

Improving Learning Experiences for Community College Transfer Hospitality and Tourism Students

Abstract

Previous studies have addressed the topic of community college transfer students, but very few have examined students' learning experiences after their transfer to a university, and none have focused on the hospitality and tourism discipline. This study aimed to understand community college transfer students' expectations of hospitality or tourism undergraduate degree programmes and assess any differences between teachers' and students' views of these students' learning experiences. A qualitative study was conducted with teachers and students, using semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The study revealed that the students encounter challenges such as campus and faculty environments, gaps in their expectations, heavy study loads, teaching methods, assessment of subjects, and social and affective development. The findings also showed that the feeling of inferiority could drive some students to strive hard to achieve their academic goals. Several strategies to improve students' learning experiences are recommended.

KEYWORDS: Community college, transfer students, undergraduate programmes, hospitality and tourism, qualitative study

1. Introduction

Worldwide, the demand for hospitality and tourism management programmes is high due to the important contribution of this industry to the world economy. Recent figures published by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), an organisation representing the travel and tourism sector globally, indicated a global contribution of 8.9 trillion USD to the world's GDP in 2019, representing 10.3 percent of the world's total GDP (WTTC, n.d.). In addition, the hospitality and travel industry accounts for one out of every ten employment opportunities (Agarwal, 2019). This increases the demand for qualified hospitality and tourism employees, thus creating the need for alternative entry pathways, such as articulating level 4 diplomas or level 5 advanced diplomas to the second or final years of various hospitality and tourism bachelor degree programmes (CTH, n.d.). It is common for students to start in a community college and then transfer to a baccalaureate degree in a 4-year university (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Community colleges play a crucial role not only in American higher education (Ma & Baum, 2016), but also in eastern countries including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education (FSTE), 2017). Transfer students' learning experiences when they move to university is a topic that has gained recent attention due to the 'transfer shock' (Archambault, 2015) caused by various differences between community colleges and universities. To address these differences, tertiary institutions should consider different promotional strategies to attract community college transfer students (CCTS) to their undergraduate programmes, and also to address the students' wellbeing in terms of academic, emotional and social support. Programme administrators should recognise CCTS' views of their educational experiences to ensure their satisfaction with the delivery of teaching programmes and the services and facilities provided to meet their special needs. Universities should be responsible for establishing a receptive culture (Castro & Cortez, 2017). More work to strengthen the collaborations of 2-year community colleges (as the sending institutions) and 4-year institutions (as the receiving institutions) is essential (Reyes, 2011).

There is far more research on issues such as transfer shock (Hill, 1965), the barriers to successful transfer (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), the transfer process (Hagedorn et al., 2006), different factors affecting transfer decisions (Monroe & Richting, 2002), and student advising (Swigart, 2000) than on teachers' and students' understanding of the transfer students' expectations. In hospitality and tourism, it is notable that previous studies have usually focused on issues such as students' learning styles (Dale & McCarthy, 2006; Green & Sammons, 2014), learning preferences (Deale, 2019), the university teaching styles and methods used to assist Asian hospitality-management students (Barron, 2002), hospitality students' perceptions of the international hospitality industry (Jenkins, 2001), their preferred experiential learning activities (Yan & Cheung, 2012), their placement experiences and classroom learning (Stansbie et al., 2016), their expectations of virtual learning (Patiar, et al., 2020) and their perceptions of online hospitality and tourism courses and the use of technology for their learning (Annaraud & Singh, 2017). Previous studies of CCTS taking hospitality and tourism-related programmes are few. There is no empirical evidence about hospitality and tourism teachers' and transfer students' perceptions of the study process and little insight about the hospitality teachers' expectations of their students and vice versa. To address this research gap, this study aimed to provide hospitality and tourism educators with essential insights into the learning experiences of community college hospitality and tourism transfer students and to facilitate the development of strategies to help them cope with university. In view of the growth worldwide of this group of students, it is worth looking at their learning experiences and how these can be

improved. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to explore how university academics can modify their teaching methods and support systems to assist CCTS to complete their undergraduate programmes successfully. Specifically, this study aimed to:

- explore community college transfer hospitality and tourism students' expectations of undergraduate degree programmes
- investigate differences between teachers' and students' views of these students' learning experiences
- present recommendations to improve community college transfer students' learning experiences.

1.1. Research context

Higher education institutions' recruitment of CCTS is not a new phenomenon in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) government introduced community colleges in 2000, to provide students with the alternative of completing associate degrees if they failed to secure bachelor's degree places (Education Commission Report, 2000). At present, eight of 21 degree-awarding institutions in Hong Kong are funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), which provides a set quota of 15,000 places annually (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2019). The transfer function of the associate degree makes it feasible for bridging associate degree/higher diploma holders to enter university. Therefore, many students, who could not get places in government-funded universities (mostly due to having failed one of the required core subjects such as English, Chinese, Mathematics or Liberal Studies), consider another admission route (senior year entry) via community colleges. Generally, CCTS are designated as year three students in their chosen 4-year undergraduate degree programmes if enrolled successfully via the senior year admission route. Consequently, they normally need to complete their selected programmes within two academic years (Cheung et al., 2020a).

Most CCTS want to complete their undergraduate degrees relatively more quickly (normally two years) when compared with their native (normal entry) counterparts (Cheung et al., 2020a). Tight schedules and heavy study loads may cause obstacles to their studies. Ishitani and McKittrick (2010) investigated ways to engage CCTS in 4-year institutions since many have felt stressed and unsupported. Anecdotal evidence has also shown that, while effectively freshmen of their universities, they are seldom treated the same as other year-one native students. For instance, in one Hong Kong university, CCTS are not given any opportunity to take minor studies due to the 'tightly-packed' major programme structure. This leads to the feeling that their study loads are heavy. Some students have mentioned their difficulties and expressed the need to extend the normal programme duration.

Clearly, research on CCTS in Hong Kong is essential, especially as the HKSAR government is increasing the intake places continuously (Concourse, 2020 May). As shown in Table 1, in the 2019/20 academic year, the total senior year student intake in government-funded programmes was 5,000. This is likely to increase further because associate degree/higher diploma holders wish to pursue higher degrees and because the government has a policy to increase the number of available places progressively.

(Pls. insert Table 1 here)

According to *Hospitality & Tourism Management: The Ultimate Student Guide 2000*, over 32,000 students around the world are interested in hospitality and tourism programmes (educations.com, 2020). These programmes are popular for CCTS. In Hong Kong, the demand has been prompted by the development of the hospitality and tourism industry. The number of hotels is expected to increase from 283 (79,231 rooms) in March 2018 to 327 (90,893 rooms) in 2021 (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2018) because of the rapid growth of visitor arrivals (55.91 million in 2019) (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2020), even despite the recent hit to the industry triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, there are about twenty-one full-time accredited hospitality and tourism-related higher diploma and associate degree programmes offered by eleven institutions (Information Portal for Accredited Post-secondary Programmes, iPASS, 2020). After the completion of the courses, the higher diploma/associate degree holders will compete for the very limited places in hospitality and tourism-related undergraduate degree programmes offered by the two government-funded universities. In fact, these applications have not dropped significantly in the Hong Kong Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS), which is a unified system for applying for full-time undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong, and Non-JUPAS. For instance, the two hospitality and tourism-related undergraduate programmes offered by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University were the university's most popular and competitive programmes in the 2020/21 academic year (SCMP, 2020). CCTS are also an essential source of hospitality and tourism student candidates.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Importance of transfer experience

Previous studies indicated that CCTS' learning experience is particularly important to their development (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). According to [Cheung et al. \(2015\)](#), the transfer students' academic performances can be affected significantly by their universities' teaching and learning environments. In addition, students' psychological health can be influenced by heavy study loads (Thuraiselvam & Thang, 2015). [Laanan, et al. \(2010\)](#) indicated that their transfer experience has received attention from researchers and policymakers, but their learning experiences in their receiving universities have not yet been examined thoroughly ([Wyner, et al., 2016](#)).

2.2. Characteristics of community college transfer students

CCTS normally have difficulties in adjusting to the rigorous academic standards of 4-year institutions (Townsend, 1993). Some have problems with transferring credits gained from their respective community colleges to university studies and registering for appropriate subjects (Townsend & Wilson, 2006) and have consequently experienced heavy study workloads and study-related stress (Cheung et al., 2020a). Transfer students' academic performances can be lower than their native 4-year counterparts' (Porter, 1999). However, other recent studies found that their performances improved and some even outperformed the native students ([Xu, et al.,](#)

2018). A recent study by Cheung et al. (2020b), investigating the workloads and academic performances of transfer and native students in a Hong Kong university confirmed that CCTS in Hong Kong attained higher award GPAs than their native counterparts. Transfer students with high levels of social and academic involvement during their 2-year community college studies will very likely continue this behaviour in their 4-year institutions (Astin, 1984), although they normally have less social contact with their institutions (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983). Notwithstanding this, CCTS from western countries are, on average, older than 4-year college students (Popovich, et al., 2020) and mostly older than their eastern counterparts (Cheung et al., 2020a). It has been suggested that their study performances can be affected by their family and other obligations (Maino, 2015) such as taking care of family and work in addition to their own studies (Cheung et al., 2020a). With English communication important for the internationalisation of a country's higher education system, transfer students whose mother tongue is not English can encounter obstacles during their studies (Hawley & Harris, 2005). One study (Porter, 1999) found that the attrition rates of transfer students from baccalaureate institutions were normally higher than native students'. Similarly, when examining transcript records and demographic information of nearly 70,000 students at a US public university, Aulck and West (2017) found that CCTS had higher attrition rates. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the attrition rates of transfer students in Southeast Asian contexts are not as high, probably because they are normally not 'older university students' with families to look after. In fact, the transfer students' ages are similar to those of their native counterparts. For instance, the Hong Kong CCTS had lower attrition rates (Cheung et al., 2020).

2.3. Unique issues that community college transfer students encounter

During their first year at university, many CCTS encounter 'transfer shock', a term coined by Hills (1965) to describe a post-transfer drop in grade point averages during their first semester. Laanan et al. (2010, p.176) pointed out that '*Barriers to successful transfer can be attributed to lack of academic preparation, inaccurate transfer advising, unfamiliarity of academic expectations and rigor of the senior institution, and weak transfer and articulation policies.*' The extent of transfer shock varies by discipline (Cejda, 1997). Other scholars have indicated that demographic factors (e.g., students' socio-economic status) (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Gonzalez & Hilmer, 2006), academic under-preparation or inferiority (Xu et al., 2018), psychological challenges (e.g., poor self-concept) (Mehr & Daltry, 2016), and stress, and anxiety (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013) are also factors contributing to the shock, consequently increasing the risk of attrition. However, some other studies have found the "transfer ecstasy" phenomenon, which refers to the transferred students' post-transfer improvement in academic performance (Aulck & West, 2017). Ishitanai and McKitrick (2010) investigated CCTS' engagement at a four-year collegiate institution, finding they had difficulty in establishing their own peer networks and were less engaged than their native counterparts. Peer support can affect their study workloads and stress levels significantly (Cheung et al., 2020).

2.4. Critical success factors for successful education experience

Previous studies have identified some important factors that affect the transfer student experience and success in the receiving institution. For instance, Berger and Malaney (2003) found that transfer preparedness is the most prevalent indicator of student satisfaction and

academic performance. Advice and assistance rendered by faculty and administration staff, academic advising or counselling, and students' understanding of the academic requirements of the receiving institution are some examples of transfer preparedness. Pennington (2006) concluded that CCTS' college GPAs can be the greatest predictor of their academic performances during the receiving institution's first semester. Ishitani (2008) suggested that more credit transfers granted upon their admission to the receiving university would contribute to their success. Psychologically, transfer students with low intellectual self-confidence and greater perceptions that the university environment is competitive will normally encounter more difficulty in academic adjustment (D'Amico, et al., 2013; Laanan, 2007). Transfer student capital is one of the important factors determining whether a college transfer student will have higher levels of satisfaction with academic experience. Advice given at the receiving university, along with the students' collaboration and experiences with faculty at the community college and motivation and self-efficacy, will determine their capital (Moser, 2013). Mobley and Brawner (2018) further found that community college engineering students attributed their successful transition to their self-motivation and initiative associated with community cultural wealth (i.e. that people of colour and minority groups bring to their educational pursuits) and experiential capital (i.e. students' hands-on experiences gained from their families). Both factors were found to affect transfer students' persistence. Shaw et al. (2019), investigating how the community college experience affects CCTS after they have enrolled in the receiving institution, emphasised that community college instructors are in a particularly strong position to support their students by aligning the course standards with those of receiving institutions. Parnes et al. (2020) echoed the important role the instructors play and the impact of student-instructor relationships on student success. It is worth noting that the larger size of a community college and its proximity to a public university play a contributing role to the CCTS's success because it may ease the transition between the two institutions (Umbach et al., 2019).

2.5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical basis for this study consisted of transfer student capital (Laanan et al., 2010), transfer student success (Fauria & Fuller, 2015), the longitudinal process of degree completion (Cabrera et al., 2005), and Tinto's (1975) attrition model. Transfer student capital refers to the students' academic performances and the learning experiences gained from their community colleges and applied during their studies in the receiving university. Grade point average, as a pivotal measure of academic performance, is one indicator of transfer student success. The longitudinal process of degree completion is related to the process spanning transfer students' college-related decision-making, experiences and outcomes. The student college experience entails both academic and social involvement (Wang & Wharton, 2010), as well as academic performance. Tinto's model of student attrition (1975) states that successful academic and social integration into university lead to a higher level of commitment to university study and thereby a lower likelihood of attrition. The students' personal attributes, family backgrounds and college learning experiences contribute to college performance as well as the commitment to their receiving institutions. Tinto's attrition model has been used in many previous studies examining CCTS and validated as a rigorous model (Getzlaf et al., 1984; Mannan, 2007).

3. Methodology

This study employed an instrumental case study design (Crowe et al., 2011), since qualitative methods can provide the opportunity to collect more personal and flexible data (Brunt, 1997). A single case study has the advantages of offering an empirically rich, context-specific, holistic account of the phenomenon under investigation (Willis, 2014). The current study examined how university academics and CCTS perceived student learning experiences and the reasons behind their perceptions. This is a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, and the investigators had little or no control over the behavioural events. This is why the case study method was considered appropriate for this research; it is useful where areas of perceived complexity exist (Yin, 1989). The method allows the investigators to have an in-depth investigation of the development of a single event, situation, or an individual over a period of time (Creswell, 2013) and detailed analysis of changes that addresses how and why they come out. It also sets a boundary for geographical site to be explored on teaching/learning experiences of the academics and CCTS from hospitality and tourism disciplines (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

3.1. Case selection

A hospitality and tourism school (hereafter named as ABC Hospitality and Tourism School) in a Hong Kong university was selected because of its history and reputation in leading undergraduate and post-graduate education in this discipline. The names of the school and all informants have been changed for confidentiality. With over 2000 students, ABC Hospitality and Tourism School provides various programmes, from undergraduate to PhD levels. It admits, on average, 140 community transfer hospitality and tourism students and 120 normal entry freshmen annually. The school's undergraduate programme structure consists of three major blocks of credits. The first block addresses the general university requirements, and is common for all universities in Hong Kong. For example, students are required to take a service-learning subject to meet the graduation requirements. The second block is for discipline-specific subjects required by the hospitality and tourism majors. In addition to the subjects, hospitality and tourism bachelor students are required to undertake a 6-month work-integrated-education experience by working full-time or part-time in a local or overseas hotel or tourism organisation before their graduation. The last block offers the free credits dedicated to the study of a minor subject and free electives.

3.2. Data collection

To understand the learning and teaching issues in depth, we employed extensive semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method. The data were collected individually from 4 faculty members and focus group interviews were conducted with 11 community college hospitality and tourism transfer students (3 group interviews with 2 groups of 3 students and 1 group of 5 students). Several criteria were set to maximise the richness of the information obtained from the teachers. The invited teachers had to have worked for the school for at least a year, to be full-time employees and to have experience in teaching both community college transfer and native students. With the assistance of a gatekeeper – the person in charge of

undergraduate programmes – the teachers and students listed in Table 2 agreed to be interviewed. These teachers were selected because of their high involvement in teaching CCTS.

(Pls. insert Table 2 here)

Two different interview guides were designed, one for the teachers and one for the students. The students were asked to share their experiences of adjusting to the university learning environment and associated challenges, as well as the support they had requested and received. The teachers were questioned about their experiences with teaching and supporting transfer students, especially in understanding the challenges. Table 3 lists the questions in detail:

(Pls. insert Table 3 here)

The interviews were mainly conducted in a quiet room on campus, and usually lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the informants' consent. A research assistant attended the focus group interviews and took notes about the interview flow, main ideas of the conversation and the interactions or emotional status of the participants. After each interview, the interviewer and the research assistant debriefed the participants to communicate the findings, especially what new additions to the data pool.

3.3. Data analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by a research assistant who was well trained to conduct qualitative studies and data analysis. NVivo software package was utilised to organise the qualitative data and code the transcribed interviews to identify patterns and themes. The interviewer, research assistant and authors repeatedly re-read all transcripts to locate the concepts and compared the coding schemes to reach agreement about the categories. We adopted both inductive and deductive approaches when analysing the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This combination is important because the inductive approach allows an open mind to identify new elements from the data, which have not been identified in the previous literature while the deductive approach provides the dimensions of previous research experience. Using the analytical approach, we identified each meaning unit and labelled it with codes. Sub-themes were grouped under six main categories, as shown in Table 4 (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

4. Findings and Discussion

Based on the main categories and sub-themes shown in Table 4 that emerged from the data, the research findings and discussion are presented in the following order:

- Campus and faculty environment
- Gaps in subject expectations

- Study load
- Preferred teaching methods
- Assessment of subjects
- Social and affective development

(Pls. insert Table 4 here)

4.1. Campus and faculty environment

Overall, the students indicated that they had enjoyed their university studies and life. Most commented that the school provided them with **adequate resources and facilities** while the staff were supportive and ready to help. Student S5 stated *‘the resources are much better than in my college where I studied the higher diploma, ... the staff explained how we can utilise the database to do our projects, ... we can contact a centre to share, they are very eager to help’*. Another student S4 explained, *‘many resources here, ... the professors will make a spontaneous offer of help, ... that is you can contact them whenever you want’*. The findings are different from some previous studies that claimed CCTS normally have trouble in developing relationships with faculty in a new institution (Lee & Schneider, 2018). Nevertheless, some mentioned that it took time to understand the university systems (e.g., library, and subject registration system etc.), which created extra workloads for them, consequently hindering their adjustment. Teacher T3 commented *‘they are comfortable with their old ways, ... they seem to take a longer time to get used to it here’*. In addition, some students seldom participated in university activities because of the **location of their school**. Student S11 explained *‘the location of our school is detached from the university main campus ... it deprives us from participating in activities there.’*

It is evident that these students had **adapted to the new learning environment** quite smoothly, with the support and resources given by the school. Student S6 reflected *‘many people from our school come to explain the exchange programme, volunteering activities, and student activities etc., ... and share their experiences, ... I feel the university has given sufficient resources’*. However, the adjustment is discounted if students are not familiar with the university-wide systems. This could have contributed to the students’ low social involvement and integration in the university community (Borglum & Kubala, 2000). Student S7 rationalised that *‘due to time clashes, we seldom join these activities’*. Student S6 added *‘we ourselves do not join, we do not take the initiative’*. In addition to a school/department’s designated systems, facilities and activities, both university and school administrators should therefore communicate clearly about different university-wide systems, facilities and activities and to support transfer students to utilise these through freshmen seminar/orientation sessions specifically designed for this student group. For instance, training can help them to understand the mechanisms of different systems and use them effectively and efficiently; as student S5 mentioned *‘if you need to get access to a system to search for information... The search instead increases your workload; ... it seems you need to learn new stuff’*. In cases where a school/department is far from a main university campus, an administrative system is essential to widen student participation in the university-wide activities.

4.2. Gap of subject expectation

Some students said they had experienced **adjustment shock at the outset** because of assessment requirements and subject content. They said that it took greater effort to meet the high academic requirements. Others echoed that the subject and assessment requirements are somewhat more demanding than their previous sub-degree studies. Student S8 mentioned *'I feel that the degree of difficulty of test and examination is definitely higher than those of my higher diploma programme'*. Student S3 explained *'finding the right answers to questions is a kind of problem-solving and knowledge acquisition per se'*. Some thought that too many research skills were taught in their courses, even though research is normally a critical aspect of undergraduate programmes. Student S10 stated *'we want to know more about consumer motivation, ... but the focus is on marketing research skills, ... I know learning the skills is beneficial, but, ... the research skills are always taught.'* The findings further provide more reasons for 'transfer shock' (Hills, 1965).

The transfer students wanted to learn more in-depth knowledge from the degree programme because they had gained some knowledge about the discipline previously. They also expected to learn more practical knowledge and skills, which could facilitate their future careers in the hospitality and tourism industry. Student S4 expressed *'I hope to learn more practical skills and knowledge, ... but what I am studying now is ... more academically-related'*. However, some teachers explained the practical skills could be obtained from the student internship, whereas subject lectures should focus more on theories and concepts that guide the practical learning in the field training. Teacher T2 emphasised *'those practical skills, ... you can learn anywhere, ... what are the concepts or theories or how are things being really considered or conceptualized? I think those are the things that we can teach here'*. T2 added ***'the students should learn to link the theories and concepts into their internship'***. It seems there is a gap between the students' expectations of the core subjects and teachers' expectations of the students' subject foundation knowledge and ability. These findings echo Laanan's (2007) suggestion that community colleges should reconsider their 2-year curricula to require their students to do more reading, writing and researching, to prepare them for university study and enable them to understand the significance and linkage between theory and practice.

Notwithstanding this, most teachers were quite **positive about the CCTS' learning attitudes and commitment** and agreed that they tended to be hard working. Teacher T3 indicated *'it seems that the transfer students try harder, they put more effort into their studies, ... and put more effort into every assignment ... they perform more than I expect'*.

4.3. Study load

Most of the students commented their **study loads are heavy but still acceptable**, especially for those whose similar internship experiences in their sending institutions made them eligible for credit transfer. Teacher T1 confirmed *'they need to study about 21 credits each semester, ... if they do not have the credit transfer granted for their placement, ... it could be very heavy for them'*. Although some students said they had joined the overseas exchange programme, some others felt stressed and focused purely on academic studies due to the competition. Student S7 pointed out *'All students in this school really make a good effort in their studies; ... we dare not slow down ..., you know... our weaker qualifications, ... I seldom join other extra curriculum activities, but always study, study and study'*. The competition and the feeling of

inferiority were the main stressors, as was found by Xu et al. (2018). The CCTS' comments suggested that they normally perceive themselves to be less competent than those admitted to the programme through the normal entry route. However, this also drives them to strive hard to perform better academically. Student S7 expressed *'we are lucky to be transferred to degree programmes, ... because we failed to get in through the normal entry admission system'*. Teacher T1 explained *'this is their second chance to get a degree ... and that's why, once admitted, most have strived very hard to complete the degree'*. The sense of failure and valuing of the second chance are common in Hong Kong (Wong, 2020). Our findings suggest that these students could transform their negative perceptions into positive energy to strive for academic excellence. It also helps explain the 'transfer ecstasy' phenomenon (Fredrickson, 1998), indicating a recovery from transfer shock within the first year after the transfer.

Although all agreed that applying their knowledge and skills to serve the community is good and meaningful, some students complained about the **demanding workload of service-learning**. They commented that they have less flexibility about the timing of the service-learning course due to the relatively short duration of the programme. Student S10 reflected *'because of our tight time table, it is not too flexible to select our preferred service learning subject, ... we just randomly take one to fulfil the requirement'*, although teacher T1 indicated *'There are enough service learning subjects'*. In addition, the students were required to complete huge amounts of preparation work before providing the service and to prepare reflective journals afterwards. This reflects that better policies for transfer and articulation of university common requirements between community colleges and receiving universities is essential to ensure a smoother transition. It also reflects that the students may emphasise their major studies' core subjects rather than service learning. Universities should consider the transfer students' needs, including extra time to fulfil some graduation requirements.

4.4. Preferred teaching methods

The students described their preferred teaching methods as those that can **enhance their understanding and application of knowledge**. They commented that learning through different case studies affords them better understanding of theories and terminology within real-life contexts and enables them to apply the learnt knowledge in their future jobs. Student S2 reflected *'Case studies are very helpful, ... we will understand how to apply what we have learnt and analyse the real case; ... it is useful for our future careers'*. Regular assignments can help facilitate their learning and thinking. Student S7 stated *'regular assignments give us opportunities to digest and review the knowledge learnt in a timely manner'*. They believed that their practical information technology skills (e.g., excel worksheet, OPERA system normally used by hotels, and big data analytic) could be enhanced, since these skills are important for their future career development. *'For instance, SPSS, that we will not have the chance to learn in our daily life, ... and Excel, which we can hardly learn from our subjects' text books'* (Student S6).

However, some students indicated that they were dubious about the efficiency and effectiveness of group discussion in class, describing it as time-consuming. Some preferred teachers just to give answers or share experiences. Student S2 stated *'Better for the lecturer to tell (the answer), ... it is better than what we discuss, which does not really matter'*. Student S1 echoed *'We spend too much time on discussion, perhaps he can tell us the answer directly'*.

This seems to suggest that the students tended to be **reliant on teachers' spoon-feeding** rather than thinking proactively and critically. This can be reflected by some teachers' comments that the transfer students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities were not well developed and there were very few personal ideas seen in their assignments. Teacher T2 explained '*The students just believe what they have read ..., but have less personal ideas*'. Another teacher T3 added '*the mainstream students, ... just very briefly write the answer after they have thought it out, ... but transfer students write out their whole way of thinking, ... for them critical thinking is more difficult, not as natural as for the mainstream students*'. The transfer students' weak generic skills likely contribute to their study-load stress (Cheung et al., 2020). This finding may help explain why some transfer students prefer the 'spoon-feeding' teaching approach that can probably save their study time; as a shortcut, this surface approach may help reduce their heavy study loads (Cheung et al., 2020).

4.5. Assessment of subjects

Some students indicated that the assessment guidelines for different subjects were acceptable. However, more were concerned about the unavailability of suggested answers to past examination papers or intended outlines of flow for presentations. Student S3 pointed out '*the past examination papers should be released together with suggested answers, so we know the key points*'. This reflects that some of the transfer students over-emphasise 'standard answers', which may indicate the **problem of exam-orientedness** and, again, a lack of critical thinking ability. In fact, some teachers stated many transfer students still had secondary school mind-sets and tended to memorise more and require clearer guidelines. As teacher T3 explained '*they are still used to the secondary school style, which is that all the feedback is on the paper, and they just read the paper*'. In addition, some teachers felt that the students were **shy and not brave enough to approach teachers for comments**, although they wanted more individualised and formative feedback on their assignments or presentations. Teacher T3 indicated '*They will not come to you, ... they do not feel that they can ask their teacher questions, they will discuss it among themselves*'. Student S4 admitted '*I dare not go to ask, ... perhaps I can handle it by myself*'. To tackle the problem, subject tutor(s) should take initiative to approach the transfer students more, perhaps during tutorials, to provide them with more personalised feedback and encourage them to consult subject teachers whenever necessary.

There were divided opinions about students' academic performances. Some teachers thought that most students achieve good GPAs because they are diligent and self-motivated. Teacher T1 explained '*many of them have strived very hard to complete the degree here; and I can see many good results from this group of students*'. Wang's (2009) findings could help to explain this phenomenon, advocating that the transfer students' academic preparedness in terms of higher college GPA and higher degree aspirations can affect their academic performances at their receiving 4-year institutions. Wang indicated that transfer students "*who expect to earn a bachelor's degree are more motivated to put forth more effort to make progress towards the attainment of their ultimate educational goal*" (p. 582) and "*... community college GPA turned out to be a strong and significant predictor, ...*" (p. 583). We suggest that transfer students should learn how to cope with academic studies at university. Universities or respective faculties should establish academic advising systems allowing students and advisors to share more about university teaching and learning, while academic advisors can regularly encourage

transfer students, who are normally admitted with high college GPAs, to achieve their academic goals.

On the other hand, some teachers stated that the students performed less well in assessments than their native counterparts. One added that the students' deficiencies in **language skills might have hindered them from expressing ideas well in assignments and examinations**. Teacher T4 commented *'In general, the mainstream students' language is better. I mean English, ... their presentation skills overall are better. ... But most of the transfer students are local, English obviously is not their native language. So, it is harder for them to present'*. In fact, student S4 agreed *'about the "English only policy in the classroom" ... this is the only thing that I cannot get used to'*. Student S5 added *'perhaps the English standard that we used before in the higher diploma was not too strict'*. Teacher T1 stated *'some community college students had very high GPAs, but they couldn't speak English well in the admission interview'*. In fact, the college transfer hospitality and tourism students' written English is better than their spoken. Teacher T3 pointed out that *'when it comes to presentations and speaking in English they are not as confident; they will exclaim, ... oh no, I need to speak English. They are actually very anxious, ... but when it comes to writing, it's almost similar to the mainstream students.'* The finding is similar to that of [Ching et al. \(2020\)](#), that college transfer nursing students face challenges in general and discipline-specific English use. It seems college transfer students from different disciplines generally have the same problem when English is their second language, whereas transfer hospitality and tourism students in general have no problem with written English, only the spoken. Therefore, a university language centre should work closely with its respective schools/departments to tailor-make discipline-related English communication courses to enhance the students' language skills, especially oral communication skills. In particular, this is important to hospitality and tourism schools, which have many non-local students and where most subjects are conducted in English, which is the 'common language' in this industry.

4.6. Social and affective development

Some informants admitted that they **would not take the initiative to communicate with other students** in class, especially the native students. They felt reluctant to interact with others actively due to the feeling of inferiority, resulting from their relatively bad HKDSE (public examination) results. Student S7's explanation reflected this: *'we are actually not from the DSE system I somehow feel self-conscious, ... that is, ... not brave enough to contact, ... not to take initiative to ...'*. The findings are in line with Xu et al. (2018) and Mehr and Daltry (2016), who reported that transfer students face psychological challenges (e.g., poor self-concept). A few students reported difficulty in collaborating with native students when doing group projects together, especially when their learning goals varied. Another contributing factor was the above-mentioned **perception of their limitations in English ability when communicating with others**, especially with international students who do not speak Chinese. The findings reconfirm that of Hawley and Harris (2005), that *'English as a second language could be a problem for college transfer students.'*

To integrate transfer hospitality and tourism students and native students better, we suggest that course administrators should make arrangements for the two groups to meet and mingle more during the transfer students' first year of study, for example in group projects or

discussions. To enhance their confidence to communicate with native students in English, apart from the 'English Only in Classroom' policy, teachers should encourage students, even during individual consultations, to speak in English whenever possible because spoken English is extremely important and essential for the students' future career development in the hospitality and tourism industry.

5. Practical Implications

Our study results indicate that the major challenges for the community college transfer hospitality and tourism students include campus and faculty environments, gaps in subject expectations, heavy study loads, teaching methods, assessment of subjects, and social and affective development.

With regard to the campus and faculty environments, university administrators should provide special support to the CCTS. Examples of this support include arranging workshops to train the students to use different university-wide systems and facilities. These are important because our findings show that CCTS' adaption to the receiving institution will be influenced negatively if they are not familiar with the university-wide systems even if they are conversant with their own faculty environments.

Our findings also show that CCTS can experience transfer shock due to gaps between their expectations of their subject contents and assessment requirements and the actual situation. It is suggested that exam-oriented summative assessments could be adjusted slightly as an alternative to formative methods. This could enable the transfer students to be monitored through ongoing feedback, especially during their first semester when they are most likely to encounter 'transfer shock'. Subject teachers should make the subject explicit and consistent and consider students' advice about the teaching content.

As a result of heavy study loads, some of the CCTS interviewed in this study had focused purely on their studies, seldom joined other extra-curricular activities and had some reservations about undertaking overseas exchange studies. To allow for opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities in addition to exchange programmes, service learning and placements, the hospitality and tourism school should consider extending the study period for transfer students if possible. It is suggested that programme administrators should allow CCTS who cannot manage to complete their studies within the normal duration (2 years) to take the remaining subjects by paying the tuition fees on a credit unit basis. On the other hand, community colleges should take initiatives to communicate with receiving institutions (in this case the hospitality and tourism school) to explore ways to facilitate the credit transfer for placement; the credit transfer can reduce CCTS' study loads significantly, as it accounts for about 10% of the total credits required for graduation.

About the teaching methods, our findings show that some learning/teaching gaps between transfer students and their teachers are triggered by the transfer students' expectations of more vocation-related 'spoon-feeding' and less research-skill related topics, probably to reduce their study workloads. Programme administrators and teachers should therefore provide transfer students with more opportunities to learn and experience generic skills such as analytical skills and critical thinking, or they will likely adopt surface approaches, hence the study workload

stress issues (Cheung, et al., 2020). Our findings show that CCTS from the hospitality and tourism discipline prefer learning through real-life contexts (e.g., case studies), which help them apply the acquired knowledge in their future jobs. In addition to the programme's required placement, subject lecturers can consider providing students with more practical training, field studies and assessments to meet their preference to apply their knowledge to real-life contexts. Notwithstanding this, however, community colleges should also prepare the students appropriately by providing them with more opportunities to practise their research skills, which is normally required in the university learning environment, in order to increase the transfer student capital.

Our findings about social and affective development indicate that the CCTS did not often participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities due to their heavy study loads and felt reluctant to take the initiative to communicate with other students in class, especially the native students as a result of their poor self-concepts. It is suggested that the hospitality school and even the university administrators should strive hard to restructure CCTS' academic requirements to allow them to spare time to participate in other activities, as social and affective development are important to the campus life experience (Massi et al., 2012). To enhance their confidence to communicate with native students, programme administrators should make arrangements for the two groups to meet more often, especially during the transfer students' first year of university study, for example by mixing them in class activities whenever possible. Although it is difficult to adopt peer learning because of fierce competition amongst students, measures should be taken to encourage more student interaction.

Admittedly, there are many barriers for transfer students as a result of the short study period, however, most important of all, they need to adjust their mind-sets so that they can achieve academic requirements and live balanced university lives. As suggested by Laanan (2007), an academic advisory system is essential, with faculty members/counsellors assigned to provide the transfer students with advice on their studies and their social, psychological and academic adjustment processes. All of these strategies can help contribute to the success of community college students when they enter university.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

There have been few studies of both CCTS and university teachers' perceptions of their experiences, especially in the hospitality and tourism discipline. This study provides a better understanding of how CCTS in this discipline perceive their university studies and identifies some gaps between students' and teachers' expectations. To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first attempt to explore the issues in the context of hospitality and tourism education. The findings and discussions of this study contribute to the literature by expanding the body of research on hospitality and tourism teaching and learning and the CCTS' learning experiences and expectations. This study lays a foundation for further in-depth research and offers insights to different stakeholders (e.g., hospitality and tourism schools, universities and community colleges) to facilitate the articulation agreements between community colleges and universities' programmes.

While many previous studies have mentioned transfer students having low GPAs as a result of transfer shock, the findings of this qualitative study provide more insights into the underlying reasons. In addition, our findings show that the feeling of inferiority could be a positive driving force for the transfer students to strive to achieve their academic goals. The results also identify that campus and faculty environments, gaps in subject expectations, heavy study loads, teaching methods, assessment of subjects, and social and affective development are the major challenges for the CCTS from the hospitality and tourism discipline.

The authors hope that the findings of this study can be used to help the 4-year institutions (universities) develop some strategies to help transfer hospitality and tourism students to cope with their studies. This study has also laid a foundation for further in-depth research, particularly about the effectiveness of the strategies for dealing with transfer students.

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected through in-depth interviews with a group of faculty members and transfer students in Hong Kong, and thus are not widely generalizable to university academics and students in other universities and other parts of the world. Second, the collected interview data were confined to the participating teachers and students' recollections of past experiences, even though they were selected because of their recent involvement. However, the findings of this study could be viewed as a preliminary step to understanding the issues encountered by hospitality and tourism transfer students. Similar research studies could be undertaken in other faculties to elucidate the differences and similarities across disciplines. A cross-cultural study could be considered using a wider population and multiple universities in different countries with different cultures.

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**Table 1 Approved Senior Year Student Intakes of UGC-funded Programmes
(2019/20AY)**

| Institutions in Hong Kong | No. of Approved Intakes |
|--|--------------------------------|
| City University of Hong Kong | 1395 |
| Hong Kong Baptist University | 646 |
| Lingnan University | 130 |
| The Chinese University of Hong Kong | 404 |
| The Education University of Hong Kong | 184 |
| The Hong Kong Polytechnic University | 1750 |
| The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology | 151 |
| The University of Hong Kong | 340 |
| Total: | 5000 |

SOURCE: Information Portal for Accredited Post-secondary programmes (iPASS) (2019)

Table 2 Detailed List of Informants

| Teaching Staff | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Informants from ABC hospitality & tourism school | Teaching areas | Gender | Working experience | Age range |
| T1 | Hospitality | M | 16 – 20 years | 45-59 |
| T2 | Hospitality & Tourism | M | 6 – 10 years | 35-44 |
| T3 | Hospitality & Tourism | F | 6 – 10 years | 25-34 |
| T4 | Hospitality | F | 6 – 10 years | 25-34 |
| Community College Hospitality and Tourism Transfer Students | | | | |
| | BSc programme of study | Gender | Year of study | Age range |
| S1 | Hotel Management | F | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S2 | Hotel Management | M | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S3 | Hotel Management | F | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S4 | Hotel Management | F | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S5 | Hotel Management | F | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S6 | Hotel Management | F | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S7 | Hotel Management | M | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S8 | Hotel Management | F | Year 4 | 19-24 |
| S9 | Tourism Management | M | Year 3 | 19-24 |
| S10 | Tourism Management | F | Year 3 | 19-24 |
| S11 | Tourism Management | F | Year 3 | 19-24 |

Table 3 Interview guides

To explore teachers' experience with hospitality & tourism transfer students

General broad opening question

1. Can you tell me about your experience with hospitality and tourism transfer students?

Probing questions

1. What is your impression about the transfer students?
 2. What do you think about the learning and social experiences of the transfer students?
 3. What were their behaviours during your class/interactions with them?
 4. From your observation, are you aware of any needs or challenges experienced by transfer students? How do you support transfer students in university?
 5. How do you think of the university-level support for transfer students? Do you have any suggestions?
-

To explore the academic and social experience of hospitality and tourism transfer students

General broad opening question

1. Can you tell me about your experience studying in the university?

Probing questions

1. What do you think about your transition experience at the university?
 2. What were you particularly hoping to gain from this programme? What have you actually gained from it?
 3. What learning approach do you use (surface or deep learning)?
 4. Which aspect of teaching have you found most helpful, in getting to grips with the key subject-matter? And which aspect is the least helpful?
 5. How have you found your relationships with the staff/transfer students/non-transfer (mainstream) students? How about extracurricular activities?
-

Table 4 Main categories and sub-themes of the interview data

| Categories | Sub-themes |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Campus and faculty environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adequate resources and facilities• Location of school/department |
| Gaps of subject expectation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adaption to new learning environment• Adjustment shock of the outset• Linking theories and concepts into internship• Student learning attitude and commitment |
| Study load | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavy study load but acceptable• Workload of service learning |
| Preferred teaching methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding and application of knowledge• Spoon-feeding |
| Assessment of subjects | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exam-orientedness• Shyness of students to seek comments• Language skills for assignments and examination |
| Social and affective development | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiative to communicate• English ability in communicating with others |