

Post-lecture evaluation of a university subject on leadership and intrapersonal development

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Abstract

This study investigated subjective outcome evaluation of a leadership and intrapersonal development subject amongst university students in the first semester of 2013/14 academic year. Students from 17 classes (N = 1,070) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University completed a post-lecture evaluation form after each lecture. Results showed that the majority of students held positive perceptions about the subject and the lecturers who delivered this course. Students' perceptions about teacher attributes and subject attributes were the strongest predictors of the overall evaluation of the teacher and the lecture, respectively. The present findings have both theoretical and practical implications in guiding future curriculum revamping work and further evaluation studies.

Keywords: Hong Kong, leadership, intrapersonal development, subjective outcome evaluation, university education

Introduction

Recent news of young celebrities' drug abuse in different Chinese societies raised further concerns of youth developmental problems. In fact, substance use as well as other risk behaviors has become a serious public health issue worldwide (1). In the United States, nearly 80% of college students reported that they had engaged in substance use (2). It was also found that 12-18% of college students displayed different mental disorders and the percentages kept rising significantly (3, 4). Besides, a recent review showed that 15.6% American college students suffered from depression or anxiety disorders (5). In Hong Kong, youth developmental issues including internet addiction, consumption of pornographic materials, tobacco and alcohol use, and materialistic values were found common among young people (1). For example, 22.9% of primary and secondary school

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students were at risk of internet addiction and 17.2% of secondary school students showed bullying problems. Adolescents and young people who were born after 90s are regarded as more fragile, egocentric and immature even though a majority of them received higher or post-secondary education.

With particular reference to university students, Shek and Wong (5) pointed out that this group of young people is also not free from developmental problems although they may have the advantage of getting higher education opportunity and well-paid job. Academic pressure, peer relationships, financial issues, and the transition from adolescence to adulthood constitute a series of stresses for university students. Many of them were not aware of the available services that could help them when they had mental health disturbance, and some even did not know they needed help (4). Students also felt reluctant to seek help and treatment due to various individual and social barriers (4). These findings suggested that adolescent problems will not decrease or disappear automatically when they grow older and receive higher education. One question that educators and researchers must consider is how to help these young people develop in a positive manner and nurture them to become the pillars of our society in the future. Obviously, merely providing remedial services may not really help students. Instead, prevention programs that can raise university students' awareness of developmental issues and risk behaviors, as well as foster their holistic development are needed in university education before students enter into a more complex society and adulthood.

Positive youth development approach that focuses on nurturing strengths and development assets in students provides a promising direction for designing such programs. Catalano and his team (6) proposed that positive youth development in 15 areas: bonding, resilience, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioral competence, moral competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in future, recognition for positive behavior, prosocial norms, and involvement, together resemble a shield to protect young people from problem behaviors and bring positive outcomes. Research findings have demonstrated the effectiveness of youth programs based on positive youth development

approach (6, 7). In the context of Hong Kong, a project entitled "Promoting Adolescent Development through Holistic Social Programme," the Project P.A.T.H.S. has been implemented in more than half of local secondary schools. Different research findings have consistently showed the effectiveness of the program in promoting positive youth development and preventing problem behaviors in secondary school students (8, 9). However, programs and courses focusing on nurturing the psychosocial competence of the students are grossly lacking in tertiary education in Hong Kong. Although leadership and self-development programmes were offered as non-credit bearing subjects or electives in some universities, not all university students can benefit from such training. Credit-bearing prevention program targeting at all students in the university is rare (8).

Against this background, Shek (10) developed a subject titled "Tomorrow's Leaders" for undergraduate university students at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which was aimed to promote students' holistic development in terms of both interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies. This subject was first piloted as a 2-credit elective subject in 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years. Starting from 2012/13, the subject has been adapted to a 3-credit course and implemented as a compulsory subject for all first-year students under the new 4-Year undergraduate curriculum. Based on experiential learning approach, students were taught the concepts of different leadership qualities, encouraged to evaluate their own possession of different interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, and provided opportunities to practice methods learned in lectures to develop these qualities through different in-class activities and reflective exercises.

To investigate the outcome of the subject, systematic evaluation has been conducted, including pre-test and post-test objective outcome evaluation based on the Chinese Positive Youth Development Scale (CPYDS), post-lecture and post-course subjective outcome evaluation, qualitative evaluation based on students' reflective journal writing, and focus group interviews with students (11-13). The evaluation findings generally supported the effectiveness of the subject. For example, a post course evaluation conducted in the first semester of

2012/13 revealed that more than 90% of the students reported that they were satisfied with the subject and the lectures promoted their personal development in different areas (13). Qualitative studies based on students' reflective journal showed that more than 93% of the students expressed that the knowledge and skills taught in the subject helped them understand the characteristics of effective leadership and promoted their all-round development such as sense of responsibility in serving the society, communication skills, moral competence, and self-reflection habits (14, 15).

One evaluation method used to examine the implementation and effectiveness of the subject "Tomorrow's Leaders" is the post-lecture evaluation (10) where students are invited to evaluate individual lecture immediately after the lecture is delivered. According to Shek (10), there are several methodological advantages of post-lecture evaluation. First, since the evaluation is conducted after individual lecture, more details of each specific lecture can be obtained (such as the content and teachers' performance). This instant feedback can help teachers gain important information about how to make improvement on a particular lecture and plan for the next lecture in response to different needs of the students. Second, teachers can discuss with students about their feedbacks in the next lecture to obtain a deeper understanding on students' opinions. This will definitely help clarify students' misconceptions and enhance the relationship between the teachers and students. Third, post-lecture evaluation allows students to evaluate on what they have just experienced, and the feedback would be more precise and effective, as compared to the general perceptions of students about the subject collected in post-course evaluation.

In 2013/14 academic year, the curriculum of "Tomorrow's Leaders" had been revamped based on feedbacks collected in its implementation at the first year (i.e., 2012/13 academic year). As such, it is important to investigate whether the revamped subject "Tomorrow's Leaders" still worked well for the students. Specifically, the present study aimed to answer the following research questions: 1) what were the perceptions of students about the revamped subject? 2) How would students' perceptions of teacher attributes, subject attributes, and lecture

attributes predict students' perceived effectiveness of the subject and the teacher?

Methods

In the first semester of 2013/14, the subject was offered to 17 classes with a total of 1,070 students. At the end of each lecture (Lecture 1 to Lecture 13), all students were invited to respond to a subjective outcome evaluation form on their opinions toward the lecture. Informed consent from students was obtained at the beginning of the semester. On the day of data collection, the questionnaires were distributed to students upon the completion of all lecture content. The purpose of the evaluation was mentioned. Anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data were also emphasized to all students. The students were provided with sufficient time to complete the evaluation form in a self-administrated and voluntary manner.

Instruments

A 16-item Post-Lecture Evaluation Form was used in the present study to conduct subjective outcome evaluation on the lecture in multiple areas such as the curriculum design, peer interaction, student participation, opportunities for reflection, effectiveness for personal development, teacher's mastery of lecture materials, overall evaluation of the lecture and the teacher. All items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale based on the extent to which they agreed to the items (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3 = "Slightly Disagree", 4 = "Slightly Agree", 5 = "Agree", and 6 = "Strongly Agree") with higher score representing better evaluation. The items of the evaluation form are listed below:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Item 1 | The design of this lecture was very good. |
| Item 2 | The classroom atmosphere of this lecture was very pleasant. |
| Item 3 | This lecture increased my awareness of the importance of self-development. |
| Item 4 | This lecture has improved my problem-solving ability. |

- Item 5 This lecture has improved my understanding of importance of attributes of successful leaders (e.g., critical thinking, moral competence).
- Item 6 This lecture has improved my interpersonal communication skills.
- Item 7 There was much peer interaction amongst the students in this lecture.
- Item 8 This lecture has improved my critical thinking.
- Item 9 There was much student participation in this lecture.
- Item 10 There were many opportunities for reflection in this lecture.
- Item 11 This lecture is helpful to my personal development.
- Item 12 The lecturer had a good mastery of the lecture material.
- Item 13 The lecturer used different methods to encourage students to learn.
- Item 14 The lecturer in this lecture was able to help students understand the knowledge covered in the lecture.
- Item 15 Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of the lecturer in this lecture.
- Item 16 Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of this lecture.

While Items 15 and 16 were designed to assess the global evaluation of the teacher and the lecture, Shek and Leung (14) further proposed that the rest 14 items could be reduced to three subscales based on factor analysis, including Subject Attributes (SA; Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11), Lecture Attributes (LA; Items 2, 7, and 9), and Teacher Attributes (TA; Items 12, 13, and 14). In the present study, both the composite scores of the three subscales and the total score of the questionnaire were calculated for each lecture. Reliability coefficients of the scales are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2. The high Cronbach's alpha coefficients and mean inter-item correlation coefficients suggest that the Post-Lecture Evaluation Form and its three subscales were internally consistent.

Data analysis

To answer the two research questions, different statistical methods were employed. First, descriptive statistical analyses were performed to examine the overall perceptions of students on each lecture of the subject. Specifically, the percentages of students who responded to the questionnaire positively were calculated for each item and summarized. Means and standard deviations of each subscale score for individual lecture were calculated. Second, to investigate whether students' perceptions on teachers' teaching and lecture attributes predicted the overall evaluation of the lecturer (Item 15) and the lecture (Item 16), two multiple regression models were estimated for each lecture and the whole sample. Students' scores on Item 15 and Item 16 served as dependent variables and the three subscale scores (TA, SA, and LA) served as independent variables. All data analyses were performed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 20.0 (SPSS 20.0).

Results

As reported in Table 1, the response rates of the survey were high with the numbers of questionnaires obtained from each lecture ranged from 867 to 1,043. Totally, 12,406 completed Post-Lecture Evaluation Form were collected over 13 lectures. Percentages of students who responded positively to the questionnaire were calculated for each lecture and as a whole (Table 1). Several observations can be highlighted from the findings. First, students generally perceived the subject in a positive way. For example, 78.89% of the students reported that the design of the lectures was very good (Item 1), 72.77% of the respondents agreed that the subject provided them many opportunities for reflection (Item 10: 72.77%) and improved their understanding in the attributes of successful leaders (Item 5: 75.07%).

Table 1. Percentage of Students with Positive Responses and Reliabilities of the Post-Lecture Evaluation Form in Each Lecture

Items	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L11	L12	L13	Overall
1. The design of this lecture was very good.	75.53	73.29	81.49	77.21	85.84	79.34	83.60	86.09	79.65	79.02	74.25	74.90	75.37	78.89
2. The classroom atmosphere of this lecture was very pleasant.	80.27	71.54	85.57	75.92	81.20	77.39	78.18	84.34	77.26	76.63	74.82	71.40	71.66	77.40
3. This lecture increased my awareness of the importance of self-development	64.90	68.91	67.08	71.09	79.96	70.74	77.80	80.02	73.60	73.12	69.10	73.09	72.27	72.44
4. This lecture has improved my problem-solving ability	38.78	49.41	62.41	65.58	75.57	65.67	66.74	68.54	76.43	70.34	72.86	70.88	68.92	65.55
5. This lecture has improved my understanding of importance of attributes of successful leaders (e.g., critical thinking, moral competence)	72.33	78.67	71.02	64.94	74.67	75.15	79.68	84.90	79.15	77.28	73.59	75.26	69.27	75.07
6. This lecture has improved my interpersonal communication skills.	66.15	58.41	67.80	69.36	63.47	67.86	67.13	74.34	76.66	76.30	79.45	64.16	64.67	68.90
7. There was much peer interaction amongst the students in this lecture.	81.60	73.78	85.58	77.89	75.95	79.36	73.82	84.69	79.34	78.13	73.46	62.20	65.63	76.26
8. This lecture has improved my critical thinking.	43.59	53.71	64.98	57.99	66.09	71.22	70.59	71.11	67.71	69.02	68.00	68.07	65.78	64.45
9. There was much student participation in this lecture.	78.77	70.72	84.67	78.94	78.67	79.01	75.43	86.88	81.33	80.43	76.26	65.22	66.74	77.16
10. There were many opportunities for reflection in this lecture.	62.40	66.63	61.73	70.87	84.66	74.64	81.89	83.35	72.59	73.75	69.28	72.45	71.84	72.77
11. This lecture is helpful to my personal development.	67.92	68.06	69.48	73.46	82.70	72.76	79.33	82.85	76.66	78.56	74.31	76.91	76.58	75.35
12. The lecturer had a good mastery of the lecture material.	89.01	85.14	86.01	81.64	86.72	82.30	85.57	87.78	84.11	82.15	80.16	80.21	79.01	83.83
13. The lecturer used different methods to encourage students to learn.	81.91	76.34	84.38	80.32	84.59	79.94	81.78	87.21	81.72	81.70	77.49	77.22	75.94	80.81
14. The lecturer in this lecture was able to help students understand the knowledge covered in the lecture.	78.34	80.59	80.12	80.86	85.08	80.58	82.79	87.20	83.68	81.83	79.34	79.18	77.60	81.32
15. Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of the lecturer in this lecture.	88.44	84.03	86.95	83.71	89.01	82.84	86.47	87.98	83.28	83.79	81.40	80.08	79.47	84.42
16. Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of this lecture.	80.52	79.47	84.05	80.45	87.80	81.91	84.43	89.10	82.71	80.41	80.72	78.36	80.17	82.32
Number of questionnaires collected	1043	1031	973	926	920	974	867	908	964	920	973	972	935	12,406
Response rate (%)	97.48	96.36	90.93	86.54	85.98	91.03	81.03	84.86	90.09	85.98	90.93	90.84	87.38	89.19
Coefficient alpha for the 16-item scale	.91	.92	.94	.95	.94	.95	.95	.95	.95	.95	.96	.96	.96	.95
Mean inter-item correlation	.39	.41	.48	.53	.48	.56	.54	.53	.57	.57	.60	.58	.62	.52

Note: Percentage of students with positive responses = the cumulative percentage of students with responses as “Strongly Agree”, “Agree” and “Slightly Agree.”

Figures in italic are percentages.

L1 to L13 means Lecture 1 to Lecture 13.

Most students agreed that the subjects effectively promoted their personal development in different areas, such as increased their awareness of the importance of self-development (Item 3: 72.44%), improved their problem-solving ability (Item 4: 65.55%), critical thinking (Item 8: 64.45%) as well as interpersonal communication skills (Item 6: 68.90%). Second, the majority of students showed favorable evaluation on each specific lecture. Overall, 77.40% of the students regarded the atmosphere of the lecture was very pleasant (Item 2), 76.26% agreed that there was much peer interaction (Item 7) and good student participation (Item 9: 77.16%) in each class. Third, the lecturers were welcomed by students for their good mastery of lecture materials (Item 12: 83.83%), different methods to motivate students to learn (Item 13: 80.81%), and teaching competence in helping students understand the knowledge covered in the lecture (Item 14: 81.32%). Fourth, most students expressed very positive evaluation on the overall performance of the teaching staff (Item 15: 84.42) and the lecture (Item 16: 82.32%).

Means and standard deviations of students' scores on the whole scale and three subscales for each lecture were summarized in Table 2. A preliminary observation was that Lecture 5 and Lecture 8 appeared to have higher scores than other lectures on

subject attributes (SA), lecture attributes (LA), and the whole Post-Lecture Evaluation Form (PLE). For lecturer attributes, Lecture 3 and Lecture 8 seemed to have the highest scores among all lectures. Though no statistical comparisons were made in the present study, the observed differences deserve further examination in future study.

To investigate whether students' perceived attributes of subject, lecture, and teacher would predict their overall evaluation of the teacher (Item 15) and the lecture (Item 16), multiple regression analyses were carried out. Table 3 presents the estimated results of the multiple regression models. As expected, for each individual lecture and the whole sample, all three independent variables significantly predicted students' overall evaluation on the teacher and on the lecture. For the overall evaluation of the teacher, perceived teacher attributes (TA) played a more important role ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$; the whole sample) than subject attributes (SA: $\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$; the whole sample) and lecture attributes (LA: $\beta = 0.17$, $p < .001$; the whole sample). For the overall evaluation of the lecture, students' perceived subject attributes (SA) had the largest regression coefficients ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$; the whole sample).

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability of the Post-Lecture Evaluation Scale and Subscales

Lecture	TA		SA		LA		PLE	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
L1	4.07	.52	3.66	.50	4.03	.58	3.86	.45
L2	4.00	.55	3.71	.49	3.85	.60	3.83	.46
L3	4.06	.56	3.78	.54	4.14	.60	3.94	.50
L4	4.04	.60	3.81	.57	3.98	.62	3.97	.54
L5	4.13	.57	3.96	.52	3.98	.57	4.03	.49
L6	4.04	.59	3.87	.54	4.00	.58	3.95	.53
L7	4.09	.58	3.95	.54	3.95	.61	4.00	.52
L8	4.17	.56	3.98	.51	4.13	.57	4.07	.50
L9	4.08	.60	3.93	.55	4.02	.60	3.99	.53
L10	4.06	.60	3.90	.55	4.00	.59	3.97	.53
L11	4.01	.62	3.87	.56	3.92	.62	3.93	.55
L12	3.99	.59	3.87	.55	3.78	.61	3.89	.54
L13	3.96	.60	3.83	.57	3.80	.64	3.87	.55
Total	4.05	.58	3.85	.55	3.97	.61	3.94	.52
Overall statistics	TA		SA		LA		PLE	
No. of items	3		8		3		16	
Cronbach's alpha	.82		.90		.81		.95	
Mean inter-item coefficients	.61		.54		.59		.52	

Note: TA = Teacher Attributes; SA = Subject Attributes; LA = Lecture Attributes; PLE = Post-Lecture Evaluation Form. L1 to L13 means Lecture 1 to Lecture 13.

Table 3. Multiple Regression on Students' Overall Evaluation about the Teacher and the Lecture

	Lecture													Overall
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L11	L12	L13	
DV: Overall evaluation of the teacher														
SA	.16	.24	.19	.12	.27	.24	.16	.15	.14	.12	.16	.22	.08	.16
LA	.17	.13	.27	.18	.18	.17	.08	.19	.14	.20	.12	.06	.19	.17
TA	.45	.46	.41	.56	.41	.45	.60	.52	.55	.55	.58	.58	.60	.52
R Square	.44	.52	.60	.63	.59	.63	.63	.63	.61	.64	.66	.66	.66	.61
DV: Overall evaluation of the lecture														
SA	.35	.44	.39	.44	.41	.43	.39	.34	.33	.39	.37	.47	.43	.39
LA	.23	.16	.27	.22	.14	.18	.13	.22	.17	.14	.21	.08	.09	.18
TA	.26	.23	.21	.22	.32	.26	.33	.29	.39	.34	.31	.33	.34	.30
R Square	.49	.52	.60	.63	.61	.64	.62	.60	.66	.66	.67	.68	.66	.62
No. of completed questionnaires	995	983	952	915	899	960	860	896	944	914	960	953	924	12,155

Note: All regression coefficients were statistically significant, $p < .001$.

TA = Teacher Attributes; SA = Subject Attributes; LA = Lecture Attributes; PLE = Post-Lecture Evaluation Scale.

L1 to L13 means Lecture 1 to Lecture 13.

Discussion

This present paper reports the post-lecture subjective outcome evaluation findings on an interpersonal and intrapersonal development subject entitled "Tomorrow's leaders" offered at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in the first semester of 2013/14 academic year. In general, the results showed that the students perceived the subject positively in terms of the attributes of the subject, individual lecture, perceived benefits, and the teacher. Throughout the whole semester (13 lectures) a high proportion of the students demonstrated favorable attitudes towards each lecture as well as the performance of the teacher. This suggests that the revamped curriculum of "Tomorrow's Leaders" remained to be well-received by the new cohort of students recruited in 2013/14 and the work of teaching staff in this subject was duly recognized. These findings are also consistent with the results of other evaluative methods on the subject conducted on the same cohort of students (10, 15). Along with findings obtained in 2012/13 (14), the present study provides direct evidence for the effectiveness of the program based on students' subjective outcome evaluation.

A rough impression on students' ratings across lectures seemed to suggest that Lecture 3, Lecture 5

and Lecture 8 were rated with relatively higher scores than other lectures. These findings were interesting but since no statistical comparison was made due to the non-independence of observations across lectures, conclusion regarding which lecture was most welcomed by students cannot be made. Future studies should further compare students' evaluation data of different lectures by conducting repeated measures MANOVA based on matched dataset. Such findings could inform the development and curriculum revamping of this subject.

It was found that all three dimensions of the post-lecture evaluation form significantly predicted students' overall evaluation about the teacher and the lecture. In particular, students' perceived teacher attributes and perceived subject attributes were the strongest predictors of their overall evaluation on the teacher and on the lecture, respectively. These findings are aligned with previous studies. Hill et al. showed that teachers' quality play a vital role in students' perception about the quality of education (16). Similarly, Lee (17) reported that the teachers' way of teaching significantly predicted students' learning attitude and their satisfaction towards the learning process. Concerning subject attributes, a number of studies showed that course design, lecture materials, and intended learning outcomes all contributed to the effectiveness of teaching and learning and thus

influence students' satisfaction towards the subject (18). This study further supports the importance of teaching staff and basic subject qualities in determining good learning outcomes based on students' views.

While the present study contributed to a more complete understanding about the effectiveness of the subject "Tomorrow's Leaders," several limitations should be noted. First, this study was quantitative in nature. Although the findings based on a large sample of students can be easily generalized, the reduction of data to numbers may result in lost information. And the reasons behind the quantitative findings could not be obtained if such variables are not included in data analyses. In future studies, qualitative methods shall also be employed to obtain direct comments and opinions on the subject from students. Second, the present study did not take into account the factors regarding the students' background, such as gender, age, major, etc., which may affect students' subjective outcome evaluation about the lecture. For instance, students' preferences on different topics in the subject may vary across their disciplines, and mainland students who used to be educated with traditional teacher-centered approach may perceive the subject differently with local students. It would be interesting and informative to include these variables in future analyses. Third, as mentioned, no statistical comparison was made on students' ratings across lectures. Although the preliminary observations were interesting, the findings must be validated based on statistical analyses. Lastly, the study only focused on students' subjective outcome evaluation and it is unknown whether the students' personal development has really been promoted after participating in the course. Objective outcome evaluation would be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the subject. In addition, other stakeholders' perspectives shall be considered when evaluating the subject, like the opinions of teachers and administrative staff who were involved in the subject delivery and coordination. This has pointed to the direction of future studies. Despite these limitations, the study provided a descriptive profile on students' subjective evaluation of the revamped subject "Tomorrow's Leaders" and the findings have both theoretical and practical implications that would guide future studies and curriculum revamping work.

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