

## Title

Are Students Customers? Tourism and Hospitality Students' Evaluation of Their Higher Education Experience

## Abstract

Research has suggested that higher education students assume multiple roles during their studies. Moreover, the student-as-customer model has been discussed for years and needs more in-depth discussions than other roles. Few studies have investigated education experiences from this perspective. This research contains two studies. Study one investigates faculty members' perceptions on students' roles in higher education and found students should not be considered purely as customers. Other roles were found. Study two investigates students' perception of their roles in university education and how the education experiences influence their satisfaction toward university choice. A majority of the students see themselves as the "recipient of knowledge". The six dimensions of higher education experience include "student-centred service" (SCS), "diversity and global citizenship" (DGC), "co-production of learning experience" (CLE), "reliance on teachers" (ROT), "responsibility" (RES), and "whole person development" (WPL). SCS, DGC, ROT and WPL were found to have significant impact on student satisfaction.

## Authors

Jing (Bill) Xu<sup>a</sup>

School of Professional Education and Executive Development, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

TEL: +852 3746 0083

EMAIL: [spbill@speed-polyu.edu.hk](mailto:spbill@speed-polyu.edu.hk)

<sup>a</sup> Correspondence author

Ada Lo

School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

TEL: +852 3400 2237

EMAIL: [ada.lo@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:ada.lo@polyu.edu.hk)

Joey Wu

School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

TEL: +852 3400 2255

EMAIL: [joey.wu@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:joey.wu@polyu.edu.hk)

**Keywords:** Students, roles, tourism and hospitality, higher education, Hong Kong

## Funding agency

This work was supported by the College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, under Grant SP-CHTM-2015-90(E)

**Title**

Are Students Customers? Tourism and Hospitality Students' Evaluation of Their Higher Education Experience

**Abstract**

Research has suggested that higher education students assume multiple roles during their studies. Moreover, the student-as-customer model has been discussed for years and needs more in-depth discussions than other roles. Few studies have investigated education experiences from this perspective. This research contains two studies. Study one investigates faculty members' perceptions on students' roles in higher education and found students should not be considered purely as customers. Other roles were found. Study two investigates students' perception of their roles in university education and how the education experiences influence their satisfaction toward university choice. A majority of the students see themselves as the "recipient of knowledge". The six dimensions of higher education experience include "student-centred service" (SCS), "diversity and global citizenship" (DGC), "co-production of learning experience" (CLE), "reliance on teachers" (ROT), "responsibility" (RES), and "whole person development" (WPL). SCS, DGC, ROT and WPL were found to have significant impact on student satisfaction.

**Keywords**

Students, roles, tourism and hospitality, higher education, Hong Kong

## Introduction

Customers make choices about which products or services they buy or use. In the experience economy, customers are no longer passive recipients of services. Customers seek variety and customizations and are looking for experiences and outcomes they desire (McColl-Kennedy, Cheung, & Ferrier, 2015). They are also searching for compelling experiences that involve them emotionally, physically, and intellectually (Walls, 2013). Service providers exert considerable efforts in retaining customers not only by offering the services but also by creating experiences with both utilitarian and hedonic components (Sandstrom, Edvardsson, Kristensson, & Magnusson, 2008). The higher education sector noticeably shares similarities with the service industry, whereby students consider themselves as paying customers and the institutions as the service providers (Ng & Forbes, 2009). When selecting university programmes, besides tuition fees and cost of living, students collectively look at the reputation of the school and the programme, opportunities for industry placement, programme structure and curriculum, class size, and opportunities to interact with faculty members (Goh, Nguyen, & Law, 2017).

Universities have attempted to create a holistic and value-laden experience for the students through the careful design of curriculum to facilitate the delivery of conceptual knowledge and the acquisition of practical skills (Dredge, Benckendorff, Day, Gross, Walo, Weeks, & Whitelaw, 2012). Administrators and faculties need to understand what will appeal to the students and at the same time fulfil the goals of the education institutions. Private or tuition-based universities are particularly under pressure to meet their budget so they must find innovative ways to recruit and retain students. Therefore, the student-as-customer model has been at the forefront in the contemporary era (Kreuter (2014). In line with this model, certain characteristics and symptoms appear to be dominant, such as “slick advertising,” “easy credit,” “universities [turned] into brands,” “universities’ growth for growth’s sake” and “higher education being vocationalised” (Kreuter, 2014). In fact, today, many students were found to raise their expectations and complaints more directly either at the commencement of their studies or toward the end, through various channels. Many faculties or schools choose to handle these voices and comments in order to “improve” their “education service” provisions that can fit students’ needs.

From the long-term perspective, the negative consequences of this educational model have been evident (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Kreuter, 2014; Muncy, 2008; Nguyen & Rosetti, 2013). Many students may not be aware of their long-term needs whilst receiving educational services (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Hence, they may fail to recognize the importance of the values, learning attitude, persistence, and team spirit that are being shaped during their university years for their career and the later stage in their lives.

Opponents of this model asserted that the educational process cannot be regarded simply as a commercial transaction similar to a business-like service industry (Rolfe, 2002). Students who cannot achieve the qualification standards may have to pay for tuition again to retake the failed courses and successfully graduate (Sharrock, 2000). Thus, in the context of higher education, students are not mere customers (Sharrock, 2000). They are simultaneously considered as the institutions’ products (Muncy, 2008; Obermiller, Fleenor, & Raven, 2005), partners/co-producers (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Mark, 2013), or aspirants (Khalifa, 2009). Universities are accountable for “producing” qualified manpower for the job market and well-rounded talents for the society. Students, in return, are responsible for “assisting” and “co-creating” values in enhancing the quality of the

educational process. Students play multiple roles in the process of attaining higher education. The needs, expectations, and experience vary depending on the role they assume. Failure to deliver experience that meets the role expectations creates dissatisfaction (Kotler et al., 2016).

Hospitality and tourism educators see the importance of seeking input from students and other stakeholders in designing their curriculum (Dredge et al., 2012) and graduate outcomes (Gross, Benckendorff, Mair, & Whitelaw, 2017). Based on the multiple-role model, how the experiences of the students in higher education affect their satisfaction of the university choice requires further attention. Universities and relevant programmes may consider putting efforts selectively in enhancing the student experiences on the basis of role fulfilment. Few studies have documented the different approaches/models in research on service quality in higher education, educational experience, and student learning processes (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Nguyen & Rosetti, 2013). Limited attempts have been made to ensure an effective and comprehensive conglomeration of information based on the understanding that students play multiple roles in their higher education experience. The tourism and hospitality higher education sector is no exception. Studies on student's roles and experience are expected to generate academic and pragmatic values to hospitality and tourism educators. In the current study, the student experience was defined to equalize the fulfilment of student multiple roles. Therefore, the current study aims to fill the knowledge gaps through the following research objectives:

- 1) Investigate the possible roles which hospitality and tourism students assume in their university education; and
- 2) Examine the different dimensions of hospitality and tourism higher education experience; and
- 3) Investigate students' assessment of their higher education experience and its impact on their satisfaction in their choice of university.

## **Literature review**

### ***Higher education institutions as service providers***

Previous studies have long considered higher educational institutions as service providers (Gruber, Reppel, & Voss, 2010; Muncy, 2008; Ng & Forbes, 2009). Browne, Kaldenberg, Browne and Brown (1998) precisely expressed that students are customers and their perceived institutional quality and satisfaction are important. They adapted the SERVQUAL instrument to explore institutional service quality and measured student satisfaction in three dimensions: global satisfaction, satisfaction with value, and willingness to recommend. A number of researchers have concurred with the enhanced SERVQUAL instrument to measure service quality in higher education (Cheng, Tsai, & Lin, 2016; Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011; Li & Kaye, 1998; Tan & Kek, 2004). Additionally, Joseph and Joseph (1998) evaluated whether the quality of service offered by higher education institutions were acceptable by employers of the graduates. The service measured was configured to include "programme issues," "academic reputation," "physical aspects/cost," "career opportunities," "location" and "time". Oldfield and Baron (2000) asserted that some institutional services are essential to students ("requisite") and some are utilitarian in nature ("functional") whilst others are mostly desirable ("acceptable"). For example, students may wish to have personal contact with an individual or have the attention of professors. Kwan and Ng (1999) studied higher education in Hong Kong and Mainland China by supplementing service quality factors with the opportunity of advice services, social activities

and student communication with universities. Khodayari and Khodayari (2011) quoted several academics, indicating that “if students cannot be seen as ‘customers’, the measurement of service quality, with the intention of improving the service experience, is wholly inappropriate (p.42).”

### ***Students as “customers” and other roles in higher education***

A thread of discussions in literature over the past few years on whether universities should take the customer orientation approach or the product approach. The former approach ascribes to the perspective of a well-established viewpoint that educational institutions provide a service and their students, as paying customers, have needs and wants to fulfil when receiving that service. Athay (2002) implied that students see college as “a means to making money” (p.7) in the future. Obermiller, et al. (2005) defined this approach based upon the premise that the university’s goal is to satisfy customers in the design of its courses and services. In contrast, the latter approach emphasizes that the goal of a university to generate students (as products) who have relevant academic and professional knowledge and know-how (Muncy, 2008; Obermiller et al., 2005) through the process of education. López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla (2014) developed a model which includes the building of both generic and specific competences in tourism higher education. This holistic competence model integrated knowledge, skills and attitudes that universities expect their students to eventually attain.

Obermiller et al. (2005) found differences between students and universities in terms of their perceptions and preferences toward the two alternative approaches. Students tend to prefer the customer orientation approach whilst the faculty or professors are more in favour of the product orientation approach (Obermiller et al., 2005). The adoption of customer orientation approach in higher education has been acknowledged to generate negative consequences (Nguyen & Rosetti, 2013), the existence of this approach has been argued to be attributed to the ideological gap (Ng & Forbes, 2009; Nguyen & Rosetti, 2013) that students may be short-sighted and tend to seek immediate pleasure and fun in their learning process. University administrators and faculties may also consider their educators’ long-term interests other than the short-term outcomes and student satisfaction. Nguyen and Rosetti (2013) adopted the societal marketing concept to fill the information gap and confirmed that despite students preferring to be pleased in their learning process, they also accept that learning is challenging. Findings from their research on the motivation of the students in their selection of educational models varied according to their focus on either short- or long-term oriented interests of the students and their education providers.

Mark (2013, p.2) criticized the adoption of a single student-customer model in higher education and opposed the traditional business-oriented notions that the “customer is always right” and “[there is always a need for] pandering to the short-term demands of students.” However, many students undeniably tend to be pleased and have fun while attending the university (Nguyen & Rosetti, 2013), and would be satisfied with easy courses and lenient lecturers. Mark (2013) asserted that many students have a clear sense of quality education and learning outcomes that may be perceived as more helpful in the later stages of their life, and thus resent being pampered. In practice, students may have both short- and long-term expectations of universities and may possibly interpret themselves as “customers” at different levels.

Clayson and Haley (2005) argued that students are stakeholders and partners of the university, thus taking the relationship marketing perspective. Through the use of this

partnership paradigm, students can be engaged more fully in their experiential learning and can also provide advice and evaluation feedback to their faculty. The evaluation of this paradigm has been considered to include not only the students' evaluation of their teachers but also "student outcomes assessment and regular feedback from parents, alumni, and industry" (p. 8). Ng and Forbes (2009) proposed the contribution of education to the service logic and quality of experiences. According to their line of thinking, students co-create the learning value and educational experiences that result in satisfaction with the faculties or universities. Their research shares a similar standpoint with that of Clayson and Haley (2005) because students are argued to play two roles in co-creation process of value and experience: "as a productive resource and as a contributor to quality, satisfaction and value" (p. 48).

Similarly, embedded in Elliot's (2002) propositions, students desire to play different roles throughout their learning process. They have basic expectations as customers; can provide feedback and contribute to the educational process as partners; seek quality education and personal growth to better prepare them for their future career and thus view themselves as university products within society.

Higher education has made efforts to define students by using metaphors. These metaphors are translated into the different roles expected from students in their higher education experiences. The most commonly identified ones are "student-as-customer" (Hoffman & Kretovics, 2004; Khalifa, 2009), "student-as-product" (Hoffman & Kretovics, 2004; Khalifa, 2009), "student-as-manager," (Nordensvard, 2011), "student-as employee" (Hoffman & Kretovics, 2004; Khalifa, 2009). Khalifa (2009) further added "student-as-partner," "student-as-client," "student-as-co-producer," and "student-as-aspirant," as possible roles. Khalifa (2009) and Nordensvard (2011) both agree that it is appropriate to see students as "citizen". As suggested by researchers in customers' role in service delivery, these roles are not mutually exclusive. Customers have vital roles to play in creating the service outcomes and ultimately enhancing or reducing their own satisfaction and the value received (Bitner et al. 1997)

However, the existence of these roles lack valid evidence. Viewpoints from students and university need to be sought to identify and understand the student roles in order to deliver education experiences that meet and exceed their expectations.

### ***Dimensions of higher education experience and students' satisfaction***

Higher education experience is complex. Various dimensions of higher education experience have been discussed in previous literature (Chahal & Devi, 2013; Ng & Forbes, 2009; Yeo, 2009). Ng and Forbes (2009) proposed a framework of the university experience which is adapted from the service marketing literature with three components, namely, "process", "people" and "physical evidence" contributing to "core service: learning" and "supplementary services" offered to students. Similarly, Yeo (2009) recommended another service quality approach and suggested that "customer orientation", "quality course design and delivery" and "support services" play vital roles in the student experience. In a study on satisfied and dissatisfied service encounters in higher education, Chahal and Devi (2013) categorized six key dimensions, namely, "teaching", "examination", "library", "computer lab", "administration" and "infrastructure" based on student responses. In a recent study, Cheng et al. (2016) adopted the importance-performance and gap analysis, decision-making trail and evaluation laboratory, and quality function deployment to development a service-quality improvement model to identify areas of critical services quality deficiencies in

hospitality and tourism education. The SERVQUAL dimensions adapted in education context were used to assess students' expectation and performance of their education experience. Although the standpoints on the individual elements of higher education experience may vary, scholars appear to agree that higher education experience can be viewed as a service experience. Unfortunately, so far, more student experience models were built from the supply/service side, lacking in understanding of the real expectations of students in contemporary era and how they are assuming different roles during their studies. Student experience model based on multiple roles is expected to fill the knowledge gap. Furthermore, this study aims to understand how students assuming multiple roles will have different expectations and evaluations of their higher education experience.

While students' higher education experience consists of different dimensions, these dimensions may not be equally important in contributing to the student satisfaction with their choice of university and higher education experience. Previous studies have identified a number of determinants of student satisfaction with their higher education experience and many of them are teacher- and teaching-related (Butt & ur Rehman, 2010; Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2008; Elsharnouby, 2015; Grace, Weaven, Bodey, Ross, & Weaven, 2012; Navarro, Iglesias, & Torres, 2013; Thomas & Galambos, 2004; Voss, 2009; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). Teachers' quality, expertise, competency and preparedness are often considered as key determinants in achieving student satisfaction (Butt & Rehman, 2010; Elsharnouby, 2015; Thomas & Galambos, 2004; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). Teaching-related factors, such as "teaching methods", "clear goal setting", "quality and availability of resources" and "effective use of technology" also have strong influence on student satisfaction in higher education experience (Grace et al., 2012; Navarro et al., 2013; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). Voss (2009) also identified "teaching skills", "empathy" and "friendliness" as the three most crucial dimensions in the satisfaction of students in his study on student experience in college education. Meanwhile, Sojkin, Bartkowiak and Skuza (2012) recognized "social conditions" as the most important determinants of student satisfaction, followed by "professional advancement", in their university experience study. Friendly relationship appears to play a significant role in higher education. Duque (2014) found that student "co-creation" in learning also helped achieve higher satisfaction in student experience. In short, based on prior literature, the teacher/teaching, relationship with people, professional advancement and co-created learning are more significant determinants of student satisfaction compared to other higher education experience dimensions.

Some studies have attached importance to the nature of higher education in hospitality, tourism and event sector (Dredge et al., 2012; Goh et al., 2017; Gross et al., 2017). Due to the consideration of the graduate outcomes by industry (Gross et al., 2017), students may expect more practical educational experiences that involve skill-based training other than conceptual knowledge dissemination (Dredge et al., 2012). Goh et al.'s (2017) study concurred, noting that students of hotel management would have more practical component in their high education experiences when paying higher tuition fees, in the capacity of customers. The hospitality, tourism and event sector is considered more like an "interdisciplinary field of research and practice" (Gross et al., 2017, p. 10) that students should be able to capture and apply diverse knowledge and skills to prepare for their graduation and future career. Meanwhile, these students may also expect to learn more about inter-personal communication skills toward a higher professional competency in this field (Gross et al., 2017).

Marketing literature suggests that the roles that customers assume influence their expectations and evaluation of the product or service they purchase (e.g. Bitner et al., 1997).

Following Khalifa's (2009) propositions of the multiple roles students play in their education experience, it makes sense to understand the different roles that students assume and identify the determinants of their satisfaction. Most studies investigate the service quality of higher education by assessing the students' perception of the performance of the service provider, which includes the teachers, administrators, facilities, the teaching and learning experience, and the ancillary services they receive. However, the education experience is not quite the same as a service experience in hospitality or retail in which the interactions are much shorter, as compared to the students' higher education experience which is much longer and has more interactions with different stakeholders. Ultimately, what students obtain is the attainment of the education outcomes through the process of education. Their evaluations of higher education experiences include their assessment of the quality of their encounters and their attainment of education outcomes.

## **Methodology**

This study combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. Study 1 attempted to address the first two research objectives. It consisted of in-depth interviews with faculty members of tourism and hospitality programmes in Hong Kong to explore their perceptions and experiences of the customer-role of students, and further identify other possible roles that students assume in their university education. Faculty members help develop a full capture of students' multiple roles in higher education experiences for which students themselves might not be able to identify and understand. Results of Study 1 were also used to help develop the questionnaire for Study 2, which is the student survey. The survey aims to examine the existence of multiple student roles from the students' perspective, and the impact of the different dimensions of higher education experiences on student satisfaction in their university choice. Figure 1 shows the research framework of the two studies and how they are related to each other.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

### **Study 1: Interviews with faculty members**

Purposive sampling was used to shortlist informants for the interviews. Faculty members of tourism and hospitality related programmes from two units of one Hong Kong-based university were chosen. One unit is university grant-funded and the other is self-financed. Quota sampling was adopted to cover different academic positions held, cultural background, format of the courses taught (practical lab vs. classroom lecture), teaching experiences, and gender. Twenty-three faculty members were interviewed. An interview guide (Appendix A) was developed to guide the interview process. The faculty members were asked to provide descriptions of the roles that students are currently assuming. They were also asked to describe how students would evaluate their education experience based on the different roles they assume. Each interview took between 45 to 75 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English and were voice-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. When analysing the data, in-depth reading and coding of the raw data helped summarize and describe the faculty members' viewpoints, both positive and negative, and their expectations and current situations of the multiple roles of university students. Although some findings were found from those later interviews as being saturated; they were also analysed and included in discussions when considered more effective in word depiction.



### *Informants' profile*

Thirty faculty members were approached; a great percentage of them agreed to support the project owing to their interest in the topic. Table 1 shows that 10 female and 13 male faculty members were interviewed, thus resulting in a high response rate of 76.7%. Two faculty members were aged 30 or below, 11 were between 31 and 45, and 10 were 46 or above. In terms of ethnicity, 17 were ethnically Chinese and others were from Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Italy, and Germany. Ten faculty members were lecturers or instructors, while eight were senior lecturers or assistant professors. The rest were full professors or associate professors, or categorized as other education specialists. A majority (n=15) of the informants were teaching in government-funded units, and the rest were from self-financed units. Forty-three percent (n=10) of the informants have taught less than 10 years; thirty percent (n=7) of the informants have taught for 10 to 20 years. Among those, six respondents have more than 20 years of teaching experience.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

### *Perceptions of students' roles in hospitality and tourism higher education experience*

Some faculty members agreed that students can be considered as “customers” to some extent. Informant 8 suggested that “they [students] pay for tuition....they will rate the instructor with student feedback questionnaire” (Similarly, Informant 5 expressed that “if students are paying for our services, therefore, these people are customers”. Informant 2 suggested, “[universities and their programmes] rely on tuition...especially for those self-financed non-government funded programmes”. This statement is echoed by Informant 9 who stated “as a self-financed programme, what we need is students because most of our income come from the students”. In this line of thinking, students can have many reasonable expectations, such as “beautiful campus,” “better facilities,” “good GPA”, and universities may take a “student-centred” marketing strategy to cater to the needs of their potential students. Informant 16 indicated, “Students expect teachers to give or “feed” them everything because they have the mentality of customers”. A few interviewees mentioned that they referred students as “a special kind of customer (Informant 3) and in order to please them, additional notes and study materials were provided (Informant 4). Some faculty members also noted that students see themselves as customers and they are demanding particularly in terms of the services offered by the administrative units. Students are very vocal in expressing their needs and expectations in services provided by the university’s supporting units” (Informant 12).

Evidently, many faculty members did not fully support the “customer” role of students. They do not want to see students behaving like customers. They see students coming to universities mainly for learning and “[students] should treasure the opportunity to absorb as much as [possible] and to treasure every opportunity” “In theory, [students] should respect that [their] level of knowledge and expertise in that particular subject area (Informant 21). “The relationship between teacher and student is at a higher level than just a customer... in education, it is transfer of knowledge” (Informant 7). One female instructor indicated that teachers also have different roles. The university should not see itself as a service provider in the business sector.

“Because we have to create an environment like a hotel pampering their guests so they will return and not go to another hotel. We know that they are wrong. Don’t worry, they are rich. What we want to get is their money. Full stop. However, on the education side, if you do this to your students... that is wrong! Students of course pay tuition. But as a teacher, you have to tell them what is right and wrong. Not only because you are being paid to do so, but we have to demonstrate justice and ethics... [and] we have no obligation to give all the students a pass... or to let them graduate. Why? This will hurt the reputation of the university. Employers will know and ultimately students will suffer. ” (Informant 14)

Higher education students are expected to have learning experiences and outcomes different from their secondary school experience. This is confirmed by responses of some interviewees:

“University students are young adults looking for guidance along the way right from the moment they walk through the door. They have more autonomy in deciding what, when, and how they should study... I think we are playing a different role here ... we are more nurturing and we are more family oriented. We need to set them free to get out there and learn but we are here to support them.” (Informant 20)

“I normally tell the students that they have to have discipline and they have to endure some uncomfortable situations because this is part of the education process. They can be unsatisfied with the education system as we do not need to please them all the time by making things easy and comfortable for them as they are not customers.” (Informant 19)

An instructor concurred that this kind of “services” offered by the university to students in exchange of their tuition fees are interpreted by students as teacher’s “professionalism” in a partial sense, “the professional knowledge... the professional advice for further studies” (Informant 14).

A number of informants felt disappointed that many students in Hong Kong failed to understand the appropriate roles students should play in their higher education experience. Similarly, the students consider themselves as customers in their relationship to universities. An argument has been put forth that today’s higher education industry could be considered as more of a business-like industry. These phenomena have been reflected in the students’ expectations, attitude and behaviour when interacting with their universities, faculty and staff. Some instructors summarized many demanding expectations from their students, which include “can workload be lowered?”, “can the dates for assessments and examinations be adjusted?”, “can the laboratory be opened till late hours over the weekends?” (Informant 21) and “can you give a more detailed version of the PowerPoint slides for the class?” (Informant 20).

Many students expect to be spoon-fed. Informant 23 highlighted that “they want something easy.” Students compare different subjects, different programmes, different lecturers and even different universities to make a decision on their “purchase” and evaluations of the “services” they received. This observation proved that some university students in Hong Kong have become more “vocal” in expressing their expectations and

satisfaction toward the university (Informant 12). Some students are also very “egocentric” and are rude and disrespectful toward their instructors and other staff of the universities.

Informant 17 directly referred this development to the business economy and the social-cultural background of Hong Kong: “transactional,” “materialistic” and “outcome-oriented” mindsets are what many Hong Kong students and parents have. She provided further explanations,

“Parents send their young children to ballet classes because they want their kids to have the credentials to go to a good primary school. Parents send their children to church and Sunday school in order for them to get “extra points” to be admitted by a Catholic or Christian school.... It [Hong Kong] is just a very materialistic society. And so if you grow up in such a society, you are trained to see that everything is just like transaction”

Some informants noted that the behaviours of students from different programmes vary. Students studying in programmes offered by self-financed units, or private universities may possibly have different mind-sets when compared to those in government-funded programmes. Students studying in self-financed programmes or private universities that require them to pay higher tuition fees are more likely to demonstrate a customer-oriented role. Students from relatively affluent families were found to have low study motivations in many circumstances. Informant 15 expressed that first year students do not have this “customer” mind-set. After they complete their internship or summer job experience, they display more of a customer role.” However, Informant 23 noted that some students who were in their third or final year of study rather appreciate the “challenging” learning experience and would appreciate the guidance provided by the teachers.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, some faculties teaching self-financed (non-government funded) programmes are more likely to hold the opinion that students see themselves as “paying customers” who have the right to evaluate the teachers’ performance by means of student feedback questionnaires. The number of student enrolment equates to the revenue generated by the university. Students who see themselves as “customers” have expectations on the “service” they receive not only from the faculty members but also from administrative support units and campus facilities. Students in better financial situations have lower learning motivations. They are materialistic and view higher education as “transactions”. They want learning to be easy and expect high GPAs. Because they have a strong sense of “service expectation”, they are more prone to making comparisons, voicing out their opinions, and complaining. Students are connected via social media and they demand for transparency of information. Even though students’ “customer” roles existed among some faculty members, they were frustrated and reluctant to see this as the only role students assume. They believe students (and teachers) play multiple roles in the higher education process. Students are co-producers of learning experiences, citizen of the university community, partners in education, recipients of knowledge, mentees and products of higher education.

Faculty members strongly advocate that education is not a business; rather, it is a process that allows the transfer of knowledge. Faculty members are aware that they have no obligation to give high GPAs or to make learning easy but they are there to provide support and guidance to the students. They believe the students should respect teachers and other students. They view the higher education experience of the students includes experiences

both in and outside of classrooms. Students evaluate their experience based on their interactions with teachers, administrative support units and other students. They were found to co-produce their study experiences and values, and contribute to the whole process of education, consciously or unconsciously. The attainment of education outcomes of becoming global citizens, ethical professionals, team players who can interact and work with others with respect and self-motivated life-long learners are also mentioned as attributes of higher education experience. Each successful graduate has been considered as a “product” that carries the brand of university and programme. In a concluding remark, the reflected multiple roles of students largely include: “customer,” “partner”, “co-producer,” “product,” and “citizen.”

## **Study 2: Students’ role perceptions and evaluation of their higher education experience**

Based on the literature in higher education experience and the results of Study 1, a total of 82 statements describing the students’ higher education experience and the different dimensions of the higher education experience were generated. A pilot test with 71 students. to assess the relevance of statements that describe the different aspects of their higher education experiences. A dichotomous scale of “Yes” and “No” was used. Based on the content validity ratio (CVR) of 0.5 as proposed by Lawshe (1975) (as cited in Ayre & Scally, 2014), statements with CVR of 0.5 or above, which is approximately over 75% of the respondents indicating “Yes” were included in the final survey. Finally, the statements were reviewed by three faculty members to ensure face validity and eliminate statements with similar meanings. The total number of statements was shortened to 58.

For Study 2, a questionnaire was designed in English and consisted of four sections. The first section includes eight statements describing the different student roles identified in Study 1. They include “students are customers”, “students are co-producers of learning experiences”, “students are partners”, “students are citizens of the university community”, and “students are products of higher education” (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Khalifa, 2009). Three other students’ roles identified from the literature “students are recipients of knowledge,” (Svensson & Wood, 2007) “students are mentees and faculty members are mentors” (Johnson, 2000) and “students are contributors to university’s revenue” (Svensson & Wood, 2007) were also included. Students were asked to indicate the statement that best described their role in the university higher education experience. The second section contained 58 statements describing the students’ experience in higher education. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the statements. A five-point Likert scale was used with “1” = “strongly disagree” to “5” = “strongly agree”. In the third section, students were asked to indicate their satisfaction with their decision to choose the university they were studying in by indicating their level of agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my decision to choose this school/university”. A five-point scale was also used. Finally, the last section collected demographic and education information of the respondents.

The study was conducted in a university offering different levels of tourism management and hospitality programmes in Hong Kong. Convenience sampling was adopted to invite students enrolled in different full-time programmes (Higher Diploma, Associate Degree, Top-Up Degree, and Bachelor Degree) and in different years of their study. Students enrolled in selected courses across different programmes and year groups were invited to complete a questionnaire. Students who completed the questionnaire were given a coffee coupon of HK\$25 (approximately US\$3.50) as a token of appreciation.

A total of 249 questionnaires were distributed. After screening out the incomplete questionnaires, 239 valid responses were used for the analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the profile of the respondents, their roles in higher education experience, perceptions of their higher education experience, and satisfaction with their decision in choosing the university. Factor analysis was used to identify the underlying dimensions of students' perception of their higher education experience. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the impact of the factors of higher education experience on students' satisfaction with their university choice.

### *Respondents' profile*

Table 2 shows that 82.8% of the respondents were female, which mirrors the ratio of female students enrolled in hospitality and tourism management degree programmes offered by universities in Hong Kong. Majority of the respondents (63.2%) were enrolled in four-year undergraduate degree programmes, and 27.2% were in the two-year top-up degree programme, and 9.3% were in two-year higher diploma or associate degree programmes. A majority of the respondents were in their first (35.1%) or second year (32.6%) of study. Approximately one-fifth of the respondents were in their fourth year of study (20.5%). The majority of the respondents were local Hong Kong residents and the rest are from Mainland China and other places. The samples closely resemble the student profile of hospitality and tourism undergraduate and sub-degree programmes in Hong Kong.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

### *Students' roles in university higher education experience*

Students were asked to choose one among the eight statements that best described their main role in their experience in the university. Half of the students indicated they were "recipients of knowledge" (50.6%). About 17% considered themselves as "co-producers of learning experiences" while 10% viewed themselves as "citizens of the university community". About 5% saw students as "customers. "Mentee" (1.3%) and "contributors to university's revenue" (2.5%) were the least selected roles.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

### *Dimensions of students' higher education experience*

Exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis) with VARIMAX rotation was conducted with the statements measuring the students' evaluation of their higher education experience. The analysis was performed to identify the underlying dimensions (factors) of students' perception of their higher education experience. The Kaise-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.854, which falls within the acceptable level and Barlett's Test of Sphericity was 1680.860, significant at  $p < 0.000$ , which showed significant correlation among the variables.

Resulting factors with eigenvalue greater than 1.0 were obtained, and statements with factor loadings greater than 0.4 were retained. Cross-loaded items were deleted step by step. As a result, 24 statements with six dimensions of higher education experience were identified. Reliability analysis was conducted to test the internal consistency of each factor. The

Cronbach's alphas of the six factors ranged from 0.647 to 0.730. Alpha coefficients of 0.50 or greater were considered acceptable (Bearden et al., 1989; Kim & Kim, 2003).

Table 4 shows that the six dimensions of higher education experience together explained 56.25% of the total variance. The six factors were labelled as "student-centred service" (SCS) "diversity and global citizenship" (DGC), "co-production of learning experience" (CLE), "reliance on teachers" (ROT), "responsibility" (RES) and "whole person development" (WPD). Mean scores of the different factors of higher education experience were compared. "Responsibility" had the highest mean score ( $M=4.00$ ) followed by "Diversity and global citizenship" ( $M=3.67$ ). "Co-production of learning experience" had the lowest mean score among the six dimensions ( $M=3.52$ ). Based on the examinations of the statements in each dimension, SCS, CLE, ROT were related to the actual encounters in the education process while DGC, RES, and WPD were the graduates' outcomes of education.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

#### *Determinants of students' perception of their higher education experience*

Multiple regressions were conducted to assess whether the six factors of higher education experience had statistically significant effects on students' satisfaction of university choice. Student satisfaction was regressed to the above six factors with their respective composite mean scores. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis. The six independent factors explained 25.0% of the variation of the students' satisfaction with the choice of university. The Durban-Watson statistic of 1.868 and significant F ratio ( $F=14.204$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) suggested a satisfactory goodness-of-fit of this regression model.

Four factors were found to have a significant impact on student satisfaction at the .05 level. These factors include SCS ( $t=2.202$ ,  $p=.029$ ), DGC ( $t=2.208$ ,  $p=.028$ ), ROT ( $t=1.999$ ,  $p=.047$ ) and WPD ( $t=2.223$ ,  $p=.027$ ). The two other factors, CLE and RES, were not significant predictors of students' satisfaction with the decision to choose the university (SAT). The standardized betas were assessed to determine the relative importance of each of the six factors in contributing to the students' satisfaction with their university choice. Among the factors, DGC ( $B=0.160$ ), with the highest B value, was the most important determinant factor in explaining students' satisfaction with university choice, followed by SCS ( $B=0.157$ ), ROT ( $B=0.144$ ), and WPD ( $B=0.139$ ).

[TABLE 5 HERE]

#### **Discussion**

Results of the study supported the existence of the multiple roles of students in tourism and hospitality higher education experiences. Many faculty members from Study 1 felt reluctant to agree with the customer-role model, although this is dissimilar from the perspective of their perception of students' views. Some students were perceived by faculty members to have certain expectations for the role of customers and take the education experiences as business transactions, mainly because of the tuition fees they have paid (Obermiller et al., 2005). This fact might be attributable to the ideological gap (Ng & Forbes, 2009), social-cultural reality in Hong Kong, and specific student segments and study modes. The interviewed faculty members illustrated the differences and similarities between education products and traditional business products. However, it is interesting to note in

Study 2, 50.6% of students reported themselves as “recipient” of knowledge while only 5.4% of the students indicated that they are “customers.” These two statements as student roles were included in the questionnaire because of the highlights and comments collected from the faculty members in Study 1. From the service perspective, the concept of service encounter can be considered as a process of interactions between a service provider and a service receiver (Gronroos, 2001). Accordingly, if the students see themselves as recipients of knowledge, this may also possibly imply that they also see themselves as “customers” to some extent, despite not directly stating the “customer” role.

Undoubtedly, students also play the role of customers to a certain extent, because they also generate revenues for higher education institutions, particularly private universities. Students may possibly have certain service expectations from universities in the entire education process. In return, universities and their schools need to understand the students’ needs and demands to improve their “services” further and stand out from the competition in the minds of students. In Cheng et al.’s (2016) study, student survey results suggested that student-centred education services in hospitality, tourism, and leisure undergraduate programmes (e.g. “personnel taking initiative in solving students’ problems,” “personnel are prompt and efficient in dealing with students’ complaints and queries,” “administrative rules centred on students’ best interest,” “friendly and courteous personnel”) critically needed improvement. Of course, taking this line of thinking merely for the short-term revenue concerns might be short-sighted. Kuper (2014) indicated directly that “higher education institutions have the opportunity to retain the customer for a lifetime and build real brand loyalty as an education provider.”

Education “transcends grubby commercialism” (McGhee, 2015) and the idea of reimbursing students if they fail their studies might be weird. McGhee (2015) further argued that the difficulties and challenges encountered by students are not business problems but are normal in the process of education, which involves counselling, supervision and even friendship. Universities are expected to nurture and develop able and reliable individuals to serve future society. Thus, treating students completely as customers will equalize the business and education, and mislead the next generations. Although higher education institutions can be considered as “service providers”, these kind of “services” relate mainly to “professionalism” as reflected in the design of curriculum, programmes, provision of job opportunities, student on-campus and extracurricular experiences, training and education for the hospitality and tourism career competence as well as various administrative supports (Chahal & Devi, 2013).

Obviously, other than student-centred experiences and “services,” students themselves also have different roles in their university education (Khalifa, 2009). These views are reflected in both Study 1 and 2. At least the students understand that they come to university to receive knowledge. The student survey resulted in six dimensions of higher education experiences based on the multiple roles students assume. Students view themselves as customers, co-producers, citizens, responsible individuals and students as well as products as whole-persons. This measurement scale offers both academic and pragmatic insights for educators and universities, and can be validated further in other cultural and social circumstances.

Previous student satisfaction models did not look at the multiple roles of students. In this study, when soliciting their responses of the students’ roles in higher education and overall satisfaction, students can easily elicit roles far beyond the customer role when

evaluating satisfaction. Interestingly, the fact that today's hospitality and tourism students are cautious about their future roles in global and hospitality community is noteworthy. They hope to understand the future state of the hospitality and tourism industry and would like to develop local and global citizenship. They expect universities to provide multi-cultural study and placement opportunities. This is especially true for students enrolled in hospitality and tourism related programmes who need to collect sufficient front line working experiences for their better understanding of knowledge and concepts learnt from classes and for their job seeking in the future. Thus, it is important to recognize the importance of student placement and internship experiences during the degree studies.

The students' recognition of their citizenship role in the university community and society at large suggests part of the success of education in today's economy and business world. Students have also come to understand that future society needs well-rounded development of citizens and employees. For example, a student needs to learn relevant professional skills, and learn how to be independent, confident, ethical and culturally sensitive. A competitive higher education service provider should bear in mind the future needs of the society and student expectations at the same time. These reflected roles of customers, students and citizens coexist in the minds of students on campus, and parallel the findings of previous studies of higher education experiences (Grace et al., 2012; Navarro et al., 2013; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013).

Education practitioners may ponder on innovative ways to measure student education experiences on the basis of multiple roles. Students can be briefed about their different roles in orientation sessions at the commencement of a new semester. The assessment methods for different subjects can also include an evaluation of the students' understanding, performance and appreciation of multiple roles. Students who view education services from merely the customer perspective may fail the assessment in some circumstances. Furthermore, students may be trained and educated to be more proactive in taking up roles beyond the students' normal expectations, which can shape higher education success in the long run.

Although six dimensions, namely, diversity and global citizenship, student-centred service, reliance on teachers, whole-person development, co-production of learning experience and responsibility have been identified in hotel and tourism learning experience, only the former four elements were found to have an impact on student satisfaction with university choice. Interestingly, diversity and global citizenship were the most important factors, whereas student-centred service, an apparently more customer-oriented element, only came second. Similar to the findings of Sojkin, et al. (2012) on professional advancement contributing to student satisfaction, students may recognize the nature of diversity and globalization in the hotel and tourism industry and be keen on learning to become global citizens. Hence, not only should educators ensure that diversity and globalization are part of the curriculum; they should also consider optimizing opportunities for student practice in school activities. For example, heterogeneous groups mixed with local and international students for class assignment can be encouraged to ensure that students can learn by practice through collaboration with others from different backgrounds. Concurring with Yeo (2009) on customer orientation as a vital part of higher education experience, student-centred service was the second strongest determinant in student satisfaction with university choice. Despite the opposition to the customer model in higher education from other studies, a student-centric approach tends to be preferred by learners, especially preparing to enter the service-oriented hotel and tourism industry. Student surveys on learning experience at the end or even in the



middle of a semester can be a useful way to solicit the views of learners for continuous improvements of their learning experience and satisfaction.

Unfortunately, it seemed that the students have yet to realize the importance of their role in completing their own education process and producing valuable education experiences. Students were found to rely more on university, schools and teachers or professors for the evaluation of satisfaction. They failed to generate adequate self-reflections on how they can assist in achieving their learning outcomes together with teachers that can pave the way for satisfaction. Their satisfaction was not found to be attributable to their role of co-producer and responsible student. This result deviated from the findings of Duque (2014) who identified this relationship. It is recommended that faculty involve students more in helping achieve learning outcomes and producing memorable education experiences. Innovations may be considered for students' co-production of curriculum design and teaching plans of certain subjects. A responsible student seeks faculty recommendations, which can help his or her future success in the business world and the society, both locally and globally.

## **Conclusion**

It has been acknowledged that target research of hospitality and tourism higher education is scarce (Ballantyne et al., 2009; Goh et al., 2017). But there is urgent need to discuss fully how to provide these educational "services" to better fit the ever-increasingly changing needs of industry, students and even faculty members. Higher education can be regarded as services to some extent, but need to be given attention with caution. On the one hand, it is noted that student satisfaction is important otherwise it may affect the school/university's reputation over the long run. Different roles of students toward their higher education experiences should be considered to generate this satisfaction. The relative importance of the roles can be learned through this study. It is no question that their suggestions and comments can be consolidated toward more effective design of curriculum and course structure. Obviously, more efforts can be given to those who fail to recognize the importance of their roles to be expected in their higher education experiences. On the other hand, the education is not pure business, thus students' voices and expectations should be reviewed carefully with more input from faculty members and education managers. The views of faculty members as reflected from this study can be considered for practitioners and educators.

## **Limitations and future research**

The results of the study should be interpreted with caution. The sample of the faculty study and the students' surveys were collected only from two units offering hospitality and tourism programmes within one university in Hong Kong. The university and the target units, currently adopted by this study, have been long recognized as high ranking in Hong Kong. Hypothetically, faculties and students from a top university would generate very different results from a bottom tier university. Their profile, study/work expectation, learning/job commitment, and professional competence all contribute to this limitation. Statistically, six independent factors were found to explain 25% of the variance of the dependent variable in the main student survey. According to Cohen (1988), this was considered highly acceptable. Unfortunately, in the line of more recent thinking (Hair, Ringle, C., & Sarstedt, 2011), higher explained variance is needed and this study is limited in this regard. Hair et al., (2011) suggested 50% as moderate. Moreover, it has been noted that three factors are related to the graduates' outcomes ("responsibility," "diversity and global citizenship" and "whole-person

development”) and the other three (“student-centred service,” “co-production of learning experience” and “reliance on teacher”) are related to the actual encounters which include teaching and learning experiences, and interactions with students and teachers. There are other possible dimensions of higher education experiences which we might not have included in this study, e.g. physical facilities, industry opportunities, etc.

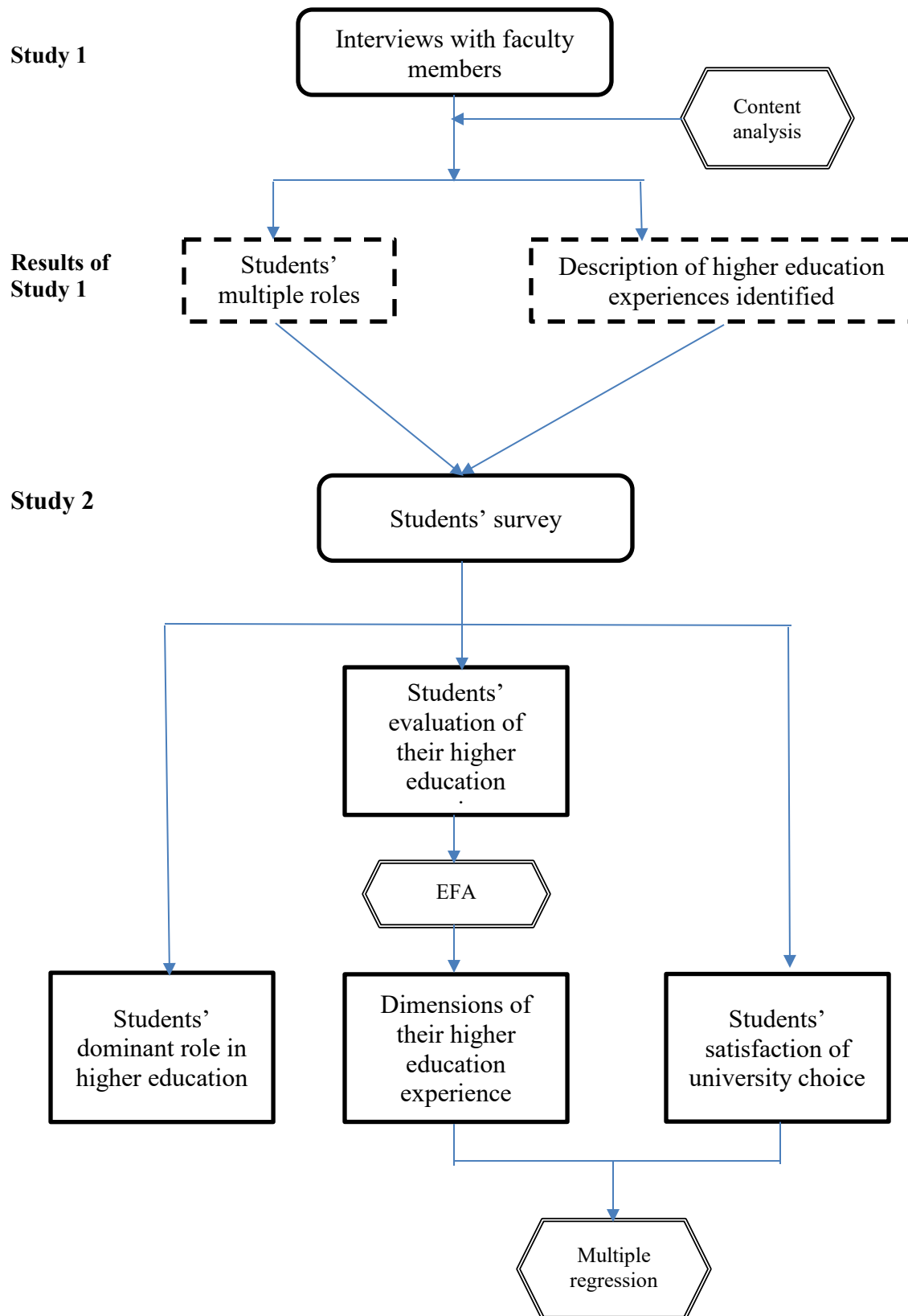
Future studies can be replicated in universities in other cities and countries to assess if similar results can be obtained. Future research can also assess the moderating role of the student’s roles and academic performance on the impact of the higher education experience dimensions on students’ satisfaction of their university choice. In many circumstances, the approach adopted by institution may be a crucial matter and will influence the roles students assume and their experiences. This can be given more serious attention for future studies. A qualitative study on the students’ perception of their higher education experience can also be conducted to explore why the specific aspects of higher education experience are important to them and how they think the experience can be delivered and created effectively to enhance their overall education experience.

## References

- Athay, S. (2002). Is it true that the sky is blue? *The Northern Iowan*, (October 28), 7, 9.
- Ayre, C., & Scally, A.J. (2014). Critical values for Lawshe's content validity ratio: Revisiting the original methods of calculation, *Measuring and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 47(1), 79-89.
- Ballantyne, R., Parker, J., & Aexlsen, M. (2009). Trends in tourism research. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(1), 149-152.
- Bearden, R., Netemeyer, R., & Teel, J. (1989). Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(4), 473-481.
- Bitner, M.J., Faranda, W.T., Hubbert, A.R., & Zeithaml, V.A. (1997). Customer contributions and roles in service delivery. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 8(3), 193-20.5
- Browne, B.A., Kaldenberg, D. O., Browne, W. G., & Brown, D. J. (1998). Student as customer: Factors affecting satisfaction and assessments of institutional quality. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 8(3), 2-14.
- Butt, B. Z., & ur Rehman, K. (2010). A study examining the students satisfaction in higher education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 5446-5450.
- Chahal, H., & Devi, P. (2013). Identifying satisfied/dissatisfied service encounters in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 21 (2), 211-222.
- Cheng, C., Tsai, M., & Lin, C. (2016). Quality education service: put your feet in their shoes. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(11), 1120-1135.
- Clayson, D. E., & Haley, D. A. (2005). Marketing models in education: Students as customers, products, or partners. *Marketing Education Review*, 15(1), 1-10.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioural sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dredge, D., Benckendorff, P., Day, M., Gross, M., Walo, Weeks, P., & Whitelaw, P. (2012). The philosophic practitioner and the curriculum space. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(4), 2154-2176.
- Douglas, J., McClelland, R., & Davies, J. (2008). The development of a conceptual model of student satisfaction with their experience in higher education, *Quality Assurance in Education*, 16(1), 19-35.
- Duque, L. C. (2014). A framework for analysing higher education performance: students' satisfaction, perceived learning outcomes, and dropout intentions. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 25(1-2), 1-21.
- Eagle, L., & Brennan, R. (2007). Are students customers? TQM and marketing perspectives. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 15(1), 44-60.
- Elliot, K.M. (2002). Key determinants of student satisfaction. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(3), 271-279.
- Elsharnouby, T. H. (2015). Student co-creation behavior in higher education: the role of satisfaction with the university experience. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 25(2), 238-262.
- Goh, E., Nguyen, S., & Law, R. (2017). Marketing private hotel management schools in Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 29(4), 880-889.
- Grace, D., Weaven, S., Bodey, K., Ross, M., & Weaven, K. (2012). Putting student evaluations into perspective: The course experience quality and satisfaction model (CEQS). *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 38(2), 35-43.
- Gronroos, C. (2001). The perceived service quality concept – a mistake? *Managing Service Quality*, 11(3), 150-152.

- Gross, M., Benckendorff, Mair, J., & Whitelaw, P. (2017). Hospitality higher education quality: Establishing standards in Australia. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 30(4), 4-14.
- Gruber, T., Reppel, A., & Voss, R. (2010). Understanding the characteristics of effective professors: The student's perspective. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 20(2), 175–190.
- Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). PLS-SEM: Indeed a silver bullet. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 19(2), 139-151.
- Hoffman, K. D., & Kretoivics, M. A. (2004). Students as partial employees: a metaphor for the student-institution interaction. *Innovative Higher Education*, 29(2), 103-20.
- Johnson, J. L. (2000). Learning communities and special efforts in the retention of university students: what works, what doesn't, and is the return worth the investment? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 2(3), 219-238.
- Joseph, M., & Joseph, B. (1998). Employers' perceptions of service quality in higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 8(2), 1-13.
- Khalifa, A. S. (2009). Student-as-aspirant: strategic implications for business education. *European Business Review*, 21(2), 172-190.
- Khodayari, F., & Khodayari, B. (2011). Service quality in higher education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research in Business*, 1(9), 38-46.
- Kim, W.G., & Kim, H-C. (2003). The analysis of Seoul as an International Convention Destination. *Journal of Convention & Exhibition Management*, 5(2), 69-87.
- Kotler, P., Bowen, J.T., Maken, J.C., & Baloglu, S. (2016). *Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson
- Kreuter, N. (2014). Customer mentality. Retrieved 27 May 2015 from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/02/27/essay-critiques-how-student-customer-idea-erodes-key-values-higher-education>
- Kuper, S. (2014). Student as a customer. Retrieved on 13 June 2017 from <https://webcpm.com/articles/2014/01/01/the-student-as-customer.aspx>
- Kwan, P. Y. K., & Ng, P. W. K. (1999). Quality indicators in higher education-comparing Hong Kong and China's students. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 14(1), 20-27.
- Lawshe, C. H. (1975). A quantitative approach to content validity. *Personnel psychology*, 28, 563–575.
- Li, R. & Kaye, M. (1998). A case study for comparing two service quality measurement approaches in the context of teaching in higher education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 4(2), 103-113.
- López-Bonilla, J. M., & López-Bonilla, L. M. (2014). Holistic competence approach in tourism higher education: an exploratory study in Spain. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 17(4), 312-326.
- Mark, E. (2013). Student satisfaction and the customer focus in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 35(1), 2-10.
- McColl-Kennedy, J., Cheung, L., & Ferrier, E. (2015). Co-creating service experience practices. *Journal of Service Management*, 26 (2), 249–275.
- McGhee, P. (2015). Let students be students-not customers. Retrieved on 13 June from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/31/students-not-customers>
- Muncy, J. A. (2008). The orientation evaluation matrix (OEM): Are students customers or products? *Marketing Education Review*, 18(3), 15–23.
- Navarro, M. M., Iglesias, M. P., & Torres, P. R. (2013). A new management element for universities: satisfaction with the offered courses. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19(6), 505-526.

- Ng, I. C. L., & Forbes, J. (2009). Education as service: The understanding of university experience through the service logic. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19(1), 38–64.
- Nguyen, A., & Rosetti, J. (2013). Overcoming potential negative consequences of customer orientation in higher education: closing the ideological gap. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 23(2), 155-174.
- Nordensvard, J. (2011). The consumer metaphor versus the citizen metaphor: different sets of roles for students. In M. Molesworth, R. Scullion, & E. Nixon (Eds.), *The marketization of higher education and the student as consumer* (pp. 157–169). London: Routledge.
- Obermiller, C., Fleenor, P., & Raven, P. (2005). Students as customers or products: Perceptions and preferences of faculty and students. *Marketing Education Review*, 15(2), 27–36.
- Oldfield, B. M., & Baron, S. (2000). Student perceptions of service quality in a UK university business and management faculty. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 8(2), 85-95.
- Rolfe, H. (2002). Students' demands and expectations in an age of reduced financial support: the perspectives of lecturers in four English universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24(2), 171-182.
- Sandstrom, S., Edvardsson, B., Kristensson, P., & Magnusson, P. (2008). Value-in-use through service experience. *Managing Service Quality*, 18 (2), 112–126.
- Sharrock, G. (2000). Why students are not (just) customers (and other reflections on life after George). *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 22(2), 149-164.
- Sojkin, B., Bartkowiak, P., & Skuza, A. (2012). Determinants of higher education choices and student satisfaction: the case of Poland. *Higher Education*, 63(5), 565–581.
- Svensson, G., & Wood, G. (2007). Are university students really customers? When illusion may lead to delusion for all! *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21(1), 17-28.
- Tan, K. C., & Kek, S. W. (2004). Service quality in higher education using an enhanced SERVQUAL approach. *Quality in Higher Education*, 10(1), 17-24.
- Thomas, E. H., & Galambos, N. (2004). What Satisfies Students? Mining Student-Opinion Data with Regression and Decision Tree Analysis. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(3), 251–269.
- Voss, R. (2009). Studying critical classroom encounters. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 17(2), 156-173.
- Walls, R. (2013). A cross-sectional examination of hotel consumer experience and relative effects on consumer values. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 32, 179–192.
- Wilkins, S., & Balakrishnan, M. S. (2013). Assessing student satisfaction in transnational higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(2), 143-156.
- Yeo, R. K. (2009). Service quality ideals in a competitive tertiary environment. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 48(1), 62–76.



**Figure 1: Research framework**

**Table 1: Profile of Informants**

Interviewee ID No.	Gender	Age	Ethnicity*	Position	UGC-funded	Tertiary teaching experiences
1	M	46 or >	Chinese	L/Ins	YES	10 - 20
2	F	46 or >	Chinese	AssoPro/Pro	YES	> 20
3	M	46 or >	Chinese	AssoPro/Pro	YES	> 20
4	M	31 - 45	Non-Chinese	SL/AssisPro	YES	10 - 20
5	M	31 - 45	Non-Chinese	L/Ins	YES	< 10
6	F	31 - 45	Chinese	L/Ins	YES	< 10
7	M	31 - 45	Non-Chinese	SL/AssisPro	YES	< 10
8	F	30 or <	Chinese	SL/AssisPro	YES	< 10
9	M	46 or >	Chinese	SL/AssisPro	NO	> 20
10	F	31 - 45	Chinese	L/Ins	NO	10 - 20
11	M	46 or >	Chinese	L/Ins	NO	10 - 20
12	F	46 or >	Chinese	SL/AssisPro	NO	> 20
13	M	31 - 45	Chinese	L/Ins	NO	10 - 20
14	M	46 or >	Chinese	L/Ins	NO	10 - 20
15	F	31 - 45	Chinese	L/Ins	NO	< 10
16	F	31 - 45	Chinese	L/Ins	NO	< 10
17	F	31 - 45	Chinese	L/Ins	YES	< 10
18	M	31 - 45	Chinese	AssoPro/Pro	YES	10 - 20
19	F	31 - 45	Non-Chinese	SL/AssisPro	YES	< 10
20	M	46 or >	Non-Chinese	Others	YES	> 20
21	M	46 or >	Chinese	AssoPro/Pro	YES	> 20
22	F	46 or >	Chinese	SL/AssisPro	YES	< 10
23	M	30 or <	Non-Chinese	SL/AssisPro	YES	< 10

**Note: M: Male; F: Female**

**\*This summarizes the ethnicity of Chinese vs. non-Chinese only, for the sake of privacy;**

**L/Ins: Lecturer or Instructor; SL/AssisPro: Senior lecturer or Assistant Professor; AssoPro/Pro: Associate professor or full professor;**

**Others: including other positions**

**Table 2: Demographic profile of survey students**

		Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender			
	Male	41	17.2
	Female	198	82.8
	<i>Total</i>	<i>239</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Programs enrolled in			
	Higher Diploma or Associate Degree (2-year program)	23	9.6
	Top-up Degree program (2-year program)	65	27.2
	Degree program (4-year program)	151	63.2
	<i>Total</i>	<i>239</i>	<i>100.0</i>
No. of years in the program			
	Less than 1 year	84	35.1
	1 year to less than 2 years	78	32.6
	2 years to less than 3 years	28	11.7
	3 years or more	49	20.5
	<i>Total</i>	<i>239</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Place of origin			
	Hong Kong	206	86.2
	Mainland China	16	6.7
	Others	17	7.1
	<i>Total</i>	<i>239</i>	<i>100.0</i>



**Table 3: Students' dominating roles in higher education experience**

<b>Students' dominating role in higher education experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percentage</b>
University students are customers	13	5.4
University students are co-producers of learning experiences	42	17.6
University students are citizens of the university community	24	10.0
University students and faculty members are partners in education	16	6.7
University students are recipients of knowledge	121	50.6
University students are mentees and faculty members are mentors	3	1.3
University students are products of higher education	14	5.9
University students are contributors to university's revenue	6	2.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>239</i>	<i>100.0</i>

**Table 4: Factor analysis of higher education experience**

	Eigen value	Variance explained %	Cronbach's alpha	Factor loadin g	Mean score	SD
<b>Student-centered service (SCS)</b>	<b>6.438</b>	<b>10.402</b>	<b>0.717</b>		<b>3.526</b>	
Teaching is student-centered.				0.485	3.732	0.847
The school/university provides good service to me.				0.719	3.615	0.779
The school/university provides enough administrative support to me.				0.744	3.456	0.858
The school/university cares about the students.				0.640	3.301	0.826
<b>Diversity and global citizenship (DGC)</b>	<b>2.095</b>	<b>10.055</b>	<b>0.703</b>		<b>3.668</b>	
I am aware of the future state of the hospitality and tourism industry.				0.492	3.674	0.790
I can share with future students some information about the school and university education.				0.470	3.695	0.817
The school/university helps me develop local and global citizenship.				0.753	3.569	0.795
The school/university helps me recognize cultural differences.				0.721	3.736	0.875
I have the opportunity to learn from other students.				0.547	3.665	0.748
<b>Co-production of learning experience (CLE)</b>	<b>1.435</b>	<b>9.861</b>	<b>0.718</b>		<b>3.517</b>	
I can express my rights and opinion.				0.551	3.632	0.732
I contribute to the learning in class.				0.698	3.573	0.711
I actively participate in group projects and class discussions.				0.529	3.724	0.824
I teach my fellow students.				0.731	3.234	0.862
I can play the role of leader.				0.567	3.423	0.913
<b>Reliance on teacher (ROT)</b>	<b>1.315</b>	<b>9.327</b>	<b>0.722</b>		<b>3.359</b>	
Teachers provide suggestions to my personal and life issues.				0.686	3.151	0.904
Teachers motivate me to learn.				0.741	3.351	0.790
The teachers provide me with everything I need to learn.				0.675	3.414	0.870
The teachers use ways which appeal to our generation to teach us.				0.439	3.519	0.749
<b>Responsibility (RES)</b>	<b>1.179</b>	<b>8.661</b>	<b>0.730</b>		<b>4.004</b>	
I am trained to take responsibilities for other people.				0.700	3.895	0.687
I am trained to be responsible for myself.				0.782	4.121	0.749
I am trained to fix problems by myself.				0.757	3.996	0.701
<b>Whole Person Development (WPD)</b>	<b>1.037</b>	<b>7.937</b>	<b>0.647</b>		<b>3.570</b>	
The school/university is a small community where I perform civil responsibility.				0.710	3.640	0.848
The school/university creates all-rounded students.				0.690	3.544	0.781
The school/university creates ethical students.				0.736	3.527	0.854
<b>Total variance explained</b>	<b>56.244</b>					

Kaise-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0.854

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-square: 1680.860, df 276, p<0.000

1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

**Table 5: Higher education experience influencing satisfaction of university choice**

Independent variables	Standardized Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	-0.359		
SCS	0.157	2.202	0.029*
DGC	0.160	2.208	0.028*
CLE	0.026	0.362	0.717
ROT	0.144	1.999	0.047*
RES	0.116	1.815	0.071
WPD	0.139	2.223	0.027*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.269		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.250		
<i>F</i>	14.204		
<i>P</i>	0.000		

WPD = Whole person development, DGC = Diversity and global citizenship, CLE = Co-production of learning experience, SCS = Student-centered service, ROT = Reliance on teachers, RES = Responsibility, SAT = Satisfaction with decision in choosing the university.

a. Dependent Variable: SAT

b. Predictors: (Constant), ROT, RES, WHP, DGC, SCS, CLE

Note: \* significant at  $p < 0.05$ , Durban-Watson statistic: 1.868

## Appendix A

Objectives	Interview questions
<p>1. Investigate the faculty members' perceptions of the possible roles which hospitality and tourism students assume in their university education.</p>	<p>Based on your experience in interacting with undergraduate students, what role(s) are the undergraduate students playing in their university education?</p> <p>What metaphors or analogies will you use to describe the students? Please explain why.</p> <p>Please explain why and give examples of their behavior and expectations that make you feel they are _____ [role/metaphor].</p> <p>How do you feel about the role/metaphor and their behavior/expectations?</p> <p>What role(s) would you like to see the students assume? Please explain why.</p>
<p>2. Examine the different dimensions of hospitality and tourism higher education experience.</p>	<p>In each of the roles you have mentioned, based on what criteria do you think the students use to evaluate their university education experience? Please give examples.</p>