



A Study on The Determinants of Singapore Polytechnic Students' Choices in A Hospitality and Tourism Program

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Abstract.

The hospitality and tourism industry in Singapore is rapidly growing and all polytechnics in Singapore are offering hospitality courses so that they can help sustain the economy with the necessary manpower. However, the new generation of Singapore millennial students choosing hospitality programs assess choice factors differently and give different priorities of importance to these factors. Factors have been grouped according to 'Personal', 'Institution – Academic', 'Institution – Others', and 'Curriculum', and students rated these on their own perceptions and against those perceptions from the faculty when designing hospitality programs to attract potential students. It has been noted that the ability to get a job after graduation is of the highest importance to both parties and that parents' and peers' influence do not matter in their choice of hospitality programs or polytechnics. With this understanding, educational institutions would need to relook at their strategies on enticing students to join their programs. This study will also grant a precursory insight into how students from developing Asian countries will select hospitality programs, using Singapore as a model in the future.

Kata Kunci:

Singapura;
politeknik;
perhotelan;
pendidikan; pelajar;
milenial

Abstrak.

Industri perhotelan dan pariwisata di Singapura berkembang pesat dan semua politeknik di Singapura menawarkan kursus perhotelan sehingga mereka dapat membantu menopang ekonomi dengan tenaga yang diperlukan. Namun, generasi baru mahasiswa milenial Singapura yang memilih program perhotelan menilai faktor-faktor pilihan secara berbeda dan memberikan prioritas yang berbeda tentang pentingnya faktor-faktor tersebut. Faktor-faktor telah dikelompokkan menurut 'Pribadi', 'Institusi - Akademik', 'Institusi - Lainnya', dan 'Kurikulum', dan siswa menilai hal ini berdasarkan persepsi mereka sendiri dan terhadap persepsi dari fakultas saat merancang program perhotelan untuk menarik calon siswa. Telah dicatat bahwa kemampuan untuk mendapatkan pekerjaan setelah lulus adalah yang paling penting bagi kedua belah pihak dan bahwa pengaruh orang tua dan teman sebaya tidak penting dalam pilihan program perhotelan atau politeknik. Dengan pemahaman ini, lembaga pendidikan perlu melihat kembali strateginya dalam menarik siswa untuk mengikuti program mereka. Studi ini juga akan memberikan wawasan awal tentang bagaimana siswa dari negara berkembang Asia akan memilih program perhotelan, menggunakan Singapura sebagai model di masa depan.

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1. Introduction

The field of hospitality and tourism education in Singapore is relatively new. In Europe, the inception of hospitality schools and programs started with École hôtelière de Lausanne in 1893 in Switzerland. In the United Kingdom, hospitality and tourism education started with trade schools and polytechnics in 1891 and eventually evolved to become universities such as Oxford Brookes University and the University of Surrey (Baum, 2006). In the United States of America, the first university offering hospitality programs was Cornell University in 1922. The objectives of these hospitality programs are to booster the economies of a country or region, train a new generation of hoteliers and to upgrade the skills of existing managers (Barrows, 1999; Weiermair & Bieger, 2006).

In Singapore, the main-stream education centres for skills and trade supervisory training, at a post-secondary level for students, aged 17 -21, would be the polytechnics. The Singapore polytechnics, currently numbered at five are under the education mainframe of the Singapore Ministry of Education, have a total of ten hospitality-related programs. With the current offerings of multiple tourism and hospitality courses, the prospective Singapore student is often spoiled for choices. However, the number of courses can also serve to distract prospective students who are unaware of the curriculum and specialization of the different programs. Some programs place more emphasis on technical skills, others focus on the management aspects. This issue is further compounded as many young prospective students might not have the discernment to understand the design and approach taken by each course.

The research objective of this study is to better understand the psyche of prospective students in undertaking their polytechnic choices when selecting a hospitality program. Veloustsou, Paton, and Lewis (2005, p.281) believed that prospective students are ‘influenced by many factors and often collect information from many sources.’ This study delves into these factors/influencers be it direct, or indirect; personal or on a macro-level when making such decisions. These findings grant greater clarity to hospitality educators and administrators about students’ decision-making process in selecting hospitality programs at the polytechnics. From the results obtained, educators can redefine their future efforts in the recruitment of staff, facilities upgrading, etc.

At present, no such studies have been conducted in this area in Singapore at the hospitality polytechnic level, hence there is a substantial gap and dearth in understanding in this aspect. This study would be of vital importance at this educational level, i.e. the polytechnic level, as it sets the initial stage/course of study tantamount to one’s future career and job prospects. Hence this study will delve into what students deem as important in their choice of polytechnic hospitality programs. It is the intent of this study to answer the following questions regarding the determinants and importance levels when Singapore students choose a specific polytechnic hospitality program.

- a. *Which are the key determinants when students choose a specific hospitality polytechnic program?*
- b. *How these determinants influence the student decision-making process and how do students rate these factors in terms of priority?*
- c. *How polytechnics can better understand the prospective students’ needs in choosing their hospitality program and react accordingly?*

By answering the above questions, one will be able to understand the priorities by which prospective millennial students place in making their decisions when choosing a hospitality program in Singapore. Similarly, institutions will also be able to adopt the right strategies to meet these students’ needs and desires.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Ranking of Educational Institutions*

The ranking of educational institutions has been in existence for almost a hundred years; however, it has only been of late since the 1980s that it has gained popularity amongst the public (Hazelkorn, 2011). The ranking of institutions was originally incorporated not for scrutiny by the public, but for internal institutional uses and for the teaching fraternity to benchmark programs (Sauder & Espeland, 2009).

The gradual public awareness of the ranking and the need for accountability resulted in governmental and other stakeholders' interest in the ranking and measuring of performance, quality, and competitiveness between institutions through the use of 'numbers' (Olsen & Reid, 1983). From the industry stakeholders' perspectives, they see the ranking as an opportunity to further organizational strategy with joint-collaborative projects with the institutions. As for governmental organizations, they see ranking as a means by which funding can be allotted. The matter for ranking also fuels the parents' need for placing their children in the best schools that correlate to their future success (Clarke, 2007).

The ranking of institutions also creates varying opinions and perceptions (Hazelkorn, 2011). This accentuates the reputation of an institution, not by the merit of its academic ranking, but also through the generation of new information from particular ideals, culture, traits, symbols that are associated with the institution (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009). However, these implications do not correlate that an institution is of a good ranking. Brewer, Gates, and Goldman (2001, p.28) cited that 'certain characteristics of colleges or universities become associated with good providers even though these characteristics might not be directly be related to the quality of output'.

From a hospitality program perspective, Kent, Lian, and Khan (1993) stated that industry executives favoured more traditional programs and ranked them higher; whereas academic educators who were aware of more recent involvements of each program, rated these programs better. Due to the difference in assessing the ranking of hospitality programs from different interest groups, Gormeley, Jr. and Weimer (1999) has outlined six adherence in order to establish a 'successful' program ranking instrument, i.e. (1) Validity – the information provided by a hospitality program ranking should be valid and should meet widely accepted standards of scientific practices; (2) Comprehensiveness – the information contained in the ranking should be comprehensive in terms of vital indicators for the evaluation; (3) Comprehensibility – the information presented should be readable by the respective stakeholders; (4) Relevance – the information provided by hospitality programs rankings should take into account the needs of the potential user, i.e. the parents and students; (5) Reasonableness – the program ranking should be reasonable in the demands it places upon those necessary in completing the ranking exercise, and lastly (6) the ranking should have a purpose and must be of use. In relation to the Singapore polytechnic education system, although there is a ranking of hospitality programs using the demand-supply placements and admission cut-off points systems, many programs still subtly define the quality through aspects such as the number of lecturers, the number of years of industry experience garnered by lecturers, the types and number of facilities offered, history of the program, etc.

2.2. *Students and their relationship with their parents and peers*

The prospective students seeking entry into the Singapore polytechnic are aged between 16 to 18 years old and are generally termed as, 'millennials'. Carlson (2008), Leung (2004) and Wong (2014) stated that the millennial generation is people born from 1983, and go up to the early 2000s.

According to Raines (2002), the characteristics of such millennials are generally sociable, optimistic, talented, well-educated, open-minded, and achievement-oriented. These characteristics have a strong alignment with that of the employees desired by the hospitality trade. Woodley, et al. (1987) have stated that students who choose to join specialized courses, such as hospitality, are often inclined to seek employment within the framework of their studies.

Further accentuating their characteristics, Howe and Strauss (1993) highlighted the millennials display seven main characteristics. These characteristics could have both a direct and indirect influence them choosing a hospitality program. Firstly, they need to feel (1) special. In terms of this vernacular of 'specialness', their feelings are inclined towards their parents and their friends. Parents play an important role in influencing their choice of studies (Lowery, 2001). Friends, through peer influence, also play an important role in their decision-making. Another characteristic of the millennial generation is that they are (2) sheltered. Being sheltered by their parents, the millennials have a superficial understanding of the hospitality industry, i.e. it is glamorous, without the need for hard work (Tribe & Lewis, 2003). Moreover, in Singapore, this form of sheltered life-style

comes in the form of a domestic helper. According to TWC2 (2011), there is one domestic worker for every five families in Singapore. Another characteristic of the millennial generation is that they are very much (3) team-oriented and dynamic. This generation likes to work in groups (Brown, 2000). As for dynamism, the millennials are able to multi-task (Freud, 2000). The hospitality trade is known for its work dynamism and their work team, hence appealing to the characteristics of the millennial. Another characteristic of the millennials is their level of (4) confidence. This confidence level stems from the fact that they seem to easily attain good grades in school (Monaco & Martin, 2007) and their mastery over their language abilities. As such, they are open, vocally, and expressive (Howe & Strauss, 2003), ensuring that they are suited for the hospitality trade. However, the millennials feel (5) highly pressured to perform. Howe and Strauss (2003) explained that this is due to the expectations placed on them.

Therefore, they feel the need to have constant reassurance and counsel from their parents and fellow peers. The millennials have a strong desire to (6) achieve and expect instant gratification (McGarvy, 1999). The hotel trade is noted for its customer service, where personal satisfaction is usually obtained instantly from servicing guests. Due to the inseparability and co-consumption of service and gratification, the millennials might feel that a hospitality-inclined career might be suited for them. The final characteristic of the millennials is that they are surprisingly (7) conventional. Raines (2002) identified trends during the 1990s and the 2000s that focused on children and the family, scheduled structured lives, and parent advocacy. These themes have influenced the millennial generation to be conventional, as compared to Generation X who were more rebellious (Manaco & Martin, 2007). This indirectly influences the millennials to work in conventional establishments such as hotels.

2.3. *Student Choices in Choosing a Program*

Kallio (1995) and Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) cited that the selection of a post-secondary program is one that is complex. Kallio (1995, p.110) mentioned that the process is one 'in which various individual and organizational factors interact to produce an outcome to affect the next stage or phase'. There are many factors that influence how students make their choices and as mentioned by Bergerson (2010), ranging from parents, location, to the program's academic reputation.

Parents, Peers, and Social Ties. The role of parents is integral to the decision-making process of the prospective student. The matter of social dynamism can be extended even to teachers and religious affiliations (Moogan & Baron, 2003). As cited by Butler and Murphy (2009), socio-

cultural, and socio-economics factors facilitate the 'differentiation and ranking in terms of wealth, reputation and the prestige of the university (institution)'.

Peer influence can also be a factor in the choosing of an institution and the choice of program. Patton (2000) asserted that while families play an important role, peers influence is the main leading decision factor for students' choices (Khwaja & Bosselman, 1990; Malaney, 1987; Strohbahn, 1991). Peer support is especially important when students are driven to join certain reputed fraternities, or social clubs at institutions of higher learning (Sciarini & Borchgrevink, 2008).

Locality and Accessibility. The locality of a program is also of significant importance to the prospective student (Moogan & Baron, 2003). Research on distance revealed that there is a threshold to the actual distance to the institution to the ranking of the establishment (Bennett, 2004). Freshmen are more likely to ponder more and factor-in rankings when the distance to the academic institution increased (McDonough, Antonio, & Walpole, 1998; McManus-Howard, 2002; Robert & Thompson, 2007). Chapman (1981) and Briggs (2006) also supported this matter of location, where students would be keener to accept a program if it was nearer to a transportation hub. According to Chapman (1981) and Briggs (2006), the location of the institution being located within a city versus that of a rural campus can be an important issue in one's consideration. In order to mitigate the location and to reach a wider network of students, institutions have adopted a multi-campus approach. Breakey and Craig-Smith (2007) stated that many programs are now offered at multiple campuses and through third-party providers. This model was once adopted by Temasek Polytechnics in Singapore with a satellite campus on Sentosa, a resort island off the southern coast of Singapore.

Facilities and Resources. When one is deciding on a hospitality program, the facilities and resources offered by an institution, ranging from technology (computer labs, systems, etc.), information systems (libraries), and physical facilities (mock-up rooms, training kitchens and service restaurants) play a part. Facilities are often inter-linked to the curriculum design and therefore are instrumental in a hospitality program's success (Smith & Cooper, 2000). Breakey and Craig-Smith (2007) brought up the matter that hospitality programs currently can be parked under singular hospitality schools, for example, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's School of Hotel and Tourism Management, or it can be part of a business school, such like University of Queensland's Tourism program falling under the purview of the Faculty of Business, Economics, and Law, which is very common for many universities (Scott, Puleo, & Crotts, 2008).

Breakey and Craig-Smith (2007) argued that in the latter case, hospitality-related facilities might not be as adequate or inclined towards the said industry, as compared to the former, as the monetary funds and allocation would need to be distributed to all schools within the Faculty. This can lead to an issue of a diluted perception in terms of quality, resulting in lower enrolment. In Singapore, all hospitality programs offered at the polytechnics are granted through their respective Schools of Business, with the exception of the Republic Polytechnic, which has a specialized School of Hospitality. The need for industry-related facilities is a driving force, not only to train the students adequately but also used an opportunity to sell academic institutions. Institutions that have to incorporate a holistic training program, i.e. a training hotel cum facilities, are perceived to be of higher quality. Examples of such universities would be Cornell University's Statler Hotel and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's Hotel Icon. In the study of hospitality programs, Severt, Tesone, Bottorff, and Carpenter (2009), mentioned that the above-mentioned universities were rated in the top 25 programs globally. This implies that facilities do have an impact on the ranking of the programs, which affects the choices of prospective students. Lee's (2007) study also discovered that hospitality students who had experiential learning through the better use of facilities enabled them to have a greater understanding of how hospitality establishments function and have an increased ability to review their careers.

Content and Curriculum. Kerin, Harvey, and Crandall (1975) looked upon program content as the most influential decision-maker in program selection and this has been supported by many other studies which found the curriculum to be the most important or the second most important factor in choice-making as cited in much existing literature (Moogan, Baron & Harris, 1999; Nasser & Fresko, 2003; Patton, 2000). Currently, many hospitality programs have aligned themselves with the business environment. Craig-Smith (1998) highlights that in the late 1990s, there were several categories of an offering of hospitality-related programs. Firstly, there were hospitality programs that were classified according to their focus ranging around the specialization and themes. An example would be Griffith University's Bachelor in Hotel Management (now renamed as Bachelor in International Tourism and Hotel Management). On another hand, there were programs that were slightly less focused, i.e. Bachelor of Business (Hospitality Management) from Western Sydney University. These programs contain more general business practices, as well as a portfolio of hospitality-specific modules. The third category was that of business degrees offering a major in hospitality. The hospitality content within the curriculum amounts to no more than 25%. An example of such a degree would like that of Murdoch University's Bachelor of Arts (Tourism and Events Management and Human Resources Management – Double Major). In the present day, there seems to be a greater proliferation of the third category as highlighted above. The reasons put forward by Scott et al. (2008) were that hospitality is nowadays more closely-related to business practices and having a degree that encompasses both business and hospitality fields ensures that a graduating student has greater possibilities of obtaining jobs both in and outside the hospitality field. It has been mentioned that industry managers when sourcing for prospective candidates to join their establishments looked at both business and hospitality knowledge and skill-sets (Tesone, 2002). Several of the polytechnics have in Singapore have diplomas that feature a minor in hospitality or have subjects from the hospitality field.

Teaching Staff and Quality of Teaching. The quality of teaching and the experience of the teaching faculty are several of the main reasons why certain programs are more favourable than others (Avgoustis & Brothers, 1993). In addition, I-graduate (2011) conducted a survey of over 95,000 students and the research showed that the most important factor in influencing student choices to take up a particular course is that of the 'quality of teaching'. Brookes (2003) through her research stated that the most pertinent feedback on the quality of teaching-related back to human factors and the relationship between students and faculty. This indirectly means that the quality of teaching staff is the most important factor, within the framework of 'Quality of Teaching' and will affect student enrolment in hospitality programs. In hospitality programs, unlike other academic programs, faculty hired are encouraged to have practical business industry experience which can value-add to the quality of education that they are imparting. Borchgrevink and Sciarini (1999, p.112) highlighted that 'considering that hospitality programs serve a definable segment of the business world... reasonable to expect or even require that hospitality faculty have practical (non-academic) work experience... This will provide faculty with a realistic point of reference and would add credibility vis-à-vis student.' Moreover, Olsen and Reid (1983, p.39) found it necessary for a hospitality program to be successful is to have 'members with a hospitality faculty who have had considerable experience in higher-level management positions from the corporate industry... This added element of experience would bring about the balance between the technical and general education of the student.' Furthermore, the educator, with industry experience can design courses in reference to the needs of the industry.

Marketing and Alumni. The marketing of an institution plays an important factor in how it is perceived by prospective students. Marketing can be derived from two forms, i.e. direct marketing – through overt techniques, such as the use of collaterals, etc., or indirect marketing – through more subtle means of collaboration with other universities, etc. In terms of direct marketing, Huang and Brown (1996) indicated the school guides and brochures of the school were the most frequent sources of information and had the greatest influence on students (Yu,

1991). As for indirect marketing, it was found that alumni's success, collaborations, scholarships featured played an important decision-making role in the perception of prospective students. Shah, Nair, and Benett (2013) found that when alumni's success is marketed correctly, prospective students would be keen to inquire about the school based on the past success of the alumnus. Likewise, use of collaborative strategies such as the hospitality industry's Hospitality Business Alliance with educational institutions, and the need to obtain accreditation, stand wells in creating good public relations in the eyes of the prospective students (Scott et al., 2008; Stalcup & Cannon, 2002; Tse, 2012).

3. Methodology

A survey was conducted on students from three polytechnics. This study was directed to hospitality-related program students, ranging predominantly from first to third-year students. The survey also took into consideration that there might be some fourth-year students. Through a Qualtrics survey platform, 279 surveys were sent out to Year 1 to Year 4 students. The method used was direct and snowball sampling. From the 279 surveys sent out, 104 were duly completed, representing a 37.2% participation rate.

This survey being quantitative in nature had a total of 14 questions. The initial four questions (Questions 1 – 4) were based on demographics. The next six questions (Questions 5 – 10) inquired on the circumstances by which they entered the polytechnic. The subsequent four questions (Questions 11 – 14) centered on the students' perception of importance in the selection of a polytechnic and its programs. These four questions inquire into the groupings of 'Personal', 'Institution – Academic', 'Institution – Others', and 'Curriculum' respectively. Under each of these questions are influential factors, such as under the question of 'Personal', there are factors of 'peer and friends influence', 'family influence', 'distance to the institution', 'accessibility to the institution', 'ability to find work after graduation' and 'ability to further one's studies to university after graduation'. Under the question of 'Institution – Academic', the factors are 'number and diversity of lecturers', 'experience and knowledge of the lecturers', 'friendliness of the lecturers', 'a number of hospitality facilities', 'diversity of hospitality facilities', 'range of information resources', and 'availability and number of hospitality systems'. For the question of 'Institution – Others', the three factors are 'ranking of the institution by GCE 'O' level and GPA scores', 'alumni and networks', and 'opportunities to join hospitality-related societies and events'. For the final question of 'Curriculum', the four factors are 'number of hospitality diplomas', 'diversity of subjects and modules', 'student internship- overseas and local 'industry workshops and guest speaker sessions availability (internal)'. The students are required to rank the level of importance to themselves of each factor on a five-point Likert-type scale, from 'Most Unimportant', to 'Most Important'.

A similar survey was conducted on 30 members of the teaching faculty as a point of reference. These questions were similar to the student questions (Questions 1 – 4 and Questions 11 -14). These questions gave the perspectives from the faculty's point of view in terms of the importance of the above- mentioned factors. The divergent viewpoints (if any) will grant the researchers the opportunity to evaluate what is deemed important from the students' perspective.

4. Results and findings

Table 1 depicts the means, standard deviation and ranking (of importance) from both the perspectives derived from the survey. From Table 1, it should be noted all p-values for significance are below 0.05, other than for the factors of 'friendliness of lecturers' and 'number and diversity of lecturers', which has a p-value of 0.123 and 0.093 respectively, which should not be accounted for. However, due to the substantial differences in importance between the categories, the factor of 'friendliness of lecturers' (ranking of 5th and 14th respectively) will be discussed in the later section, nonetheless. All other factors meet the 95% confidence level.

Table 1. Importance of factors from the perspective of the student and from the polytechnics

| Factor | Category | Importance by the Students | | | Importance placed by the Polytechnic Faculty | | | Diff. Mean* | t-value | Sig. |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|--|-------|------|-------------|---------|-------|
| | | Mean | SD | Rank | Mean | SD | Rank | | | |
| Peer and Friends Influence | Personal | 3.18 | 0.973 | 20 | 3.35 | 0.868 | 20 | -0.163 | -1.938 | 0.000 |
| Family Influence | Personal | 3.32 | 0.917 | 18 | 3.42 | 0.962 | 19 | -0.106 | -1.370 | 0.000 |
| Distance to Polytechnic | Personal | 3.80 | 0.918 | 15 | 3.63 | 0.957 | 17 | 0.173 | 1.566 | 0.004 |
| Accessibility to Polytechnic | Personal | 3.93 | 0.927 | 10 | 3.77 | 0.850 | 16 | 0.163 | 1.743 | 0.000 |
| Ability to find work after graduation | Personal | 4.38 | 0.827 | 2 | 4.53 | 0.638 | 1 | -0.154 | -1.785 | 0.002 |
| Ability to go to university after graduation | Personal | 4.12 | 0.928 | 7 | 4.25 | 0.833 | 6 | -0.135 | -1.379 | 0.000 |
| No.& diversity of lecturers | Institution (Academic- related) | 3.52 | 0.750 | 16 | 4.08 | 0.692 | 13 | -0.558 | -6.096 | 0.093 |
| Experience of lecturers | Institution (Academic- related) | 4.23 | 0.740 | 3 | 4.50 | 0.575 | 2 | -0.269 | -3.471 | 0.002 |
| Friendliness of Lecturers | Institution (Academic- related) | 4.15 | 0.721 | 5 | 3.95 | 0.863 | 14 | 0.202 | 1.986 | 0.123 |
| No. of Hospitality Facilities | Institution (Academic- related) | 3.96 | 0.723 | 9 | 4.17 | 0.630 | 9 | -0.212 | -2.751 | 0.001 |
| Diversity of Hospitality Facilities | Institution (Academic- related) | 4.04 | 0.667 | 8 | 4.20 | 0.674 | 8 | -0.163 | -2.387 | 0.000 |
| No. of Information Resources | Institution (Academic- related) | 3.87 | 0.777 | 14 | 4.17 | 0.730 | 10 | -0.308 | -4.328 | 0.000 |
| No. of Hospitality Systems | Institution (Academic- related) | 3.88 | 0.804 | 12 | 4.27 | 0.740 | 5 | -0.385 | -4.877 | 0.000 |
| Ranking | Institution (Others) | 3.48 | 0.924 | 17 | 3.83 | 0.864 | 15 | -0.346 | -3.786 | 0.000 |
| Alumni & Networks | Institution (Others) | 3.31 | 0.837 | 19 | 3.55 | 0.811 | 18 | -0.240 | -2.608 | 0.000 |
| Opportunities to join societies | Institution (Others) | 4.20 | 0.829 | 4 | 4.28 | 0.717 | 4 | -0.077 | -0.872 | 0.001 |
| No. of specialized Diplomas | Curriculum | 3.90 | 0.631 | 11 | 4.13 | 0.654 | 12 | -0.231 | -3.298 | 0.000 |
| Diversity of Subjects | Curriculum | 4.13 | 0.725 | 6 | 4.25 | 0.693 | 7 | -0.115 | -1.421 | 0.001 |
| Internship Opportunities | Curriculum | 4.41 | 0.705 | 1 | 4.38 | 0.699 | 3 | 0.038 | 0.515 | 0.000 |
| Guest Speakers & Workshops | Curriculum | 3.88 | 0.889 | 13 | 4.14 | 0.769 | 11 | -0.269 | -3.187 | 0.000 |

* Difference in Mean from the two categories

(Ranking of '1' denotes the highest importance; Ranking of '20' denotes the lowest importance)

Many of the factors in Table 1 have means and ranking which are relatively similar between the perceptions of the students and the polytechnic faculty. Some of the highly ranked means, namely 'ability to find work after graduation', 'experience of lecturers' and 'internship opportunities' are consistent with studies, highlighted in the literature review. However, there were also other factors, whose means through consistent through both categories, i.e. 'peer and friends influence', 'family influence', and 'ranking' were not in line with previous studies and research. There were also other factors, whose rankings were vastly different between categories, i.e. 'number of hospitality systems' and 'number of information systems'. These will be discussed in the below section. In order to confirm the reliability of the factors, Cronbach's α test was applied. The value obtained was 0.918, which is acceptable (Kline, 1999). The respective 'corrected item-total correlation' was also applied to all factors. All factors, other than 'Alumni and Networks' for both categories were within the acceptable range of greater than 3.0.

5. Discussions and analysis

5.1. Gender

It was noted the females amounted to a greater number of respondents i.e. 84%. This study is reflective of the changing dynamics of students who take up courses in hospitality. As highlighted by Davidson and Tideswell (1998) and O'Mahony and Whitelaw (2008), the gender imbalance in Singapore hospitality programs are no different from other countries, however this can affect their ratings of importance in Singapore, as the male students have to serve military national service after their studies and this can lessen the importance placed on factors i.e. 'ability to find work' and 'ability to go to university'.

5.2. Macro Overview

From the mean scores obtained, it can be seen that there are similarities in importance for certain factors between the students and institutions respectively. The factor of 'ability to find work after graduation' is ranked 2nd and 1st in terms of importance, by the students and the faculty. The factor of 'experience of lecturers' was also heavily weighted in terms of importance by both the students (ranked 3rd) and the institutions (ranked 2nd). Another factor that received a high level of importance from both the students' perceptions (ranked 1st) and the polytechnics (ranked 3rd) is that of 'internship opportunities'.

Factor: 'Ability to Find Work After Graduation'. On the views of obtaining a career after graduation, the students' perception of its importance is equitable to that of the faculty. This notion amongst the students could have been reinforced by teachers from the students' previous secondary schools. From a polytechnic's stand-point, the mission is to channel students to the workforce. This is supported by Davidson and Tideswell (1998) and Kim, McCleary, and Kaufman (2010) who found that the fundamental reason why students study at certain hospitality programs is to ensure that they can find employment after graduation.

Factor: 'Experience of Lecturers'. The matter of the importance of the 'experience and past qualifications of lecturers', has great importance from the results obtained. The past working experience of lecturers is deemed as being vitally important to the institutions and to the prospective students when choosing a hospitality program. The reasons why this importance has transcended to the prospective students could be a cultural norm in Singapore, where teachers are usually well qualified and respected, and from the advocacy that polytechnic lecturers come with vast industry experience. According to Polytechnic Education (2019)'s website, it is stated that Singapore's polytechnics are staffed by qualified lecturers with a number of years of working experience drawn from the education field as well as the private sector. They bring with them a wealth of teaching and industry experience'. Hence, prospective students could have been impacted by these statements linking the importance and quality of education to the lecturers' background and past experiences. Similarly, the polytechnic hires candidates with only the best

qualifications and industry experience, as their lecturers. Therefore, this matter is of high importance to educational institutions.

Factor: 'Availability of Internship'. Although this factor is important from an academic standpoint (hence it is highly ranked by the faculty), many prospective and pre-internship students view the internship program from an idealistic standpoint. Many students in actuality, after returning from internships become negative towards the industry. (Getz, 1994; Kozar, Horton, & Gregoire, 2005; Lam & Ching, 2007; Purcell & Quinn, 1996; Tse, 2010). The reason could be due to the lack of understanding and maturity on the part of the student. Barron and Maxwell (1993) highlighted that pre-internship students often have unrealistic and glamorous perceptions of the hotel line. In this sense, the students would have rated 'availability of internship' important, based on perception of fun and excitement, rather than from an operational hands-on stand-point.

Factor: 'Ability to go to University after Graduation'. On the factor of 'Going to university after graduation', this is an Asian-cultural norm where the obtainment of a bachelor's degree is perceived to be vital to one's success (Kao & Thompson, 2003). Moreover, Singapore's meritocratic system has compelled students to continue studying after their graduation from the polytechnic. The ranking of this factor, although consistent between the categories, (a ranking of 7 from the 'Importance by Student' category; and a '6' on the 'Ranking by the Institution' category), is generally not as high as compared to other factors. This divergent from the cultural norms and research from Kao and Thompson (2003), could be due to the issue that only the top 10% of the polytechnic graduates are accepted into the local universities, hence most prospective students do not see themselves furthering their studies given this ten percentile quota.

Factors: 'Peers and Friends Influence' and 'Family Influence'. As for the least importance factors, 'peer and friends', as well as 'family influence' had the lowest means (ranked 20th versus ranked 20th; ranked 18th versus ranked 19th for the 'Importance by Students' and 'Importance by the Polytechnic' respectively), contravene to existing literature. The reason for this could be the breakdown of social and family values in Singapore. In Singapore, there is less time being spent between parents and children in recent years (Shum-Cheung et al., n.d.). According to Sim (2013), Singapore polytechnic students' time spent online has increased by 45 minutes per person from 2011 to 2013. The internet being a source of information, has decreased the time and effort needed by prospective students to seek counsel from family and friends. The polytechnics may also feel that due to the high internet penetration rate and the ease of obtaining information from the internet, has resulted in prospective students turning to the internet as a source of information from reviews and forums, rather than from their friends and families, hence the lower ranking.

Factor: 'Ranking'. With regards to 'ranking', it was noted that this factor was not rated highly, i.e. 17th and 15th respectively in both categories. The mean of the 'ranking' was 3.48 and 3.83 from the students' view on importance and from the school, which showed importance but on a lower scale. Conversely in previous studies, many researchers found that 'ranking' was the one of the important factors in choosing an institution (Clarke, 2007; McDonough et al., 1998; Robert & Thompson, 2007). A possibility of this could be due to the lack of long terms goals of the students at the tender age of 16 - 17 years. Previous studies were conducted at a university-level, where student could be more knowledgeable and mature as compared to polytechnic students who were younger. From a faculty perspective, the ranking is notably low. The reason for this could probably be due to the lack of nationally recognized ranking of hospitality programs in Singapore and the tagline from the Ministry of Education i.e. 'Every school – A Good School', hence ranking is perceived to be unimportant.

Factor: 'Number of Information System'. Under the factor of 'Number of information systems', there is a considerable divergence in ranking. The student perception rated it as 12th in the ranking scale, whereas the institution's ranking is 5th. The reason for this difference could be due to

students not using the computer system as hospitality courses are generally more manual intensive. As cited by Kusluvan (2003), the practice of hospitality is generally seen as being more practicum and hands-on, rather than being computer intensive. In the framework of the hospitality cluster diploma programs offered for example in Temasek Polytechnic, only one module per program is mandated to be a fully-online operated subject. Other modules will incorporate partial elements of hospitality systems such as having a property management system, revenue management system, etc. Hence, this has resulted in a lower ranking by the student. Interestingly, the ranking for the importance to the institution was high. This could be due to the constant upgrading of computers terminals and technology on campuses throughout all polytechnics in Singapore. According to Tan (2018), the education industry is given the second highest allotment of funding for the fiscal year of 2018, behind the military, from the Singapore National Budget, i.e. a sum of \$12.8 billion.

Factor: 'Information Resources'. Under the factor of 'Information resources', there is also considerable difference in ranking. The student perception rated it as 14th in the ranking scale, whereas the institution's ranking is 10th. Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, and Lichtenstein (1996) brought up the matter that newer students did not find the resources of the library important and probably suffered 'library anxiety' – the process of obtaining data through the library resources being too procedural. This can be further compounded that polytechnic students are able to use platforms such as Google scholar for their research. Similarly, with the upgrades constantly being done on the campuses of the polytechnic due to the accommodation of partner-bridging-university programs, with Singapore Institute of Technology (Singapore Institute of Technology, 2019), information resources such as the library resources are increased several fold to meet the rising needs of both polytechnic and university students on the same campuses. Therefore, students could deem the importance on a much lower scale as compared to the needs of the institution.

5.3. *Viewpoints on Divergent and Prevalent Factors*

Divergent Factors. Certain factors which were lowly-ranked should be highlighted, as they have not been congruent to current-reality practices. Firstly, students felt that the institutions did not think that peers and family influences are of importance, as reviewed from the findings, however this is not true in reality. Many lecturers also feel that parents and friends do not play a major role as mentioned earlier. However senior management (who were excluded from the survey) within the institutions still continue to send flyers directed to the parents of students inviting them to open houses and other events. Hence from the perspective of the prospective students, there is a loss of understanding on the part of the polytechnics' senior management. Secondly, from the results obtained, the students' and the institution's ranking are 5th and 14th respectively, depicting a divergence in ranking. While most students feel that the friendless and warmth exuded by teaching faculty towards students helps in providing a conducive environment for caring and teaching (Mohan, 1975), most Singapore institutions feel that workshops conducted prior to the open house events might be more useful in inducing interest, which may be misconstrued as not being warm or friendly and clinical instead.

Prevalent Factors. The 'alumni and networks' factor have generally been neglected by the institutions. From the results obtained, the students' and institutions' ranking are marked at 19th and 18th respectively. Many polytechnics have failed to utilize alumni to sell their programs to prospective students. This is probably due to the lack of constant connections and tie-ins after the alumni have graduated from the polytechnic. Moreover, polytechnics in Singapore are no longer seen as terminal points of education. This role has been taken over by the local and private universities, hence alumni have lost their importance.

Lastly, the factor of 'industry speakers and workshops' has been rated lowly in importance for both categories (ranking of 13th and 11th respectively). The polytechnics have seldom

highlighted industry speakers and seminars in their programs, and have not maximized their mileage and networks. Moreover, many hospitality lecturers do not emphasize or embed these talks into recruitment, open houses and grading process of subject assessments, using them only as intrinsic value-adds to their modules. Hence the low score in importance in both categories. Moreover, students might not understand the value of these industry talks and might not rate them favourably.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the factors and the different levels of importance that students place in the selection of a hospitality polytechnic program in comparison to the perception of faculty in Singapore. As previous researches have often centered on undergraduates and post-graduate students from the Western hemisphere, this research sets a milestone in understanding student expectations as it is the first to be carried out in Singapore and on polytechnic students (which is the largest pool of hospitality and tourism student at any educational discipline level). This can be of extremely useful not only to the academic faculty and administrators from the polytechnics but also to the Singapore Ministry of Education in formulating the hospitality curriculum at a macro level.

From the findings, the students' and the faculty's perceptions are generally in-sync. However, as students might not be aware of certain policies and endeavours of the institutions, their viewpoints might not be aligned to current practices conducted by the institutions. Based on the data collected and the mean scores analysed, it is acknowledged that the students view their aspirations of moving on after graduation to work in the hospitality industry as the vital and most important component of choosing the right hospitality program. The students are also right to assume that the polytechnics' most important mission is to equip them with the skills to work, and their ability to secure jobs in the future. On the issue of least importance, it was surprising to note that they did not rely on their peers and family to help them in the decision-making, which is a new realization, differing from other traditional-Asian countries. The polytechnics' senior management will also find it surprising that students paid the least importance to the roles of their friends and families when they are actually targeting heavily in terms of marketing to their peers and relations. This would be of great importance, value, and understanding to polytechnics in designing their marketing targets and efforts.

With the growing hospitality and tourism market in Singapore, there is a need for students not only to join the industry line but also on the quality of students to deliver the service aspect in hospitality establishments and companies. Given this, hospitality programs and polytechnics must understand what factors are heavily weighted upon in terms of importance, so that they can better manage the expectations of these students who are vastly different from the previous generation of service providers. By doing so, the polytechnics/hospitality programs are able to achieve their set goals of channeling and truncating hospitality students to their pre-chosen (hospitality) industry, without losing them to other service sectors upon their graduation, such as to the banking, insurance and other non-hospitality industries, due to students' perception that the educational institutions have failed to address their needs and desires.

One of the limitations of this study is that it only took the views of three polytechnics students instead of all five. Moreover, the sample size consisted of Year 1 to Year 4 students, and this difference in students levels' perceptions can lead to differences in views, as needs do change over time and there might be issues of encapsulation for the older students who might not remember the reasons on why they specifically chose a hospitality and tourism program. Despite the above limitation, this study will allow Singapore polytechnic institutions to take the appropriate steps to meet the students' expectations, especially in the areas where there are divergences in perceptions, as depicted through this study's results and mean scores.

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