

**Commercialising higher education:
The impact of student-customer social identity on
student learning motivation**

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This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration
Newcastle Business School
Faculty of Business and Law
The University of Newcastle
April 2016

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is a pleasure to thank the many people who made this thesis possible.

It is difficult to fully express my gratitude to my DBA supervisor, Dr Leo Fredericks. With his vast experience, his guidance, his inspiration, and his great way of explaining things clearly, he helped me to stay persevering and focused throughout my thesis-writing period. I have learnt from Dr Fredericks not to be afraid of making daring efforts to challenge my own work and ponder even the subtlest issues. The interaction I had with Dr Fredericks has immensely enhanced the learning experience of my postgraduate study. I believe such experience will continue to guide me throughout my academic and teaching career.

I would like to thank all the participants for their valuable time and their most generous, in-depth sharing and contribution. I am grateful to Dr Ted Poon, Dr Jimmy Chang for providing their insights, and Jen, Kim, Celia, Debbie, Stormie, Michelle, my DBA classmates and colleagues who have graciously supported me along the way.

I wish to thank the professors of the University of Newcastle who have enlightened me with their great teachings and advice, and to the staff who have provided the most professional and timely assistance.

Lastly, I am indebted to my family for their encouragement, patience and unwavering love in these tough years. Most importantly, I wish to thank my parents, Sylvia C. Lau and David Lau. They raised me, supported me, taught me, and have always loved me. To them I dedicate this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The commercialisation of higher education is a new operating paradigm adopted by higher education to set new standards and practices. Under the influence of commercialisation, business-centred initiatives have focused on the issue of 'quality' in higher education. Higher education institutions feel the pressure to 'compete' to attract and retain students by examining the business sector for guidance. While the grand education goals for all students as 'universal learners' must be attained, academics also aim at student satisfaction aligned with the institutional worldview of students as 'customers' of higher education. The homogenisation of student identity reflects a progressive erosion of available time and space for students because of depleting institutional resources. Concerning identity formation, the student's 'ontological voice' constitutes the most relevant and important unit of analysis. Linked to social identity and social categorisation theory, student social identity exerts a significant impact on student learning behaviour. As student learning motivation contributes strongly to student academic achievement, it enables the understanding of how student achievement can be enhanced.

The purpose of the present study is twofold: (1) to examine the definitions and meanings of student-customer identity in terms of the student ontological voice; and (2) to investigate the possible impact of student social identity on student learning motivation. This research topic is a qualitative phenomenological study adopting an interpretivist-constructionist paradigm. The semi-structured interview is the primary data collection method and eighteen recent university graduates were interviewed. The results indicate that the definition of the student-customer identity is heterogeneous in nature. There is an observed positive relationship in real life settings between student social identity and student learning motivation.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Overview

This study examines the phenomenon of students-as-customers in the higher education setting and explores the impact of social identity on student learning motivation. The research topic explores the meaning of student identity and the dynamics of student learning behaviour in the commercialisation of higher education in which higher education institutions perceive themselves as 'businesses' and students as 'customers'. The research illustrates the idea that 'students-as-customers' is an equivocal concept; student identity is a broad and complex notion which necessitates explicit and in-depth examination. When the identity of 'student-customer' is cast in a commercialised setting, its impact on the learning motivation of students in terms of its directions, magnitude and sustainability cannot be underestimated. The impact is hypothesised to be more significant when the students' personal identity conflates with the students' social identity manifested in the educational context.

The research is qualitative in design steered by the interpretivist-constructionist paradigm. The semi-structured interview constitutes the data collection method as the essence of the phenomenological inquiry. Eighteen participants are sampled for the interviews. The thematic analysis involving coding and categorisation of data is conducted using Nvivo. The results of analyses are thoroughly reported, interpreted and triangulated, and their implications for the higher education sector are discussed, and recommendations made.

Chapter One provides an introduction to globalisation and the commercialisation of higher education, and presents critical issues in modern higher education linked to the research project. Its main objectives, along with its significance and contributions, will also be presented in the chapter, followed by an outline of the dissertation.

1.1. Background of research

1.1.1 Changing education culture

Over the last few decades, the world's economic system has featured an accelerated pace of technological change (Hill, Jones, & Schilling, 2014). In a world impacted by globalisation, crisis and uncertainties, new thinking and practices have emerged catalysing the formation of new knowledge and values. Globalisation as a continuous trend has created the age of information, in which competitive advantage is highly dependent on a firm's ability to efficiently and effectively access and use information. The rapid rate of technological change and diffusion not only enables innovation to replace the obsolete, but also consistently what used to be dogmatic. Consequentially, societal changes and assumptions are accelerated and often escalated with the rise of new symbolisations and assumptions that silently impregnate all basic aspects of life. The emerging culture is de-territorialised and complex, rather than simplistic and monolithic, due to the general hybridisation of culture (Rugman, 2012). In the corporate world, for example, firms must promptly respond and adapt to such changes to maintain strategic competitiveness and achieve above-average returns. Therefore, it is widely accepted that committing to continuing improvement and incorporating a flexible corporate culture is salient to a

firm's long term success. This connects to the contingency perspective, which suggests that appropriate managerial behaviour in a firm is contingent on its unique elements (Griffin, 2013). They cannot be universally consistent as they are subject to constant change under the different forces emerging from the firm's internal and external environments.

In such a context of rapid changes and dissolution of boundaries, firms must perform with new commitment, flexibility and adaptability, and the field of higher education not excepted from this demand. Conventionally, the university setting has been understood as a preparation tool for life, as a personal instrument for realisation, and as an essential element in promoting social changes consistent with society's changing needs (Chitty, 2002). The key concepts of knowledge, truth, reason and critical dialogue in the university have been battered in the wake of the academic movements and a global re-positioning of the university (Barnett, 2015). Thus, traditional idealism that education *must* work for society and individuals cannot easily be attained if certain precautions are not observed or vigilance not taken. Without earnestly probing the changing needs of education and their relation to the global community, the presence of education, not the lack of it, becomes problematic as it merely equips people to become what Orr (2004, p.5) refers to as "more effective vandals of the earth". What is expected of conventional education in its culture, core beliefs, constructs and delivery, therefore, cannot be merely perceived superficially and quantitatively. The need to formulate a clear vision of how the education system, higher education in particular, can most effectively contribute to the development of a knowledge-based economy becomes a common prerequisite (Salmi, 2001). While new initiatives underpinned by the changing environment must be sought, social capabilities to foster social change should not be

undermined.

1.1.2 Issues underlying higher education reform

The modern world as viewed from the universities, which Barnett (2000, p.132) terms 'supercomplexity', requires academics to be unafraid of staging daring interventions and working with one another in an 'epistemological pandemonium'. Barnett (2004) elaborates, where 'supercomplexity' is the contemporary world, the additional task of the university is to engage with the life-world challenges that students face in addition to addressing the pedagogical challenges that arise in due course. At the same time, in the past decade, global markets and economies have undergone the worst recession since World War II (Cecchetti & Schoenholtz, 2015), forging more challenges and uncertainties for higher education. While these hard times can also be seen as tremendous opportunities for higher education, universities and other higher education institutes' traditional boundaries are inevitably stretched under the momentous changes in the environment (Salmi, 2001). Controversies intensifying across boundaries of academic disciplines and skills have generated heat, which demands different ways of cooling down (Strathern, 2008). The trend of education reform, comprising a renewed commitment to education, and a renewed approach to its delivery, is therefore widely adopted by academic institutions (Pusser, 2006). While the extent of education reform would transcend the application of the latest policy, it means "changing the cultures of the classrooms, the schools, the districts, the universities" to Fullan (2007, p.7). Nevertheless, while the grand notion of education reform radiates in all directions with the new initiatives, it defaults into the situation of 'supercomplexity' where a steering media is apparently needed to set the tone of the fundamental shift in higher education.

Academic development, fostered by the need for education reform, requires specific and intentional activities to improve the quality and functions of the learning that students are expected to be acquiring (Handal, 2008). It is necessary to note that activities whose purpose it is to improve educational quality and present an effective higher education cannot be simplistically defined. Academic development is yet another complex notion too varied to warrant univocal definitions (Di Napoli, 2014). The situation is exacerbated by the notion that education not only transmits specific values, but also articulates itself around different sets of internal and external key stakeholders' values which constantly interact and affect the function and direction of higher education. Due to inevitable moral and identity conflicts about the nature of higher education, standardised managerial practices are introduced to enable smooth academic development delivery. However, these standardised practices may fall short of meeting the inherent ambiguities and complexities of academic life in higher education (Bolden, Gosling, & O'Brien, 2014; Delanty, 2008). Considering the diverse cultural aspects and idiosyncrasies of different higher education institutes, it is questionable whether any standardised strategy can produce uniform results for all the stakeholders involved.

1.2. Commercialising higher education

1.2.1 Definition

In the current thinking about education reform, there is a lack of clarity about academic values, prompting an exploration of how its various constituents are perceived in contrast to the traditional point of view (Bok, 2009): the commercialisation of higher education (CHE hereafter) is one such trend. CHE

fundamentally refers to the adoption of the spirit of private enterprise and entrepreneurship in the field of higher education (Bok, 2009) and the operational tendencies and practices of higher educational in the manner of the private sector (Turk, 2000). This connects to the continuous search for a new mode of governance in the public sectors of many countries, viz. new public management (NPM), alluding to the idea that private sector techniques and practices are directly transferable to the public sector (de Boer, Enders & Schimank, 2007; Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004). As observed by Symes and Hopkins (1994, p.47), higher education has evolved to display the features of the enterprise culture in which "education is a commodity". Kidwell, Vander, Linde, and Johnson (2000) assert that there are tremendous advantages for higher education institutions to develop business objectives comparable to those of the enterprise culture. The complex concept of 'managerialism', essentially the scientific management of Taylor, is espoused by higher education managers in developing standard operating procedures governing or informing how work should be performed (Koermer & Petelle, 1996; Lawrence & Sharma, 2002; Vallée & Moreno-Galbis, 2011). Motivated by management reform and a need for governance shift (i.e., NPM), higher education seeks a new managerial approach which allows for the strengthening of the management function, culture, and structures (Amaral & Meek, 2003). These new managerial approaches pertinent to change in management and the delivery of public services, often referred to as 'new managerialism', consists of the development of market forces, performance measurement, and control and consumer populism (Deem, 1998; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). Under the ideology of NPM, higher education relies on more overt managerialism along with 'market-based reforms', 'budgetary reforms' and 'performance measurement' (Broucker & Leisyte, 2015). In short, academic managerialism converts traditional teaching and learning in higher

education into academic processes, systematically and robotically monitored (Singh, 2002).

1.2.2 Quality of education

Once higher education is influenced by commercialisation, the notion of 'quality' reflexively arises. Notwithstanding how society reaches a consensus on what 'quality' is in higher education (Green, 2014; Seng & Khoo-Lattimore, 2012), it is a major and controversial issue (Wilson, 1996). Total Quality Management (TQM), for example, is a concept and philosophy that can guide what constitutes 'quality' in higher education (Pitman, 2000; Wallace, 1999; Williams, 1993; Tasie, 2010). According to Ali and Shastri (2010), TQM is a practical concept which can revolutionise the higher education system in the long run. While TQM does not have a generally acceptable definition, to the International Organization for Standardization it constitutes:

A management approach of an organisation centred on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organisation and society (ISO 8402:1994).

Alternatively, the American Society for Quality (2014) defines TQM as:

A term first used to describe a management approach to quality improvement. Since then, TQM has taken on many meanings. Simply put, it is a management approach to long-term success through customer satisfaction.

Scholars like Hill (1995) propose that collating student expectations about quality assurance is needed. While quality is what the customer dictates in the traditional marketing sense, scholars like Michael, Sower, and Motwani (1997) contend that it is particularly relevant in the higher education setting. Nevertheless, this contentious topic remains an enigma especially in self-financed higher education institutes.

1.2.3 Financial pressure and competition

Higher education is being transformed under the impact of market pressures to an extent greater than any period since the end of the Second World War (Zusman, 2005). Increasingly too the rhetoric of markets has been applied by governments to public higher education policy in seeking to equate research and higher education with a knowledge economy (Harding & Harrison, 2015). While there are scenarios where self-financed higher education institutes are under financial pressures, other scenarios embrace money-making opportunities (Bok, 2009). These higher education institutes are compelled to 'compete' to attract and retain students, tapping the business sector for profit-seeking strategies (Bok, 2009; Michael, 1997). Higher education institutes, thus, rely on academic rankings and other competitive factors to boost their admission outcomes and facilitate pricing decisions (Meredith, 2004), and a competitive academic culture has influenced academic quality in higher education (Buena-Casal, Gutiérrez-Martínez, Bermúdez-Sánchez, & Vadillo-Muñoz, 2007). While teaching and learning in higher education encompass a broad range of qualities and activities, relying on limited factors to reflect competitiveness and ranking is contestable, leaving aside decisions about university education, which may involve complex interactions between an individual's agency and such strong third party influences as the individual's family or social network (Kutty, 2014).

Hence, the fundamental premises underlying the CHE concept includes, first, under the initiative of new public governance, higher education can be managed and operated like corporate businesses. Second, that business objectives are developed along with the commodification of the key aspects of higher education, which literally turn education from something abstract and ephemeral into something that

can be bought and sold in a very concrete manner. Third, that in accomplishing its business objectives (leading to financial viability in some cases), higher education institutes show a tendency to rely on managerial tools and corporate language. In a nutshell, the current trend of commercialisation has created a new ecology, inspiring innovations in thinking and practices in the higher education system operating in the more technologically sophisticated, knowledge-based economy (Bok, 2009). This has generated enormous legal and policy-related implications for both private and public higher education institutes (Kaplin & Lee, 2013). While some of these implications are discussed in the current study, there are academic sectors who are generally averse to CHE (and perceiving students as customers), who emphasise their negative effects on teaching and learning, the CHE with its orientation on entrepreneurialism, marketing and competition (see Acevedo, 2011; Chorney, 2008; Giroux, 2002; Jiang & Carpenter, 2014; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Osipian, 2009; Singh, 2002; Turk, 2000; Washburn, 2008).

1.3. Business models in higher education

1.3.1 Economic pyramid

In the context of commercialisation, some scholars recommend that higher education institutes need a 'metaphor' (business concept model) to orient their strategic development in a process which resembles a business firm. For example, Khalifa (2009) suggests that the 'economic pyramid' model of Gilmore and Pine (1997, 1998) can be used to analyse the dynamics among the university, students and teaching faculty. In Gilmore and Pine's concept of the economic pyramid (Gilmore & Pine, 1997, Pine & Gilmore, 1998), competitive forces drive the evolution of

economic offerings via five stages – *commodities*, *goods*, *services*, *experiences* and *transformations*. The first stage of this conceptual model postulates that *commodities* are identified and extracted from the business environment, catalysing the formation of *goods* at the second stage. *Goods* are then delivered by the relevant constituents as *services*. Eventually these *services* are scripted to the stage of *experiences* which ultimately have the capacity of being a determining and guiding force for persons or enterprises in the stage of *transformation*. Against the economic pyramid framework, Gilmore and Pine (1997, 1998) advocate that modern businesses should move beyond providing just goods or services to offering experiences and transformation to their ‘guests’ or ‘aspirants’. Gilmore and Pine (1997) further describe the relationship between the various manifestations of ‘business offering’ and the identities of the various constituents as:

...a customer receives value directly from a good - using it himself. A client, however, derives value only through an agent who uses goods as a means to deliver service. In turn, buyers of experiences become guests at place where goods and services are used to stage a personal encounter. The experience stager must create a bond with the buyer, converting ordinary service spaces into personal places. Such intimate relationships are a prerequisite for offering “transformation” (p.16).

When such a business model is adopted by higher education institutions, the relationship between the universities, students and teaching faculty under different stages of economic offerings can be scaffolded in Table 1.1 below:

Table 1.1 Economic pyramid model in higher education

Business offering	Business function	Student identity	Teacher identity
Goods	Selling	Customers	Sales
Services	Providing	Clients	Agents
Experience	Staging	Guests	Stagers

Transformation	Guiding	Aspirants	Elicitors
-----------------------	---------	-----------	-----------

*Derived from Gilmore and Pine (1997)

1.3.2 Implications of business model

Several scholars have supplemented different perspectives to this model. For example, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) stress ‘experience’ as an offering and suggest that individual customers can actively co-construct their consumption experience with the provider via personalised interaction, thereby co-creating a unique experiential value. Under this assumption, first, the nature of ‘customer’ could become a general concept inclusive of ‘aspirant’ as depicted in the highest level of the economic pyramid. Second, students would prefer teachers with whom they can interact intimately, who are willing to stage a desirable experience for the students. Similarly, Khalifa (2009, p.179) believes that ‘transformation’ best describes what is being offered by universities; students in the higher education setting “want more than publishers’ goods, accommodation services, or campus experience, they want to develop, to be better persons in terms of character and competence”.

Therefore, the questions that arise with reference to the above model include, first, in the higher education setting, which offering concept best describes, explains and caters to the needs of students? Second, are students pursuing education as goods, services, experiences, transformations or other objectives which may exceed the scope of the current business model? Third, is the business model representative in describing the market segmentation and business functions for all the existing higher education systems? Fourth, is the business model effective in defining what exactly

is being offered to students in each layer of the business scaffolding?

While these questions may elicit a wide range of perspectives and debates, noteworthy is that, under different assumptions of offering, students may have diverse educational needs (their reasons for pursuing an education) and expectations (of their school life), which must be satisfied. If the business model is adopted by any higher education institute, regardless of traditional educational attributes like learning behaviour and academic standards, there should be conscious thought about the possibility that students have various educational needs and expectations consistent with the business model layers. Given that some institutes are under high competitive pressure, enhanced sensitivity to students' needs could not be overemphasised. In short, Gilmore and Pine's concept (1997) demonstrates that higher education institutes are offered managerial options: the type of offering described and chosen by students would ultimately affect the strategies to attract and retain them. It is also necessary for these institutions to endorse the fundamental educational needs of the students by prescribing new expectations of the teaching faculty. While CHE or the business model make various assumptions of student identity, it is acceptable that some academics can perceive students as traditional learners. In the following section, the critical issues in contemporary higher education will be discussed.

1.4. Critical issues in higher education

1.4.1 Grand education goals

Although some definitions of the student-customer identity have been given, there

are concerns about how student learning may be adversely affected with regard to CHE and the phenomenon of students-as-customers. Singh (2002), for example, claims that students are being relegated to the role of passive recipients in their educational pursuit under the phenomenon of students-as-customers. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) postulate that such a student disposition can negatively impact the development of higher order skills and quality consistent with autonomous, lifelong learning. To Schwartzman (1995), the concept of students-as-customers is often too narrowly defined neglecting long-term learning with compromising educational goals. These studies share a common presupposition that higher education students are expected to fulfil a set of grand educational goals or long-term outcomes (set by educators and policy-makers, generalisable to all students), viz., outcome-based education (Astin, 2012; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 2013). In the event that they are not achieved by all 'learners', CHE and the phenomenon of students-as-customers are criticised in the areas of academic performance, learning attitude and learning outcomes.

When customer satisfaction is a key component of the student-customer identity, whether or not these grand goals are compatible is contingent on how student-customer identity is defined. That is to say, while some student-customers would be receptive to these grand educational goals, it is unrealistic to generalise the situation for all student-customers. To scholars like Ecclestone (1999, p.29), the presupposition of outcome-based education creates "cynical, instrumental attitudes to learning in teachers and students alike and removes critical dimensions of student-centredness from higher education". The underlying mentality governing outcome-based learning is that all students are homogeneously assumed to be 'universal learners' who have to fulfil a set of standardised learning outcomes. As

Spady (1994, p.1) defines it, outcome-based learning means “focusing and organising everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences”. Such a universally prescribed ‘learner identity’ (Bozik, 2002; Balmeo et al., 2012; Coll & Falsafi, 2010) represents the tradition of higher education which Burgess (2008, p.94) refers to as ‘the myth of a golden age’. According to Burgess (2008), this myth can assume one of two forms: (1) unity in a university whose members share a collective sense of traditions and ethos; and (2) that some academics know intuitively what the role of an educator entails, along with its duties and boundaries. Such a unity of university functions and academic identities is shaped by culture change, involving challenges which most universities and curricula fail to adequately accept as a new responsibility (Barnett, 2000).

It would be ideal if course designers’ perceptions of student skills and abilities were balanced by the students’ perceptions of their skills and abilities (Lo, 2010), but this is as problematic as gauging students’ perceptions and expectations. While the students-as-customers concept may be equivocal, the universally prescribed student-learner identity projects just another homogenised sense of student identity where students are expected to fulfil a standardised set of educational and learning needs. Should a new business model arise incorporating the universal ‘student-learner’ as an option of student identity in its business pyramid, with universal learning outcome in place, the problem would still not be immediately resolved. The ‘student-learner’ identity would be partitioned conveniently under the existing categories, as shown in Section 1.3.1, and made consistent with the presumption in this study that student-as-customer is, in fact, an equivocal concept under CHE.

The critical issue facing modern higher education, therefore, is not which student identity or mentality is assumed to be institutionally justifiable, but whether or not objective assessments are made of the sentiments, perspectives and perceptions of students in real life. In short, under CHE, where student identity is intertwined with satisfaction, to what extent these grand education goals are applicable universally and to what extent improvisation is possible constitutes a complex issue.

1.4.2 Polarity of student identity

In exploring the educational needs and learning motivation in higher education associated with student social identity, the present research aims to explore and construct a pattern of reality, perhaps not widely accepted, that the phenomenon of students-as-customers derived from CHE is an equivocal concept. Its equivocality induces a wide range of interpretations of the definitions and meanings of the student-customer identity. While it is heterogeneous in nature, it has become homogenised based on an institutional worldview. The homogenised identity of 'student-customer', for example, or any other homogenised models, represent extreme examples of student identity. The present research therefore contends that these extremes embed qualities may not reflect what students in reality truly perceive and resonate with.

When students in higher education are assumed to have a standardised set of needs and expectations under CHE, an ideological gap arises where students are seen as 'customers' in the traditional marketing sense, while also being expected to attain lofty learning outcomes. The present research contends, on the contrary, that such an ideological gap can be reconciled: the heterogeneous nature of student identity

deserves to be a central and consistent theme in what the phenomenon of students-as-customers implies. There is nothing either good or bad in any definition of student identity, but to claim that student identity is defined as being homogeneous neglects the possible existence of other identities. This becomes particularly problematic and detrimental when student identity affects central issues such as student learning behaviour and the way the teacher-student relationship is built. Furthermore, when student-centeredness assumes a principal role in students-as-customers of higher education, considerable effort is needed to determine what constitutes their best learning outcomes with respect to their perceptions. Ultimately, the present study hypothesises that the enhancement of student motivation can be linked to the enhancement of student learning motives, which could be moderated by student social identity. These thoughts converge into the research objectives of this study, which will be described in the next section.

1.5. Research objectives

Thus far, the research has described that education reform is widely adopted by higher education, and corporate language has been utilised as a representative language of institutional worldviews. Given that CHE has become the philosophical canon in the education reform trend, the present research has analysed the positivist phenomenon of students-as-customers derived from CHE, and its conflicts with the traditional point of view. In comparison, the research should proceed to investigate researchers' perspectives on the phenomenon of students-as-customers, and their implications on the definition of the nature and meaning of student identity in the higher education setting. Ultimately, it is the perspectives of students and their voice in defining the characteristics of their own identities which serves as the

fundamental rationale of the present research. Without the ability to express their voice, needs, and expectations of and standards for learning, education would merely serve as a concept that students would receive passively, rather than actively being able to seek quality learning.

The research also aims to explore the impact of student social identity on student learning motivation. While the present research is interested in examining the nature of the 'student-customer' identity, another area of exploration is in whether such a collective student identity would possibly affect student learning behaviour. Given the prominence of social identity and social categorisation theory, how student-customer identity and social identity are conflated, and has an impact on student learning behaviour, particularly student learning motivation, should form the fundamental rationale of the present research. There may either be observable impact, as the current research speculates, or no observable correlation upon analysis of the research data.

In this regard, the purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to examine the definitions and meanings of the 'student-customer' identity in terms of student perceptions and explore the wide spectrum of characteristics of student-customers in higher education; and (2) to investigate the possible impact of student social identity on student learning motivation with respect to the student-customers' characteristics. Hence, the two research questions that guide this study are:

- *Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do students define their 'customer' identity?*
- *Research Question 2 (RQ2): What impact do social identities have on student learning motivation?*

Not only has there been little in-depth investigation of the impact of CHE on student learning (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), but there has been extremely limited analysis of the impact of student social identity on student learning motivation in general. In other words, it would have been constructive to investigate, first, how social identity affects student learning motivation, and second, whether such impact could be acknowledged in the context of CHE. Where CHE has overshadowed contemporary higher education culture, student learning is not evident as a priority, and the controversy of what student learning constitutes is unresolved, as previously discussed in this chapter. The present research, therefore, attempts to connect these two puzzles, CHE and student learning behaviour, with the following core strategies: on the one hand, treating CHE and the critical issues facing contemporary higher education as exogenous variables and recognising their complex nature which underlies such research gaps, and, on the other hand, examining the authentic meaning of student identity, 'student-customer' in particular, and probing directly into the concept of student learning motivation together with its relationship with academic achievement.

The construct of qualitative design pertinent to the investigations of intertwining phenomena is essentially complex. Therefore, the following measures should substantiate the core strategies of the present study: first, to discover the logical and rational links between all the component parts of the thesis pertinent to the research questions; second, to manage data objectively and effectively, such that a meticulous process of data analysis is ensured; third, to develop an appropriate methodology as a conscious process of deliberation and conform to robust quality criteria; and finally, to be aware of the subtlest ethical implications and acknowledge the rights of the participants and relevant parties as required in the ethical protocol (see Section 3.5.3

for details).

1.6. Significance of research

It is to the issue of education reform that the present research attempts to draw the attention of policy makers, school management, teaching faculty and students in higher education, as well as relevant individuals and key stakeholders. It also attempts to offer a constructive perspective for managing organisational change and reform of the higher education sector, in particular, pragmatic options for higher education institutions to consider along with the following assumptions: first, organisations carrying out major organisational changes should ensure a positive experience of the process for the people involved (Neal, 2008). Second, any organisational change, particularly when it deals with core institutional policies and practices, should anticipate resistance where people's intentions are one of the key factors (Boyatzis, 2006). It would be ideal and sensible, therefore, to broaden the understanding of the needs of people, especially the needs and sentiments of students as social actors, instead of improvising changes for the sake of reforming education. Furthermore, the current study should serve as a spark for further research relevant to any higher education institution in relation to their own usage and managerial needs. Future research should be focused on refining the understanding of CHE, the business model, and student expectation. With regard to student expectation, it is anticipated that this process would contribute to the enhancement of learning motivation and academic achievement. The research also alludes to the idea that student time and energy are accounted as salient institutional resources; academic matters can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they increase or reduce student involvement (Astin, 1984).

The managerial research problem supposes that the educational needs of students, their learning motivation and academic achievement, in connection with student social identity and its impact on student learning motivation, are key topics in contemporary higher education. These topics affect decision making in education policies, teaching approaches and the sustainability of higher education, which collectively serve as the salient areas to which this study hopes to contribute. Specifically, the significance of this study includes, first, change of strategy and managerial perception of the operation, and implementation of educational policy and pedagogical design. Second, enhancement in student learning experience in higher education as a result of new awareness in requiring teaching faculty to better motivate students in their learning. Third, collection of information about the type of change in higher education that is imposed and legitimised by procedure rather than justification, in accounting for changes in terms of *colonisation* as in critical theory (see Bourdieu, 1988; Laughlin, 1987; Power, 2013; Singh 2002). Fourth, refinement of the mission of higher education and the way higher education is delivered in terms of corporate social responsibility.

1.7. Outline of dissertation

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter Two presents a review of literature pertinent to the research objectives with an emphasis on four important domains: first, the phenomenon of students-as-customers of higher education; second, the social identity and social categorisation approach in explaining the formation of social identity of various student-customers; third, the relationship between social identity and student learning motivation; fourth, the relationship between student learning motivation and academic achievement. The conceptual

model that guides this study will emerge at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Three presents the methodology adopted by the present study, and includes a thorough examination of the theories related to the credibility and reliability of qualitative research designs.

Chapter Four presents and analyses the findings connecting the two research questions of this study and reports on the key phenomena explored.

Finally, Chapter Five summarises the study, offers in-depth proposals related to the critical issues facing higher education, and provides an account of possible directions for future investigation.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Preamble

A rapidly changing world in which higher education is conceived as a 'supercomplexity' calls for a new perspective on education. With education reform perceived as changing education culture, CHE is a widely held model for higher education institutions. The conflicting demands by academics stem from the existential dilemmas challenging CHE: on the one hand, grand education goals are expected to be achieved by all students as 'universal learners'; on the other hand, academics are expected to cater to student satisfaction consistent with the institutional worldview that students are 'customers'. While student identity is often a polarised and much-debated concept, academics confront an 'epistemological pandemonium' underpinned by such existential dilemmas. The homogenisation of student identity reflects a progressive erosion of time and space for students arising from scarce and depleting institutional resources. Higher education's business offerings and functions transcend being monistic and simplistic—segmenting student expectations and identities are ineluctable. The identity of students in higher education should not be schismatic; students must harness their 'voices' through a valid evaluative mechanism. The consequence of neglecting student identity and voices in learning methodologies is the deterioration of academic standards, ultimately eroding societal competitiveness.

This literature review aims at demonstrating the equivocal nature of the students-as-customers phenomenon and the heterogeneous student-customer identity. It is divided into five parts: In Section 2.1, the equivocal concept of

students-as-customers from marketing researchers' perspectives is examined, concluding that the student-customer identity is heterogeneous naturally and can be measured via the fundamental concept of student voice. Section 2.2 examines the theory of social identity and social categorisation, and explores the process of how the social identity of the student-customer is formed. Section 2.3 examines the dynamics of student learning motivation, comparing the educational psychology and organisational theories' perspectives. It evolves into an analysis of how student social identity perspectives integrate with student learning motives in influencing student learning motivation. Section 2.4 discusses the salient relationship between student learning motivation and academic achievement. Finally, Section 2.5 draws together all the theories and concepts reviewed and converges on a conceptual model underpinning this study.

2.1. Students as customers

2.1.1 Researchers' perspectives

CHE creates new ground where marketing researchers and quality management and customer relationship experts can contribute to understanding higher education students. Higher education institutes under CHE are perceived as 'businesses' questioning the identity of their students, leading to the phenomenon of students-as-customers requiring them to satisfy 'customer demands' (Furedi, 2011). As Melewar and Akeel (2005, p.41) observe, "in a market where students are recognised as customers, universities have to implement strategies to maintain and enhance their competitiveness or attraction in the eyes of students. They need to develop a competitive advantage based on a set of unique characteristics". For

Eagle and Brennan (2007), students are considered higher education customers as they are increasingly liable for most of their study costs. Hence, the traditional higher education setting is permeated with a new sense of 'marketing mix' of their business offerings and functions. Marketing principles are assumed to be applicable to all higher education institutions (Bejou, 2005; McCollough & Gremler, 1999; Redding, 2005). They become 'service providers' (Kamvounias, 1999; Nicholls et al., 1995) and rely on applying effective marketing principles to prosper. Institutional success is reflected by consumerism and marketing philosophy to retain and attract sufficient customers.

Consequently, customer management techniques such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (Katz, 2002; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006) are readily available to higher education institutes. Seeman and O'Hara (2006), for example, claim that its benefits include a student-centric focus, improved customer data and process management, and increased student loyalty and satisfaction with institutional programs and services. Munteanu, Ceobanu, Bobâlca, and Anton (2010, p.125) advocate that "higher education institutions have to be concerned with not only what society values in terms of the skills and abilities of their graduates, but also with how their students feel about their educational experience". Bowden (2011) contends that the relationship marketing approach is fundamental to higher education management, requiring a broader and proactive strategy to promote an ideal student-university relationship. 'Customer satisfaction' was thus transformed into 'student satisfaction' and given the highest priority by higher education institutes (Dimas, Goula, & Pierrakos, 2011; Winn & Green, 1998). Similarly, Tasié (2010) advises universities to consistently invest effort to satisfy their customers by eliciting continual feedback on their services. Voss, Gruber, and Szmigin (2007)

elaborating on students-as-customers argue that lecturers being 'friendly' is a key to 'student satisfaction' in CHE.

Thus, the criteria defining academic standards have been revolutionised; they not only entail traditional academic merit and objectives, but whether customer needs are being met to deliver 'student satisfaction'. Given the controversy regarding what marketing strategies and techniques are effective and sustainable for any firm, it is unsurprising that few studies have investigated customer targeting or segmentation in the higher education marketplace (Moogan, 2011). Nonetheless, marketing experts like Obermiller and Atwood (2011), for instance, have contemplated a marketing scheme where 'delivery on the vision' is appropriate in higher education to fulfil its reason for existence and contribution to society. This model would not need to dampen student accountability, academic values, integrity and freedom; notwithstanding that the 'complexity of service' means "universities must deliver satisfaction for that demand (attracting students): they must be marketing oriented...many more (students) opt for universities, because they find universities more satisfying of their wants and needs" (Obermiller & Atwood, 2011, p. 14).

This perceptual change has positioned 'customer satisfaction' as a legitimate goal for CHE. It symbolises an institutional worldview although it is contentious whether the student under CHE is a customer in the traditional marketing sense. This suggests that an enrichment of such equivocal notions would be productive.

2.1.2 Enriching researchers' perspectives

Some preliminary conclusions on the nature of 'student-customers' in the setting of higher education are possible here. First, it is assumed that student-customers have different expectations of their institution's business offerings and functions, as defined by Gilmore and Pine (1997). Second, student-customer satisfaction is associated with how effectively these expectations are met. Third, student-customer satisfaction is inextricably linked to educational quality of the higher education's business functions and offerings. What expectations students essentially have as 'customers' (in turn determining how they would be satisfied, and how the quality is defined) remains a sticky conundrum. At this juncture, just as the construct of 'stakeholders' allows almost anyone to be so considered (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997), the 'student-customer' construct is as diffuse (Schwartzman, 1995). As Eagle and Brennan (2007, p.56) aptly observe, to use this concept, "it should be clarified in terms of exactly what type of customer is envisaged...the focus must move to ensure that the implicit and explicit needs of students and other stakeholders are met". Therefore, the equivocality underlying the phenomenon of students-as-customers is widely open to debate as to what sustains the very definition of the student-customer identity.

As shown in the previous chapter, the changing sets of institutional worldviews across the higher education sector stemmed from education reform have contributed to the formation of the homogeneity of student identity, resulting in polarisation between the student-customer and student-learner identity, where one mentality is reflective of the student as a consumer of the services provided by the higher institution, and the other as a learner participating in the programme of the

higher institution for maximum educational gain. While 'student-customers' represents as an extreme example of student identity under CHE, the concept has been variously enriched: stakeholders (Borkowski & Ugras, 1992), partners (Sperlich & Spraul, 2007), empowered learners (Harvey, 2000), employees (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2009), customer-employees (Chizmar, 1994), patients (Ferris, 2003), clients (Armstrong, 2003; Ferris, 2003), guests and aspirants (Khalifa, 2009). Regardless of the nomenclature, all contestants have unique expectations and educational needs to be 'satisfied' to whatever degree feasible, measurable, and realistic. To illustrate, Michael, Sower, & Motwani (1997) in analysing how twenty higher education institutes defined their customers, concluded that all definitions are too broad. However, while there is no specific and defining formulation for these definitions, scholars like Ali and Shastri (2010) or Zabadi (2013) conveniently adopt Harvard University's definition of "to whom we provide information or service" (as cited in Michael, Sower, & Motwani, 1997) to define student-customer of heterogeneous nature, which will be discussed below.

2.1.3 Heterogeneous nature of student-customer

It seems incontrovertible that multiple academic identities of student-customers in classrooms exist (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008; Hendrix, Jackson, & Warren, 2003). Being inclined to any narrow definition of student-customer identity on the contrary, that is, homogenising student identity, or neglecting the equivocality of the students-as-customers phenomenon, could essentially be problematic and make 'student-customer' a notion largely valueless. To illustrate, consider the notion of 'student-clients', which Armstrong (2003) prefers over student-customers as schools are professional service providers and student participation should be encouraged

and emphasised. In contrast, Ferris (2003) suggests that although 'student-clients' is a reasonable model, it downgrades student participation in showing their preferences for the customisation or delivery of service. Ferris (2003) further argues that such involvement is nothing more than a 'doctor-patient' interaction not consistent with the full participation to transform their character and competence. Other definitions disregard how students perceive their own identities (viz., reality of students in a classroom). 'Stakeholder', for instance, tends to be "too fragmented and superficial to be able to make meaningful assessments of the bases upon which groups form, interpret and act in relation to the firm" (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011, p. 78). The definition does not accept the reality that stakeholders can have heterogeneous roles (Fassin, 2008).

Despite the existence of multiple perspectives and incessant debates about what defines student-customers in higher education, the prototype of 'customer' has continued to be enthusiastically chosen (Baldwin, 1994). The weakening of difference and the projection of students-as-customers has become a sector-wide policy (Lapworth, 2008) primarily caused by rapid institutional changes, together with depleting resources, tending to disrupt and deconstruct identities. Such rapid changes stress the practicality of the system (McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek, & Gonsalves, 2008) and its effectiveness in minimising change resistance (Land, 2008). Hence, regardless of the possible existence of various contestants, along with their unique needs and expectations, the student-as-customer identity in higher education is perhaps obviously "predetermined to fulfil the instrumental end to economic and social survival" (Bennett, Dunne, & Carré, 1999, p. 73). It is ironic that even scholars like Khalifa (2009, p.175), who believes that 'transformation' (thus 'student-aspirants') best describes the offering of universities, postulates that

“students are customers who know what they want, able to express what they want, and express choice to select the university or college which best responds to their wants”. Khalifa (2009, p.180) elaborates that the student-aspirant identity is presumably “an ideal way of looking into a university’s offerings”. This identity exemplifies its homogenous nature in denying the possibility of multiple student voices and identities.

Academic identity has a paramount effect on the dynamics of everyday teaching and learning. While any reductionist and stereotypical definition of student-customer identity is obviously a convenient practicality, the analyses above contend that the student heterogeneity cannot be ignored. As such, a serious study of the sentiments and expectations of students in real life is unavoidable.

2.1.4 Student voice and identity

What constitutes, oversees, and governs the unique sense of self has been subject to the philosophical debate of rationalism versus empiricism, psychological treatises on nature versus nurture, and sociological examination of whether personal identity is a product of cultural symbolism, social conflicts, or social functions. Nevertheless, an inventory of such factors as personality, body, gender, family, ethnicity, career, religious beliefs, relationships, or memory could configure the unique coding of the sense of self (Bloom, 1993; Noonan, 2003; Perry, 2008). It assigns individuals a sense of possession; contributing to and reflecting individual identities (Belk, 1988). ‘Personal identity’, therefore, is a concept of one’s self derived from self-knowledge or belief, which literally is all the characteristics of a person or “a person’s unique

sense of self” (Postmes & Jetten, 2006, p.260).

While the complexity of student identity blends personal, social, and academic factors (Baxter, 2012), even deeper complexities are embedded in student-customer identity. Although student identity can be equated to a thinking and learning entity, it has organic substance in Barnett’s (2015, p.64) formulation of “actors in the world”. Thus, employing an analytical unit to capture the humanistic characteristics and implications of the concept is necessary (paradigm and approaches explained in Chapter 3). In contrast to the homogenised and generalised concept of student-customers, which are heavily constructed by the institutional worldviews and researchers’ perspectives, such an analytical unit accounts for the student’s genuine perspective, developed through personal experience and interaction with higher education.

Batchelor (2008, pp.41-42) introduces the theory of the ‘student voice’, which incorporates the capacity of “progress self-formation and self-construction, shaping one’s own individual identity and not accepting ready-made paradigms of studenthood”. It suggests that if student identities were unselectively bestowed upon them, the process of self-realisation or self-understanding and the fundamental voice of student self-formation would be neglected and muted. Without this fundamental voice, student identities would be properly shaped, and subsequently, the desire for self-transformation through higher education cannot be fulfilled. Batchelor (2008) contends that higher education students currently find themselves caught in the paradox of commercialisation and commodification where, on one hand, they have to evaluate the quality of programs and courses, and, on the other hand, commercial language and a prefabricated student image restrict their

vocabulary, even silencing their real voice. Therefore, to Batchelor (2008), CHE promulgated by global marketing practices would be problematic to the 'student-as-customer', since the neglecting of the student perspective could suppress their ontological voice. This could then lead to a stymying of the expression of students' personal and educational needs and growth of the same, and preventing universities from providing students with the necessary foundations. Thus, it is not the totality of the student voice that is dwindling into silence, but rather the most important of the 'voice modes' that will disappear, while other models of the voice are overemphasised and even exaggerated in compensation. Batchelor (2008) summarises the concept of student voice thus:

The concept of student voice may be anatomised into three constituent elements: an epistemological voice, or a voice for knowing; a practical voice, or a voice for doing; and an ontological voice, or a voice for being and becoming. (p.45)

To Batchelor (2008), today's academia does not sufficiently validate the vulnerable voice of being and becoming, but prioritises the notions of knowing and doing. The ontological voice is necessary for the understanding of the other two voices which has to be 'uncovered' in the sense that such voice "reveals a person's inner nature" (Batchelor, 2008, p.47). Due to the vulnerability of such a voice, it is possible to 'discover' the voice when students are given the spaces where they can "express the vulnerable aspects of the experience of forming their academic and personal identities" (Batchelor, 2008, p.48). Ironically, the ontological voice of self-realisation is only used in CHE marketing practices promising students they could become whoever they aspire to be. To Batchelor (2008, p.46), higher education could be "diminished by being restricted to the status of quickly achievable orientations directed towards successful activity in the world". An imbalance of the three student voices caused by short-termism, the longing for success and an

emphasis on being productive could subsequently lead to “a corrosion of character” (Batchelor, 2008, p.54). Batchelor (2008, pp.48-49) proposes that the voices of being and becoming should be in the foreground as they enact “an academic identity that is authentic self-expression”. Weakening such voices contributes to withdrawal from higher education as students become vulnerable to setbacks inevitable in the normal process of becoming (Batchelor, 2006). This resonates with Giroux’s (2002) insight that self-interested individuals are produced under the corrosive impact of commercialisation, privatisation, and the corporate culture of the academy.

Batchelor’s (2008) theory offers a philosophical analysis of the meaning of student identity against an educational climate dominated by market and managerial discourses (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008). The voice of student identity in the academic world coincides with Belk’s (1988) argument of possession reflecting identity. Against Batchelor’s (2008) theory of student voice, this study postulates that the third voice, the ontological voice, is the most delicate and vulnerable, as it has the capability to substantiate and integrate with the other two voices. It is the most relevant and important voice in identity formation, particularly when individualised student voice transcends into a collective voice interacting with and combining each of their individual voices (Batchelor, 2014). Since the theory of student voice pertains to students’ unique consciousness and experiences and regards the social actors (students) as integral to the understanding of organisational dynamics (higher education institutions), it elucidates the critical issues in Section 2.1.3, defining the heterogeneous nature of the student-customer identity.

2.1.5 Section summary

This section has described how CHE has created a new arena in which researchers and experts have contributed to the understanding of student identity, leading to the current predominant phenomenon of students-as-customers. The changing perception of student identity in higher education has rippled across all the critical aspects of the modern higher education system. Irrespective of its complicated origin, the phenomenon, manifestations and implications of students-as-customers, has dynamically shaped the comprehension of 'quality' in higher education. It has also influenced how teaching and learning are manoeuvred, how teacher-student relationships are built, and how academic standards are measured in the short and long term. Nonetheless, the equivocality underlying the phenomenon of students-as-customers is widely open to debate as to what sustains the very definition of the student-customer identity. It is a moot question to be asking whether a prototype of 'student-customer' with universal, standardised characteristics, needs and expectations could ever exist.

Despite there being a definite need for the notion of student-customer to be enriched, none of these homogenised enrichments and examples of identity are universally agreeable or shown to be sufficient to represent the student-customer identity in contemporary higher education. Since the theory of student voice pertains to students' unique consciousness and experiences, it is employed as an analytical unit to capture the humanistic characteristics and implications of the concept. In the next section, the social identity theory as a prominent perspective for contemplation of student identity in higher education is discussed.

2.2. Social identity theory

2.2.1 Overview

In collaboration with his graduate student John Turner (1947-2011), social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1919-1982) pioneered the social identity approach, comprising social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and self-categorisation theory (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Turner 1985; Turner et al., 1987). Since its emergence in the early 1970s, the social identity approach has highly influenced the understanding of multiple group-mediated phenomena. It has effected fundamental and transformative changes to how cultural expectations and belonging are defined, while generating insight into how individuals view and define themselves in a broader social context. The social identity concept offers an alternative perspective to comprehend critical identity-based issues in organisations, and has been successfully applied to an extensive range of topics encompassing leadership, motivation and commitment, communication and coordination, productivity and performance. Culture, identity and image form three related parts of how an organisational system presents itself to its various constituencies (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Social identity incorporated into stakeholder theory facilitates a better and holistic classification of relevant stakeholders (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011). In this study, this holistic classification fosters the understanding of how students view and define their social identities in higher education, in which the complex notion of student-customer arises from the students-as-customers phenomenon. Also, it examines how student-learning motivation is impacted by the formation and consolidation of student social identity.

2.2.2 Dynamics of social identity

A person's individual identity, or self-concept, according to social identity theory, is an identity profile encompassing all the idiosyncratic characteristics of a person as well as his social identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). 'Social identity' is derived from social groups, to which an individual perceives a sense of belonging, along with its value and emotional significance (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Erikson (1956, 1968, 1980) articulated identity as both a conscious sense of individual identity, and an unconscious sense of striving for a continuity of personal character. Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory, on the other hand, introduce 'social identity' as an elastic entity resulting from the individual's personality and the contextual or situational factors. Social identification, therefore, is a person's 'expounded' perception of oneself in relation to the social aggregations that the person joins, participates in, and belongs to. As such, it serves as a core supplement to the existential question of "Who am I?" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1982). According to Tajfel (2010), individuals tend to respond to such questions first in terms of social categories designating roles or the membership of a group ('man or woman', 'father or mother', 'student', 'Christian', etc.). Multiple potential identities of the individuals may arise in specific organisational contexts, leading to complexities related to identity salience (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001) and the development of the hierarchy of social identities (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Hogg and Terry (2000) summarise the salience of group membership as follows:

The responsiveness of social identity to immediate social contexts is a central feature of social identity theory and self-categorisation theory within it. The cognitive system, governed by uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement motives, matches social categories to properties of the social context and brings into active use (i.e., makes salient) that category rendering the social context and one's place within it subjectively most meaningful (p. 125).

According to Tajfel (1982), three components are necessary for the social identification process to take place: (1) the *cognitive component* (the level of awareness of membership); (2) the *evaluative component* (the value connotation linked to such awareness); and (3) the *emotional component* (the emotional engagement for both awareness and evaluation). Hogg and Vaughan (2005) describe social identity as an aspect of an individual's self-concept generated by the perception of memberships of various social groups. The social identity of 'us' associated with any internalised group membership is defined and determined by the individual's perception. Social identification, more specifically, refers to the internalisation of individuals' group membership as a unique part of their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social context results in multiple 'social identities' as it causes a person to think, feel, and act on an escalated 'level of self'. Some of these social identities are ascribed, and others emanate from group memberships of individual choices (Turner et al., 1987). Finally, group membership depends on the time and functions of diversified social situations.

2.2.3 Social categorisation

One's social identity has the adaptive function of fabricating social behaviour (Turner, 1984). The social identity approach suggests that human interaction ranges on a broad spectrum of 'interpersonal' to the 'intergroup'. A purely interpersonal interaction, considered rare, involves people relating entirely on an individual basis, with no awareness or influence of social categories. Conversely, when a person's idiosyncratic qualities are group membership, a purely intergroup interaction happens whereby the person relates entirely as a member of his or her group. A more in-depth observation of group membership and the way individuals perceive

such classification of groups leads to the discourse of social categorisation theory. According to the theory, this social categorisation is the grouping of diverse social circles based on the members' stereotypical attributes, culture, personal background, and behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). That is to say, individuals have the tendency to classify people (including themselves) into various social categories. Social categories are defined by prototypical characteristics such as organisational membership, social affiliation, gender, age cohort, education, values, and attitudes abstracted from members in any given group (Turner, 1985).

In this context, people may choose to adopt different categorisation schemas while being classified into a wide range of social categories. Further, social identification implies that individuals tend to associate themselves with certain groups, to bolster their self-esteem (Tajfel, 2010). The basis of social identity theories is the notion that positive self-esteem is a fundamental human need (Haslam, Oakes, Turner, & McGarty, 1996; Tajfel, 1981). There are times when it is deeply uncomfortable for individuals to challenge their self-esteem, yet it is a core feature of self-identity (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Studies exploring social identity in higher education suggest that students' sense of belonging to a university community is clearly associated with their sense of psychological well-being. This was reflected in psychometric constructs such as self-esteem, life satisfaction and depression (Cameron, 1999).

When existing category distinctions reach a desired significance level, individuals conceptually enhance in-group similarities while enhancing differences among the group. To Hogg and Terry (2000), one's psychological sense of belonging is captured by the groups one identifies with. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), social

categorisation serves two fundamental functions: First, alongside social identity, it influences how people see themselves by activating a broader sense of one's self-concept. Second, since social categorisation cognitively segments and organises the social environment, it is a rational method of defining those who are different, depending on how the individual defines him or herself. An increasing body of research affirms that group identification brings important motivational consequences to an individual. 'Group motivation' *per se* is what individuals perceive to be psychologically interchangeable with others who share the same social identity (Haslam, Powell, & Turner, 2000). The membership that an individual is assigned or chooses will result in relevant actions manifested in a variety of domains (Deaux, 2001). Individuals who strongly identify with a particular group are more likely to carry out actions that resonate with that group. Intergroup behaviour is motivated by intergroup relations underpinned by people's need to feel positive and certain about themselves, their place in the world, and the way they relate to other people (Hogg, 2013).

2.2.4 Homogenisation and social differentiation

The interplay of social identity and social categories leads to the dynamics of homogenisation and social differentiation; that is, 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. 'In-groups' refer to a social group to which a person conceptually identifies as being a member. In contrast, 'out-groups' is a social group with which an individual does not identify. In-groups and out-groups create the mechanism of social comparison, through which individuals compare in-group members with out-group members, perceive what they belong and do not belong to, and look for motivators and benefits within the in-group to enhance self-esteem. Positive distinctiveness,

therefore, is generated in situations where individuals use verbal or non-verbal cues to make the group they belong to more socially valued, thereby creating an increasingly positive meaning and distinctiveness to the identity of the group. Individuals homogenise in such a way by making and assigning similar characteristics and attitudes to members of each group uniform in composition and characteristics. Furthermore, individuals continue to accredit additional favourable and approving characteristics to the group that has been identified as 'us' as opposed to members of other groups identified as 'them'. This subsequently leads to the necessary outcome of 'in-group favouritism', which in turn generates intergroup discrimination (them vs. us).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) systematically identified three variables affecting the dynamics of in-group favouritism: (1) how closely people identify with an in-group and internalise that group membership in establishing their self-concept; (2) how closely the prevailing context provides the conditions for comparison between groups; and (3) how relevant or meaningful the comparison group being perceived is, itself shaped by the in-group in a relative or absolute sense. The following section applies social identity theory to the formation of the student-customer social identity.

2.2.5 Applying social identity theory

The formation of the student-customer social identity occurs when, in a given social context, a particular student-customer ('Customer X' hereafter) reacts on a level beyond his or her personal identity. Customer X transforms into being a member

of the 'Customer X Group', among other memberships available in the sociocultural and educational contexts, thereby enabling the student to perceive, associate, and internalise any necessary ingredients in the construction and substantiation of his or her social identities. The student's emotional engagement to such a membership of the Customer X Group formulates the prescribed emotional component.

When a student perceives a social identity from being a member of the Customer X Group, the student's selection of social identity may result in the reinforcement of such factors as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and depression. Social behaviour generated from a student's multiple social identities could be radically different as it is contingent on which group(s) the student chooses to assume a more intimate identification with within a given social setting. In this context, while students may, as a result of their original Customer X identity, behave under the influence of the original interpersonal basis on one end of the spectrum, they may also begin relating on an intergroup basis as a member of Customer X Group, at the other end of the spectrum.

In the context of the social identity of Customer X, the characteristics which differentiate between Customer X and non-Customer X (Customer Y hereafter), as observed in the classroom settings, can be interpreted as those who accept such identity and those who do not. In this aspect, it is likely for students who belong to either group to display favouritism towards the group they belong to and act in accordance with the norms and expectations such group. Students would strive to maintain such perceived distinctiveness as Customer X; the formation of such an in-group perspective enables the student to compare favourably with out-groups (Customer Y) in cases where the student subsumes the individual self to the social

self. In summary, the formation of the student-customer social identity can be illustrated by Figure 2.1 below. The way personal identity goes through a hierarchy of processes by which social identity is formed, as well as the establishment of in-group and out-group among student-customers are explicated by arrows pointing downwards.

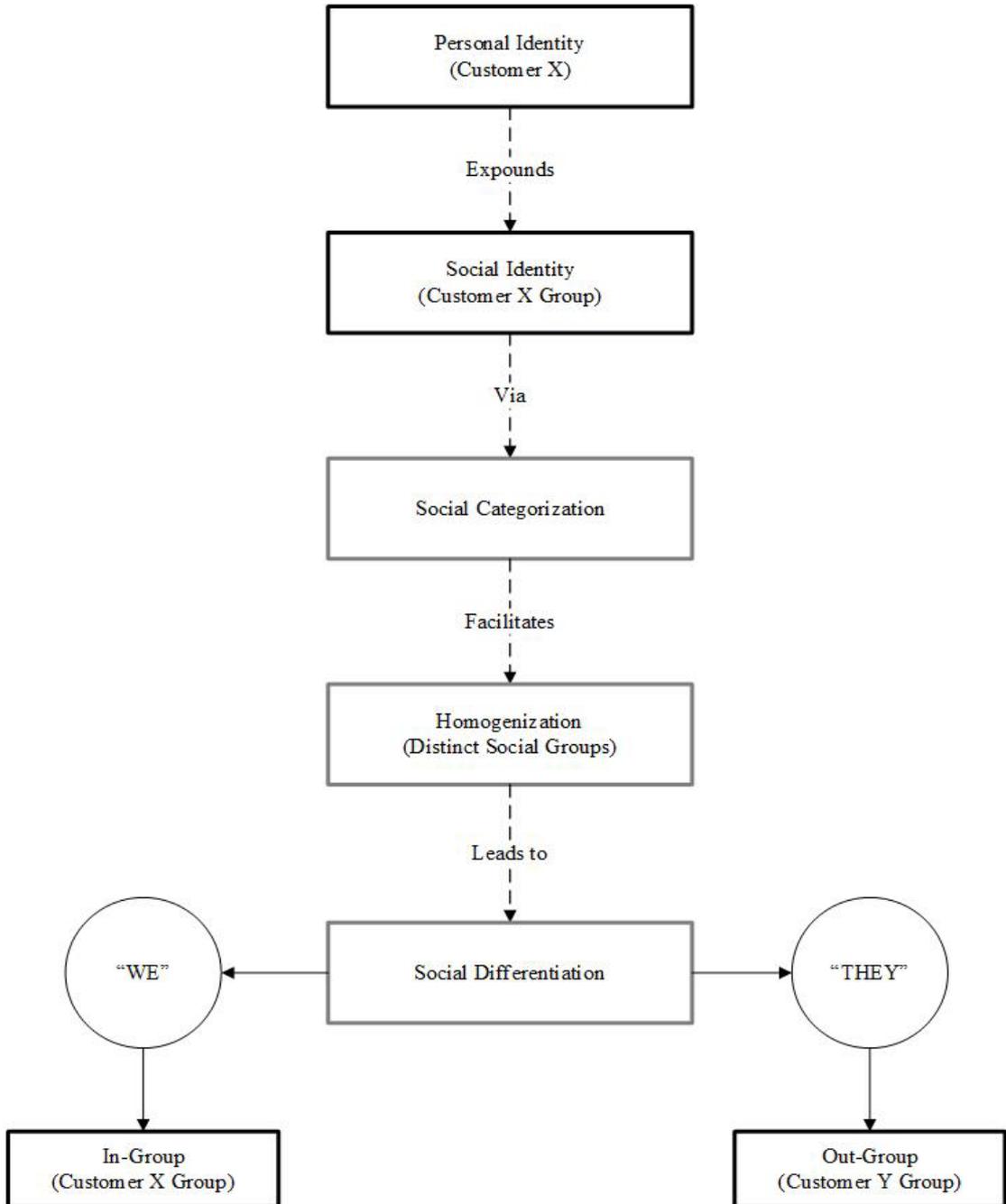


Figure 2.1. Illustration of the formation of student-customer social identity

2.2.6 Section summary

Self-definition and self-understanding lie at the core of human experience. Knowing who we are, why we exist, and how we should lead our lives are facets of the basic impulse in human consciousness. What it is to be 'me' and what it is to be the 'same person' are two sides of the same coin in the nature of personal identity. The social identity approach substantiates the understanding of how human beings formulate their identity in relation to other groups of people. Further, it suggests that there is a qualitative difference between behaviour based on personal identity ('I') and behaviour based on social identity ('we'). The theory significantly shapes how an individual's self-concept is affected and elucidates the dynamics of social perception regarding how self-concept can have social aggregation, group, and membership dimensions. In the next section, the relationship between the social identity approach and learning behaviour is discussed, with a particular focus on how students' social identity can affect their learning motivation.

2.3. Social identity and student learning motivation

2.3.1 Social identity and learning behaviour

The subject of identity and its relationship with general learning behaviour has interested many scholars. For example, Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) propose a theoretical framework of how the construction of identity is understood in fostering cognitive growth. A case study conducted by Wortham (2004) suggests an intertwining relationship between models of identity and cognitive models as a robust mechanism for the mutual constitution of social identification and learning. Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) provide a detailed discourse on the dynamics

of identity, cognition, affect and behaviours as follows:

Identity situates the person in a given context, delimiting a set of cognitions, affect and behaviors (. . .). In the study of human cognition and behavior, identity is one of the key foundational concepts helping to explain why people think about their environment the way they do and why people do what they do in these environments. The concept of identity helps capture the essence of who people are and, thus, what they do as they do (. . .). Identification matters because it is the process by which people come to define themselves, communicate that definition to others, and use that definition to navigate their lives, work-wise or other (p. 334).

There are also studies which reveal that students' school identities could influence their willingness to continue the schooling process (Bornholt, 2001; Bornholt, Maras, & Robinson, 2009). Dean and Jolly (2012) believe that the learning process is related to social identity in that 'learning' is a fundamental process of recognising and adapting one's different identities. Smith and Woodworth (2012) suppose that the interplay of social identity and student self-efficacy enhances student commitment to learning.

Bizumic et al. (2009) studied the role of social identity in students' well-being, defined as a dependent variable, encompassing self-esteem, positive and negative effects, job involvement, and school outcomes. Through the term 'school climate', they refer to several factors, such as the extent to which students support school's goals and objectives, decision-making processes, or fairness of the school. Bizumic et al. (2009) established that a school climate is significantly correlated with students' well-being and their identification with the school, concluding that "social identification is central in explaining individual functioning...social identity processes need to be considered in explaining individual functioning in schools" (pp. 188-189). In addition, Bliuc, Ellis, Goodyear, and Hendres (2011) studied the relationship between social identity and student learning behaviour and their academic performance in higher education, and concluded that student social identity tends to

be associated with academic achievement, and his or her deep learning approach (learning associated with a deep sense of personal satisfaction and consistent, relevant and related commitment) mediates student social identity and high academic achievement.

2.3.2 Student learning motivation

While the deep learning approach can mediate the relationship between student social identity and academic achievement, the concern is whether it leads to student learning motivation. The term 'motivation' is derived from the Latin verb *movere*, which means 'move', referring to the force that makes one do something. Ryan and Deci (2000) defined motivation as an individual being moved to do something. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) suggest that motivation is an instigated and sustained human process that comprises of goals, physical or mental activity. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) associate motivation with attributes leading to an ideal self-image that individuals like to possess or believe that they ought to hold. Deckers (2010) provides the following as a summary of motivation:

To be *motivated* means to be induced or moved into action or thought by either the push of a motive or the pull of an incentive. A *motive* is an internal disposition that pushes an individual toward some desired end, which is the incentive. An *incentive* is a valued feature of the environment that pulls an individual toward it...the study of motivation concerns the relation between motives, incentives, and behavioral acts (p.7).

Brewer and Burgess (2005) identify motivation as a fundamental aspect of learning, which assumes that learning is a purposive rather than a random process. Student learning motivation, therefore, is defined as what causes students to learn or what arouses student-learning interest. It is consequential to the interaction between the student and the learning environment. Students who are 'motivated' exert a

greater effort to learn and perform than those who are 'not motivated', since motivation fuels the persistence needed to exhibit sustained effort on a learning task. Crump (1995) summarises that excitement, interest, and enthusiasm towards learning as the primary components of learning motivation. In this sense, learning motivation is a process which begins with a learning need (or deficiency), triggering a goal, or incentive-oriented learning behaviour or drive. Further, the willingness of a student to learn something is also conditioned by the consequence of such learning to satisfy a need. Students may exhibit both positive (e.g., engagement in learning) and negative (e.g., absenteeism) learning behaviour in classrooms. While infants are considered active learners and infant learning motivation is inclined to be self-initiated (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2013), learning motivation in classrooms has multiple dimensions.

2.3.3 Learning motivation in classrooms

Educators commonly agree that motivating students is one of the hardest tasks of teaching, since it involves engaging students cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally in classrooms. Educational psychologist Paul R. Pintrich (1953–2003), who made significant contributions to the fields of motivation, epistemological thinking, self-regulated learning and higher education, comprehensively examined the subject of student needs and what motivates students in classrooms (Figure 2.2). Pintrich (2003) highlighted five generalisations of motivations to explain why students are motivated in classrooms. These generalisations, which support the current focus of motivational research in social-cognitive constructs, are organised into five categories.

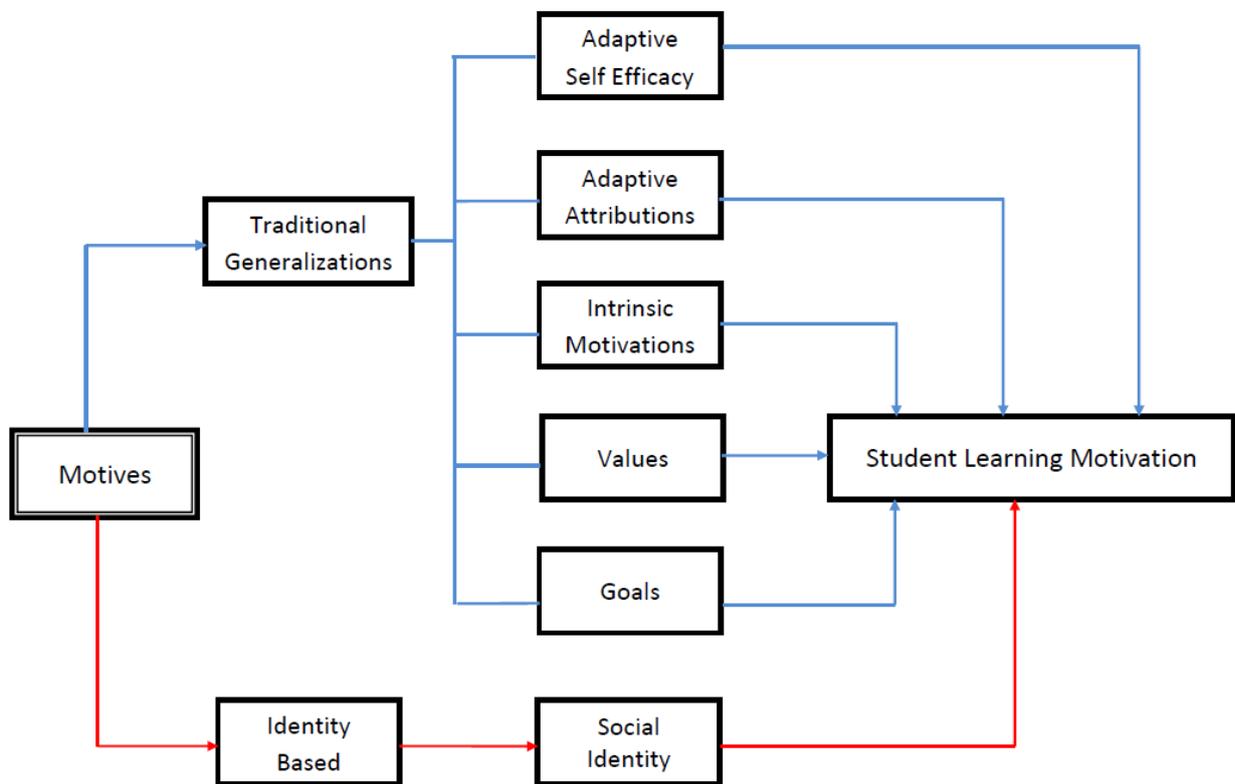


Figure 2.2. Pintrich's (2003) model of student learning motivation

The first category, *adaptive self-efficacy and competence perceptions motivate students*, refers to the idea that “students who believe they are able and that they can and will do well are much more likely to be motivated in terms of effort, persistence, and behavior” (Pintrich, 2003, p. 671). The second category, *adaptive attributions and control beliefs motivate students*, states that “students who believe they have more personal control of their own learning and behavior are more likely to do well and achieve at higher levels than students who do not feel in control” (Pintrich, 2003, p. 673). The third category, *higher levels of interest and intrinsic motivation motivate students*, alludes to the theory that “students who are intrinsically motivated not only feel autonomous and self-determined, but also experience high levels of interest (Pintrich, 2003, p. 674). The fourth category,

higher levels of value motivate students, supplements the idea that although interest and intrinsic motivation can motivate students to learn, what also makes a difference lies in whether “students care about or think the task is important in some way” (Pintrich, 2003, p. 675). The fifth category, *goals motivate and direct students*, assumes that students are motivated because of goals or goals-oriented objectives. The goal-oriented approach in student learning reflects the self-regulatory approach in motivational science which asserts that “students who are self-regulating, in other words those who set goals or plans, and try to monitor and control their own cognition, motivation, and behaviour in line with these goals are more likely to do well in school” (Pintrich, 2003, p. 677).

Whilst models of self-regulation have made an impact on the understanding of student motivation and learning, Pintrich (2003, p.678) observed that there are many occasions “when motivation and learning, in the classroom and in life in general, are not so conscious, intentional, and self-regulating”. Pintrich (2003) concluded the impact of student social identity on student learning motivation as follows:

...the power of group and social identity for motivation and behavior and the fact that these effects may be produced without much conscious awareness or regulation. Finally, these models of group and social identity offer strong theoretical models and empirical data in support of the potential role of identity in motivation and learning and in keeping with the general theme of multidisciplinary, should be pursued more vigorously by classroom researchers interested in the role of identity in learning (p. 678).

2.3.4 Motivation in organisational perspectives

It is useful to look at the organisational perspectives of motivation to complement the motivation theories discussed above. One widely held theme is the empowerment of workers to foster a sense of autonomy and self-determination in

the workplace (Chizmar, 1994; Haslam, Eggins & Reynolds, 2003). In conceptualising empowerment in motivational terms, Conger and Kanungo (1988, p.474) recognise it as a process whereby “an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced. ‘To empower’ means either to strengthen this belief or to weaken one's belief in personal powerlessness”. It is associated with Pintrich’s (2003) first generalisation of student learning motivation in the classroom, where an adaptive self-efficacy serves as a powerful learning motive. Conger and Kanungo (1988) summarise the five stages of the empowerment process: *Stage 1* refers to the conditions leading to a psychological state of powerlessness of organisational members. *Stage 2* entails the use of managerial strategies and techniques which include goal-setting and participative management. *Stage 3* relates to the provision of self-efficacy information to subordinates as well as the removal of the conditions listed under the initial stage. *Stage 4* denotes the establishment and enhancement of the empowering experience for the subordinate. *Stage 5* anticipates the observation of behavioural effects and the accomplishment of task objectives. Menon (2001) considers *Stage 2* to be one where goal internalisation is a major component of the psychological experience of empowerment, comparable to Shamir’s (1991) model of self-concept and its links to workplace motivation enhancement.

Drucker (2013) concurs that extrinsic motives such as materialistic incentives should be de-emphasised in enhancing performance as they are likely to diminish in the long run. However, according to Drucker (2013), the greatest de-motivator is employee dissatisfaction when comparing compensation among peers. In higher education, a controversial issue is what constitutes the ‘material incentives’ supporting student learning motivation. Armstrong, Brown and Thompson (2014) propose that

qualification value, grades, academic progress, and positive feedback from lecturers are extrinsic motivators of student learning. Comparing student academic achievement with labour productivity, Koch and McGrath (1996) find that the latter improves with a more sophisticated human resource planning and selection strategy. In higher education, this strategy can be applied by streaming and classifying students their different learning interests. This corresponds to the second generalisation of Pintrich's (2003) model where adaptive attributions and control beliefs are core motives for student learning in classrooms. Pintrich's (2003) model tracing a possible link between social identity and motivation is affirmed by Van Knippenberg (2000) linking social identity with work motivation, task performance, and contextual performance. The significant similarities between learning motivation and work motivation therefore include empowerment of individuals (self-efficacy), goal-oriented objectives (particularly extrinsic goals), enhancement of adaptive attributions and control of beliefs, and social identity.

2.3.5 Social identity and motivation

Given that social identity serves as a significant similarity in affecting motivation in learning and work, in terms of the specific relationship between social identity and motivation, a central theme is that individuals have the motivation to seek or maintain group distinctiveness (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). In other words, individuals would be motivated by how their group behaviour would be directed in a consistent fashion with the distinctiveness identified. Oyserman, Fryberg, and Yoder (2007) state that people behave in an identity-infused fashion; that is, people engage in behaviour that carries a positive tone of inclusion for the in-group they belong to. Groups not only are instrumental to executing organisational functions

and processes, but enable and constrain motivations and commitments of members (Korte, 2007). Perceived membership of an individual in an organisation could moderate the individual motivation to achieve. Here, identity-based motivations are crucial in the continuous learning and adaptation of the individuals in organisational settings (Korte, 2007). Goodenow (1992) suggests that integration of student social identity and aspects of their learning, motivation, in particular, be included as a valid psychology of education:

Though concepts of self and identity are receiving increased attention, research in educational psychology may benefit from exploring more explicitly the links between students' self-categorisations and group identities, on the one hand, and their behaviour, motivation and learning on the other. Research investigating the multiple meanings of social identities, and the factors that increase or decrease the salience of those dimensions of identity, may be an important part of the agenda for psychologists concerned with education (p.182).

Apart from in-group distinctiveness, goal framing pertinent to social identity is speculated to affect motivation. Pintrich's (2003) fifth generalisation of student learning motivation in a classroom assumes that students are motivated because of goals or goals-oriented objectives. In the context of student learning, goal setting can produce deeper engagement in learning activities, better conceptual learning, and higher persistence in learning activities (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). Deckers' (2010) study reinforces the idea that goals consisting of the notions of psychological valence and achievement could affect motivation. Oyserman, Fryberg, and Yoder (2007) take a further step to believe that identity-based motivation is a process comprising content of social identities influencing people's beliefs about in-group goals and strategies. In specific, social identity affects motivation also in that individuals with strong group identification would behave according to the group's goals and in turn facilitate the group's performance (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004).

Other than in-group distinctiveness and goal framing, Oyserman and Destin (2010) establish that the premise of the identity-based motivation perspective is that identities affect how individuals make sense of the world around them. In this context, Oyserman and Destin (2010) believe that when a particular social identity is salient to an individual, academic performance is likely to improve if the social group associated with the identity is stereotyped as high performing in an academic domain of interest. If the social group associated with the social identity is negatively stereotyped as low performing, the opposite will be true. While it was discussed in Section 2.3.1 that social identity could impact student learning behaviour, the specific relationship between social identity and motivation is summarised and illustrated by Figure 2.3 below:

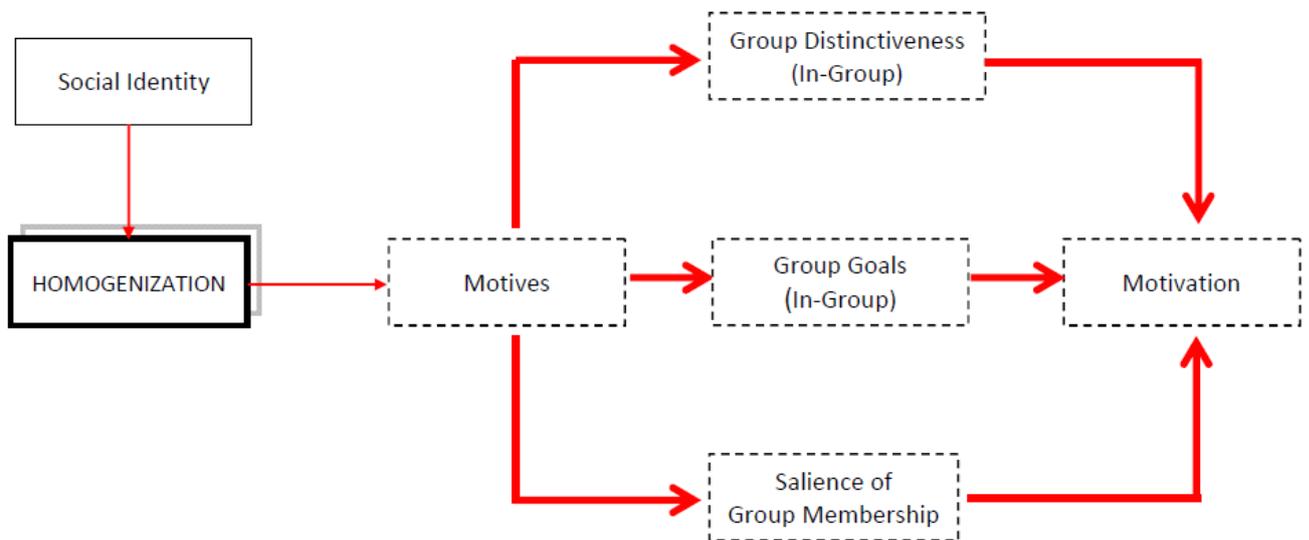


Figure 2.3. Social identity and motivation (an integrated model)

2.3.6 Section summary

Social identity perspectives provide insights into how student social identity can influence student learning behaviour. Therefore, with regard to the student-customer, the risk of associating (or disassociating) a social identity with students without considering how it originates, forms and evolves may be problematic. Some challenges that may arise include: how to motivate a group of students to upgrade their learning performance, how the measurement of student group performance can be refined, and the ethical and critical import of education to various student cohorts in comparison to its universalistic traditions. In the next section, the relationship between student learning motivation and academic achievement will be examined.

2.4. Motivation and academic achievement

2.4.1 Academic enablers and academic achievement

Much research has elucidated how student motivation has a direct and powerful impact on academic achievement. DiPerna and Elliott (2002, p.294) define the academic enabler construct as “attitudes and behaviors that allow a student to participate in, and ultimately benefit from academic instruction in the classroom”. They suggest that motivation, interpersonal skills, engagement, and study skills are the broad domains of academic enablers. A cross-sectional investigation by DiPerna, Volpe and Elliott (2002) suggest that student motivation influences study skills and engagement to promote achievement. DiPerna, Volpe, and Elliott (2002) summarise that, prior to achievement, interpersonal skills, study skills, motivation, and engagement are predictor variables in the theoretical model of academic

enablers and academic achievement. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) recognise that student motivation is a significant academic enabler for school success, and conceive student motivation as a multifaceted construct. According to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002), the four key components of student motivation include academic self-efficacy, attributions, intrinsic motivation, and achievement goals, associated with academic achievement and other academic enablers. Busato, Prins, Elshout, and Hamaker (2000) posit an integration of intellectual ability, learning style, personality, and achievement motivation as predictors of academic success in higher education. Wehrwein, Lujan, and DiCario (2007) hypothesise that using students' varied learning style preferences to improve student motivation and performance can be done by adapting teaching approaches, and that learning style preferences are "the manner in which, and the conditions under which, learners most efficiently and effectively perceive, process, store, and recall what they are attempting to learn...students have a variety of learning style preferences" (p.153). Finally, Christiana's (2009) work demonstrates that student motivation has a high positive correlation with academic performance.

2.4.2 Identity engagement model

Cohen and Garcia (2008) discuss how academic achievement could be affected by social or group identities. Cohen and Garcia's (2008) concept stems from group membership, which can trigger psychological threat and belonging concerns. To them, other than depending on the traditional factors, achievement motivation is conditional on the strength of one's sense of social identity and social belongingness. Cohen and Garcia (2008) propose The Identity Engagement Model, depicting the effects of social-identity threats on performance. In the model, it is assumed that if

individuals perceive that their identity is threatened, it will be psychologically engaged to uncover situational cues to confirm or deny its existence. If the cues disconfirm the identity threat, performance is likely to be sustained or improve. Otherwise, performance will either be sustained or lowered, depending on the individual's ability and desire to cope with the threat.

2.5. Summary of literature review

This literature review has surveyed the rise of students-as-customers as a prevalent phenomenon in higher education under education reform and CHE. The concept of students-as-customers has an equivocal nature subject to multiple definitions and interpretations. Just as the notion of student-customer identity may not be univocal, the question of whether or not higher education students are customers that are homogenised in the traditional marketing sense is moot. The literature review has projected that the student-customer has a broad, complex and heterogeneous nature. Furthermore, the ontological 'voice' of students, and thereby, their unique consciousness and experiences constitute the critical analytical unit of the student customer-identity.

With respect to the social identity and social categorisation theory, how student-customer identity conflates into the student-customer social identity has also been demonstrated. Student social identity can significantly impact student learning behaviour, particularly student learning motivation. Given the concepts of motivation from the education-psychological and organisational perspectives, significant similarities between the two domains have been revealed. While social identity is found to be influential in affecting motivation in both domains, specific

ways of the impact of social identity on motivation has been probed. Finally, the literature review has explained that student learning motivation contributes heavily to student academic achievement leading to its intensification.

2.6. Conceptual model and research questions

2.6.1 Working definitions

The literature review has provided insights for constructing the working definitions of the key concepts. They facilitate the understanding of the conceptual model and the research questions. For ease of reference, they are listed in the chronological order in which they appear in the literature review (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Working definitions of key concepts

Key Variable	Working Definition(s)
1. Personal identity of Student-customer	The personal identity of student-customers possesses the following idiosyncratic characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Heterogeneous in nature; diverse needs and expectations. ■ Satisfaction linked to how well these needs and expectations are met; level of satisfaction defines the notion of education quality. ■ A universal definition of these needs and expectations is currently lacking, thereby making it impossible to establish a 'prototype' of student-customer.
2. Student voice	The ontological voice of students of their being and becoming; the unique consciousness and experiences of students most important and relevant for identity formation.
3. Social identity of student-customer	The personal identity of the student-customer conflates into the social aggregations.

4. Homogenisation	The process by which similar characteristics and attitudes are assigned to members of the categorised group.
5. Student learning motivation (SLMO)	Student excitement, interest, and enthusiasm for learning; a significant academic enabler for academic achievement.
6. Student learning motives (SLM)	What causes students to learn and arouses learning interest in achieving their learning objectives.
7. Goals framing	Educational and learning goals of student-customers. The outcome towards which student endeavour is directed.
8. Distinctiveness	Expectations of student-customers which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Purpose of higher education (business functions). ■ Provision of education (business offerings). ■ Teacher-student relationships.
9. Salience of membership	Students' awareness of their belonging to a specific customer group; how the customer group facilitates behaviour within a given social context.

2.6.2 Conceptual model

The conceptual model (Figure 2.4) systematically integrates the concepts and logical links analysed in the literature review, and models the process by which social identity of student-customers is formed and affects student learning motivation. While there is limited research on the links between CHE and student learning motivation, the proposed model integrates research on CHE, student-customers identity, social identity perspectives, and student learning motivation. As given in Figure 2.4, student voice (Batchelor, 2008) functions as the entry point for how students describe their student-customer identity. Each student-customer identity described consists of their unique expectations pertinent to Gilmore and Pine's (1997)

business model, in which 'business functions' refers to the expectation of the student-customer of the purpose/meaning of higher education institutions, and 'business offering' refers to their expectation of the higher education (see Chapter 1). 'Teacher identity' refers to the ideal teacher-student relationship preferred by the student-customer. These expectations, together with their individual-based student learning motives, structure the unique characteristics of the student-customer social identity.

While it has been revealed in Section 2.3.4 that social identity plays a significant role in affecting motivation both in the areas of student learning and organisation, Section 2.3.5 sheds light on how social identity specifically affects motivation. Based on the literature review of 2.3 on social identity and student learning behaviour, the three directions depicted in the model are established to exemplify how student social identity may impact student learning motivation.

Direction 1: The first direction deals with 'in-group distinctiveness'. In-group distinctiveness, as discussed in Section 2.3.5, refers to the concept that individuals would be motivated by how their group behaviour would be directed in a consistent fashion with the distinctiveness identified. While in-group distinctiveness may refer to a wide array of characteristics, three particular threads of student expectations have been examined in this study (see Table 2.1, definition 8). The model demonstrates that in-group distinctiveness amplifies learning motivation when the student-customer identifies his or her interests with the sociocultural and educational context of the anticipated group membership. That is, sociocultural and educational context embeds a group culture consistent with the ontological characteristics of the student-customer.

Direction 2: The second direction deals with ‘in-group goal’ and ‘goal framing’ which are cogent learning motives based on education psychology and organisational perspectives. As discussed in Section 2.3.5, social identity affects motivation in that individuals with a strong group identification would behave according to the group’s goals and objectives. The model illustrates that in-group goals or goal-framing heightens learning motivation when the student-customer validates his or her educational goals through the sociocultural and educational context in which s/he belongs (perceived group membership). That is, when the educational goal of the individual student-customer and the collective goal sustained by the context to which s/he is exposed are conflated, his/her learning motivation should be enhanced.

Direction 3: The third direction concerns the salience of student in-group membership. As discussed in Section 2.3.5, social identity may affect motivation when it affects how individuals make sense of the world around them. When a particular social identity is significant to an individual, wherein a high threshold of in-group membership is perceived, the individual’s motivation is likely to be affected. In the classroom environment, in-group membership could be affected by the practice of streaming and classifying of students into learning cohorts. Once learning cohorts are formed, ‘stereotyping’, ‘identity engaging’, and ‘inter-group comparisons’ (classic mechanisms of social identity as discussed) would occur, which affect the student-customer’s perspective of the salience of a group membership. The model suggests that strengthening the student-customer’s sense of group membership should ultimately enhance their learning motivation.

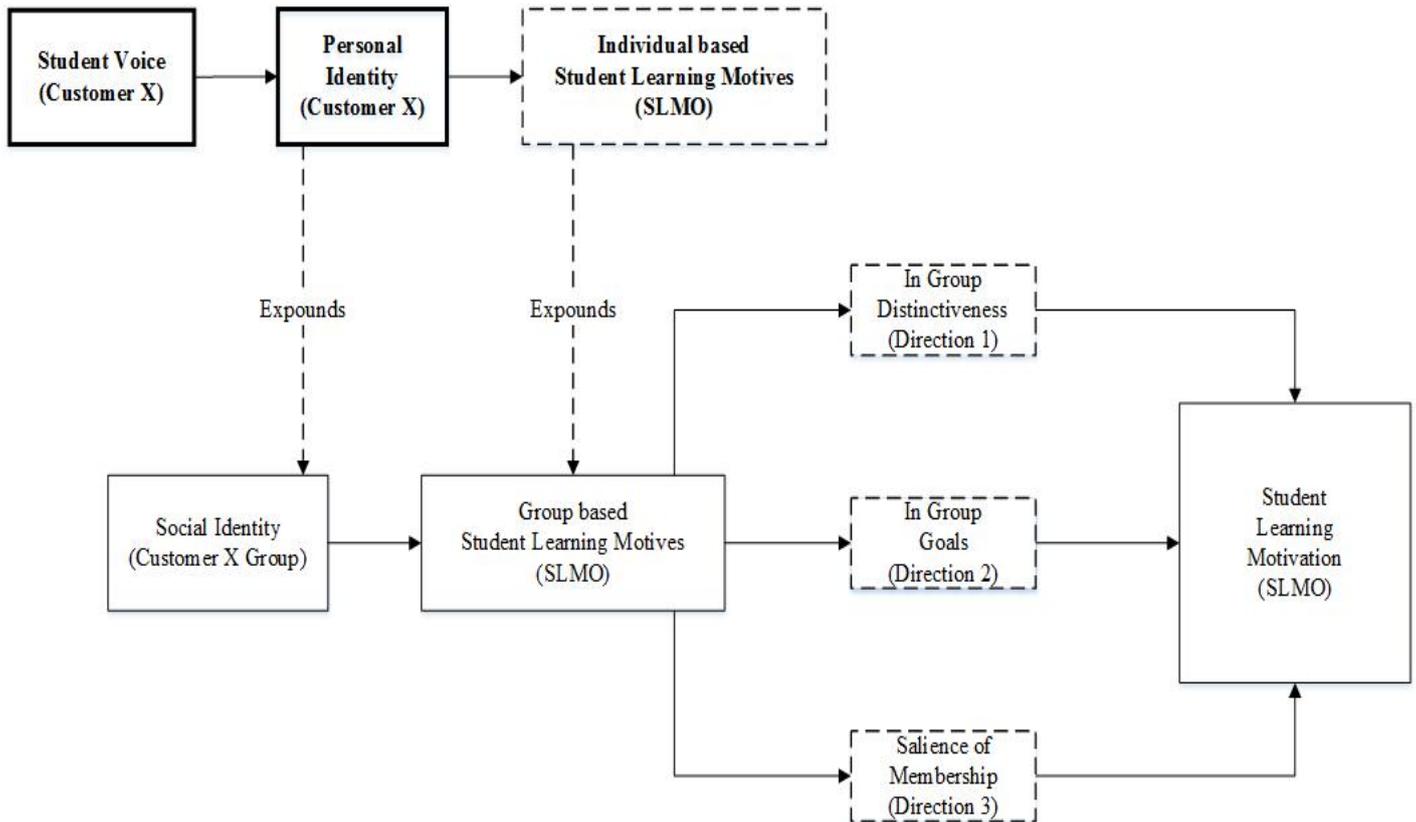


Figure 2.4. Conceptual model

2.6.3 Research questions

The two research questions guiding this study are:

- *Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do students define their 'customer' identity?*
- *Research Question 2 (RQ2): What impact do social identities have on student learning motivation?*

Given the analyses conducted thus far in the present research, the objectives of this study are elucidated as follows:

1. Given the fact that 'student-customer' identity is a heterogeneous concept bestowed upon students in higher education, inclusive of institutional worldviews and researchers' perspectives, this study will examine the definitions and meanings of such standardised and equivocal notions of 'student-customer' from the perspectives of students in real life, in terms of their ontological 'student voices', and explore the wide spectrum of characteristics of student-customers in the higher education context; and
2. Given the understanding that student social identity has an obvious impact on student learning motivation, the results achieved through the above objective will be utilised in an examination of the possible impact of student social identity on student learning motivation in the context of the 'student-customer'.

The dissertation will proceed with the framework of study methodology discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter introduces the methodology pertinent to the operation of the conceptual model of this study, and is divided into five sections. The significance of the qualitative research design, its relation to the research, paradigm, and approaches for data analysis are discussed and explained in Section 3.1. The semi-structured interview as the data collection method is presented in Section 3.2, while the sampling method and the interview plan are given in Section 3.3. Section 3.4 proceeds to the establishment of quality criteria, and addresses the relevant ethical issues. A chapter summary highlighting the strengths of the methodology is provided at the end of the chapter.

3.1. Research design

3.1.1 Qualitative research method

The qualitative research method assumes an important role in social science research (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Qualitative researchers view the social world through the eyes of people and attribute meaning to events and their environment (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This study recognises the importance of quantitative and qualitative analyses in the process of decision-making (Anderson, Sweeney, Williams, Camm, & Cochran, 2016), and concurs with Kvale's (1996) classical work on the interactive essence between quantitative and qualitative research. Kvale (1996) proposes that while both methods interact in the practice of

social research, the use of qualitative interviews is legitimated by a linguistically constituted social world. Kvale (1996) rejects the positivist assumption that qualitative research is unscientific. While the influence of people or the researcher is acknowledged and validated in qualitative research, it does not have to look objectively since objectivity in itself is viewed as rather a subjective notion (Kvale, 1996). Phenomenology, which stems from postmodernism and the essence of dialectics, is a prevalent approach in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996). Together with its undertones of the 'human-sciences', phenomenology is derived from realities which are socially constructed by and between human beings in their expressive and interpretive practices (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The phenomenological study, therefore, relies on human perspectives for the provision of insight into motivations (Sauro, 2015). This connects to Kvale's (1996, p.65) conclusion that the interview as a data collection method achieves the objective meaning of "letting the object speak". Interviewing, being a prominent research methodology in the qualitative method, is considered a highly valid and appropriate means of data collection pertinent to phenomenology and enquiries for education and social science (Seidman, 2013).

The very notion of Kvale's (1996) "letting the object speak" is coherent with Batchelor's (2008) insight of student voice as a reflection of a phenomenological reality. This study is qualitative in design in that it explores the nature of a number of intertwining phenomena wherein the experience and views of the individual are especially valued (Kiernan, 1999). That is to say, such an investigation has to be based on the understanding of the individual, their motives, perspectives, and the meaning they give to the phenomena (Bricki & Green, 2007). The investigation of collective phenomena of import is fundamentally motivated by a search for better

conceptual schemes owing to dissatisfaction with existing theoretical explanations (Bandura, 2005). In this context, the exploratory nature of this study is twofold: (1) to gain familiarity with the phenomena in context, notwithstanding that only limited information is available on how similar research issues have been explained in the past (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013); and (2) to use the interview findings to contribute to the development of a more viable theoretical framework for future research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

With regard to the divergence of positivism and phenomenology in explaining the existence of social institutions, this study has the following considerations: first, higher education institutions as phenomenological “transcendental organisms” (Nonaka, 2005, p.379) as they have “distinctive histories, mental models, and other emerging collective characteristics”. Second, students, as the primary human agents of these phenomenological institutions, are apt to express their authentic feelings and motives. Hence, by using phenomenology or interactionism, qualitative research approaches serve as ideal tools for investigating research questions involving human feelings or motives (Oliver, 2012).

The present study is considered as an empirical study in the field of business and management, consistent with the description of Myers (2013), where the body of knowledge symbiotically interacts with the empirical data. The status of current research is consolidated, therefore, in the collection of substantive qualitative data under a rigorous methodology, as described in the present chapter. Under the assumptions that qualitative methods could make significant contributions to the business and management field, and quality research can be evaluated through appropriate assessment criteria (Cassell, Symon, Buehring, & Johnson, 2006), the

current research aims to forge a solid empirical data base which substantiates the recommendations pertinent to the research questions. In the next section, the paradigm and approaches guiding this study will be elaborated upon.

3.1.2 Paradigm and Approaches

This study regards the experience of social actors as a salient factor in understanding organisational dynamics. Additionally, it recognises the importance of capturing the subjective meaning of social actions for the interpretation of organisational behaviour (Bryman & Bell, 2011). An ontological assumption of constructivism that the construction of realities is accomplished by both the social actors (i.e. students of higher education) and the researcher is made. Such an assumption delineates the epistemological ground of this study where truth is discovered, known and understood via social interaction (viz. interactionism) and the professional judgment and experience of the researcher (Anderson et al., 2016). The investigator and the object of investigation, thereby, assume an interactively relationship where findings are literally created in the investigation process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretivist-constructionist paradigm, which literally suggests the mission of 'what has been constructed shall be interpreted' is, therefore, the epistemological foundation of this study (Figure 3.1).

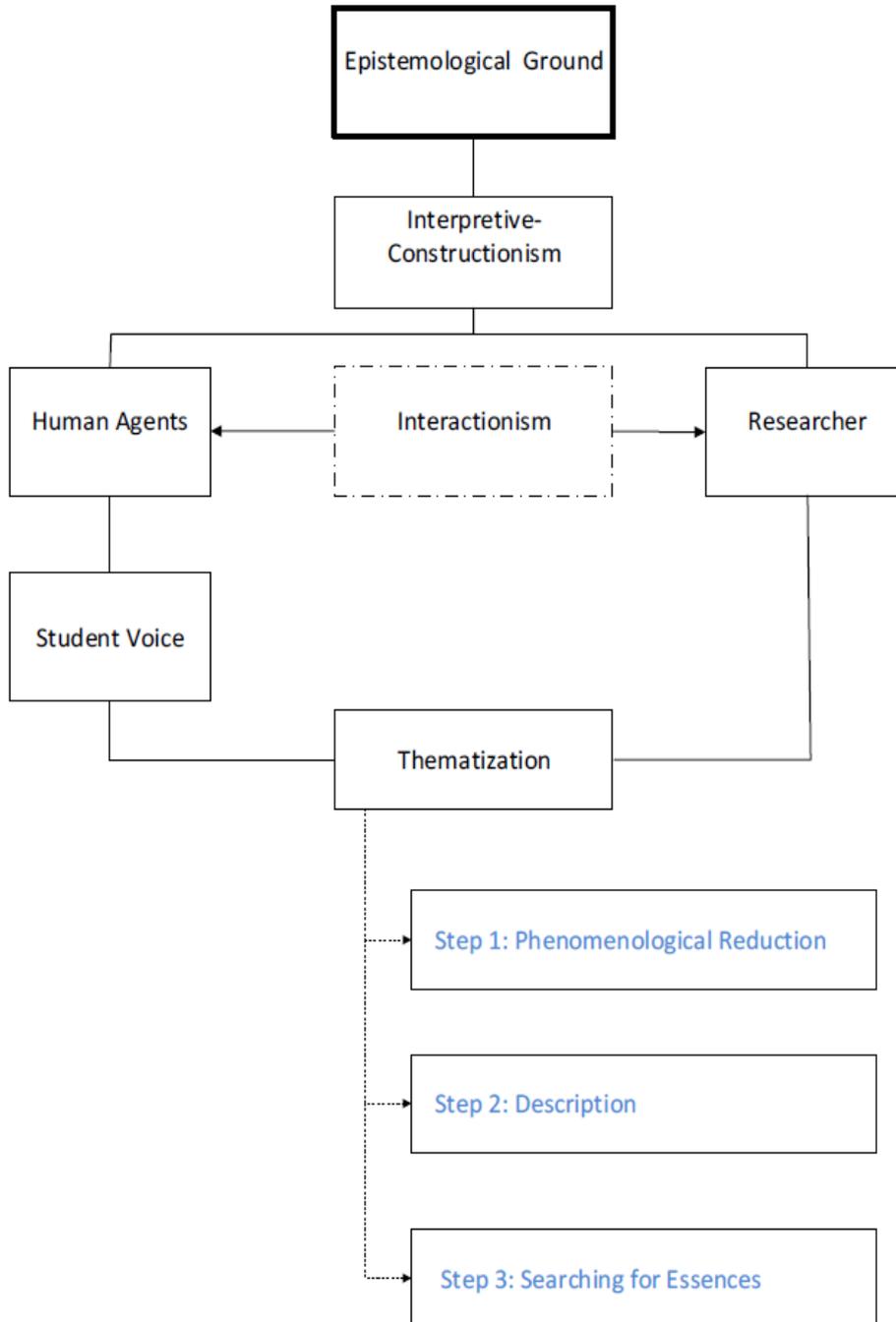


Figure 3.1. Epistemological ground of present study

Steered by the interpretivist-constructionist paradigm, the methodology adopts the qualitative phenomenological study in describing the unique ‘lived experience’ of participants (Nieswiadomy, 2008, p.172). Such a phenomenological orientation defines a central component of modern humanistic enquiry where people and things

are being perceived as freshly and as openly as possible (Crain, 1991). According to Giorgi (1997), the two key aspects overseeing the phenomenological approach are: (1) organising the individual’s consciousness and experiences into coherent ‘themes’; and (2) giving more precise meaning to the notion of ‘experience’ where it is understood as ordinary types of awareness or ‘intuition’ in Husserlian terms. Giorgi (1997) provides a three-step method essential for phenomenological inquiry. This method and its applications to this study are summarised in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1. Applications of the phenomenological method

The Phenomenological Method	Applications
<p><i>Step 1: Phenomenological reduction</i> To understand what motivates a conscious individual to think or act in a certain way</p>	<p>To understand the primary perceptions of students of higher education in terms of ‘student voice’ insofar as their social identities impact their learning motivation</p>
<p><i>Step 2: Description</i> To provide detailed, precise, and a concrete description of specific experiences of individuals</p>	<p>The student experience is to be accurately recorded and transcribed, and subsequently organised into meaningful themes. See Section 3.2.2 for the administration of the semi-structured interviews</p>
<p><i>Step 3: Searching for essences</i> To analyse the description with special sensitivity in search for ‘scientific essences’.</p>	<p>Meaningful themes which have been explored and organised reveal striking patterns substantial to the research enquiries. See Section 3.2.4 for detailed procedures of coding and interpretation of data.</p>

*Derived from Giorgi (1997)

As shall be revealed later, the notion of ‘themes’ or ‘thematization’ serves as a cohesive and coherent framework for the methodology of this research. It is a key concept in qualitative phenomenological study substantiated by qualitative research experts such as Kvale (1996, 2007), Flick (2007), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). The

qualitative interviewing methods and the semi-structured interviews pertinent to thematic analysis and the phenomenological inquiry guiding this study are introduced below.

3.2. Semi-structured interviews

3.2.1 Interviewing techniques

Kvale (1996) defines the qualitative research interview as aiming to describe and understand the meanings of the theme in the world through the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. According to Kvale (1996), the qualitative research interviews establish an understanding of knowledge from the subjects' point of view and uncover the meaning of their experiences. The qualitative research interviews are one of the major approaches in collecting standardised data for the construction of knowledge (Flick, 2007). A key function of the qualitative research interview is to serve as a tool to comprehend meanings of the 'themes' discovered in the world (Kvale, 1996).

The structured interview is generally adopted in quantitative research with numerical data being collected for statistical calculation and analysis. Conversely, a qualitative interview embraces both unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The unstructured and semi-structured interviews are theme-oriented and considered to be a flexible and effective means of data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Kvale, 1996). The basic assumption in qualitative interviewing is that researchers are able to obtain all relevant information when questions are set properly (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Moreover, interviewees are competent and

truth-tellers and are capable of revealing their feelings during the conversations. The common differences between the two types of qualitative interviews are summarised in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. Types of qualitative interviews

Interview Types	Format	Responses	Data	Usage
Semi-Structured Interview	All questions should be written down; the Interview Guide includes instructions for the interviewer.	Controlled; less room for exploration beyond the Interview Protocol	Can be tape recorded or recorded in notes depending on the need for detail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quality of interview depends on the competence of interviewer. ■ Can be used by less experienced interviewer.
Unstructured Interview	Using a single question to start and the interviewer responding to some crucial points.	Less controlled; participants are encouraged to tell their own stories.	Same as above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quality of interview is highly dependent on the competence of interviewer.

*Derived from Rubin and Rubin (1995)

While qualitative design is predominately guided by acts of questioning and dialogue (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), there are numerous advantages of qualitative interviewing. One advantage is that the interviewee does not try to impress the interviewer, so bias is low. Additionally, the interviewer can gain greater individual insight during the interview than in focus group interviews. This assists in the finding of specific knowledge, understanding, and stands or state of affairs of the interviewees (Turner, 2010). Also, an interview helps in gathering additional information through social cues, such as the voice, accent or body language of the interviewee. In-depth interviews encompass not just queries, but powerful probing for profound connotation as well as comprehensible responses (McNamara, 2009).

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview is the most appropriate type of interview for this study. First, it caters to the purpose of investigation, which pertains to the discovery of multiple themes. Second, it enables specific questions to be asked and interpreted for each specified and defined direction guided by the conceptual model. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interview process anticipates and allows for flexibility and deviation from participants' responses. Hence, it is expected that an in-depth understanding of participants' reflection on identity and learning as well as the meaning derived from such experience will be achieved (Seidman, 2006). While there is no 'standardised' procedure for qualitative research interviews, this study adopts Kvale's (1996, 2007) seven stages of an interview investigation (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Seven stages of interview investigation

Stage	Description	Correspondence
I. Thematising:	Formulate the objectives of the investigation and succinctly describe the concepts and the topics to be investigated before the interviews commence.	Chapter 1 and Chapter 2
II. Designing:	Plan the design of the study, taking into consideration all seven stages of the investigation, before the interview starts.	Chapter 3
III. Interviewing:	Conduct the interviews based on the Interview Guide and adopt a reflective approach to the knowledge sought	The Interview Protocol, see Section 3.2.3
IV. Transcribing:	Prepare the interview data for analysis, which commonly includes transcriptions from oral speech to written text.	Step 2 of the phenomenological method as described in Section 3.1.2
V. Analysing:	Decide, on the basis of the purpose and topic of the investigation and on the nature of the interview data, which methods of analysis are	Coding and interpretation of data as described in

	appropriate.	Section 3.2.4
VI. Verifying:	Ascertain the generalisability, reliability, and validity of the interview findings.	Establishment of research equality as described in Section 3.4
VII. Reporting:	Communicate the findings of the study and the methods applied in a form that lives up to scientific criteria, takes into consideration the ethical aspects of the investigation, and results in a readable product	Chapter 4

*Derived from Kvale (1996, 2007)

3.2.3 Interview Protocol

The Interview Protocol (Appendix A) complying with the procedures above was designed for this study. The Protocol consisted of four parts: Part 1 was the Participant Information Statement (PIS) which provided detailed information of the research project to potential participants. Part 2 was the Consent Form for the Research Project which the interviewee must sign before the interview commences (see Section 3.4 for the procedure). Part 3 was the Interview Guide which guided the interviewing procedure. Part 4 was the Interview Schedule comprising a list of twenty-three questions specifically constructed to elucidate the research questions and the directions of the conceptual model (Figure 3.2). As shown in Figure 3.2, interview questions designed for *Direction 1* and *Direction 2* supplemented additional data for RQ1.

The Protocol served as the vehicle for the collection of qualitative data based on the conceptual model. Its design was guided by the epistemological ground of this

study such that participants' responses are critically solicited for systematic analysis. How this study's theoretical concepts and constructs are defined (see Table 2.1) also helped determine the semantics and composition of the interview questions.

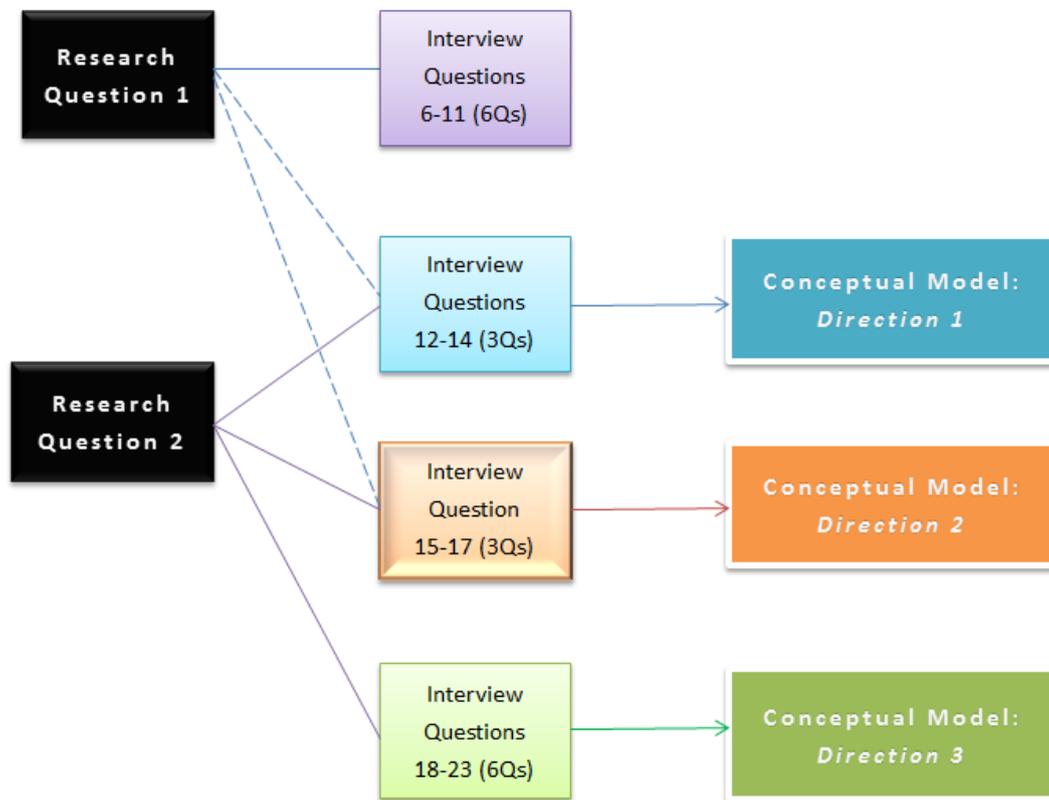


Figure 3.2. Design of interview schedule

The interview questions in the Protocol were critically formulated in five categories so that participants face no difficulty in comprehension. In addition, the working definitions provided the linguistic parameters which substantiated the meanings to be deciphered in the Interview Protocol. For a preliminary verification of the semantics of the questions, five qualified individuals had participated in a pre-pilot test, all of whom reported no difficulty in comprehending and responding to the questions. The next section introduces various types of coding methods for data organisation and interpretation.

3.2.4 Coding and interpretation of data

Coding or categorising data plays an important role in qualitative analysis. Adopting the right coding method for the effective identification of emergent meanings in related themes is essential to the research. By adopting an appropriate coding method, data can be effectively organised and processed. Bricki and Green (2007) describe the key stages involved in the thematic analysis of qualitative data summarised in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Key stages in thematic analysis of qualitative data

Key Stages	Descriptions	Type of Coding/ Significance
I. Read and annotate transcripts	Scanning and skimming the data, make preliminary observation of the first few sets of data.	Setting the stage for in-depth thematic analysis.
II. Identify themes	Analyse the data in details and discover if there are any striking patterns.	Open coding: Identification of distinct concepts, key words and categories.
III. Developing a coding scheme	Striking patterns are organised and grouped together for the emergence of coding scheme.	Axial coding: Numerical categories developed which allows for viability of interpretative phenomenological analysis.
IV. Coding the data	Applying the identified coding schemes to the remaining whole set of data; amend the coding scheme when necessary.	Selective coding: Discovery of further examples and evidence which contributes to the complete development of storylines.

*Derived from Bricki and Green (2007) and Strauss and Corbin (1990)

Coding involves the process of examining the raw qualitative data, in the form of words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs and assigning codes or labels to them (Basit, 2003). Strauss and Corbin (1990) identified three types of coding: Open Coding, Axial Coding and Selective Coding. *Open Coding* involves coding or labelling words

and phrases found in the transcript or text. In open coding, distinct concepts and categories emerging in the data are discovered and form the basic blocks of analysis. *Axial Coding* is relatively more arduous, as ‘themes’ or ‘categories’ are created by assigning codes or labels given to words and phrases where striking patterns have emerged during data analysis (Esmond, 2012). With axial coding, themes identified with open coding will be collapsed and narrowed down into schematised categories. Finally, *Selective Coding* involves the discovery of further examples and evidence for the relevant categories, which leads to the development of storylines. Selective coding is particularly useful at the end of the whole analytical process in complementing the core categories, as it generates further details for any specific sub-categories where applicable.

3.2.5 Justification of techniques

A plethora of research studies have attempted to explore various research topics on identity by using semi-structured interviews. As an example, Esmond (2012) studies how students in an English further education college look at their identities and transition to further studies. Allen-Collinson and Brown (2012) observe the accounts of first year UK university students on identity, transition, negotiation, and confirmation in relation to the Christian identity. Finally, O’Shea, Lysaght, and Tanner’s (2012) research probes how students at an Australian university with advanced standing or credit transfer describe their experiences in areas such as ‘identity formation’, ‘initial experiences of this environment’ and ‘expectations and realities’. These examples suggest that qualitative methods are common in the field of social identity and higher education, and that semi-structured interviews, when carefully designed and administered, are effective for exploring issues of identity

among higher education students.

Thematic narrative analysis is widely endorsed by scholars in the field of qualitative research. Feather (2016), for instance, adopts the interpretivist approach where common themes are drawn for the analysis of the heterogeneous nature of academic identity. Jungert (2013) observes that semi-structured interviews are suitable for identifying themes and having participants narrate their experience. In an interpretative phenomenological analysis, Jungert (2013) studies the change of social identities of engineering students. O'Shea, Lysaght, and Tanner (2012, p.265) concur that the use of narration in capturing participants' experience is essential because the stories gathered are "powerful devices, valued by researchers for their ability to convey detailed, complex and often intimate experiences whilst providing a foundation for change".

3.3. Applying thematic analysis

3.3.1 Synopsis of theoretical constructs

Reverting to the phenomenological inquiry discussed in Section 3.1.2, thematic analysis enables the discovery of meaningful themes and striking patterns relevant to the research questions. The crucial step in the effective construction of themes pertaining to 'open coding' had two objectives: first, the themes have to be aligned with the theories and concepts emerging in the study; second, they have to be relevant to the RQs. In other words, they should not only correspond to the subjects examined, but must be directly relevant to the scope of the RQs.

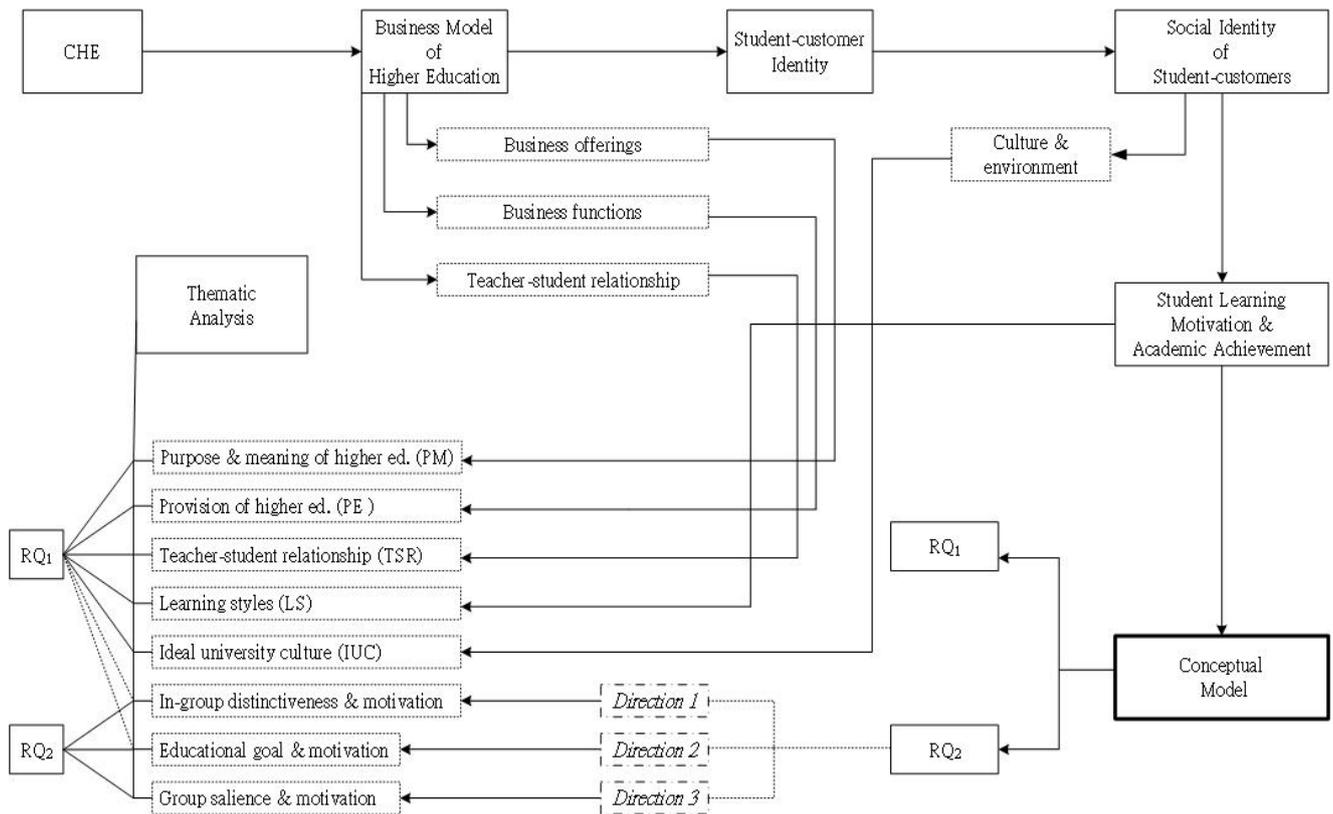


Figure 3.3. Conceptual map

In this light, a more effective understanding of the way core themes were constructed can be gained by a conceptual map (Figure 3.3), in which the core theories and concepts derived from the RQs and thematic analysis are diagrammatically displayed. Grounded themes are linked to their origins and associated with the literature review.

The challenge, however, was in organising the copious qualitative data pool (eighteen transcriptions equivalent to two hundred and three pages) into meaningful categories. More concise themes had to be developed in order to allow for appropriate and relevant categorisation, which necessitated the development of the ‘axial code’, described in Section 3.2.2. In addition, when exceptional cases did not belong to any themes or codes, they had to be accounted for according to the

stipulated quality criteria. The following section depicts the standardised procedure governing the qualitative thematic analysis of this study.

3.3.2 Nvivo and thematic analysis

To facilitate the management of data and meticulous data analysis, the computer software Nvivo was utilised. The software, developed by QSR International, is the leading platform for organising and analysing basically all forms of unstructured data (QSR Intl., 2015). The researcher had received intensive training in its use (Appendix B) and regarded Nvivo as a highly useful tool for the thematic analysis of the current study. In specific, the key stages of coding described in Table 3.4 were digitised and computerised, instead of manually performed, enabling important queries to be made in a more organised, systematic and effective fashion. In this light, the researcher is confident that this study will be replicable as all the analytical procedures digitally completed can be tracked and traced.

Nonetheless, Nvivo is neither capable of interpreting data nor answering research questions. Therefore, the researcher had to decide which features and functions of the software were to be utilised for effective management of qualitative data. Another caveat in using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was the unpredictable computer malfunctions (Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012). To tackle this issue, the researcher backed up computer files generated for the research project on a regular basis to minimise the chance of data loss. Updated antivirus software was installed to prevent data corruption. Hence, with the right tool chosen in a controlled and safe environment, the raw data collected were efficiently handled and subsequently yielded a research procedure which complied with the

quality criteria (see Section 4).

The utilisation of Nvivo was carried out in the steps as follows:

1. All eighteen transcriptions were imported and saved in Nvivo forming the database for thematic analysis;
2. Digitised 'Nodes' which corresponded to each of the individual grounded themes were created; and
3. 'Nodes' created were accordingly sorted into their main categories.
4. Each transcription was examined in-depth as follows:
 - i. Participant's responses which pertained to each grounded theme were identified;
 - ii. Identified responses were then highlighted and matched with their representing nodes; and
 - iii. Categorised nodes were then 'drawn' from the transcription and classified into their respective categories of nodes.
5. Each node, once it has 'received' all the data from all the possible sources, would be exported into a separate document and printed out.
6. Each of these printed documents were meticulously analysed as follows:
 - i. Decipher the underlying meanings of the words and linguistic features;
 - ii. Decide whether or not further themes (sub-themes), i.e., axial codes, have to be constructed when new phenomena emerge; and
 - iii. Discover exceptional cases for further investigation.
7. Report the results of all analyses as stipulated in Stage 7 of interview investigation in Section 3.2.2.

The data collected for this study were analysed with strict compliance to the steps outlined above and are reported in the following sections.

3.4. Interview plan

3.4.1 Sampling method

Non-probability sampling was selected for this research to identify and recruit information-rich participants for the semi-structured interview (McMillan, 1996). The value of *persons* as sampling units, therefore, is the most valid and obvious choice in this interview-based study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Since qualitative research often confronts constraints of access, time and resources, it was practical to select participants who could be particularly informative about the present research issues (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Likewise, as a systematic sampling process in qualitative research designs is rarely established (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), a purposive non-probability sampling technique was adopted, identifying interviewees according to careful pre-selected criteria (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005; McMillan, 1996).

The snowballing sampling technique, as a type of purposive non-probability sampling, was selected for the present research. It has the generic functions of locating and identifying participants otherwise difficult to find (Bricki & Green, 2007). It is also widely adopted for qualitative research to provide comprehensive characterisations of unknown populations (“Snowball Sampling”, 2015). Used exclusively in interview studies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), it operates like a rolling snowball as the sample

group expands. It is similar to the opportunity sampling technique, chaining sampling technique, and referral sampling technique in accumulating referrals by the 'agent' using social networks in locating and suggesting informants they know (McMillan, 1996). These 'agents' are informed people who are utilised to identify critical cases or informants in supplying abundant information about a phenomenon (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Snowball sampling leads to clustered samples as nominations of cases happen within a circle of acquaintances (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004).

3.4.2 Sample size and selection criteria

The main criterion in qualitative sampling is not 'sample size', but 'case contrast', where meaningful patterns are identified by systematic comparisons between deliberately selected individual cases (Flick et al., 2004). It is generally established in qualitative research that the sample size should depend on an extensive range of factors including the nature of the research and available resources (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Mack et al., 2005). Nonetheless, it is conventional for qualitative studies where interviews are involved to process around fifteen plus or minus ten (15 ± 10) cases (Kvale, 1996). This figure is based on the time and resources available for the investigation and the law of diminishing returns (Kvale, 1996).

Multiple studies have demonstrated how substantial qualitative data pertinent to identity, social identity and higher education experience are collected within this standard number: Allen-Collinson and Brown (2012) adopt an interactionist framework with a sample size of five to explore issues of identity construction of first-year undergraduate students based in a UK university. Jungert (2013) applies a

phenomenological analysis of ten samples to study the change of students' social identities throughout their program and in the transition process to employment. Haggis (2004) conducts twelve case studies to explore individual narratives about learning in higher education and the processes involved in study. Esmond's (2012) phenomenological study analyses twelve samples to probe how students in an English further education college see their transition to further studies and social identities. Ahearn, Broadbent, Collins, and Spentza's (2008) study is based on the reflections of three students on their identity of being an undergraduate student in the twenty-first century. Finally, O'Shea, Lysaght, and Tanner (2012) employ the interpretivist-constructionist approach with eight samples to develop insights into the experiences of a student group in their individual experiences in the transition to higher education.

While student experiences relevant to the research questions are fundamental qualitative data to be gathered, the participants must fulfil two selection criteria pertaining to *credibility* (see Section 3.5). First, they must have full exposure to the education prior to the interview. Second, they must have a fresh recollection of their education and learning experiences, and an ability to narrate these experiences effectively. Thus, fresh graduates had been selected for this study with the requisite experiences of their undergraduate studies, with 'fresh graduates' being defined as individuals who have graduated not more than two years before this study. This criterion was comparable to Jusoh, Simun, and Chong's (2011) study of the organisational commitment of fresh graduates.

The method and criteria described above enabled the successful selection of eighteen fresh graduates to participate in the semi-structured interview. As shown

in Table 3.5, all participants had graduated within two years of this study prior to the interview to enable the exhaustive assembly of qualitative data described in the previous chapter. The saturation of cases was considered satisfactory as the participants' majors extended across science, social science and the arts.

Participants graduated from five different tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, of which four were UGC-funded institutions¹ and one was a self-financed tertiary institution. These participants represented information-rich individuals who communicated their stories and experiences via their 'student voices'.

Table 3.5. Participant profiles

Participant	Graduation status	Major
P1	2015 graduate	Language Education
P2	2015 graduate	Chinese and Bilingual Studies
P3	2015 graduate	Accountancy
P4	2015 graduate	English Studies and German
P5	2015 graduate	Language Education
P6	2015 graduate	Nursing
P7	2014 graduate	Psychology
P8	2015 graduate	Language Education
P9	2014 graduate	Chinese Language and Literature
P10	2015 graduate	Architecture
P11	2014 graduate	Mass Communication and Journalism
P12	2014 graduate	Architecture
P13	2014 graduate	Architecture
P14	2014 graduate	Architecture
P15	2015 graduate	Public Policy Management and Politics
P16	2015 graduate	Language Education
P17	2015 graduate	Language Education
P18	2015 graduate	Statistics

¹Higher education institutions funded by the University Grants Committee of the Hong Kong SAR Government.

3.4.3 Role of interviewer

Since the researcher was the interviewer in this study, he had to prudently reflect on the important traits an interviewer should possess and how the interviewee expectations were to be better met. The researcher had to ensure that adequate preparation was made prior to the interview and that the vigilance of interviewer competence during the interview was maintained. The researcher commended Kvale's (1996, 2007) metaphors of interviewer as a 'miner' and as a 'traveller'. In the former metaphor, knowledge is taken to be a valuable metal buried in the subject's interior waiting to be uncovered by the miner—the interviewer. In the latter metaphor, the interviewing experience is taken to be a traveller on a journey to a distant country where tales are to be told upon returning home. Kvale's (1996, 2007) metaphors of interviewer summarise the salient epistemological issues involved in interviewing.

On this basis, the interviewer and the interviewee should establish a trusting relationship. Ideally, a monolingual interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees is to be maintained where the same first language is shared (Nigel & Horrocks, 2010). The interviewer must also be knowledgeable, gentle, steering, interpreting, structuring, sensitive, critical, clear, open, and remembering during an interview (Kvale, 1996). Furthermore, the interviewer should create the right atmosphere for the interview to take place, properly handle cross-cultural differences, if any, and remain focused while asking questions (Thagaard, 2006). Lastly, referring to the discussion on 'student voice' in the previous chapter, since the ontological voice of the student could have been neglected and muted prior to the interview, encouragement may be needed for students to enunciate thoughts and

perspectives which had been previously hidden, or which they had been taught were worthless in the face of society.

Interview bias could cause great threat to the accuracy of the outcomes of the qualitative research. One of the most obvious biases in qualitative interview stems from what Kvale (2002, p.9) refers to as “the asymmetrical power relations of the research interviewer and the interviewed subject”. Such asymmetrical power relations may arise from obvious sources such as certain demographics factors, or more subtle cues such as socio-economic status, cultural background, or political orientation (Roller, 2016). In this light, the researcher has taken the following measures to minimise chances of asymmetrical power relation between himself and the participants:

1. None of the participants selected had personal connections with the interviewer;
2. There was no conceivable conflict of interest between the participants and the researcher; and
3. The Participant Information Statement provided detailed information of the research project to participants, and the consent form was signed. Participants were reminded to respond naturally and honestly to the questions, without the necessity to impress the interviewer.

3.4.4 Interview plan, set-up, and procedure

Participants were informed of the date, time and venue of the interview upon agreeing to participate. The interviews were conducted in English and audio recording took place. Although there would have been clear benefits, this study did

not provide preparation time for participants because: (1) the semi-structured interview was designed to solicit authentic answers, which prior preparation would negatively affect; and (2) natural anxiety during the interview could be a good device to collect true information (instead of formulaic responses) needed for the research questions.

Following the interviewing techniques outlined in Section 3.2.1, the semi-structured interviews were administered within twenty-seven days in 2015. All interviews were successfully conducted and recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed for analysis. Based on the recording times, 397.44 minutes were spent conducting eighteen interviews, with an average of 22.08 minutes being spent on each interview. While all participants were non-native English speakers (with one exception), English was used as the medium of communication as previously agreed upon.

Interviewees generally showed no difficulties in responding to the questions asked, though clarifications were occasionally needed to prompt more in-depth reflections. All interview questions were covered for all participants with the interview flows conducted as pre-planned. All interviewees voluntarily participated in a post-mortem interview to provide feedback on the study.

3.5. Establishment of research quality

3.5.1 Quality criteria

As the issues surrounding the validity of qualitative research are controversial (Winter, 2000), this study acknowledges that qualitative methods for assessing

validity are not infallible (Maxwell, 1992). It, however, agrees with Golafshani (2003, p.604) that regardless of how qualitative research is assessed, the criteria should “reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth”. This study adopted Guba’s (1981) and Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) quality: *Credibility*, *Transferability*, *Dependability* and *Confirmability* which endorse the necessary rigor in qualitative research (Krefting, 1991).

Credibility deals with how well multiple realities are adequately represented by the qualitative researcher. It concerns the ‘truth value’ of a study comparable with ‘internal validity’ in scientific terms. *Transferability* deals with how the findings are valid in other situations and relates to the ‘applicability’ of research, and is comparable with external validity. *Dependability* links with validity and seeks to establish whether findings can remain the same if the setting of a research study were changed. It is associated with ‘consistency’ and is comparable with reliability. Finally, *Confirmability* is associated with ‘neutrality’, linked to what Patton (1990) describes as ‘empathic neutrality’ or the expectation that the researcher is perceived to be caring for and interested in people but neutral about the findings. In qualitative research, since interpretation is necessary and it is not likely that it is purely objective, a researcher’s key qualities are to be non-judgemental, and report what is found in a balanced way (Patton, 1990).

3.5.2 Quality assessment

With respect to the quality criteria described above, the *credibility* of this study was considered to be satisfactory for a few reasons. All participants are required to verify that they fit the sampling criteria to ensure that their reflections are adequately

representative. Besides, the findings were triangulated by using various reference points to better understand the phenomenon concerned (Mitchell, 1986).

On the issue of whether the findings can be applied in comparable situations, *transferability* of this study should be satisfactory because common themes were identified from the interviews. The *dependability* of this study was acceptable because formal coding techniques using Nvivo was used. Lastly, this study met the *confirmability* criterion as the data collected and interpreted should adequately connect to the theoretical framework and literature reviewed for substantiation, verification, and justification.

3.5.3 Ethical issues

This study conformed to all the guidelines to protect the rights, integrity and privacy of participants and relevant parties. First, ethical approval from the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) had been obtained using the Research Information Management System (RIMS). Next, all potential participants had been provided with a copy of the Participant Information Statement (PIS), which provided details of the study and contact information for complaints or queries. If any potential participant agreed to be an interviewee, written consent was sought prior to the interview. In addition, the four ethical issues related to interviews, mentioned by Diccio-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), were vigilantly observed in this research. They include: (1) risk of unanticipated harm to interviewees; (2) risk of exploitation; (3) effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study; and (4) handling of the interviewees' information.

All the materials, audio recordings and transcriptions gathered are used strictly for research purposes. They are to be kept highly confidential and retained for a minimum of 5 years. Data retention (and disposal) is administered in accordance with the University of Newcastle's Research Data and Materials Management Procedure (Policy ID 000870).

3.6. Significance of methodology

This chapter has described the design of the qualitative research method which governs the methodology of this study. Steered by the interpretivist-constructionist paradigm, the methodology adopts the semi-structured interview techniques for qualitative data gathering, techniques justified. Snowballing sampling was selected for recruiting information-rich participants for the study, sample size justified. Data collected were systematically analysed with the assistance of the computer software Nvivo, advantages and disadvantages discussed. While Section 3.5.2 has provided a quality assessment for the present study, the significance of the study's research methodology can be summarised as follows:

1. The methodology has complied with rigorous steps pertinent to solid research practices which include:
 - i. Construct an array of interview topics pertinent to the conceptual model and research questions;
 - ii. Create an Interview Protocol with good satisfactory compliance, logical order and focus;
 - iii. Formulate specific interview questions;
 - iv. Set out pilot sessions for examining the quality of the interview guide;
 - v. Revise the Interview Protocol if necessary;

- vi. Identify novel issues that may come up during the pilot session; and
 - vii. Seek ethics approval before commencing interview (Appendix C).
2. Appropriate data-interpretation techniques would lead to systematic and meticulous thematic analyses of qualitative data; and
 3. Satisfactory consistency among the paradigm, data collection method and the data interpretation techniques with the detailed quality criteria.

4.1.2 Presenting qualitative data

Section 3.1 describes the rigorous features of the current research design and explains the interpretivist-constructionist paradigm which serves as the fundamental epistemological ground. Hence, the current study aims to present findings consistent with these rigorous features. The presentation of qualitative data could be a confusing aspect of qualitative research (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008), given that there is no one 'universal' method of presentation. Therefore, the current study has developed a systematic method, based on the steering paradigm of the current research, to present the analysed data with guidelines described below:

1. Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) describe two types of presentation for qualitative data: I) the traditional approach; II) the combined findings and discussion approach. While both approaches are common in presenting qualitative data, with consideration for the exploratory nature of the current study, the second approach is adopted. Findings are to be critically analysed and positioned within the contemporary thinking in the literature. Consequently, readers may conclude for themselves whether the findings are completely unique as they stand, or tangibly developed, and whether they contribute to current knowledge in the field. In addition, this would connect to the triangulation method as described in Chapter 3 for achieving *credibility* as the quality criterion;
2. The second approach coincides with the 'Describe, compare, relate' method described by Bazeley (2009). As Bazeley (2009, p.9) aptly observes, "relying for evidence on one or two quotes that might have been drawn from hundreds of pages of text...[does] not convey how widely this theme might have applied, or

for whom, or how it links to other themes". Hence, a more coherent approach is adopted in the current thesis where complex accounts of students' perceptions are concisely described in their relating themes; they are compared and connected with what others have already written in achieving more meaningful analyses;

3. Quantitative and qualitative data are inseparable at some level of qualitative analysis (Trochim, 2006). The current study therefore makes the assumption that all qualitative data could serve as valuable preludes to the corresponding quantitative designs (Cassell, Symon, Buehring, & Johnson, 2006; Sekaran, & Bougie, 2013). Thus, qualitative data can be assigned with meaningful numerical values to facilitate the reader's understanding and interpretation of the findings;
4. While key findings are reported under each main theme or category, they are supported with verbatim quotes where appropriate, such that subjective human experience is represented and the truth value or credibility of the research enhanced (Krefting, 1991); and
5. Lengthy and repeated themes or codes are abbreviated; shorter names are established for a concise presentation of findings (Boeije, 2009).

4.2. Student-customer identity

As defined in the current research project, the 'student-customer' identity is a heterogeneous concept bestowed to students in higher education consisting of institutional worldviews and researchers' perspectives. To examine the definitions and meanings of such standardised and equivocal notion of 'student-customer', the

semi-structured interviews were carried out to discover the ontological perspectives of students in real life, i.e., in terms of their ‘student voices’. The wide spectrum of student-customer characteristics in the higher education context were explored and are reported in the following sections.

4.2.1 Purpose and meaning of higher education

Section 4.1 reports findings which pertain to research question 1 (RQ1), *How do students define their ‘customer’ identity?* The interview commenced with participants being asked to provide an account of the purpose and meaning of higher education. They were asked to describe in detail their perceptions of the salient functions of higher education, or why and in what ways higher education had justified its existence in society. Three categories of sub-themes for the purpose and meaning of higher education were discovered: I. *functional and practical*; II. *knowledge and skills*; and III. *dreams and passion*. Table 4.2 summarises the findings of Section 4.2.1.

Table 4.1. Purpose and meaning of higher education

Purpose and meaning of higher education			
Categories	Functional and practical	Knowledge and skills	Dreams and passion
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ interpersonal skills ■ time management ■ networking & socialising ■ self-exploration ■ self-understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ critical-thinking ■ personal enrichment ■ whole-person development ■ self-maturity ■ moral values ■ improvement of mind-sets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Acquisition of any kinds of knowledge and skills motivated by self-interest and feelings

Regarding the first category, *Functional and practical*, participants thought that higher education prepared students for future employment. This was the most

popular topic, as eleven out of eighteen participants expressed a preference for this category (key words used by participants are summarised in Table 4.2). For example, P6 referred to tertiary education as the “final pathway” for students to enter society. As P6 elaborated, “university is the final destination of the study progress...that’s why I tried my best and get a place in university...final destination to me um, maybe usually the jobs requirement nowadays...at least have the qualification in the university”. To meet future job requirements and career development, participants in this category expected higher education institutions to grant qualifications widely recognised by society. Participants strongly believed that higher education was meant to deliver practical knowledge which would empower students to become professionals well-trained in their fields of study. The practical knowledge included interpersonal skills, time management, networking and socialising, self-exploration and self-understanding. As P15 put, “I think in Hong Kong in such a commercialised society people uh students do pursue their uh skills that um are helpful for their future careers...is more like uh occupational training”. This was a utilitarian view of the purpose and meaning of higher education; individuals enter universities with high aspirations of obtaining the skills and qualifications necessary to make a future living. This category corresponds to Nadelson et al.’s (2013) study finding that job-preparation is a major reason for students to pursue a higher education, and is comparable to Zolfaghari, Sabran, and Zolfaghari’s (2009) findings that career-oriented and innovative programs are the main components of quality higher education.

The second category, *Knowledge and skills*, showed comparable importance with the first category; participants prioritised higher education as a foundation for knowledge acquisition and learning opportunities. Nine out of eighteen

participants expressed a preference for this category, and key words used by participants are summarised in Table 4.2. This result is supportive of Littlejohn, Margaryan, and Vojt's (2010) argument that the validation of factual knowledge is considered to be motivational by university students. To illustrate, P18 expressed the concept of "deeper knowledge", which was supposed to be "more difficult" than secondary education. As P18 elaborated, "I think they (students) also need to know how to um before they go to the society to work they can earn learn more skills or technique of how to um to deal with different people or how to um cooperate with different people". While deeper knowledge was a general notion, participants pinpointed various types of knowledge and skills they preferred to acquire in higher education: critical-thinking, personal enrichment, whole-person development, maturity, moral values and improvement of mind-sets, all skills relating to the findings of Porter, King, Goodkin, and Chan (2012). Some of the knowledge and skills may be transferrable to functional and practical needs, as described in the first category, but was differentiated by the priority given to 'learning opportunities'. It is as if students enter universities as empty vessels in anticipation of being filled with new knowledge and skills.

While the essence of the first two categories is elaborated on in a proliferation of literature (see Gerhardt & Ackerman, 2014; Yooyen, Pirani, & Mujtaba, 2011; Wyer, 2012), a relatively smaller category covers *Dreams and passion*. Seven out of eighteen participants expressed a preference for this category, with key words used by participants being summarised in Table 4.2. There were participants who seriously believed in the non-utilitarian sense of learning enabling individuals to choose freely what and how they would like to learn based on self-interest. This is an attribute shared with some studies associating spirituality and reflective learning

with higher education (see Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2015; Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003). It also resonates with Warren and Manthey's (2011) discussion on transforming education, where a love of and passion for learning is stressed. To illustrate, P12 argued that the university should not be a place just for discovering career interest, but for actualising one's dreams. According to P12, one's "dream" was something a person would do for the rest of their lives, and a university should foster a "motivation that you get to chase after a dream, or chase after something that you discover that you really like". P16 specifically used the term "inspire" in relation to student learning interests and disavowed the idea that "people go to university to get a piece of paper" (P.16). It is interesting to note that that student, like P11, seemed to feel that it would be ideal to link practical and non-practical knowledge; a balance should be struck in order to enable the development of both extrinsic and intrinsic qualities. After all, higher education can be viewed as an organic medium facilitating one's discovery of meaning, and the realisation of dreams (Astin, 2004).

In summary, participants shared diverse thoughts about what constitutes an ideal provision of education in the setting of higher education. Participants wanted their institutions to provide education that catered to, in order of importance, their practical needs, knowledge-based learning needs and self-actualisation. While being relatively clear about their expectations, how these desires were to be attained was more broadly and abstractedly formulated.

4.2.2 Provision of higher education

In connection with the identified sub-themes of the purpose and meaning of higher

education, participants were asked to describe the anticipated educational offerings as a student. Two critical phenomena were discovered about what steered the provision of higher education: I. *Freedom-steered learning*, and, II. *Real world-and people-steered learning*.

Participants described the following characteristics which defined *Freedom-steered learning*: First, free choices and flexibility in practicing and developing the learned knowledge and skills, which cater to broader learning interests; in other words, not over-emphasising examinations, results, or GPA. P1 articulated, “(My institution should) provide different types of knowledge and not just education like my major degree...not only um, focus on the examination and does not only focus on GPA”, so that broader learning interests are taken into consideration instead of merely restricting one’s major study. Second, a free atmosphere of creations and products based on the learnt knowledge and skills along with a platform on which to practice what one has learned, which was described by P14 as such: “they (the school) just give you a platform to to try uh practice what you have learned um under the guidelines...you just have some um some references...they guide you uh as a start”. Finally, having the flexibility for class attendance in terms of time and schedule, which are traits that are compatible with the findings of Crisp et al. (2009), that greater independence and more experience of freedom are conditions highly preferred by university students. The phenomenon that learning is steered by learners taking charge of their own learning is noted in Kolb and Kolb’s (2005) study. Learners’ autonomy fosters a customised educational experience for college students (Staley, 2014), whereas flexibility in schedules and models of delivery can enhance the university programme (Greenlee, Bruner & Hill, 2009).

With regard to *Real world-and people-steered learning*, participants shared a keen preference for the opportunity to interact with people and the world. For example, P18 enjoyed having a “collaborative learning experience” with other students during the learning process, as it “benefits me a lot about the technique of how to um deal with different people”. P5 added that this process meant that one would value the opportunity to exchange ideas with classmates from different backgrounds in a professional manner. This is similar to Hughes, Walsh, Mayer, Bolay, and Southard’s (2010) finding that college students are primarily motivated by forming ongoing relationships with their peers. In addition, participants reflected that such interactions would not be restricted only to classmates but real people in the real world. This is consistent with Noel-Levitz’s (2012) recommendation that college students find learning more meaningful when they can collaborate with others in solving problems or mastering difficult materials. As P2 expressed, it would be a great opportunity to build connections with real people in society. As P2 supplemented, “connection is...of paramount importance in my life because without connection even though how well or how beautiful my resume is, without connection I cannot find any job as well”. P3 argued that a university should give students a “world-wide quality to see the world” associated with a learning approach not provincial in scope in order to broaden their horizons. This coincides with the increasing trend of universities to provide students with opportunities to engage in global learning experiences (GLE) as part of their study programme (Salyers, Carston, Dean, & London, 2015). Students are shown to have clear expectations for engaged, faculty-facilitated and safe learning experiences in global settings (Salyers, Carston, Dean, & London, 2015).

While these two phenomena steered the provision of higher education, there was

one exceptional case, P6, who articulated that it did not matter which kind of education was provided by the school or how it would be navigated. According to P6, what mattered was the people responsible for the delivery of the education. Specifically, that such people should cultivate a hospitable and friendly feeling for students to experience. This leads us to the next section, examining participants' opinions regarding the ideal teacher-student relationship.

4.2.3 Ideal teacher-student relationship

A traditional teacher-student relationship is demonstrated by the teacher being the controller of the learning environment. The power and responsibility are held by the teacher while the students are passive learners simply acquiring whatever knowledge the teacher wishes to impart. While these traditional notions were not described by participants as preferable or ideal, participants narrated the following five core qualities as core features to an ideal teacher-student relationship. Figure 4.3 summarises the frequency of these qualities with frequency indicating the popularity of each category among participants.

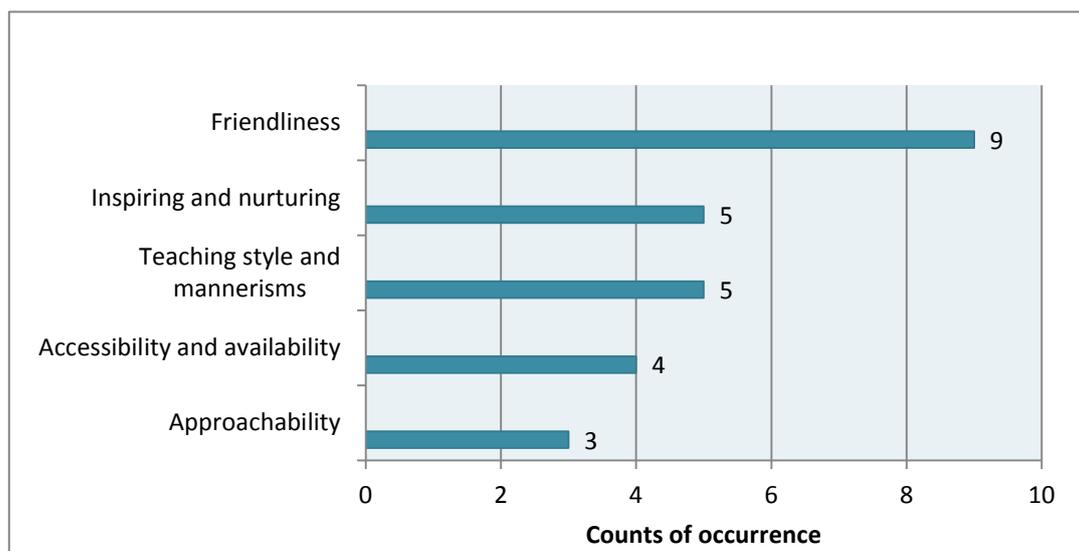


Figure 4.3. Frequency of core qualities mentioned for an ideal teacher-student relationship

Concerning the first category, *Friendliness*, participants felt that there should not be any communication barriers between the teacher and student. The teacher would not care solely about the student's academic performance, but also about the student's well-being and feelings. Moreover, the two parties should share a mutual respect and build rapport by living "the way that the students live" (P9). P9 described that "(the teacher) has Facebook accounts and he will try to 'like' the student's posts every day". In other words, while teachers may have official classroom duties, they should share common interests with their students outside the classroom in order to communicate that they regard the student as an important individual that they are interested in aside from their classroom performance.

With regard to *Inspiring and nurturing*, participants felt that the teacher should inspire students so that learned ideas can be further developed and substantiated. Teachers should act as the provider of nutrients, fostering the growth and development of student knowledge outside the classroom. Moreover, teachers should provide students with guidelines for critical thinking and problem-solving. For example, P18 suggests, "(teachers should) give us some directions to think, or where we can find the answer." Finally, not only should teachers encourage students in their school work, but in the pursuit of higher interest in and enthusiasm for the subject.

In connection with *Teaching style and mannerisms*, participants preferred teachers to be attractive and have a humorous style of presentation. They were also impressed by teachers who were at least willing to share their knowledge and expertise, if not actually be passionate about doing so. Finally, they expressed a preference for teachers who demonstrated a strong effort and enthusiasm to teach and help

students.

Concerning *Accessibility and availability*, participants thought it was desirable for a teacher to help students promptly with not only academic problems but those pertinent to personal life, career, and future direction. P11 further believed that a teacher should be available after graduation for questions or guidance. In contrast, *Approachability* dealt more with how positive and hospitable a teacher is when interacting with students. In particular, participants felt that they should not be judged by a teacher when seeking help; teachers should show genuine care and support in a friendly and non-judgemental manner.

These findings about student expectations of the ideal teacher-student relationship are generally consistent with multiple studies: Hasan, Ilias, Rahman, and Razak (2009) discovered that the 'appearance of lecturers' and 'friendly and courteous lecturers' were among the top tangible service qualities desired by higher education students. Helterbran (2008) confirms that such professional teacher qualities, such as being deeply knowledgeable and teaching meaningfully, combined with personal qualities, such as being respectful and compassionate, and encouraging student success and treating students as young adults are significant determinants of student satisfaction. According to Paolini (2015), being student-centred and demonstrating respect for students' background, ideologies, beliefs, and learning styles are the traits that reflect an ideal teacher-student relationship. Finally, Brewer and Burgess' (2005) study suggests that a teacher's positive attitude to students is a strong motivating factor.

4.2.4 Learning style and experience

Each participant described one distinctive learning style they felt was the most effective for their learning. While in Section 4.2.1, participants described what steered their learning, participants would select a particular learning style because it best facilitated and enhanced their learning. These distinctive learning styles described by each participant have been classified into three domains as represented in Figure 4.4 below:

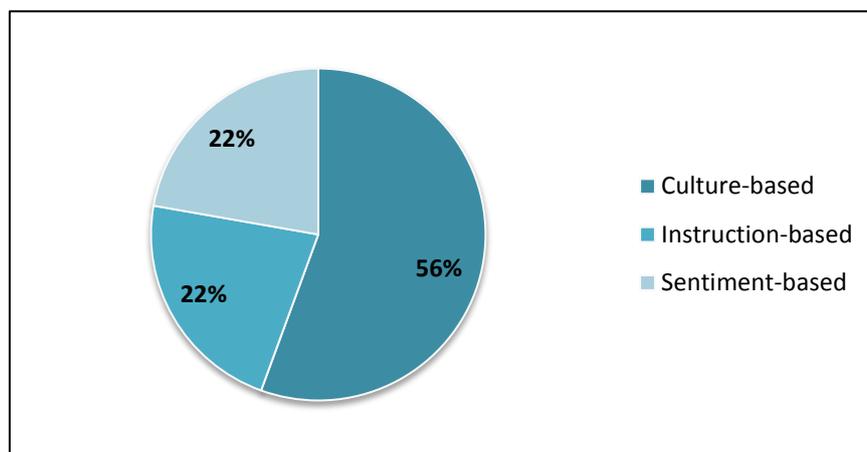


Figure 4.4. Distribution of preference for learning styles

The largest domain, *Culture-based*, referred to the phenomenon when the learning culture acts as an essential ingredient for effective learning. Specifically, ten out of eighteen (56%) participants thought that the environment and the people involved with the learner played the most important roles in learning. The findings conform to Lambert's (1973) discovery that culture exerts a profound influence on the learner's cognitive processes and affects the structure of personality. Learners' cognitive and learning styles are believed to have a significant influence on learners' choices of learning strategies (Parnrod, Darasawang, & Singhasiri, 2014; Shi, 2011). Key concepts associated with this phenomenon include: Applicable opportunities, live feedback, diverse communicative channels, peer interaction, peer observation,

role play, collaborative learning, collaborative problem-solving, foreign learning experience, and observation of the outside world. The learning experiences shared by P15 and P16 helped illustrate the nature of *culture-based* learning style:

I was having an exchange in the United States and one of the course is given by a member of a think tank in the U.S... he didn't provide any PowerPoint slides or uh or notes to the students... Just simply um asked you to buy two books and you read it and then he will discuss the topic with you by debate or group discussion...and then present yourselves...instead of to just simply free spoon fed um education style... (it's 'cool' to have) very new kind of cultural shock (P15).

We're sitting in groups, so you would have to discuss something in groups...each groups have different things to discuss. You're given a number and then number ones go to one table, and number twos go to one table, and so the whole table is mixed now. So for example, if there are thirty students around, and then by getting up out of your seat, you're meeting new people who are not usually in your group. And you're sharing ideas again, so that's really um motivating I think because it motivates you to listen in your original group and then to verbally share with a completely new group (P16).

With regard to the *Instruction-based* learning style, four out of eighteen participants thought that effective learning was dependent on the pedagogy by which instructions, teaching materials and feedback framed the teacher-student communications. This coincides with Paolini's (2015) finding that effective teaching is connected with the explicit and engaging instruction of teachers. Key concepts associated with this phenomenon include: active engagement, inspirational teaching, interactive teaching, provocative instruction, clear learning objectives, learning resources, and traditional learning modes. The learning experiences shared by P8 and P10 illustrate the nature of the *Instruction-based* learning style:

One of my professor...she always um interact with us...we didn't do many group works in her lesson but then she always keep talking and asking questions. So uh instead of only talking she asks us questions and interacts with us. So I think it's quite good (P8).

I have to get ready for my presentation twice a week...Out of sudden the professor will pick you so that everything is just in a rush...You don't really have time to prepare your stuff but you have to make up the things that you have to tell people and convince them my project is awesome...that builds up your confidence (despite stress and harsh criticism from professor) (P10).

Concerning the *Sentiment-based* learning style, four out of eighteen participants thought that effective learning was achieved by the formation and cultivation of strong feelings and reactions towards a subject, whether through past experience or new encounters. This type of learning style could ensue from acquaintances of peers and other people or the learning environment, are dependent on both sentiment and the student's own personality as the main motive of learning. This can be explained by the argument that passion and perseverance may help students persist in the face of adversity (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). It also confirms the study of Sadeghi, Kasim, Tan, and Abdullah (2012) showing that personality may help a learner resort to different learning styles or preferences, affecting learning performance. Key concepts associated with this phenomenon include: 'heart', genuine feelings, validation of effort, internalisation of experience, discovery of meaning, care-free and pleasant learning, and an un-distracted learning moment. The learning experience shared by P11 illustrates the nature of the *Sentiment-based* learning style:

(During a drama performance/presentation) my friend and I were very sick...it is winter...our voices were like shit. But we need to use our voice and then to a point during the performance my friend cried. But it's part of the scene and then but she really cried and then I was freaked out...that's a very touching moment...I saw some of the audience which were our classmates and then they cried...Our performance may not be the best which the score can show, but that performance was truly memorable (because) you give everything (P11).

4.2.5 University culture

Participants shared diverse thoughts about what constituted an ideal university culture (IUC hereafter). Some believed that the presence of 'people' was the predominant factor in making the IUC, i.e., an ideal culture was based on the kind of people it contained (*People-based*), while others argued that the essence was the

existence of ‘freedom’, i.e., whether or not culture was ideal would be based on the degree of freedom perceived (*Freedom-based*). The ratio between these two camps of opinions was 5:4; Figure 4.5 shows the count of opinions.

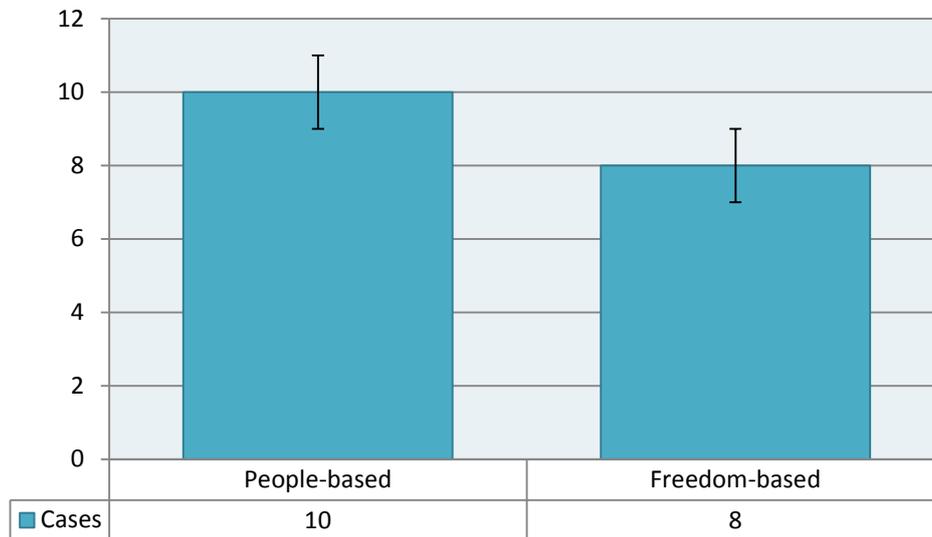


Figure 4.5. Count of opinions for IUC

Table 4.3 provides a summary of the syntactic definitions of *People-based* IUC extracted from the ten cases. These syntactic definitions summarise and demonstrate the essential thoughts of participants in these ten cases, subsequently allow for the emergence of the sub-theme *People-based*. To illustrate, the first combination (1A) is read as “Building long term relationships with **people**, sharing heart feelings at work, and receiving encouraging words”, and the second combination (2B) is read as “A very hospitable environment in the university where you have convenient communication channels with **people**, and convenient accessibility towards knowing others and building relationships”.

Table 4.2. People-based IUC

Building long term relationships with...	sharing heart feelings at work, and receiving encouraging words. (P11)
A very hospitable environment in the university where you have convenient communication channels with...	and convenient accessibility towards knowing others and building relationship. (P12)
Students can learn how to live with different... Stress on communication where...	in the residential hall; should be diversified, not only educationally but also socially, including different lifestyles. (P13)
A warm, friendly environment, where...	can actually use the language that they would use in future career and professional development. (P14)
Having the chance to meet...	people basically know each other and have good relationship. (P15)
What makes the university unique is the...	from other parts or cultures of the world. (P17)
Having friendly...	who get to enrol in that university. (P18)
An international community, having the opportunities to socialise with other...	people around, build good relationship, having the feeling that learning, growth and personal development are well supported. (P2)
Multi-cultural, meet...	from multi-cultural backgrounds. (P4)
	from different countries and communicate in harmony. Everyone can share their experience in university. (P6)

The preference for *People-based* IUC is connected to the previous findings on the steering and facilitation of learning where ‘people’ played an important role, among other factors identified. In this connection, Kacire (2015) recommends that universities develop sustainable policies preventing alienation, which can be viewed

as a state of estrangement, as either the individual from their needs or from the people both in and out of the individual’s domain. Also, there is evidence that knowledge of human cultures is recognised by higher education institutions as an essential learning outcome (Tinsley et al., 2010).

In contrast with *People-based IUC*, Table 4.4 shows all the syntactic definitions of *Freedom-based IUC* which summarise central thoughts of participants of the eight cases and allow for the emergence of the sub-theme *Freedom-based*; the key word ‘freedom’ is located in the beginning of each sentence, which functions as the common subject of each syntactic definition. As an illustration, the first definition is “Freedom means having no interference, independence of research and academic standards”.

Table 4.3. Freedom-based IUC

	having no interference, independence of research and academic standards. (P1)
	the school should not have too much of its own culture because if the school has too many traditions and boundaries, new students would feel odd in case they are not following the previous rules and previous culture. (P10)
	free to ask questions, make mistakes, interact with others and learn from peers. (P3)
Freedom means	you can learn what you want to learn and can interact with others freely. (P5)
	meeting new people, not being refrained in cliques (P15)
	having liberal ways of learning; being provided with or exposed to a culture where you have free learning choices and free expressions. (P7)
	students should have their own choice of studying, what to participate in, and also learning what they are motivated to learn. (P8)
	having no constraints of choosing what you like to study and having a schedule that you prefer and feel comfortable. (P9)

The preference for *freedom-based* IUC can be attributed to the previous discussion where learners' autonomy and a customised educational experience had a steering effect on learning in higher education. While participants seemingly had no difficulties in narrating what constitutes a free academic culture, it has drawn the attention of many scholars: Owusu-Ansah (2015) reckons that it is rarely understood and yet should be embraced for the growth of knowledge and its dissemination. Dykstra, Moen, and Davies (2011) investigate whether there is agreement between faculty and students as to whether academic freedom exists. McCrae (2011) argues that higher education learning environments are stifled by ideological rectitude, and that a reinvigoration of academic freedom is required.

4.2.6 Educational goal

The educational goal refers to what participants want to achieve in their studies in higher education institutions. While participants of this research had various objectives with regard to their studies in an intra-annual fashion, i.e., the objective of being a freshman student as opposed to that of being a sophomore, participants were asked to articulate a core educational goal (CEG hereafter) they had. They were asked to reflect on the primary educational goal considered the most important throughout their studies.

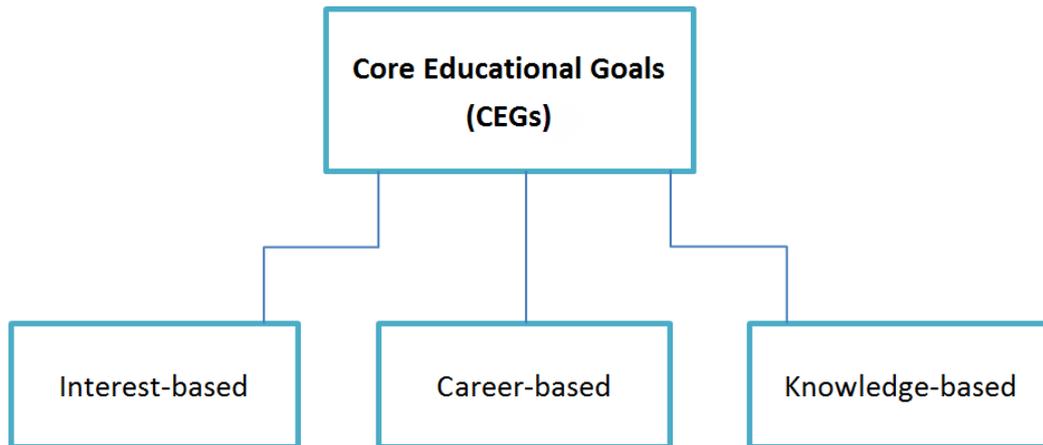


Figure 4.6. Core educational goals

As illustrated by Figure 4.6, the CEGs of participants could be divided into three categories: *Career-based*, *Knowledge-based* or *Interest-based*. These three CEG categories have a high correlation with the discovery in Section 4.2.1 where participants’ perceptions of the purpose and meaning of higher education was examined. With regard to *Career-based* CEG, for example, P6 said, “I think it’s (educational goal) related to my major. I want to gain some professional skills and knowledge from school”. For *Knowledge-based* CEG, for example, P9 (being a language major) expressed that “I would say, um, my core purpose is to just know more about language and... (learn) how language is being connected in the world”. Lastly, as an illustration of *Interest-based* CEG, P2 said that “finding yourself is very important... (my school) provides me with a lot [of] channels to find myself”. In short, the CEGs reflected by participants revealed fundamental learning roles they were willing to take on in order to achieve their educational goals. In other words, if Section 4.2.1 captured what participants believed about the business offerings of higher education institutions, Section 4.2.6 covered what they would like to achieve as active participating members of their institutions. There could be exceptional cases where students may be uncertain about what they wanted to achieve when

they first entered universities, but as P16 noted, “I think that because the elitist education system in Hong Kong is so narrow, people don’t really know what they want to do.”

4.2.7 Section summary

Section 4.1 has reported the essence of the student-customer identity pertinent to research question 1 (RQ1), *How do students define their ‘customer’ identity?* The findings have demonstrated a colourful and rich array of student voices in terms of their expectations and learning experiences. The diversity of student voices is underpinned by the heterogeneous nature and multiple dimensions of the student-customer identity. Table 4.5 summarises the findings of Section 4.1:

Table 4.4. Dimensions of student-customer identity

Purpose & meaning	Provision of education	Teacher-student relationship	Learning styles	Ideal University Culture
Functional & practical			Culture-based	
	Freedom-steered	Traditional		People-based
Knowledge & skills			Instruction-based	
	Real world-and people-steered	Non-traditional		Freedom-based
Dreams & passions			Sentiment-based	
PM	PE	TSR	LS	IUC

While Section 4.1 has reported the large variety of the student-customer identity, it is necessary to consolidate its heterogeneous nature. Hence, Table 4.5 can be viewed as a summary of how multiple combinations of the characteristics of student-customers can be viewed. Each of these themes are coded with ‘PM’, ‘PE’, ‘TSR’, ‘LS’ and ‘IUC’ for ease of reference. The quantification of the discovered

characteristics of student-customer should a foster further understanding of the qualitative data. Hence, the calculation of the maximum types of observable student-customer identity, using the rule of product ($3*2*2*3*2$), has been made and is summarised in Table 4.6 below. The extent of the student-customer identity could reach as many as seventy-two permutations. Reverting to the real life scenario where human experience is subject to multiple and varied delineations and differentiation, more subtle profiles of the student-customer identity should be expected in the context of higher education.

Table 4.5. Maximum types of student-customer

	PM	PE	TSR	LS	IUC	Possible combination
No. of traits	3	2	2	3	2	72 types

To illustrate the variability of these seventy-two permutations, a random student, Student A, may expect their higher institution to be functionally- and practically-oriented, where education stems from a freedom-based nature. Student A might also prefer a more traditional kind of teacher-student relationship, even if s/he relies more on sentiment-based motives for facilitating his or her learning. Moreover, the student might also indicate a preference for being immersed in a school culture where people and the associated human factors play important and meaningful roles.

In contrast, Student B may expect their higher education institute to be knowledge- and skills-oriented, where education is steered by the real world or people. Student B might prefer a non-traditional kind of teacher-student relationship, but s/he relies

more on instructional motives for facilitating his or her learning. Moreover, the student could possibly also prefer to be immersed in a school culture where academic freedom is important.

Finally, the dimensions of the characteristics, based on this study's findings, could be viewed as variables that give rise to multiple possibilities for quantitative research. For instance, whether or not a student's perception of a university's purpose and meaning affects their preferences of a teacher-student relationship, as opposed to whether the teacher-student relationship has an impact on the choice of learning style, are possible research topics that could be investigated quantitatively. In the next three sections, findings pertinent to the three directions of the conceptual model leading to the examination of RQ2 will be presented.

4.3. In-group distinctiveness and learning motivation

4.3.1 Sense of belonging

The following three sections report findings that pertain to the second research question (RQ2): *What impact do social identities have on student learning motivation?* Section 4.3 deals with *Direction 1* of RQ2, Section 4.4 deals with *Direction 2* of RQ2, and Section 4.5 deals with *Direction 3* of RQ2. Each of these sections is followed by a section summary.

In Section 4.1.5, two distinct types of IUCs narrated by the participants have been deciphered and reported. Following their elaborations on IUC, student subjects reflected on whether their own institutions matched their IUC definitions. If they

did, they reflected on whether or not their sense of belonging (SoB hereafter) would have been affected (stronger or no effect) with respect to the matching of culture. Lastly, participants who claimed that their SoB was stronger were asked to recall if their SoB had an impact on their learning motivation.

During the first level of enquiry, sixteen out of eighteen participants (88%) claimed that their institutions matched their expectations of IUC. The second level of enquiry probed deeper into the dynamics of SoB. Not only was SoB considered an important feature of student social identity with respect to student group membership, but a major factor affecting students' adjustment, coping strategies and adaptation (Sevinc & Gizir, 2014). The second level of enquiry investigated whether matching IUC had anything to do with SoB. Of the sixteen cases which claimed that their institutions matched their expectations of IUC, fifteen participants (93%) were certain that their SoB was stronger, which was highly consistent with the prediction of the conceptual model, which associated matching culture with SoB. The only exceptional case (P8) explained that "it's hard to have a sense of belonging because we spend less time in our school (than secondary school)." This reflected on a study conducted by Crisp et al (2009), finding that first year university students frequently expected that university life would be different to high school. Presumably, time spent on campus was a predominant factor for P8; individuals would have less mandatory time in university compared with secondary school, and therefore for a student group such as that represented by P8, factors such as matching IUC may not play an influential role in the enhancement of SoB.

Concerning the fifteen cases where a stronger SoB were reported because of matching IUC, four participants (26%) attributed their stronger SoB directly to their

departments. In other words, the students' departments boosted their SoB more than their institutions. All other cases reflected that their expectations of IUC were generally fulfilled by their institutions. Therefore, a department matching IUC would mean a more enhanced in-group distinctiveness where individual students were exposed to a culture in a more intense and coherent fashion. The impact of matching culture would thus become more intense and significant in enhancing the student's SoB. As P12 described, it was the department which provided the kind of hospitable environment in the university they sought, allowing people to have convenient communication channels and accessibility to other individuals in order to build relationships.

4.3.2 Impact on learning motivation

Connecting the two layers of enquires made above, the interview proceeded into the third layer of enquiry, where impact on learning motivation was investigated. Out of the fifteen cases where a stronger SoB was observed due to matching IUC, twelve cases (80%) reported that their learning was positively affected because of enhanced SoB. In other words, all these cases were inclined to accept the phenomenon that because SoB was stronger, their learning motivation was enhanced, corresponding to the prediction of *Direction 1* of the conceptual model. Thus, SoB derived from in-group distinctiveness was likely to have an impact on student learning motivation, consistent with multiple studies (see Alderman, 2013; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000) recognising the importance of psychological membership and SoB for motivation and cognitive enhancement.

Among the twelve cases that fit the conceptual model, four cases elaborated on the

mechanism of the relationship between SoB and student learning motivation. The four cases were P10, P11, P12, and P14. They were subject to more in-depth analyses, the findings and implications of which are presented below.

Concerning P10, while learning motivation was affirmed to be affected by SoB, it would be more likely where the overall 'work motivation' was influenced by SoB. In other words, when SoB increased, P10 felt that not only motivation for learning would be enhanced, but there would be an increase in their motivation to work more diligently. This can be compared to the scenario of enhancing motivation for language acquisition, when students are guided by set specific working goals prior to learning (Niederhauser, 1997). If the case of P10 were reflected in a preliminary research model (Figure 4.7) for future quantitative design, SoB would act as the independent variable, learning motivation would be the dependent variable, with work motivation being the mediating variable.

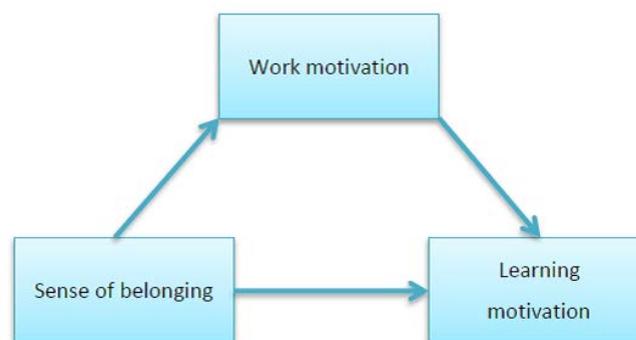


Figure 4.7. Learning motivation mediated by work motivation

For P11, SoB learning motivation stemmed from an enrichment of feelings and sentiment. In other words, P11 felt more passionate towards the subjects and learning when the SoB was stronger. With reference to the homogenisation and

social differentiation, increasing sentiment for the subjects became a mechanism to motivate and derive benefits to be incorporated within the in-group to enhance self-esteem and learning. The rationalisation is that increasing sentiment to the subjects created more positive meanings for the individual's overall learning experience. While the phenomenon could be traced to the discussion of *sentiment-based LS* in Section 4.2.4, it was also reinforced by the idea that SoB served as a core component in the affective domain, which in turn is the key to learning (Trujillo & Tanner, 2014). In the setting of online education, for example, Thomas and Herbert's (2014) findings suggest that the learning experience of university students is enhanced when SoB increases. If the case of P11 were to be configured into a preliminary research model (Figure 4.8) for future quantitative design, SoB would act as the independent variable, learning motivation would be the dependent variable, while learning sentiment would be a mediating variable.

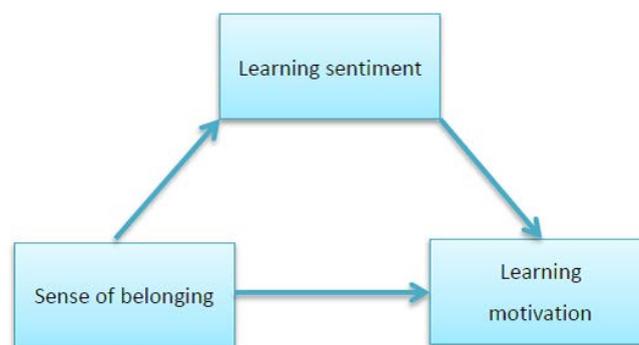


Figure 4.8. Learning motivation mediated by learning sentiment

For P12, collaborative learning moderated the effect between SoB and learning motivation. According to P12, the impact of SoB on learning motivation was stronger when there was also an opportunity for collaborative learning. P12 speculated that having the opportunity to work and learn with peers reinforces learning motivation. This phenomenon could be considered as a further

consolidation in in-group distinctiveness; the impact of human interaction and collaboration for a specific purpose compounded the socio-psychological feeling of belonging. This phenomenon was also highly consistent with the discussions of *Real world-and people-steered learning PE* in Section 4.2.2 and *Culture-based LS* in 4.2.4. A preliminary research model for future quantitative design is displayed in Figure 4.9, where SoB is the independent variable, learning motivation is the dependent variable, with collaborative learning acting as a moderating variable.

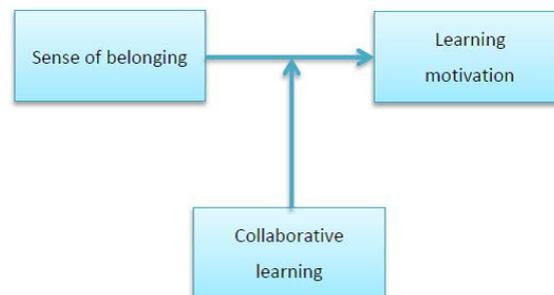


Figure 4.9. Learning motivation moderated by collaborative learning

Lastly, regarding P14, the power to self-motivate was the mediating factor which ultimately boosted learning motivation with the presence of a stronger SoB. Specifically, while SoB affected learning motivation, it was mediated by other self-motivating factors which served as, in P14’s words, “good medium for you to equip yourself”. In connection with Pintrich’s (2003) model of student learning motivation (see Section 2.3.3), self-motivating power is a traditional motive for learning in the classroom. These findings supplement Pintrich’s model in that the two types of motives may have a mutual impact, and subsequently affect students’ motivation in classrooms. A preliminary research model for future quantitative design pertinent to the relationship discovered is illustrated by Figure 4.10 below.

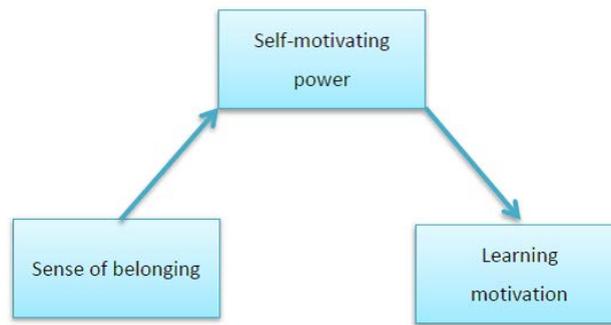


Figure 4.10. Learning motivation mediated by traditional motives

4.3.3 Section summary

These findings suggest that SoB, an essential element of in-group distinctiveness, is associated with an ideal university culture. When it matches the student's expectations, his or her SoB would be enhanced. In this light, the individual's cultural expectation conflates with the socio-educational context, reinforcing the student's social identity. What matters is whether the student's environment is significantly meaningful. Thus, while the general environment of the school can influence the student's SoB, the student's department can be more influential.

The findings suggest that most of the study cases matched *Direction 1* of the conceptual model; SoB is likely to have an impact on student learning motivation. Also, the findings contribute to the first tier of RQ2 in discovering the impact of student social identity and learning motivation. In four cases, the impact was more complex than predicted in terms of the mediating factors. These findings enrich the original predictive model of prediction and can fuel future research. In the next section, the relationship between core educational goal and learning motivation will be discussed.

4.4. Educational goal and learning motivation

4.4.1 Educational goal

After participants articulated their core educational goals, as reviewed in Section 4.1.6, they were asked to reflect on whether their higher education institutions facilitated goal attainment in order to better understand how goals or goal-framing enhanced learning motivation particularly through the socio-educational context to which they were exposed. This corresponded with *Direction 2* of the conceptual model.

When such institutional support was forthcoming, it manifests positive psychological valence which, as P14 described, stems from the feeling of having many opportunities to learn and improve. This matching of core educational goals (MCEG hereafter) becomes a salient motive to enhance learning motivation, per Levy and Campbell's (2008) argument that the academic success of tertiary students is mediated by their goals for attending university; motivation is central to such goals. The relationship between MCEG and learning motivation is explored below.

4.4.2 Impact on learning motivation

Among the eighteen cases, three reported that they did not consider their institutions to have been supportive of their core educational goal, and that they were disregarded. Of the balance, twelve cases (80%) were consistent with the prediction of *Direction 2*. The three cases which did not fit the model reported that either learning motivation was never the student's priority (one case), or they did not think educational goal and motivation were related (two cases).

Hence, twelve cases were authenticated to confirm to *Direction 2* that MCEG positively impacts learning motivation. Among them, three cases provided data about the relationship between MCEG and student learning motivation and are reported below. For P3, MCEG strongly impacted learning motivation subsequent to the enhancement of trust based on their perception that institutional resources and reputation were available to support CEG. If trust is equated to belief, then it yields behavioural intentions manifested in behaviour (Vidotto, Massidda, Noventa, & Vicentini, 2012). It was as if the students linked institutional support with a more superior environment, intensifying learning motivation. A preliminary research model for future quantitative design configuring this relationship is provided in Figure 4.11

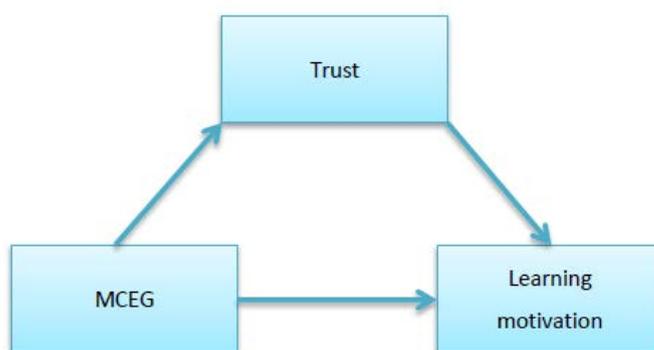


Figure 4.11. Learning motivation mediated by trust

For P11, while MCEG affected learning motivation, students felt their attitude would become more positive if the institution supported their CEG. As P11 conveyed, the term ‘post-nineties teenagers’ misrepresented the group as being irresponsible, in addition to other negative connotations. If they felt supported, they would feel validated and understood, have increased self-esteem and a more positive attitude to learning, as noted by Berg (2005). A preliminary research model for future quantitative design depicting this relationship discovered is given in Figure 4.12 below.

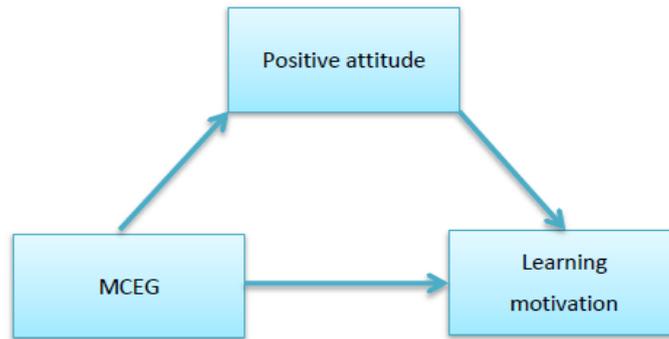


Figure 4.12. Learning motivation mediated by positive attitude

Lastly, for P12, while MCEG may be associated with learning motivation, it depended on whether a sound learning platform was available to apply their learning tasks or projects. Such a learning platform enabled long learning hours and provided a place to mingle with their peers, build relationships and gain mutual support. This is affirmed in Sogunro's (2014) study where an interactive classroom and an environment conducive to learning are important motivational factors for higher education students. A preliminary research model displayed in Figure 4.13 depicts future quantitative design: MCEG as the independent variable, learning motivation as the dependent variable, and availability of an appropriate and effective learning platform as a moderating variable.

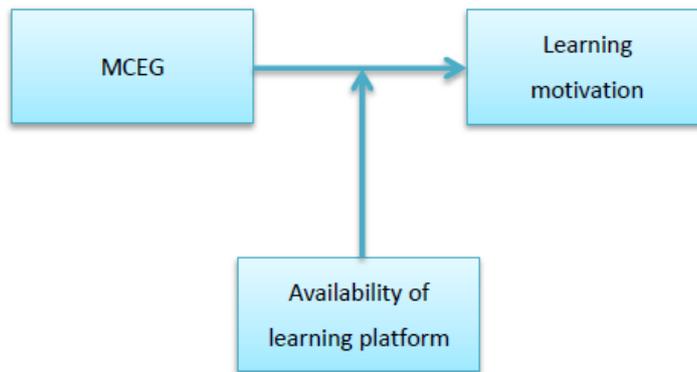


Figure 4.13. Learning motivation moderated by availability of learning platform

4.4.3 Section summary

These findings suggest that MCEG has a positive relationship with student learning motivation, affirming that collective goals and goal-framing not only reinforce student social identity but also provide a salient learning motive. This is analogous to the notion that students' life goals may influence motivations and learning strategies (Guns, Richardson, & Watt, 2012).

The findings show that most cases matched *Direction 2* of the conceptual model; MCEG is likely to have an impact on student learning motivation. They also contribute to the second tier of RQ2 in discovering the impact of student social identity and learning motivation. In three cases, the impact may be more complex than originally predicted, enriching the original model while providing for future potential research topics. In the next section, the relationship between group salience and learning motivation will be discussed.

4.5. Group salience and learning motivation

4.5.1 Group salience

Upon expressing their views on core educational goals and learning motivation, all participants were asked by the interviewer whether they would have preferred to study in a class with similar traits as discussed in Section 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4:

So in the past twenty minutes or so we've talked about a lot of different topics and your sharing has been absolutely wonderful. We've talked about your expectations as a student, learning experience and teaching-student relationship, your ideals of university culture, and just now, your educational goal. So given a choice P#, would you have preferred to study in a class with all classmates sharing similar traits and characteristics to you? In other words, all classmates have the same profile of characteristics as you, would that be something you prefer?

This was a critical moment of the interviewing process as all previous topics condensed into a concentrated focal point for further consideration. It probed how enhanced group salience strengthened learning motivation, especially in the nature of the cohort a student is assigned to. This corresponded to *Direction 3* of the conceptual model.

Diverse opinions surfaced: Seven out of eighteen participants (39%) felt that being in a heterogeneous cohort was preferable (Type I class), while eleven out of eighteen participants (61%) expressed the opposite, that being in a homogenous class was preferable (Type II class). Both classes were investigated in depth as follows.

4.5.2 Impact on learning motivation

In a Type I class, students would prefer to have heterogeneous classmates in enhancing learning motivation, contrary to the prediction of *Direction 3*. However, consistent with the preferred learning style and ideal university culture discussed

previously, Type I class students embrace multi-culturalism (*Culture-based LS* in addition to *People-based IUC*) and the opportunity to learn and interact with people of different backgrounds, opinions and personalities. This is defined by Dwyer (2006, p.39) as *diversity outcomes*. Referring to *Sentiment-based LS* as delineated in Section 4.2.4, students would have been 'bored' and 'unhappy' to be studying in a homogenous class. In some cases, a student would be more ready and likely to change an 'unhappy class setting' than to actively engage in the class learning activities.

In contrast, a Type II class was considered an ideal learning environment where participants were genuinely fond of interacting with like-minded people as a meaningful and challenging activity. It was considered meaningful because their knowledge and skills could be mutually enriched, and also challenging as students would have to compete in areas of academic performance and achievement.

In a Type II class, learning effectiveness would be fostered by the multiple channels accessible for sharing knowledge and experience with individuals of like minds. Additionally, students would tend to help each other and engage in learning activities promoting mutual benefits. A Type II class basically refers to how students show preferences for all the domains relevant to their education experience. In fact, the impact of a Type II class (and certainly a Type I class) on learning motivation can be enhanced when a classroom setting is open-minded (Chen, 2015).

Furthermore, the characteristics of a Type II class are consistent with the theory of social differentiation and in-group favouritism. Within a Type II class, students can be sub-divided into those who strive to do their best and those desiring to enjoy the

learning process. Apart from learning motivation, Na (2012) reports that bringing like-minded college students into the same class enhances students' sense of social justice and community engagement.

4.5.3 Section summary

This section has found that more than half of the sample cases matched *Direction 3* of the conceptual model; a Type II class is likely to have an impact on student learning motivation. The findings contribute to the third and final tier of RQ2 in discovering the impact of student social identity and student learning motivation. Although the Type I and Type II classes are not exhaustive, they represent both ends of the class homogeneity spectrum.

When it came to group salience and the streaming of classes, student cohorts heterogeneous in nature may prefer to either stream along with the same cohort of students or a mixed cohort of students, as the findings indicate. Hence, given that an additional level of variation is observed, the matrix displayed in Table 4.6 can be expanded by the variable 'group salience', leading to 144 permutations. In short, while diversity in university is associated with positive student outcomes, empirically little is known about how diversity directly impacts classroom learning (Packard, 2013).

4.6. Chapter summary

To recapitulate, the current chapter has provided an account of the thematic analyses of qualitative data which have delineated the investigations of the definitions and meanings of the student-customer identity (RQ1). The impact of

social identity on student learning motivation in the three directions of the conceptual model (RQ2) has been reported as well in the current chapter. In the final chapter, key outcomes and implications of the current research will be presented. Details regarding the reality of CHE, the recommendations pertinent to the critical issues in higher education, as well as limitations of the present study will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of dissertation

This dissertation articulates the managerial research questions of the student-customer identity, its corresponding social identity, and student learning motivation in a higher education setting. With the commercialisation of higher education, a new managerial direction has been observed, which has been linked with education reform. This serves as a new managerial perspective on how various constituents in higher education are viewed in contrast to the prior traditional model. Undergoing commercialisation, higher education has been transformed in order for institutes to gain a competitive edge by adopting corporate language and business practices. In this process, students-as-customers arise as an equivocal concept although student identity is largely homogenised regardless of the ontological existence of the student voice, postulating a dramatically different identity.

This study has offered an alternative, if not contrary, perspective to demonstrate that student identity is a heterogeneous notion subject to a wide spectrum of definitions. With active participation from students whose unique 'voices' are decoded in this study, student identity is a manifestation of psychological and sociocultural influences. The dynamics of student identity present in an educational context suggest that it has an effect not only on the attitudes students have towards learning, but also on learning motivation. Learning motivation plays a central role in student learning as it directly influences students' academic achievements. It is reasonable to predict an increase in student learning engagement and performance in higher

education institutes that recognise the diversity of student-customer identities.

This study has also established that, in the process of commercialising higher education, it would be advisable to cater to 'students' voices', which incorporate the students' own perspective of the customer's identity. Individual student identity conflates with student social identity, interacting with individual learning behaviour. Given that traditional motivational theory is primarily individualised, the impact of social identity on learning motivation provides an alternative insight to improve student academic achievement. With renewed awareness of critical issues in student identity and student learning motivation, a more effective strategic implementation of managerial initiatives for higher education would ensue. These managerial initiatives are not only confined to financial concerns or competitive edge, but educational policy, quality assurance, and academic development, which ultimately converge on the overall improvement of teaching and learning. This kind of implementation would also provide a fundamental extension to the issue of the corporate social responsibility of higher education.

5.2. Key outcomes and implications of research

5.2.1 Key outcomes of research

The two research questions guiding this study apropos of the conceptual model are:

- *Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do students define their 'customer' identity?*

- *Research Question 2 (RQ2): What impact do social identities have on student*

learning motivation?

This study has provided thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered to explore its research questions: First, the findings regarding RQ1 suggest that the definition of the student-customer identity, narrated through the 'voices' of the survey participants, is conceivably heterogeneous in nature. It confirms the original rationale and predictions of the conceptual model, which postulates that since 'students-as-customers' is an equivocal concept, the entailing student-customer identity cannot be interpreted in a linear manner. Such an identity of the student-customer in higher education is supported by a wide spectrum of characteristics and traits into which diverse needs and expectations are embedded. The spectrum of traits and characteristics can be subjected to psychological and socio-cultural influences, as well as the effects of student social identity, the concept of which this study has attempted to probe in a multi-faceted fashion. Against such manifold perspectives of the student-customer identity, unique themes and categories have been established and organised to critique and accommodate the discovered phenomena.

In analysing the three directions of the conceptual model derived from RQ2, the impact of social identity on student learning motivation was examined in terms of in-group distinctiveness, group collective goal (core educational goal) and group salience. It has been inductively demonstrated that when there is an observable relationship between student social identity and learning motivation, it is most likely going to be positive. In this connection, phenomena arising from participants' narrations demonstrate that the three directions portrayed in this study resonate with examples in reality. Lastly, not only do these real life examples elucidate the

relationships theorised in the conceptual model, but they also propose future research models and provide research opportunities to investigate.

5.2.2 Implications for higher education

The original intention of CHE conjures higher institutions a with competitive edge by adopting corporate language and business practices. While researchers have relentlessly offered their perspectives on how student identity should be defined in higher education, the phenomenon of students-as-customers has become reduced to a state of ambivalence, where expectations of educators and students could only be broadly generalised and polarised. Under CHE and the uprising/development/formation of students-as-customers, students in higher education cannot be perceived as traditional 'learners'. Nonetheless, as indicated in the present research, there is no evidence that a 'learner' and a 'student-customer' are identities that are mutually exclusive with respect to the heterogeneous nature of the latter. The reality of this ideological gap, therefore, signifies the fact that worldviews of higher education may have erroneously assumed that when students are not considered 'learners', the only alternative is to meet their 'short-term needs' along with the stereotyped expectations.

The analogy of the human as a lens fares well in the current situation of higher education under CHE: the lenses which substantiate the institutional worldviews do not have the function to take 'student voices' into account. This current research has indicated that students' educational needs and expectations are multidimensional, meaning that it is advisable for a wider spectrum of teaching approaches instead of a singular, exclusive method to be employed. While multiple

teaching approaches do exist, it is imperative to examine what students' needs and expectations are before distinguishing between appropriate and helpful methodology and overly simplistic people-pleasing mechanisms.

This study postulates that a reconciliation of the conflicting demands, i.e., student learning experience versus student academic achievement, is possible by catering to the unique educational needs and expectations of higher education students. Regardless of whether a higher education institute becomes commercialised or not, it is ethically imperative that universities and other higher education service providers address all the critical issues of commercialisation and take into account the perspectives of all its key stakeholders without neglecting or ignoring the central educational mission. It would, however, be a disservice to students for higher education institutions to follow the slippery-slope mentality of satisfying students by merely pleasing them. The foremost issue, once an institute decides to become commercialised, is the heterogeneous nature of the student-customer identity and its conflated social identity. The next issue is in determining the various expectations of students and how they are to be achieved, taking into account their potential impact on student learning motivation. Also, the role of the teaching faculty must be clearly articulated: the task is to motivate and empower students while maintaining a realistic fulfilment of their interests as educators.

However, what happens when the good intentions of CHE inexorably clash with the intricate realities of higher education? Do higher education institutions substantively gain a competitive edge, or are these gains merely transient? Counter to the heterogeneous nature of student identity, what is the root of higher education institutes embarking on the dangerous and unpredictable mentality of satisfying and

pleasing students if not to maintain rigorous academic standards? Why has CHE, with what seems like such good intentions, resulted in deepening concern and controversy over ethical implications and possible unwanted outcomes? In the following section, the reality of higher education under CHE will be closely examined, followed by key recommendations proposed by the findings of the current research.

5.3. Reality of higher education under CHE

5.3.1 Academic managerialism

Reverting to the discussion in Chapter 1, academic managerialism has emerged as a core component of commercialised higher education. As Winter (2009, p. 122) observes, academic managerialism has contributed to schisms in academic identity and incongruent values “when academics are engaged in academic work that embodies corporate ideologies, values and practices (e.g., profit-making activities, serving the needs of ‘customers’) that conflict with a ‘central, valued and salient [professional] self’ (as cited in Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 99)”. Dearlove (1998) believes that the nature of academic work and the professional sentiments of academic workers suggest that efficient management and good governance are preferable directions to take. Nonetheless, if what is useful is not separated from what is not, business management in the field of education yields bureaucracy and deficient governance, which can only take universities so far in terms of teaching and research (Dearlove, 1998). Academic managerialism, hence, has “altered relations within and between institutions as well as the nature of rewards and sanctions in academic life” (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005, p.270). As Melewar and Akeel (2005) elaborate, this change in perception will inevitably create a need to review the entire

relationship between the students as customers and university employees.

How specifically this relationship is altered depends on how well-defined the two parties' identities are. If the student-customer identity is defined narrowly as 'happy customers' of higher education, traditional relationships built between teachers and students would have to be acutely re-examined. The divergence of the stereotypical image of students as customers versus the universal understanding of students as learners (see Section 1.4.1) has forcefully opened the ideological gap between students' wants and educators' interests. Ironically, while neither of these perspectives is representative of the student-customer, they generate power struggles and conflicting demands, discussed in the next section.

5.3.2 Traditional vs marketing approach

In connection with the ideological gap arising from the polarised perception of student identity, a growing body of literature (Chonko, 2004; Ng & Forbes, 2009; Nguyen & Rosetti, 2013) has proposed varying teaching approaches. First is the traditional-universalistic approach where academics maintain rigorous standards, and students' academic performance is objectively reflected in academic achievement. Second is the commercialised-marketing approach where academics are expected to lower their standards and let students pass examinations to improve the student experience. The first approach generally emphasises student competence and offers accountability through whether they meet the overall learning objectives. The second focuses on student learning experience in terms of whether it can be translated into a narrowly defined and standardised sense of 'student satisfaction'; for universities to consider student satisfaction to be the goal

they are striving for is overly simplistic and does not take into consideration the unique needs and voice of each student. In short, it is a faulty premise to serve as a foundation for the responsibility that higher education has to students.

The traditional approach connects with the discussions in the beginning chapter on grand educational goals and long-term outcomes. The universal 'student-learners' are expected to fulfil rigorous academic standards and requirements. The long-term benefit of such an approach is that students in higher education are taught and trained to become members of the elite class in society. The short term cost is that students may feel aggrieved due to perceiving the treatment as being 'mistreatment' or 'compulsion', resulting in negative evaluations of the institute and its teaching staff. The teaching faculty has become the target of student evaluations such as SFQs (Student Feedback Questionnaires) or SRTs (Student Ratings of Teaching questionnaires), and at universities that place a heavy emphasis on ratings, teaching faculty are prompted to give out easy grades, avoid controversial material, and dumb down courses in exchange for higher student evaluation ratings. Even though it is uncertain whether such actions in reality would boost evaluation scores (Schneider, 2013), they have become customer satisfaction tools frequently utilised to achieve the objective of improving 'quality'.

A systematic and comprehensive shift in higher education, from tailored feedback pertinent to professional judgment to standardised feedback that meets official criteria, has been prevalent due to the fear of student complaints, litigation and the pressures of increasing student numbers (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). It is critical for higher education institutes to cater to its own students' unique needs and priorities by conducting appropriate assessments (Noel-Levitz, 2012), rather than adopting a

'one-size-fits-all' mode of evaluation. However, when students are given an opportunity to 'evaluate', rather than stressing self-evaluation (e.g., learning attitude, self-efficacy, academic performance), or longitudinal critique (e.g., relevance of present experience in the long run), they are free to express whatever they perceive about the course, teaching faculty and school. Singh's (2002) work provides a thorough explanation of the origin of student evaluations and its relationship with Taylorism and TQM. According to Singh (2002, pp.690, 693), student evaluation tools such as the SRT constitutes "a colonisation of the academic life-world by the instrumentalism of an accounting-based practice" in Habermasian terms, or simply 'accountingisation' in Singh's term. Singh (2002, p.695) concludes that SRT "legitimises the commodification of students' educational experience and student-teacher relationship".

5.3.3 Power struggle and conflicting demands

The marketing approach, in contrast, focuses on how teaching is geared towards satisfying students. Its short-term benefits include students being shaped into 'happy customers' because they feel they are being treated well, their needs are being generously catered to, and their feelings are protected. Scholars like Chan (2015) go further by asserting the 'servant-leader' role of higher education teaching faculty, signifying a state of 'being and becoming'. While the mechanism for satisfying students is reduced into a mechanism of rewards and simple pleasure, 'happy students' and 'satisfied students' as such are not necessarily the same (Gibbs & Dean, 2014). Students could be 'satisfied' because their diverse learning needs and expectations are being met, which is different from being lulled into a false sense of happiness through a distorted, idealised reality and inaccurate societal demands.

When higher education institutions are commercialised, however, being 'happy students' is somehow assumed to be what students primarily care about. In other words, higher education institutes assume that 'happy students' are less likely to drop out because they are 'satisfied'. In addition, the short-term benefit may also include favourable word-of-mouth as prospective students are attracted by a school that promotes 'happiness'. While this may well be the case if retaining customers is the priority, it poses the challenge of presenting education as being all about retaining customers, without examining the unique business functions and needs of the students in a specific higher education institute. Another issue is how the curriculum is to be delivered 'happily' in terms of the grand education goal, given that there are diverse needs reflected by the varied student-customers in a classroom.

While these are important issues to ponder, the real issue is whether or not these grand learning goals and, contrarily, the student-pleasing agenda, could be simultaneously introduced. Amidst the super-complex ecology of higher education and diverse expectations of students, the tyranny of any reform transpires when the seemingly justified options are taken for granted without even a slight delineation as to whether they are appropriate for the real world. The situation is dire because two obviously contradictory agendas are forced to co-exist, resulting in the suppression of everyone involved in the detrimental everyday power struggle.

The long-term cost for higher education emerges when employers realise that student competence has consistently deteriorated as students have been offered a false sense of training and learning (Chonko, 2004), leaving them ill-equipped for their post-university future. In fact, many of these 'happy students' may leave

school without any real sense of what their talents may be, which Robinson (2010) refers to as “a crisis of human resources”. If employers and society at large are literally the ‘consumers’ of higher education (Michael et al., as cited in Pereira & Da Silva, 2003), a false sense of training and learning translated into a false sense of academic merit means the destruction of the brand name of commercialised higher education institutions. Consequently, the consumers of higher education have to discount the academic merits of students as their assumed competence in learning outcomes has the possibility of exceeding their actual competence. While curriculum, pedagogy and assessment constitute the foundations on which teaching and learning are to take place, management in CHEs must inevitably and immediately deal with the following issues: (1) Does catering to the needs of students necessarily require the creation of a false sense of academic standards and easing academic vigilance?, and, (2) Does meeting business objectives necessarily mean students should be ‘pleased’, generously rewarded and provided with grade leniency?

On reflection, while some students may have a more short-term focus on happy learning experiences, educators’ interests are more long-term and geared towards the universal traditions and sustainability of knowledge and skills. Teachers are being appraised on their professionalism, which includes whether or not learning modules are successfully delivered. Nevertheless, the tendency to see students as stereotypically ‘happy customers’ pressures faculty members to sacrifice long-term benefits for short-term goals. CHE complicates the situation, therefore, by allowing policymakers to recklessly shift institutes’ focus from traditional teaching to commercial agendas such as pleasing customers, presenting academic ‘deliverables’ and meeting and maintaining institution ranking scores. Yet it is a fundamental role of university leadership that they must negotiate the inherent tensions within

universities while operating in a dynamic environment (Harding & Harrison, 2015). According to Bennett, Dunne, and Carré (1999), the power struggle prevailing in higher education currently means academics are deprived of the power to define what is considered to be knowledge. They are “torn between competing agendas; identities and allegiances... [academic staff] report significantly higher levels of work-related stress and significantly lower levels of organisational commitment” (Bolden, Gosling, & O’Brien, 2014, p. 765). Academics share a deep-seated antipathy towards the ethos of commercialisation, which reduces higher education to a mere economic function (Winter & O’Donohue, 2012). As Naidoo and Jamieson (2005, pp.270-271) argue, “the unmediated influence of economic forces on higher education are likely to lead to the erosion of academic capital and the valorisation of economic capital”. Such antipathy is more intense when it leads to managerial irritation and political frustration (Cuthbert, 2010). The root of education reform communicates readiness for a fundamental shift in organisational culture to take into account the dignity, welfare, needs and viewpoints of all stakeholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Friedman & Miles, 2006). Presently, the power struggles in CHE is a violation of what stakeholder theory should advocate in the first place.

5.4. Recommendations

Overview: Bounded rationality in higher education

In attempting to sort through the intention and reality dichotomy, and unravelling the super-complex situation of higher education as presented in this study, the classic theory of bounded rationality offers a useful approach for higher education

policy-makers to consider. The theory of bounded rationality by Herbert Simon (1972) suggests that rationality can be limited or restricted due to risk and uncertainty, incomplete information about alternatives, and environmental complexity, even though important decision-making requires more information and data in order for the decision to be a reasonable, considered one (Cecchetti & Schoenholtz, 2015). Simon (1956, 1972, 1990) uses the metaphor of a pair of scissors to describe rational behaviour: one blade has to do with cognitive limits and biases, the other with framing the environment. Similarly, rational behaviour is demonstrated through the interaction of context and cognition, thus showing a holistic picture of how rational behaviour cannot occur if the focus is only on one blade (Lockton, 2012). As Simon (1972) explains, 'satisficing' and 'optimising' reflect two broad approaches to rational behaviour. While complexity and uncertainty make universal absolute rationality impossible, 'satisficing' approaches settle for a satisfactory, rather than an approximate-best, decision (Simon, 1972). Gigerenzer and Selten (2002) affirm that in comparison to optimisation, the heuristic nature of decision-making captures a sense of simplicity which resembles the tools of a backwoods mechanic. Ghillyer (2012) elaborates that to 'optimise' means to select the best possible alternative; to 'satisfice' means selecting the first alternative that meets the individual's minimum standard of satisfaction. There is a sense of wonder in how simplicity can produce robustness and accuracy in an overwhelmingly complex world.

The theory of bounded rationality provides a foundation for the recommendations proposed by the current study. It believes that a 'satisficing approach', being more heuristic than perfect, exists for higher education policy-makers to consider in the context of commercialisation and the enhancement of a positive teaching and

learning experience. In other words, the theory of bounded rationality suggests that what counts sometimes does not have to be perfect; it is more practical to attain something which is acceptable instead of something impossible. In an attempt to maintain their financial sustainability, the key challenge for universities is to retain their academic integrity and responsibility to the community (Harding & Harrison, 2015). Also, it is salient to ensure the students' learning experience is a positive one, by cultivating a positive teaching and learning environment. The satisficing approach articulated by the present research contains two key elements: I) improving school culture; and II) enhancing student motivation.

5.4.1 Improving school culture

Students' expectations and educators' interests do not have to be conflicting, as long as the student's wants are legitimately defined, and educators' interests are realistically achievable. Fundamentally, higher education management ought to revolutionise the way strategies of improving the educational culture are standardised, acknowledging that the needs and expectations of students that cannot be simplistically standardised with a homogenous identity are varied and complex. Based on this study's findings about students' multi-faceted educational needs and expectations in relation to their student-customer identity, specific measures to improve higher education culture include the following:

1. Concerning the heterogeneous nature of the student-customer identity as revealed in the current research, higher education management should listen to the various 'voices' of student-customers and validate the existence of multiple, heterogeneous student-customer groups.

2. During the student admission exercise, for example, institutions can administer reliable standardised questionnaires surveying student expectations and needs. Objective satisfaction assessment of various student learning domains, as identified in the current research, can be administered throughout the academic year to determine how resources can be more appropriately allocated. Targeted action plans for retaining and serving specific student populations can thus be developed more precisely.
3. On the impact of social identity on student learning motivation as examined in the current research, higher education management can develop timely strategic plans to promote a collective school culture for students, incorporating specific and measurable expectations of student-customers and faculty.
4. Higher education management can design effective measures to empower student-customers so that their educational goals, core or provisional, are collectively supported, such that student learning motivation is positively enhanced as suggested by the findings of the current research.
5. Higher education management can stream student-customers into precise categories matching their learning expectations and needs, taking advantage of a motivating learning environment in which similar student-customers can form a learning cohort. In this way, student learning motivation is positively enhanced as suggested by the findings of the current research.
6. Finally, instead of making general assumptions about student expectations, institutions may focus on the uncovering, discovering, and encouraging of 'student voices' as discussed and demonstrated in the present research.

Institutional student development offices, for instance, could foster longitudinal research to better understand student educational goals in order to provide more effective support for them.

5.4.2 Enhancing student motivation

This study underscores the importance of discovering specific measures to improve student motivation in the context of CHE and academic managerialism. Teacher qualities and self-efficacy are important factors to consider in enhancing student motivation.

With regard to teacher qualities, Brewer and Burgess' (2005) model suggests that more than any other factor, a teacher's personal qualities may motivate students to attend a class. Nguyen and Rosetti (2013) outline the viability of three educational models: (1) *Salutary model*, which pairs rigorous standards with the professor's rigid expectations; (2) *Pleasing model*, which contains non-challenging classes and professors that please students all the time; and (3) *Desirable model*, which contains high but achievable standards and professors who respond to student needs with compassion and expectations of improvement and academic growth. Nguyen and Rosetti's (2013) correlation tests show that higher education students are more likely to choose the desirable model when they are more motivated, implying that academic standards need not be lowered when students are conscious and intentional in feeling satisfied. In this light, when teaching faculty helps boost student learning motivation, students would be less resistant to academic study pressures, provided that the necessary support is given by their teachers. While

motivation is self-focused and inspiration is other-focused, teachers with exceptional qualities tend to inspire students to discover their talents and passions as a result of a trusting, caring, mentoring relationship with the student (Bowman, 2007). The belief is reinforced by the evidence that a satisfactory pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the student could have a positive influence on student learning motivation (O'Connor & Dillon, 2008).

Therefore, whether higher education policy-makers ultimately decide to see students as customers or non-customers, the school as a market or non-market, it is crucial to ensure that a positive teaching and learning experience is generated. This is only feasible when the teaching faculty, arguably a major determinant of the teaching and learning activity, is empowered to carry out their tasks professionally. Students' conceptions of knowledge, learning and learning orientations are, in fact, broad constructs which change and evolve within different learning environments (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). Thus, teachers are likely to be strained by the demands of various groups of students under their care specifically with reference to the nuances of professional and personal qualities expected to boost student motivation. Hence, the empowerment of the teaching faculty enables the practice of authentic professional judgements on academic demands and student sentiment, instead of narrowly engaging in what Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) describe as 'emotional labouring'. The fundamental merit is that teachers should feel confident and comfortable in carrying out their teaching duties. More ideally, they should be provided with the option to teach classes which are properly streamed and organised.

In contrast, a student's personal qualities are investigated in various studies,

affirming that student self-efficacy fosters students' engagement and learning (Pintrich, 2003; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). According to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003), self-efficacy is the capabilities which an individual considers that s/he possesses in reaching their goals and objectives. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) further argue that self-efficacy affects behavioural, cognitive and motivational engagements of students, consequently affecting learning and achievement. Similarly, Smith and Woodworth (2012) explore social identity and self-efficacy among higher education students and advocate using the social entrepreneurship education approach to assist students to be self-confident in causing effective and positive social change. Smith and Woodworth (2012) associate self-efficacy with social identity theory and find that the more students perceive their identity as social entrepreneurs, the more of a positive experience they have when studying, and the better the commitment they have to their course. Smith and Woodworth's (2012) study suggests that a student's psychological state affects their behavioural outcomes. Students are motivated to do well in class when the educational approach cares about what they believe and perceive to be their social identity, and trusts in their level of competency in achieving their goals.

The fundamental merit of the findings of this study is that pressure on teachers is reduced when students are empowered and encouraged to believe in who they are and what they are capable of doing. While learning motivation and engagement will be automatically reinforced, teachers' roles could be oriented more towards implementing the educational approach and managing the class. However, self-efficacy, for example, is a matter of educational psychology, an inexact rather than deterministic science, so the principles may not be applicable in all classroom contexts and situations (Smith & Woodworth, 2012). While general principles

might be useful in some contexts, they might also result in stereotyping, which would create just the opposite effect of what was intended (Haggis, 2004). Hence, it is important for teachers to fully understand the students in their classes and implement appropriate measures to improve student motivation.

5.5. Theoretical contributions

Under education reform and commercialisation, the concept of 'education quality' has acquired a very broad meaning. As discussed in this dissertation, its essence depends on which lens one views it through (society, employers, graduates, government or institutions) and on the timeframe concerned (should the period be confined only to the time the student stays enrolled in the school, for example?). Also, student expectations have become a challenging topic under CHE as it examines whether the student is a customer in the traditional marketing sense. Student identity in CHE has been affected by an ontological equivocality, aside from deciphering student expectation and enhancing teaching and learning quality. On this basis, this dissertation has theorised the following:

First, regarding the current theory of student-customer identity which is largely homogenised, standardised and equivocal, the present research offers a contrary perspective that student-customer identity is heterogeneous in nature. Specifically, myriad traits pertinent to the identity of student-customer have been identified through the medium of 'student voices'. The phenomenon of students-as-customers, therefore, manifests more meaning for institutions in terms of defining quality and student expectations for higher education. All higher education institutions must examine these critical notions in connection with their

unique educational and business cultures. While the dimensions of student-customer identity explored in this study are not inclusive, its findings have raised potential permutations of student-customer identities in higher education institution.

Second, with regard to traditional motivation theories based on education psychology or organisational perspectives, the current view inclines towards seeing learning behaviour on the basis of the individual, which is insufficient. This dissertation has theorised, as an alternative view, that student social identity has a significant impact on student learning behaviour. In a CHE context where students are perceived to be 'customers', student learning motivation could be enhanced when student social identity is taken into account in a heterogeneously tangible manner. As student social identity is a collective manifestation of student individual identity, it is possible therefore to reconcile the heterogeneous nature of the student-customer identity with their expectations, perspectives, and understanding of quality.

5.6. Limitations of study

Exploratory studies have their advantages in terms of flexibility and adaptability, but it is not typically possible to generalise findings to the larger population due to the reliance on non-probability sampling methods (Sekaran, & Bougie, 2013). Second, since the conceptual model underpinning this study is not a replication of other extant models, even though the research problems have been thoroughly investigated, its operationalisation is largely seminal at this point, promising food for thought. In this regard, this methodology may not be directly replicable in the event more concise socio-demographic groups can be defined in future studies.

This would lead to the third limitation, which concerns a lack of segmentation and a limited representation of participants—Given limited resources, only fresh graduates from Hong Kong were sampled for this study.

5.7. Future research

Concerning the limitations discussed above, first, providing that the snowballing sampling method is justified for this study, its qualitative data collection techniques would serve as a legitimate methodological reference for future enquiries. As for the limitations of the study's conceptual model, more reliable themes alluding to the real world or past research issues could be explored and applied in future phenomenological inquiry. Finally, the issues of generalisation and external validity would be accommodated and form more substantive groundwork for further studies given that this study's findings have generally been in agreement with the predictions of the conceptual model. For future research projects, therefore, specific student groups could be mapped according to, for example, student gender, age, education background, and type of higher education institution. In this light, potential topics ventured for future studies may include:

- CHE and the 'voice' of teachers of different higher education institutes
- CHE and the 'voice' of managers of different higher education institutes
- CHE and the 'voice' of societal consumers of higher education
- CHE and internationalisation of higher education
- Social identity and means of enhancing student learning motivation
- Social identity and its impact on student career development
- CHE and its impact on student learning styles and teaching methodologies
- CHE and professional development of teachers
- Meaning of higher education and ideal school culture

- School culture and shaping of student identity
- CHE and student educational goal
- CHE and student sense of belonging
- Group salience and learning engagement
- Group salience and academic performance
- Group salience and curriculum development
- CHE and academic performance

Reverting to the discourse on CHE and of the current education reform, specific questions for future research for individual higher institutions may include: first, given the heterogeneous notion of 'student-customer', how does the higher education institute prioritise the admission of various types of students with limited resources? Second, when the target students are admitted, how can the institute best help to define student identity and cater to students' needs and expectations, and most importantly, promote quality learning and academic standards? Third, how can the forces of CHE, globalisation, marketing and competition be balanced with the myriad needs of students, all of which are linked to their satisfaction? Fourth, how could the teaching faculty be empowered so that the strategic objectives of CHE could be more effectively achieved, while also motivating and engaging students? And finally, what practical options are available for the higher education institutes to boost student learning motivation while not conflicting with academic managerialism and educational reform?

These questions suggest that there are critical intersections which higher education management could encounter in the new era of CHE as students' needs are juxtaposed with institutes' willingness to compromise on what constitutes worthwhile markers of success in higher education. Information gathered for all

these critical topics will have no value unless higher education institutions and researchers are willing to interpret the findings against their own specific educational and training objectives, together with the expected impact of their educational measures (Teichler, 2015). In short, these questions pertinent to their managerial needs could be analysed only when the gap between idealisation and reality is properly and honestly evaluated beforehand, instead of too quickly adhering to any dogmatic, if not subliminal, assumptions.

5.8. Concluding remarks

Commercialised higher education dazzles against the backdrop of uninspiring and abstract education reform. Education reform is necessitated in light of the supercomplexity of the world, but what kind of 'reform' does education really require? What do education and university tradition truly stand for in the future? Is there one kind of reformed pedagogical methodology that fits all forms of education, against all cultures and parameters, let alone higher education? The misery of reform or transformation is the tyranny of common sense; we cannot think differently from how it was, and cannot imagine an alternative outcome to what we already know. When we take for granted models from the corporate world and apply them to CHE, as this research project has explored, or any other models which we conveniently assume 'must' work, we would do better to consider the unexpected and intangible depletion of resources. This includes the way CHE may impoverish the learning spirit of students, the sanity of educators, and the energy and enthusiasm of teachers, especially when considering that students-as-customers could feel dissatisfied with the 'services' they have been rendered.

Students' vulnerable voices are often buried deep; specific circumstances have to be created so that these voices can show themselves—we would imagine education to be the way that happens, but too often, it is not. The rise of 'students-as-customers' conforms to the industrial trend of CHE, where students have become standardised entities with a monotonous and singular voice. The voice is univocal in the sense that it pursues education services in a formulaic fashion, with the search for 'quality' more vital than learning. Yet, the concept of 'quality' is just as amorphous as the concept of students-as-customers: these definitions do not only result in diminished passion for learning, but students' voices are further neglected and muted because of differences in the understanding of what it means to receive quality education. Under commercialisation, higher institutions extend the obstreperous tradition of linear thinking, hastily generalising student identity, and, thereby, their needs and expectations. This leads to further polarisation when the wheel of commercialisation inevitably clashes with traditional values. The coexistence of these discordant mind-sets in modern higher education, commercialising versus grand education goals, suggests that the great tone of 'education reform' will bring more detriment to education than the 'good intentions' it originally presented with.

While education reform has been foremost on the agenda, researchers have attempted to solve the problem by enriching the very definition of student identity. However, the homogenisation of these definitions quite often brings about only the juxtaposition of the inconsistent delineation of student identities. The analytical unit which captures the humanistic characteristics and implications of the concept of student-identity must assume the most fundamental role in education reform. Education reform would only be effective, therefore, when a fundamental change in the political power and organisational structures is in place, in which the

heterogeneous nature of student identity is acknowledged; students' voices, talents and learning passion must be re-discovered.

Higher education institutions have been given a 'free ride' in the name of education reform operating within a free-market economy and a free academic environment. However, they do not deserve to conduct reforms haphazardly in the name of academic freedom; they deserve our scrutiny as the 'quality' of education will deteriorate if its fundamental characteristics collapse. To commercialise or not is not a partisan debate; it is a humanistic one that concerns and impacts the wide spectrum of stakeholders involved in modern higher education.

Student identity and the impact of student social identity on learning are ineluctable issues in higher education management. Solving the critical issues in higher education is not a question of politics, but ultimately a moral obligation, albeit a daunting one. Individuals in higher education management should not be afraid to manoeuvre reform in such a way that features a well-rounded consideration of stakeholder sentiments and needs. They are liable to establish a more effective school culture with the most appropriate and just incorporation, interpretation and implementation of new initiatives and directions which viably and best cater to the wide array of expectations and needs of their student-customers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Participant Information Statement-Interviews-Fresh Graduates



Dr Leo Fredericks
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**Information Statement for the Research Project:
Commercialising higher education: the impact of student-customer social
identity on student learning motivation
Version 2 – 23 June 2015**

You are invited to participate in the abovementioned research project that is being conducted by Student Researcher Lau Wun Chung of the University of Newcastle, Australia. The research project is supervised by Chief Investigator Dr Leo Fredericks of the Newcastle Business School. The project pertains to the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) of the Student Researcher. You are chosen to receive this invitation to participate because you are a fresh graduate of a Hong Kong higher education institute and you are 18 years old or above.

Why is the research being done?

Higher education has undergone dramatic changes over the last few decades around the world under the impacts of globalization and the advancement of technology. The current trend of the commercialization of higher education serves as a new philosophy towards how various constituents in the higher education setting are perceived in contrast to the traditional point of view. In the process of commercialization, a number of higher education institutions have come to see themselves as "markets" and students as "customers". The research project examines the phenomenon of students-as-customers in the higher education setting and explores the impact of student social identity on student learning motivation.

Who can participate in the research?

You are eligible to participate in this research project if you are a fresh graduate within 2 years of your graduation and you are aged 18 or above.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate. Even if you indicate your interest in participating in the study and go further to sign the consent form, you may withdraw from the interview at any time. If you decide to withdraw, all data related to you will be withdrawn and destroyed.

What you are being asked to do?

If you agree to participate in an interview, you will be contacted to arrange a date, time and location for the interview and be given a copy of the consent form before the interview. Immediately prior to the interview, you will be asked to sign the consent form.

The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. During the interview you will be asked a series of questions about your school life and learning based on your experience. The interview will be recorded with an audio recording device and later transcribed by the Student Researcher. During the interview you can ask for the audio recording device to be stopped and edited or erased. You will also have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and edit your contribution if you wish.

How much time will it take?

The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

The participant will be asked to provide his/her name only when s/he signs the Consent Form. All participants' names will not be reported in the dissertation. All the questions designed for the current project are general questions which bear no capacity for individual identification. Hence, there is no risk associated with the participation of the current research project. There are no direct benefits for any individual participant. However, it is hoped the research will provide a chance for participant to examine their learning behavior and understand their social identities.

How will your privacy be protected?

All audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a computer hard drive protected by a pass code. All audio recording and transcriptions will be used strictly for research purposes. The recordings, transcriptions, all gathered data and materials will be kept highly confidential and may be retained for a minimum of 5 years. Such arrangement of data retention (and disposal) is to be administered in accordance with University of Newcastle's Research Data and Materials Management Procedure (Policy ID 000870).

How will the information collected be used?

The results from this research will be presented in the format of academic dissertation which pertains to the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) pursued by the Student Researcher. Once the dissertation report is completed and passed all the university requirements, a copy will be made available to The University of Newcastle Research Online (NOVA), <http://nova.newcastle.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Index>. It is anticipated that the report will be completed by August, 2016. In addition, the dissertation report may also be submitted to scholarly journals for publication in future.

What do you need to do to participate?

Please read this Participant Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you decide to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, contact the Student Researcher at (+852) 95550682 or c3173383@uon.edu.au. Once you have read and understood the statement and wish to proceed, please send a return email indicating your willingness to participate. Once this is received, you will be informed with the date, time and location for an interview.

Further information

If you would like further information please contact the Student Researcher at the telephone number or email address above. Thank you for considering this invitation.

Dr Leo Fredericks
Chief Investigator

Lau Wun Chung, Joseph
Student Researcher

23 June 2015

Complaints about this research:

This project has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. **H-2015-0175**. Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the Student Researcher locally, telephone (852) 95550682, email c3173383@uon.edu.au or, if an independent person is preferred, to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellery, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia, telephone (02) 49216333, email Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au.



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Consent Form for the Research Project:

**Commercialising higher education: the impact of student-customer social identity
on student learning motivation
Document Version 1 dated 23 June 2015**

I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Participant Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing. During the interview I can ask for the audio recording to be stopped and edited or erased. I may also review the transcript of the interview and edit my contribution. If I decide to withdraw, all data related to me will be withdrawn and destroyed.

I consent to:

1. Participate in an interview of approximately 60-90 minutes
2. The interview being recorded onto a digital recorder.

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

Print name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Contact telephone
number: _____

Part 3: Interview Guide

The interviewer should formulate questions that will serve as a basis for the collection of data for the current research project. The interviewer should not ask for information that will not or is irrelevant to the research topic. Before the interview, the interviewer should have the participant read the consent form carefully and ask any questions that (s)/he may have. After signing the consent form, the interviewer should declare to the participant that the interview is conducted only for research purpose and all information and data collected will remain strictly confidential.

The interviewer should greet the participant warmly when he or she arrives. Once the participant has been seated, the interviewer should ask whether they have any queries and confirm that they have settled in before the interview begins. Throughout the interview, the interviewer will give appropriate prompts to the questions and will make clarifications when necessary. The interviewer will also signal various verbal and non-verbal compliments to the interviewee as reinforcement to their performance.

The questions are developed and categorized into five major areas:

- I. Background review
- II. The student-customer identity
- III. In-group distinctiveness
- IV. Goal and goal-framing
- V. Group salience

There is no time limit for the interview as long as all the five areas have been adequately covered. After the interview, the interviewer thanks the interviewee and leads him/her to the exit.

The same set of questions should be used to interview all participants to ensure consistency.

Part 4: Interview Schedule

I. BACKGROUND REVIEW

The following questions are designed to collect general background information of the participant:

- Q1. What is your name?
- Q2. Which university did you go to?
- Q3. How long did you study in the university?
- Q4. What was your major?
- Q5. Are you currently employed?

II. The student-customer identity

The following questions are designed to gather participant's perception on the qualities of student-customer identity (research question 1).

- Q6. What do you think was the purpose/meaning of higher education?
- Q7. What kind of education did you expect your university to provide?
- Q8. What do you think was an ideal teacher-student relationship?
- Q9. What do you think was an ideal learning style?
- Q10. What learning experience did you prefer as a student?
- Q11. How would you define an ideal university culture?

III. In-group distinctiveness

The following questions are designed to gather data pertinent to the first direction of the impact of social identity on learning motivation (research question 2).

- Q12. Did your university generally match your definition of "ideal university culture"? (If 'yes'→Q13; If 'no'→Q14)
- Q13. (Connecting Q12.) Did you have a stronger sense of belonging to your university? (If 'yes'→Q14; If 'no'→Q15)
- Q14. (Connecting Q13.) Was your learning motivation affected in any way?

IV. Goal and goal-framing

The following questions are designed to gather data pertinent to the second direction of the impact of social identity on learning motivation (research question 1, 2).

- Q15. What was your core educational goal?
- Q16. Did your university generally help fulfil your core educational goal?
(If 'yes'→Q17; If 'no'→Q18)
- Q17. (Connecting Q16.) Was your learning motivation affected in any way?

V. Group salience

The following questions are designed to gather data pertinent to the third direction of the impact of social identity on learning motivation (research question 2).

- Q18. Would you have preferred to study with a class of students who shared similar traits (as previously discussed in II, III and IV)? (If 'yes'→Q19; If 'no'→Q20)
- Q19. (Connecting Q18.) Would your learning motivation be affected in any way?
- Q20. Would you have preferred to study with a class of students of a similar GPA level? (If 'yes'→Q21; If 'no'→Q22)
- Q21. (Connecting Q20.) Would your learning motivation be affected in any way?
- Q22. Would you have preferred to study with a class of students of the same ethnic background? (If 'yes'→Q23; If 'no'→end of interview)
- Q23. (Connecting Q20.) Would your learning motivation be affected in any way?

End of Interview

Appendix B: Nvivo Certificate

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Appendix C: Ethics Approval

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HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE



Notification of Expedited Approval

To Chief Investigator or Project Supervisor:	Doctor Leo Fredericks
Cc Co-investigators / Research Students:	Mr Wun Chung Lau
Re Protocol:	Commercialising higher education: the impact of student-customer social identity on student learning motivation
Date:	30-Jun-2015
Reference No:	H-2015-0175
Date of Initial Approval:	30-Jun-2015

Thank you for your **Response to Conditional Approval (minor amendments)** submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) seeking approval in relation to the above protocol.

Your submission was considered under **Expedited** review by the Ethics Administrator.

I am pleased to advise that the decision on your submission is **Approved** effective **30-Jun-2015**.

In approving this protocol, the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is of the opinion that the project complies with the provisions contained in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007, and the requirements within this University relating to human research.

Approval will remain valid subject to the submission, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. *If the approval of an External HREC has been "noted" the approval period is as determined by that HREC.*

The full Committee will be asked to ratify this decision at its next scheduled meeting. A formal *Certificate of Approval* will be available upon request. Your approval number is **H-2015-0175**.

If the research requires the use of an Information Statement, ensure this number is inserted at the relevant point in the Complaints paragraph prior to distribution to potential participants You may then proceed with the research.

Conditions of Approval

This approval has been granted subject to you complying with the requirements for *Monitoring of Progress*, *Reporting of Adverse Events*, and *Variations to the Approved Protocol* as detailed below.

PLEASE NOTE:

In the case where the HREC has "noted" the approval of an External HREC, progress reports and reports of adverse events are to be submitted to the External HREC only. In the case of Variations to the approved protocol, or a Renewal of approval, you will apply to the External HREC for approval in the first instance and then Register that approval with the University's HREC.

- *Monitoring of Progress*

Other than above, the University is obliged to monitor the progress of research projects involving human participants to ensure that they are conducted according to the protocol as approved by the HREC. A progress report is required on an annual basis. Continuation of your HREC approval for this project is conditional upon receipt, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. You will be advised when a report is due.

• *Reporting of Adverse Events*

1. It is the responsibility of the person **first named on this Approval Advice** to report adverse events.
2. Adverse events, however minor, must be recorded by the investigator as observed by the investigator or as volunteered by a participant in the research. Full details are to be documented, whether or not the investigator, or his/her deputies, consider the event to be related to the research substance or procedure.
3. Serious or unforeseen adverse events that occur during the research or within six (6) months of completion of the research, must be reported by the person first named on the Approval Advice to the (HREC) by way of the Adverse Event Report form (via RIMS at <https://rims.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp>) within 72 hours of the occurrence of the event or the investigator receiving advice of the event.
4. Serious adverse events are defined as:
 - Causing death, life threatening or serious disability.
 - Causing or prolonging hospitalisation.
 - Overdoses, cancers, congenital abnormalities, tissue damage, whether or not they are judged to be caused by the investigational agent or procedure.
 - Causing psycho-social and/or financial harm. This covers everything from perceived invasion of privacy, breach of confidentiality, or the diminution of social reputation, to the creation of psychological fears and trauma.
 - Any other event which might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.
5. Reports of adverse events must include:
 - Participant's study identification number;
 - date of birth;
 - date of entry into the study;
 - treatment arm (if applicable);
 - date of event;
 - details of event;
 - the investigator's opinion as to whether the event is related to the research procedures; and
 - action taken in response to the event.
6. Adverse events which do not fall within the definition of serious or unexpected, including those reported from other sites involved in the research, are to be reported in detail at the time of the annual progress report to the HREC.

• *Variations to approved protocol*

If you wish to change, or deviate from, the approved protocol, you will need to submit an *Application for Variation to Approved Human Research* (via RIMS at <https://rims.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp>). Variations may include, but are not limited to, changes or additions to investigators, study design, study population, number of participants, methods of recruitment, or participant information/consent documentation. **Variations must be approved by the (HREC) before they are implemented** except when Registering an approval of a variation from an external HREC which has been designated the lead HREC, in which case you may proceed as soon as you receive an acknowledgement of your Registration.

Linkage of ethics approval to a new Grant

HREC approvals cannot be assigned to a new grant or award (ie those that were not identified on the application for ethics approval) without confirmation of the approval from the Human Research Ethics Officer on behalf of the HREC.

Best wishes for a successful project.

Professor Allyson Holbrook
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

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