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## **Applications of Legal Aspects in the Hospitality Industry in Hong Kong**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The legal and ethics subject is one of the discipline subjects being offered in the hospitality and tourism programs. To investigate the effectiveness of this subject, this paper aims to examine, based on the hospitality and tourism students' perceptions in Hong Kong, (1) based on their work experiences; how much emphasizes their employers stress on those legal issues, and whether there are any discrepancies between students' perception and reality; (2) the usefulness and importance of law subject in general; and (3) what legal issues students face in their workplaces.

From sixteen legal and ethics issues, students perceived a greater importance of those issues than the companies' emphasis. The most discrepancies are employment law, insurance law, and tort. However, students have no different perception in legal issue of "duty to protect guests' properties." 63% of students agree that the law subject is the most important subject; and 68% of them believe that the law subject should be assigned to the compulsory category. Students have encountered in various legal issues such as "employment law," "hygiene & safety," "duty to protect guest," and "contract law"; whereas, students have less encountered in legal issues of discrimination, copyright, and agency relationship. The legal and ethics subject is essential for hospitality and tourism students to apply those legal issues in the workplaces. The contents should focus in employment law, hygiene and safety, and duty to protect guests. In addition, the hospitality and tourism companies can provide more training legal knowledge, so that they can meet the employees' perceptions of those legal applications.

**KEYWORDS:** Hospitality and Tourism Education, Legal Issues, Curriculum

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the one of the four key industries in Hong Kong, the valued added of the tourism industry has grown more than double from US\$ 5,731 million to US\$ 12,128 million during 2008 to 2012. The employment number of the industry has increased from 194,800 people to 250,900 people during 2008 to 2012 (Census and Statistics Department, 2013). In order to meet the increasing demand of the tourism industry, the higher education in hospitality and tourism plays a crucial role in providing the right trainings to the right talents. Offering the applicable subjects would prepare students' competencies.

Business law, business ethics, and legal aspects are the subjects that include in the business and related-business curriculum. Currently in Hong Kong, there are two universities offer government-funded undergraduate programs in hotel and tourism management, namely, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). They both offer law and/or ethics subjects as compulsory subjects. As for the non-government-funded undergraduate programs, there are five institutions offer honors degree in hospitality or tourism management. Only PolyU SPEED (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Professional Education and Executive Development) assigned compulsory status to the law subject; and the Caritas Francis Hsu College has put a general ethics course as compulsory subject. The other three institutions, namely HKU SPACE (The University of Hong Kong, School of Professional & Continuing Education), CityU SCOPE (City University of Hong Kong, School of Continuing and Professional Education) and HKMA (Hong Kong Management Association), do not offer law courses.

Not too many hospitality and tourism degree programs offer law subjects, one of the major reasons is that tourism education traditionally emphasizes on technical/vocational training (Butler, 1999; Morgan, 2004). Educators concentrate on producing skilled personnel for the industry, where the skills can be applied on the first day of the job. In order to increase the employability of students, subjects tend to focus on facility management; human resources management; event management; catering operations; wine and spirits studies; marketing management; and accounting & finance (Busby, 2003). Legal issues in the industry might seem remote to those schools because they are not that immediate applicable.

However, previous studies have already concluded that law subject is an important component of good hospitality curricula. As stated in McConnell and Rutherford (1988), facing legal risks are inevitable to the hotel and restaurant management. The number of law suits employers faced have drastically increased over the years, Sherwyn (2010) pointed out that in 1989, about 120,000 discrimination charges were filed; and in 2008, that number exceeded 190,000, an increase of almost 60%. Staff have a certain level of legal knowledge can minimize the company loss and liability.

This paper aims to examine, based on students' perceptions in Hong Kong, (1) based on their work experiences; how much emphasizes their employers stress on the legal and ethics issues, and whether there are any discrepancies between students' perception and reality; (2) the usefulness and importance of the subject in general; and (3) what legal issues students face in their workplaces.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Legal and Ethics Subjects in Hospitality and Tourism Programs

The importance of legal and ethics components in the hospitality and tourism curricula has long been studied in the past decades. Whitney (1989), Martin (1998) and Schrag (1993) established the foundation on how important ethics elements are in the

hospitality curriculum. Lundberg (1994) examined the topic from students' perspectives and found that students in hospitality program strongly agreed that ethics should be taught in hospitality programs, and the subject brought positive effects on their careers. Yeh et al. (2005) further studied how hospitality educators perceive the ethics knowledge and needs of hospitality students; they found that educators believe that ethics is important to hospitality students; and interestingly, many hospitality programs have not incorporated and implemented ethics education into their curricular, but faculty members have an impression that they have.

Other than the importance of ethics elements in hospitality programs, numbers of previous studies discussed how to teach ethics effectively. McMinn (1988) concluded that real life case studies seem to be the most effective for teaching ethics. Watras (1986) suggested teaching materials should be based on some real life dilemmas; and group discussions should help students to learn ethics effectively. Pratt (1993) stressed the importance for students to understand the values and principles put forth in the ancient ethics theories help educators produce ethical industry participants. Jaszay (2002) examined philosophically justified model for teaching ethics in hospitality programs, such that faculty members may teach ethics more effectively.

“What to teach” is another major research direction. Weaver et al. (1997) studied students' perception of ethical issues in hospitality industry and found that conditions of employment, solid waste disposal and sexual harassment are the most important ethical issues. Vallen and Casado (2000) developed 12 core ethical principles and invited general managers in the hospitality industry to rank them; they found that leadership, accountability and commitment to excellence are the three most important ethical principles in the successful operation of a hotel. Yeung (2004) conducted survey with hospitality employees to identify the importance of 39 ethical issues in the hospitality industry and concluded that the two most important issues are “Theft of company property by employees” and “Sexual harassment on the job”. He recommended that schools should consider including the ethical issues in the curricula.

In order to re-evaluate the hospitality curricula, Lefever and Withiam (1998) examined the hospitality industry practitioners' opinions about hospitality education. One of the weaknesses of the curricula pointed out by industry practitioners was the need to keep the curriculum current. Industry practitioners also expressed that they prefer recruiting hospitality students who had not only appropriate technical ability, but also a realistic view of the industry.

Comparatively, there are only a few previous studies focus on legal issues. McConnell & Rutherford (1988) examined the law component of various hospitality curricula in US and studied whether differences among programs reflected basic differences in perceptions about what legal knowledge is necessary to meet the requirements of the hospitality industry. They found that the areas of law ranked most important for students related to “protection of the person and property of guests” and to “the legal duties and responsibilities of innkeepers and restaurants”. Besides, “employment law” was also assigned high importance in the study. The authors concluded the paper with a statement, “since all the programs surveyed acknowledged the importance of this legal background, the only remaining question is why a third of the programs surveyed either assigned elective status to hotel and restaurant law or did not offer such a course at all.” The situation is rather similar with Hong Kong, where most people would agree that legal knowledge is important to students, but not too many schools offer hospitality law courses.

Chathoth & Sharma (2007) studied the core curricula of 44 hospitality and tourism management programs within the US and found that 75% of the programs offer hospitality law courses. Wang et al. (2010) compared the tourism curricula in Australia and China. They

found that out of the 7 universities in Australia, 2 offered Tourism and Hospitality Law subjects and 6 offered Business Law courses. However, among the 43 institutions in China, 32 of them offered Business Law courses; and none of them offered Tourism and Hospitality Law.

Although a wide range of researches have been done over the years, the existing studies either purely focus on ethics; or heavily concentrated on ethics, where legal issues are not the center of the studies. As a result, our knowledge on the law subject curricula in hospitality and tourism programs is limited. One of the reasons why not too many studies examine the legal components in the hospitality and tourism curricula is that law and regulations are tailor-made by countries to suit their local needs; therefore, legal components are not as universal as ethical issues.

## 2.2 Hospitality Law Curricular in Hong Kong

As mentioned above, the PolyU and CUHK are the two universities offer government-funded undergraduate programs in hotel and tourism management. And they both offer law and/or ethics subjects as compulsory subjects. The major study areas include “passenger transport”; “accommodation, catering and ancillary tourism services”; “visitor attractions and visitor management”; “tour operations and travel retailing”; “ethical theories and principles”; “ethical issues in the hospitality industry”; “ethical reasoning in practice in hospitality industry”; “legal procedures”; “hospitality and tourism licensing and regulation, contract laws and the hospitality and tourism industry”; “principles of negligence, negligence and hospitality and tourism practices, protecting guests’ properties”; “rights of guests and innkeeper, liability and sales of food and alcohol”; and “travel agent, airlines, and casino rights and liabilities”.

As for the non-government-funded undergraduate programs, among the five institutions who offer honors degree in hospitality and tourism management, only PolyU SPEED offers law subject as a compulsory subject. The major study areas are “the Hong Kong SAR legal system”; “principles of private law and essential elements of a valid contract”; “terms, discharge and breach of a contract”; “inns, innkeepers and their duties, liabilities and rights”; “agency”; “travel agents and airlines – rights and liabilities”; “sales of goods”; “law of tort of negligence”; “criminal responsibility”; “supply of goods and services”; “product liability”; “planning, environmental and holiday”; and “regulatory environment in China”.

The educational institutions in Hong Kong started to offer higher education programs in hospitality and tourism in the mid-1990s. Lo (2005) presented a comprehensive revision on the development of hospitality and tourism higher education in Hong Kong. Lo pointed out that in order to be more competitive, the PolyU’s School of Hotel and Tourism Management has modified the curricula in 2005. Based on the increasing demand for specialized education in specific sectors of the industry, specialized topics are added, namely, lodging development, foodservice management, convention and exhibition management, aviation services management, and theme park and attractions managements. More importantly, liberal elements such as culture and sociology are added; and legal and ethical issues play major roles.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Survey Design

This is an exploratory study to examine the students' perception of legal and ethics issues in the subject and application of those issues in the workplace.

The questionnaire is created and consists of three sections. In the section I, sixteen legal and ethics issues are listed and adopted on the study of McConnell and Rutherford (1988) and the law subject contents of hospitality and travel industry management programs at PolyU SPEED. Respondents were asked to rate their perception and importance of these items. 5-point Likert-type scales are used – 1 (Least Important) to 5 (Most Important). Section II, three questions were created in this section. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of legal and ethics subjects as the compulsory subject in the hospitality and tourism management programs, the importance of legal and ethics subject compare to other subjects, and the important legal and ethics issues in their workplaces, but did not learn in classes. The open-ended questions were used in this section. Section III, respondents were asked to indicate all possible legal and ethics issues that they have encountered in the workplace. The last section is about the profiles and backgrounds of the respondents and the company that they work for. Seven close-ended questions were asked such as age, gender, position, nature of business, duration of work, company branding, and company affiliation.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Students in the hospitality and tourism undergraduate programs are the target population. Respondents are in their senior years; who have taken the subject, "Business Law" or "Legal and Ethical Aspects in Hospitality and Tourism Industry" before; and have work experiences in the hospitality and tourism sector. The questionnaires were distributed to students in the following semester after they finished one of those courses. Students who have not yet worked were disregarded from the study.

The survey was conducted in December 2013 by the researchers. From the total of 260 students, 162 completed questionnaires were returned, indicating 62.30% response rate. The descriptive analysis was applied to explore the respondents' characteristics, perceptions, and importance. T-test analysis was used to compare the mean differences between respondents' perceptions and importance of legal issues.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Descriptive Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the descriptive profile of respondents and company characteristics. Among the 162 respondents, 22.64% were male, and 77.36% were female. 76.37% of respondents are in the age group of 18-22; 22.64% are in the age group of 23-27; and 0.63% of respondents are between 28-32 years old. 56.96% of them have worked for more than 1 year in their current/latest positions; 16.46% have worked for 3-6 months; 16.46% have worked for 6-12 month and 11.39% have worked for less than 3 months.

Regarding the job natures, 35% of the respondents work in the frontline areas, such as waiter/waitress/captain; 23.75% are in customer services/host positions; 13.75% are in sales positions. As for the company characteristics, 24.53% of respondents work at hotels; 19.50% work at restaurants; 15.71% work at the retail sector; 14.47% work at club houses and 13.84% work at theme parks and travel agency. Among all these companies, 51.92% are international-branded enterprises; and 48.08% are local companies. If we further look into their backgrounds, 62.82% are chain-managed; and 37.18% are independently managed.

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents and Employers

<b>Respondent Characteristics</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Company Characteristics</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Hospitality Sector</b>		
Male	36	22.64	Hotel	39	24.53
Female	123	77.36	Restaurant	31	19.50
			Club House	23	14.47
<b>Age</b>			Theme Park & Travel Agency	22	13.84
18-22	122	76.73	Retail	25	15.71
23-27	36	22.64	Others	19	11.95
28-32	1	0.63			
<b>Position</b>			<b>Duration of working at the latest/current job</b>		
Sales staff	22	13.75	Less than 3 months	18	11.39
Customer Service/ Host	38	23.75	3-6 months	26	16.46
Waiter/Waitress/ Captain	56	35.00	6-12 months	24	15.19
Others	44	27.50	More than 1 year	90	56.96
<b>Company Branding</b>			<b>Affiliation</b>		
Local	75	48.08	Independent	58	37.18
International	81	51.92	Chain	98	62.82

#### 4.2 The Perception and Importance of Legal and Ethics Issues

Respondents are asked to rate their perception and importance of sixteen legal and ethics issues, see Table 2.

“Employment law” has the highest mean (4.46); there are 146 respondents rank the topic at 4 and 5 levels. “Hygiene and safety” has the second highest mean at 4.20, and “duty to protect guests” is in the third place (mean=4.14). Topics ranked at the fourth and fifth places are “crime and criminal responsibility” (mean=4.07) and “duty to protect guest’s property /belongings” (mean=3.99). These findings are similar with the result of the McConnell and Rutherford (1988).

In contrast, “working with attorney/lawyer” is the least important in the respondents’ perception (mean=3.22). “Tourism regulation related to China” and “company law” are the second and third least important topics; their means are 3.32 and 3.51, respectively. The fourth and fifth least important topics are “agency relationship” (mean=3.60) and “intellectual property” (mean=3.70).

As for the importance of legal issues in workplaces, students express that companies emphasize most on “hygiene and safety” (mean=4.03); “duty to protect guests” (mean=3.88); “duty to protect guests’ properties/belongings” (mean=3.78); “liability of the hotel/restaurant/shop” (mean=3.76); and “crime and criminal responsibility” (mean=3.75).

Regarding the legal issues that companies emphasize less, the least important is “working with attorney/lawyer” (mean=2.83); “tourism regulation related to China” (mean=2.97) and “agency relationship” (mean=3.25). “Torts” (mean=3.30) and “company law” (mean=3.32) are ranked as the fourth and fifth least important topics in the workplaces.

The t-values are presented to compare the mean differences between the respondents' perceptions and companies' emphases, see Table 2. Overall results indicate that respondents give higher rankings to the legal issues based on their perceptions than based on their work experiences. According to their perceptions, the means of the sixteen legal issues range from 3.22 to 4.46; and if the issues are ranked according to their employers' emphases, the means range from 2.83 to 4.03. All the mean differences are statistically significant, except "duty to protect guests' properties and belonging" ( $t$ -value = 1.84,  $p > .05$ ). The most significant mean differences are "employment law" ( $t$ -value = 10.33,  $p < .01$ ), "insurance law" ( $t$ -value = 7.00,  $p < .01$ ), and "tort" ( $t$ -value = 6.74,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 2: Perception and Importance of Legal and Ethics Issues

	Legal Issues	Students' perception		Companies' emphasis		t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Duty to protect guests	4.14	0.78	3.88	0.97	2.53*
2	Duty to protect guests' properties / belongings	3.99	0.79	3.78	0.96	1.84
3	Liability of the hotel / restaurant / shop	3.93	0.79	3.76	0.80	3.92**
4	Employment law – e.g. Compensations / benefits	4.46	0.71	3.66	0.98	10.33**
5	Torts – e.g. Nuisance, disturbance	3.80	0.81	3.30	0.87	6.74**
6	Contract of sales of goods	3.78	0.82	3.53	0.91	2.70**
7	Breach of business contract	3.92	0.85	3.48	0.93	5.92**
8	Business ethics –e.g. Pricing discrimination	3.76	0.93	3.41	1.06	3.93**
9	Crime and criminal responsibility	4.07	0.83	3.75	1.05	4.63**
10	Agency relationship	3.60	0.89	3.25	0.94	5.00**
11	Insurance law	3.90	0.88	3.44	1.03	7.00**
12	Hygiene and safety	4.20	0.88	4.03	0.94	2.26*
13	Intellectual property –e.g. Trademark / copyright	3.70	0.92	3.50	1.10	3.14**
14	Tourism regulation related to China	3.32	0.97	2.97	1.20	4.07**
15	Working with attorney / lawyer	3.22	0.89	2.83	1.04	5.68**
16	Company law – e.g. Partnership and corporation	3.51	0.93	3.32	0.96	3.20**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### 4.3 Effectiveness of Law Subject in Hospitality and Tourism Curriculum

Other than ranking the specific legal issues, respondents are also asked to give their views on the law courses offered at the university. Table 3 exhibits the results. In the first question, respondents are asked to give their opinions on whether the law subjects should be assigned under the "compulsory category"; "elective category"; or "neither". Out of 162 respondents, 110 (67.91%) chose "compulsory"; 37 (22.84%) chose "electives"; 4 (2.46%) chose "neither"; and 11 (6.79%) did not have comment.



In the second question, respondents are asked to state whether they agree that the law subject is the most important subject they have taken; 5-point Likert-type scales are used, 5 means strongly agree; and 1 means strongly disagree. The mean is 3.69; and 63% (102 out of 162) respondents agree and strongly agree with the statement.

The third question aims to investigate whether there are some legal issues that are important in the respondents' workplaces, but they did not learn in class. 21% respondents agreed with the statement. In order to collect more useful data, those respondents who agreed with the statement are asked to specify those issues. Their responses are presented in Table 4. 7 respondents wrote "labour law / employment law / human resources issues"; 4 wrote "hygiene / safety / health issues"; 3 wrote "guests' privacy issues"; 2 wrote "insurance issues"; and 1 wrote "guests complains / media".

Table 3: Respondents Views on the Usefulness and Importance of Law Subject

Questions	Compulsory (%)	Elective (%)	Neither (%)	N/A (%)
Q1. In your opinion, the law subject should be assigned to which category?	110 (67.91)	37 (22.84)	4 (2.46)	11 (6.79)
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	
Q2. Among all the subjects you have taken, the law subject is the most important.	3.69	4	0.65	
Q3. There are some legal issues, you think they are important in your workplaces, but you did not learn in class.	2.90	3	0.90	

Note: For Q2 and Q3, 5-point Likert-type scales are used and given the following corresponding values: 1 = "Strongly disagree"; 5 = "Strongly agree".

#### 4.4 Legal Issues Respondent Have Encountered in Workplaces

Out of 162 respondents, 79 have shared their experiences. As shown in Table 4, they have a very wide range of experiences in handling legal issues. Among the 79 respondents, 26 of them have expressed that they have encountered issues in "employment law"; 19 of them have experiences in "hygiene and safety issues"; and 9 have handled issues on "protecting guests".

Table 4: Legal Issues in the Workplaces

Legal and ethics issues	n	%
Employment law / Labor law	26	32.91
Hygiene and safety	19	24.05
Duty to protect guests	9	11.39
Contract law / Contract of sales of goods	6	7.59
Insurance law	4	5.06
Crime and criminal responsibility	3	3.80
Food / wine license	3	3.80

Duty to protect the company	2	2.53
Sexual harassment	2	2.53
Discrimination	2	2.53
Copyright	2	2.53
Agency relationship	1	1.27
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>

## 5 DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper aims to examine how much emphasizes their employers stress on those legal issues, and whether there are any discrepancies between students' perception and reality, the importance of law subject in general, the legal issues students have encountered in their workplaces. In designing subject curricula, involving stakeholders' feedbacks are crucial. The results of this study reveal students' opinions on the hospitality law subject; the legal issues that are important to them and their workplaces; and most importantly, what students want to learn. These results provide the academic community with insights into possible improvements and directions in hospitality law curricula.

First, among the sixteen legal issues, employment law has the highest mean and more than 90% of the respondents think that "employment law" is a very important study area. The major reason is students concern about their rights, such as laws about the wages, working hours, compensations and benefits. These findings echo with Sherwyn's work (2010). "Hygiene and safety"; and "duty to protect guests" are the second and third most important issues on the list. We believe it is mainly because these issues are closely related to the job natures of the respondents, which is in the hospitality and tourism related businesses. As discussed above, most of the respondents are frontline employees, where 35% of them are waiter/waitress/captain; they deal with customers on daily basis. Therefore, issues related to customers' well-beings are their major concerns. However, according students' perceptions, the least important legal issues are "working with attorney/lawyer"; "tourism regulation related to China"; and "company law". The results imply that these topics are too remote from the students' current study and work lives. Their job positions are too junior to handle or involve in such complicated laws and regulations. They might become more important when the respondents are promoted to the management levels in the future.

Compare to the importance of legal issues in workplaces, students pointed out that their employers emphasize most on "hygiene and safety"; "duty to protect guests"; "duty to protect guests' properties / belongings". These findings echo with McConnell and Rutherford (1988), the greatest legal responsibility companies facing in the industry relate to their liability for guest safety and the protection of guests' property. And these rankings are reasonable and predictable. As for the legal issues that companies emphasize less, the least important issues are "working with attorney/lawyer"; "tourism regulation related to China"; and "agency relationship". The results are very similar with students' perceptions. We believe the major reason is the respondents are junior staff and they are not yet exposed to higher level legal issues. Therefore, what they have witnessed are mainly the legal issues related to frontline duties.

In summary, when we focus on the top five and bottom five mean values, the rankings between students' perceptions and companies' emphases are quite similar. Except for the "employment law"; according to students' perceptions, "employment law" is the most

important legal issue; but based on their work experiences, their employers do not value the issue as much as they do.

T-test analysis was used to compare the mean differences between respondents' perceptions and importance of legal issues. The larger t-values mean the greater discrepancies between students' perceptions and realities. The most significant mean differences are "employment law"; "insurance law" and "tort". The notion is the respondents believe that "employment law" is the most important issue; unfortunately, their employers do not share the same level of concern on the issue. In contrast, the non-significant mean difference of "duty to protect guests' properties and belonging" can be explained as both company and staffs see the same distinction of this issue. Most respondents work in the company as a casual or part-time worker, they may not receive the same benefits and compensation compared to full-time staff. This can cause their perceptions toward the company's emphasis is lower than their own perception of employment law.

Second, by asking the respondents to give their views on the law courses offered at the university, we find that majority of the respondents (68%) think that the law subject should be offered as compulsory subject. In the light of this finding, the teaching scholars should consider having the hospitality law and ethics subject as compulsory or elective subjects in the hospitality and tourism programs. Since respondents perceive that the legal and ethics contents are important, the educator should consider developing it as a subject not just as one content in every subject. It is because the contents and in-depth applications will be different.

Third, we find that 21% respondents state that there are some legal issues that are important in their workplaces, but they did not learn in class, namely, 'labour law'; 'hygiene'; 'guests' privacy issues'; 'insurance issues'; 'guests complains/media'. These results exhibit that some legal contents should explore more in those areas. Some legal issues such as "employment laws" and "hygiene and safety" can be introduced and embedded in other subjects (human resources management and food hygiene and safety subjects). The subject design can distinguish the scope of these studies to avoid content overlapping among subjects offered. It is worth to note that except for "guests complains / media", the existing law subject has covered all these issues, namely, "labour law"; "hygiene and safety"; "duty to protect guests"; and "insurance law". These findings imply that students find these topics crucial and useful to their workplaces and they want to learn more. Therefore, the school might need to revisit the curriculum and consider putting more emphases on these topics in the future.

Forth, out of 162 respondents, 79 have shared their experiences on the legal issues they have encountered. The top three issues are "employment law"; "hygiene and safety"; and "duty to protect guests". As mentioned above, one of the criteria on choosing the students to conduct this survey is they must have some work experiences. Therefore, all 162 respondents should have experiences in reading, signing or even negotiating employment contracts with the employers. Interestingly, among the 162 respondents, 26 of them have specified that they have encountered legal issues in employment law; this implies that they might have experienced difficulties in protecting their rights; understanding; or negotiating employments contracts. Bear in mind that these students are all full-time students, so their work experiences are either from their part-time jobs or summer jobs. Compare to the full-time positions contracts; the employment contracts of these kinds of short-term jobs are rather informal and simple. Therefore, students might feel that their labour rights are not fully protected and employers might take advantages of them.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have examined students' views on the hospitality law subject; and importance of different legal issues; based on both their perceptions and reality. Out of 162 respondents, we find that 63% of them agree and strongly agree that the law subject is the most important subject. And 68% state that the law subject should be assigned to the compulsory category.

Out of the sixteen legal issues, students think that the top five most important issues are "employment law"; "hygiene and safety"; "duty to protect guests"; and "crime and criminal responsibility". On the other hand, their employers emphasize most on "hygiene and safety"; "duty to protect guests"; "duty to protect guest's property/belongings"; "liability of the hotel/restaurant/shop"; and "crime and criminal responsibility".

The biggest discrepancy between students' perceptions and their employers' emphases is "employment law". Students think that "employment law" is a very important legal issue; and respondents explicitly state that they have encountered "employment law" issues in their workplaces. However, according to their work experiences, their employers do not value "employment law" as much as they do.

The results are helpful for the program leaders and subject leaders to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the hospitality law subject contents; and the findings should bring some insights in resources planning for different legal topics in the future. Also, considering not too many institutions offer the law subjects in hospitality and tourism programs in Hong Kong; the findings of this paper might provide some new perspectives in curricula planning.

## 7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has some weaknesses and future research will be introduced. Firstly, the study focused from students' perspectives, but did not include another major stakeholder, industry (future employers). The future research can investigate the future employers' perception to see any different findings of legal issues in hospitality and tourism industry. Secondly, most of the students are frontline staff at the junior level; their exposures to legal issues at work place are limited by their job duties and nature of work. Therefore, their perceptions on employers' emphases might be different from the employers' actual emphases. Lastly, this study focused only on one particular institute in Hong Kong, future research is needed when more institutions offer law courses in the hospitality and tourism programs. Hopefully the larger sample size and more diversified respondents' backgrounds could provide further insights on the effectiveness of the law subject in hospitality and tourism programs.

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