ten most important characteristics of effective teachers is shown in Figure 1 below.   Out of the twenty-eight items, the top 10 items were selected by at least 40% of the students surveyed.   The following discussion will focus only on

the ten most important items so as to highlight the more relevant points and to simplify the discussion. Focusing solely on the most important items was also the approach adopted by other researchers of other TBC related studies (see, for example, Buskist et. al. 2002; Buskist & Keeley, 2018; Schaeffer et. el., 2003). Following this approach leads to a more reliable comparison of this study with other researchers' findings.
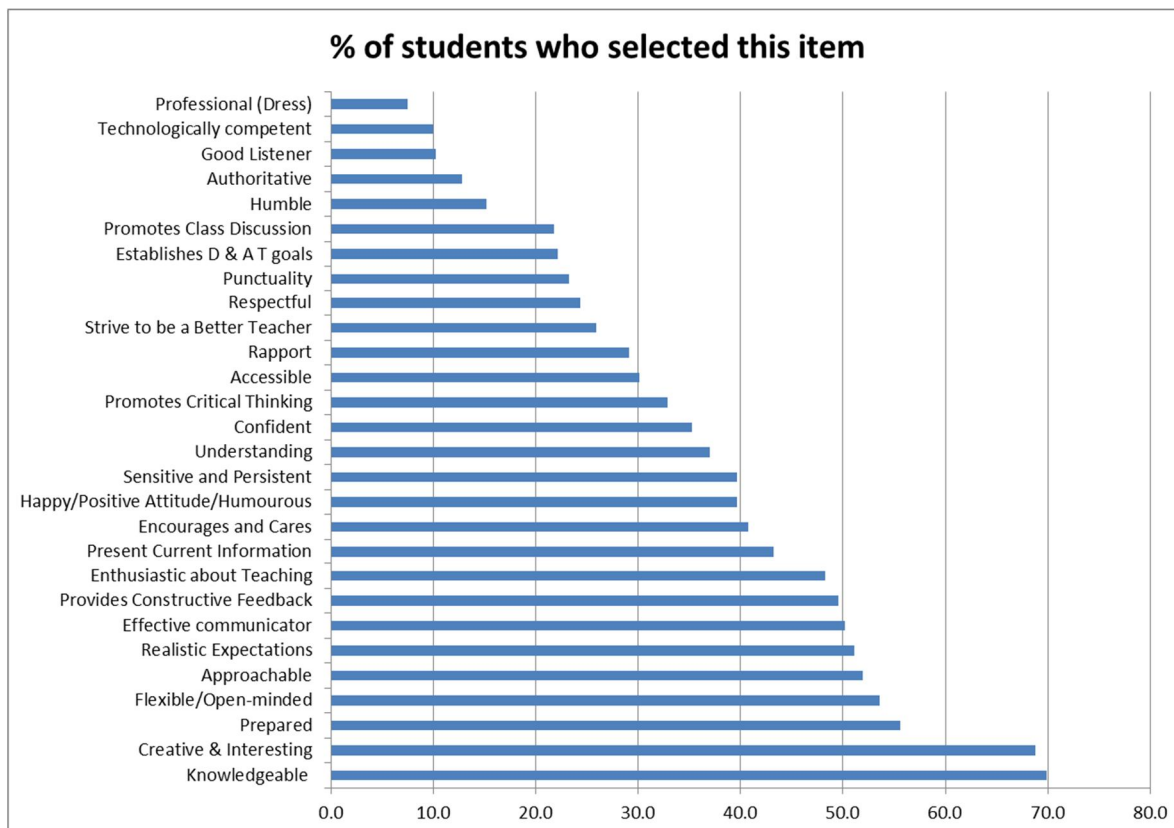

Figure 1: Items ranked by percentage of students who selected particular items

For an easy reference, a summary showing only the top 10 items selected by the surveyed students is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Items selected by the surveyed students

Rank	Items	Selected by % of students
1	Knowledgeable about Subject Matter	69.9
2	Creative and Interesting	68.8
3	Prepared	55.6
4	Flexible/Open-Minded	53.6
5	Approachable/Personable	51.9

6	Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair testing and Grading	51.1
7	Effective Communicator	50.2
8	Provides Constructive Feedback	49.6
9	Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic	48.3
10	Present Current Information	43.2
* Shaded items are related to *attributes* of teachers		

Of the top 10 ranking items, three of the items: *Knowledgeable about Subject Matter*, *Effective Communicator*, and *Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic* are related to attributes of the teachers. Seven of the top 10 ranking items: *Creative and Interesting*, *Prepared*, *Flexible/Open-minded*, *Approachable/Personable*, *Realistic Expectations*, *Provides Constructive Feedback* and *Present Current Information* are related to the teachers' behaviours.

4.2 Attributes of effective teachers

The top 3 ranking items related to attributes of effective teachers, *Knowledgeable about Subject Matter*, *Effective Communicator* and *Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic* are related to attributes of the teachers – that is, the characteristics of the teacher. As shown in Table 2, these items were considered very important by approximately 50% of the surveyed students.

Table 2: Top ranking items related to attributes of effective teachers

Rank	Items	Selected by % of students
1	Knowledgeable about Subject Matter	69.9
7	Effective Communicator	50.2
9	Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic	48.3

Knowledgeable about Subject Matter. *Knowledgeable about Subject Matter* was the most popular item, and it was selected by almost 70 percent (69.9%) of the students surveyed. When these 18 interviewed graduates were asked to explain why they selected this item, a typical explanation was given by Henry (not the student's real name; all interviewee names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality): teachers should be *Knowledgeable about Subject Matter* in order to:

1. Increase the efficiency of teaching (i.e., does not "waste time" in checking reference);
2. Improve the effectiveness of teaching (i.e., be able to explain to students some points that were "not explained clearly by the textbook");
3. Maintain the reputation of the teacher (i.e., be able to handle "challenges") and

4. Maintain students' confidence towards the teacher (i.e., no "confidence crisis").

As for what constitutes *Knowledgeable*, students in the interviews gave various definitions.   Henry simply defined *knowledgeable* as not needing to "check many references before he can answer a question", whilst two students, Barbara and Carol had varying expectations that resulted in one student's acceptance of a teacher who "occasionally failed to answer difficult questions from students", and the other's belief that the teacher should be able to "tell me something that is not included in the textbook" due to their level of content comprehension and experience.

However, the student did not expect the teacher to develop original ideas or research on the subject, as long as the teacher could provide them with additional information outside their assigned textbook.   Students expected this kind of teacher to process or interpret the textbook knowledge and then deliver it to the students, illuminating and elucidating accordingly.   The students would be more likely to trust this teacher because he fits the image of a 'scholarly person', thus encouraging more faith in what he says.

Teachers having practical knowledge or working experience related to the subject could also be considered *Knowledgeable about Subject Matter*.   Carol considered this to be a bonus because the teacher could teach students something that would not be found in their textbooks.   However, this was not considered to be a requirement as the student understands that "no one can have practical experience in all areas.".

Effective Communicator. Half (50.2%) of the surveyed students selected being an *Effective Communicator* as an important attribute of effective teachers.   The significance of this item needs special elaboration.   In Hong Kong, whilst English is the official medium of instruction in tertiary institutions (Walters and Balla, 1998), it is often a second or third language for the majority of students and teachers, resulting in many students experiencing difficulties when studying content subjects through English (Evans and Green, 2006). Hence, the ability to communicate effectively in English can be a very important issue for both teachers and students.

However, the language ability of teachers was just part of the problem.   In AD programmes, where the minimum student admission requirement is a Pass in the English Language subject in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, the language ability of students is often an even bigger problem. Grace admitted frankly:

> "If you use some more difficult terms or complex sentences, then basically, I cannot understand… If you use some simple English, then I understand everything."

As such, the weaker language ability of both teachers and students may seriously affect the learning process. Richard, another interviewee, summarised the situation like this:

"If the teacher himself is not a very good communicator, he can transfer only 70% of his knowledge to students, and if students can receive only part of those messages, then what students eventually get can be very little."

Other interviewees tended to focus more on the 'efficiency' of teaching, perceiving teachers who needed less teaching time to be *Effective Communicators*. For example, Barbara described an *Effective Communicator* as someone who could "explain something in five minutes instead of 15 minutes" and "use simple examples to illustrate what he wants to teach."

Interestingly, not all students placed the same emphasis on this item. In explaining why he did not select this item, Henry reported that he felt a more independent student may consider communication skills of the teacher as unimportant:

"Tertiary education, to a certain extent, is a kind of self-learning … Actually, you don't spend much time on class learning … you spend a lot more time on self-studying, preparing for class, doing your homework, or working on your project … how the teacher talks is not that important."

Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic. Almost half (48.3%) of the surveyed students selected being *Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic* as being one of the most important characteristics of an effective teacher. Interviewed students generally agreed that a teacher should be *enthusiastic about teaching*. Barbara perceived that such a teacher would prepare adequately for the lecture, but a teacher who was *not* enthusiastic about teaching would treat it as just a way to earn a living and would not do a good job. Barbara also explained that a teacher who is enthusiastic can motivate students to learn, whereas teachers who are not enthusiastic may actually demotivate students:

"I really like some teachers, they really teach me well and they make an effort to prepare for the lecture, and they try very hard to teach. As a student, I feel my duty is to learn. But if the teacher just fools around, I would feel reading teaching materials myself is better than listening to his lecture, and then I would skip class."

Surprisingly, being enthusiastic about *the topic* is a completely different issue. Grace explained why being 'too enthusiastic' about a topic can be considered a negative:

"A teacher who is too enthusiastic about a topic will give a lot of teaching notes to students … how can I find time to read all those additional reading materials? … I would like my teacher to tell me that what are important, and I can focus on those materials, then I solely study them for my examination … if I feel that my teacher is too enthusiastic about a topic, I will be scared … if the teacher is too enthusiastic about one topic, he may become misfocused."

In other words, teachers who were enthusiastic about *teaching* are welcome as they can motivate students and improve their grades.   However, teachers who were too enthusiastic about *the topic* might become unfocused, waste the time of the students, and hence rejected by students who were very examination-focused.

A closer look at the first three items revealed that a contingency (or situational) approach should be adopted when investigating students' perceptions of an effective teacher, because different students have different emphasis in their perceptions about effective teachers.   While 70% of the surveyed students expected that an effective teacher should be knowledgeable, what they actually expected from their teachers varied greatly. Specifically, whilst a number of students was tolerant of a more basic level of *Knowledgeable* (allowing their teacher the time to answer questions after checking a few references, or being able to interpret the difficult parts of the textbooks), other students expected a more advanced level of knowing more than what can be found in the textbooks, or even knowing enough to consolidate the materials from more than a few textbooks.

Likewise, different students also have different expectations for an *Effective Communicator.*   Weaker students would be more inclined to expect their teachers to use simple English and interpret the fundamental teaching materials for them.   Stronger students, however, would expect their teachers to speak fluent English, and be effective in presenting ideas and concepts.   Lastly, more independent students would consider themselves to be self-learners and they were less concerned with the communication skills of the teachers.   These phenomena further reinforce the notion that the contingency approach should be adopted when it comes to analyzing perceptions of students in terms of effective teachers.

4.3 Behaviours of effective teachers

Seven of the top 10 ranking items: *Creative and Interesting*, *Prepared*, *Flexible/Open-Minded*, *Approachable/Personable*, *Realistic Expectations*, *Provides Constructive Feedback* and *Present Current Information* are related to the teachers' behaviours.   Table 3 shows the percentage of students who selected these items as the top 7 behaviours of effective teachers.

Table 3: Top ranking items related to behaviours of effective teachers

Rank	Items	Selected by % of students
2	Creative and Interesting	68.8
3	Prepared	55.6
4	Flexible/Open-Minded	53.6
5	Approachable/Personable	51.9
6	Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading	51.1
8	Provides Constructive Feedback	49.6
10	Present Current Information	43.2

Creative and Interesting. This is the second highest ranking item, and it was selected by almost 70 percent (68.8%) of the students surveyed.   Students prefer teachers who are *Creative and Interesting* for various reasons.   A Logistic Management student, Mary, simply explained:

"Being creative and interesting are important … if you just talk … everyone will fall asleep … if you tell jokes or use some realistic examples … then students can remember teaching materials better."

What Mary said was echoed by Henry:

"I believe every student wants to learn while listening to something interesting. If the teaching materials are interesting, they can help students to remember them better, or to develop a deeper impression … this makes students easier to remember and understand those teaching materials."

Using interesting, relevant, and personalised examples is a very popular way to make the class interesting. Mary explained:

"In my statistics class, the teacher said that football gambling is actually based on probability … some boys in my class actually bet on football games, and (this example) makes them understand his teaching better."

Interesting examples and anecdotes have the added benefit of attracting the students to the class, as students might "treat it as an infotainment show."   However, examination-focused students were concerned that *Creative and Interesting* teachers should ensure that they did not give so many examples that they ignore the core materials (that is, the 'theories' or 'knowledge') that are required for an examination.   Also, the relevance of examples is very important. As Henry pointed out:

"However, if it is solely interesting but not relevant to subject knowledge, then it may confuse students, and they will focus on interesting matters, and ignore the subject knowledge … so it has to be a happy medium."

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Prepared. More than half (55.6%) of the surveyed students selected being *Prepared* for the class as an important behaviour of effective teachers. A Marketing student, Henry, believed that being *prepared* can help a teacher to look as if he was *knowledgeable*:

> "Actually, even if the teacher does not really know the teaching materials, it may still sound like he knows those materials quite well if he had prepared well for the class before."

Another student, Jenny, supported the idea, and said a prepared teacher can make the class more interesting:

> "If he is prepared, he can make the class more interesting … (he can) use some different methods to teach, not solely monologue-type lecturing… or show us some examples from newspapers or video clips."

Flexible/Open-minded. More than half of the surveyed students (53.6%) selected being *Flexible/Open-Minded* as an important behaviour of effective teachers. Some students considered being flexible and open-minded simply as accepting students' point of view. Students appreciate teachers who demonstrate acceptance of their viewpoints and they can enjoy the class more. Barbara pointed out that "if the students feel that the teacher has listened to them, it may raise their interests for the subject."

However, being *flexible* can also be interpreted as trying their best to meet the needs of students, such as agreeing to meet students outside the regular office hours. Hong Kong students tend to deemphasise this requirement. Barbara explained:

> "Teacher is also a job, even if students had paid their tuition fees, it is still not reasonable to ask the teacher to meet outside their regular office hours. It will be very nice if the teacher can offer that, but I do not think it should be a must."

Approachable/Personable. Slightly more than half of the surveyed students (51.9%) selected being *Approachable/Personable* as an important behaviour. Interestingly, male and female students tend to have very different opinions regarding this item: male students were more concerned about the attitude of the teacher. Oscar described this situation:

> "Even if the teacher has consultation hours, if he is not an approachable person, you will not approach him. If you take his class, you are required to listen to him. But if you have some questions after the lecture … and if he is not approachable… you dare not ask him (questions) … then it may affect the learning process."

In other words, an unapproachable teacher can scare away students. Students can be so frightened that they would rather leave their questions unanswered than asking the teacher for help. Another male student, Fred,

echoed Oscar's description:

> "If he is a good lecturer, you will treat him as a friend … but if you are like wearing a scowl, or carrying a superior air … students dare not approach you.   So even if they have some questions … they are afraid that you may think those questions are too basic, and they will not ask them … then they will have many unanswered questions, and they will be really confused."

In other words, male students were fearful of being 'humiliated or belittled' when the questions they asked were perceived by their unapproachable teacher to be stupid questions.   Unless the teachers show their friendliness first, male students would prefer to "waste their time" and search for an answer from another source rather than taking a risk of approaching the teacher for help and be considered as stupid.   Saving 'face' (Hu, 1944) was the main concern of these male students.

On the other hand, female students who were interviewed tended to be less concerned about saving 'face', and more concerned with the results of their learning process.   Nancy explained:

> "If the teacher is very kind, then I would consider this as his advantage of being a good teacher, but it may not actually make the class more enjoyable … After all, I think the teaching quality in class depends more on whether there are any interactions between the teacher and students … but that is possible even if the teacher is not approachable."

Another female student, Debby, expressed it in a different way:

> "However, when you have a problem, you will not avoid asking the teacher questions simply because the teacher may be unfriendly … you will still ask him if you feel that he can really help you … your future is at stake … if you don't ask and then you get a low score in an examination, you will be making a fool out of yourself."

Drawing a definite conclusion from this very small group of interviewees may not be convincing, but the limited data from this section may also suggest that male and female students have very different perceptions about their teachers.

Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading. Slightly more than half (51.1%) of the surveyed students selected this item.   From the teacher's point of view, *expectations* refers to how much effort the students need to put in to the course in order to get a passing grade.   Students, on the other hand, are more concerned about whether their teachers have *realistic* expectations for the students' workload and the difficulty of an examination.   Nancy explained why teachers should have realistic expectations on their assignments:

"Actually, this is required, but it depends on what subject it is. For some subjects, you (the students) are assigned too many readings for an assignment … I like to understand those materials too, but it is clearly impossible to read all of them."

Students also desired for a teacher to have realistic expectations for the difficulty of the subject. As explained by Henry:

"If a student's ability to get only a C grade, and you expect him to get a B which is not very realistic … this is not going to help the student, there may even be some negative impacts, you should teach students according to their abilities to learn."

Provides Constructive Feedback. Almost half (49.6%) of the surveyed students selected *Provides Constructive Feedback* as one of the most important items. Some students were really concerned about the feedback given by the teacher. Debby explained that feedback was important because "it identified the ways through which students can improve."

Nancy agreed that feedback was very important for students, and suggested that feedback can identify mistakes and avoid future errors:

"Because we need to improve, we don't know about our weaknesses and we need to consider those comments and understand where we had failed, and we hope we can make improvement next."

However, if feedback was really that important, why would some students never come back and collect their graded assignments from their teachers? Elaine suggested that students' own *learning attitudes* could be key:

"It all depends on students… some students are simply looking for a pass in their subject, some may be looking for a high score … those who are looking for a high score may want to read more in details … those who are looking for a pass will not care too much about it as long as they get a pass … it really depends on students and how they think".

Other than students' learning attitudes, students' *level of performance* can also affect how students react to the feedback. Amy suggested that students tended to be selective, and they paid more attention to the feedback when the score was low:

"Feedback to me is most important when I get a low score … if I get a high score, that means I have met the teacher's requirements … even if there has been feedback and it cannot be very helpful … I am not going to change much (with regard to those comments) … but I react a lot stronger to a low score, and I read those (feedback) with a low score very carefully".

To conclude, students may take a pragmatic approach: only feedback that can help them improve their grades is important, whereas feedback that does not make a discernible contribution is ignored.

Present Current Information. *Present Current Information* was the least popular item among the top 10 ranked items, but it was still selected by 43.2% of the surveyed students. Students have different opinions on whether current information was important. In general, students simply treated *Present Current Information* as teaching with real-life examples, which can raise students' interest. Students would focus more on the teaching results, and did not worry too much about whether the teaching materials or the information was current. Barbara was one of these students:

> "(Presenting current information is not really important) unless he was teaching information technology, but for other subjects, you don't really need new materials, unless those new materials can make you understand the subject better … But if the teacher can use a conventional example and also teach you well, then it is O.K."

However, other students had different views. Nancy had a more holistic view, and considered current information to be anything that is "new or updated", with teachers being responsible for providing *updated* information:

> "This is because the subject we take, and our subject (Social Work) is directly related to the society, and society keeps changing … some outdated teaching materials may not be useful/true anymore … but if the lecturer can tell us the most updated information, and then we can search for a little more, then it will be perfect."

Students were not looking for cutting-edge *research* results, with the general impression being that such content may be too difficult for students to understand. As Amy explained:

> "What worries me is that they may be too difficult for me, some research reports can only be understood by the teacher and students cannot understand them … then it just makes them fall asleep."

Hence, students prefer current materials only when the information can raise their interest in the subject, which can in turn help them to understand better, or keep them up to date. Otherwise, they would not care too much about it.

The seven behaviour-related items above were predominantly associated with classroom teaching activities, indicating that students were really concerned about what happens inside the classroom: teachers who were *Creative and Interesting* could make the class materials easier to understand and remember. It also attracted the students to the classroom and encouraged them to participate in the learning process. A *Prepared*

teacher was more impressive to the students — if the teacher could prepare more examples, it would make studying easier.   A teacher who was *Flexible/Open-Minded* could, on the other hand, improve the communication between teacher and students, and improve students' learning experiences.

Also, an *Approachable/Personable* teacher can improve the teacher-student relationship and create a friendlier learning environment.   As for *Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading*, it was only natural that students preferred a teacher who would teach at an appropriate level for the majority of students in the class, and not overload students with unnecessary reading.   A teacher who *Provides Constructive Feedback* would be welcomed by students if they perceived that this feedback would help them improve their grades.   Lastly, students in professional subjects would need teachers who could *Present Current Information* like updated legal requirements or current industrial practices as that could make them more valuable employees when they begin their career later.

5.   Discussion and Recommendations

Pertaining to research question 1 (RQ1), three of the top-ranking items selected by students were related to attributes of teachers, and they consisted of *Knowledgeable about Subject Matter*, *Effective Communicator* and *Enthusiastic about Teaching and about Topic.*   With regard to the behaviours of teachers, *Creative and Interesting*, *Prepared*, *Flexible/Open-minded*, *Approachable/Personable*, *Realistic Expectations*, *Provides Constructive Feedback* and *Present Current Information* were seven of the top ten ranking items that are perceived to be important for an effective teacher.

Comparing the main themes identified in a related study by the researchers (Poon and Lau, 2017a), five of these seven behaviours (*Creative and Interesting*, *Prepared*, *Realistic Expectations*, *Provides Constructive Feedback* and *Present Current Information)* were indeed related to *knowledge skills*, indicating that teachers with an ability to deliver content in an acceptable way are treasured by community college students.   This suggests that most community college students have a high *reliance* on their teachers.   Instead of seeing a teacher as an *Inspirer* or *Pathfinder,* students need a *Prescriber* who can assign, prepare and deliver the teaching materials to them.   The other two behaviours (*Flexible/Open-minded*, *Approachable/Personable)* are related to *human skills*, reflecting the desire of students for a teacher who is friendly, and does not cause emotional harm – someone they can trust.   This corresponds to Poon and Lau's (2017b) study that teachers having good human skills can effectively create a better student-teacher relationship, wherein student self-esteem is fostered along with trust in the relationship.

Pertaining to research question 2 (RQ2), the result of the present paper has been compared with a TBC based study from the United States, and the results of this current study in general concur with the findings of the

study by Schaeffer et. al. (2003) which was based on U.S. community college students. The only significant difference is on *Respectful*, which reflects the differences in the backgrounds and national cultures of the two student groups. This suggests that higher education management needs to acknowledge the diversified needs and expectations of students against students' multiple cultural backgrounds; where pedagogy is concerned, or strategies of teaching and learning within a greater extent, there should not be a homogeneous assumption of students' identity (Lau, 2018).

The present research has expounded on the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about the subject because this ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of their teaching. Knowledgeable teachers enjoy a better reputation, and earn confidence from students, which in turn can improve their human skills. Teachers should be good communicators as they need to clearly deliver information to students (a knowledge skill) in a way that is both interesting and comprehensible to students (a technical skill). Surprisingly, some of the attributes that are considered important by other stakeholders are deemphasized by students. For example, *Technology Competent,* which is a factor that educators and administrators often see as the basic requirement of a modern teacher, was ranked 27, the second last item on the list. This study has found that there are very clear criteria for a community college teacher to be considered 'excellent', and could serve as some guidance for instructors uncertain of how they should present themselves before their classes.

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