Comparative Analysis of the Undergraduate Political Science Research Methodology Course Syllabi among Hong Kong Universities

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Abstract

Although research methodology is a staple and essential requirement of many undergraduate political science programmes worldwide, there are still many intense and ongoing debates among teachers and students on the series of effective learning and teaching approaches and strategies for this subject matter that involve theoretical understanding, procedural knowledge, practical skills, and reflective mindsets. By undergoing a thematic analysis of the course syllabi of the undergraduate political science research methodology courses offered by seven publicly funded universities in Hong Kong, this study aims to first illustrate how individual teachers structure and sequence their courses, followed by highlighting the underlying educational implications. This qualitative study primarily focuses on seven distinct yet interrelated aspects of course design, namely course title, course description, intended learning outcomes, course topics and content, readings and references, assessment tasks, and course format. All these empirical findings can contribute to scholarship by offering greater clarity and consistency in understanding the learning and teaching of research methodology in the context of undergraduate political science education. These findings can also inform future practices in terms of course design, pedagogical best practices, lesson preparation, and assessment development among educators and practitioners.

Keywords: political science education; research methodology education; course syllabus; undergraduate education; Hong Kong

Introduction

Research methodology is among the most intellectually demanding areas of political science education (Engbers, 2016). Nonetheless, it is a staple and essential requirement of many undergraduate political science programmes worldwide (Ishiyama, 2005; Gordon et al., 2009). Unfortunately, a lot of students are not necessarily able to understand, articulate, and appreciate the underlying importance and value of research methodology (Adriaensen et al., 2015), so they are unmotivated or reluctant to engage with this often compulsory yet mundane subject. This problem is vividly illustrated by the question asked by Benson & Blackman (2003): 'Can research methods ever be interesting?' Covering the technical and complex course materials, research methodology courses are typically unpopular among students or even teachers as reflected by the low teaching effectiveness scores and underperformance consistently throughout the years (Pfeffer & Rogalin, 2012). There is still no consensus on how political science teachers should combine theoretical understanding, procedural knowledge, practical skills, and reflective mindsets as the cornerstones of students' methodological expertise (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016).

There are numerous challenges confronting teachers when it comes to shifting students' perceptions of research methodology from anxiety and fear to more positive attitudes that facilitate overall learning and teaching (Wishkoski et al., 2022). Teachers also find it formidable to figure out concrete ways to make the content accessible and learnable as well as useful and engaging, and accommodate the diverse students' backgrounds, interests, and experiences (Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2021). In reality, a lot of teachers simply teach in a way that reflects their personal experience with research, either in how they learnt about conducting research themselves, or where their particular interests and specialisms lie in (Nind & Lewthwaite, 2020). The lingering problem is that students might not receive a comprehensive and competent learning experience, which hinders them from becoming both

critical consumers and knowledgeable producers of all forms of research. Nonetheless, both roles remain equally important in view of the explosion of information and emphasis on knowledge-based development in contemporary society (Barraket, 2005).

Despite the importance and controversies of research methodology education, it has been occupying a relatively marginal and less rigorous position within wider methodological discussions (Nind et al., 2015). Theoretically speaking, although some scholars have examined the ways in which research methodology courses may be taught, these studies have primarily focused on the teaching practices rather than course structure and content (David & Zazkis, 2020). The same situation applies to political science (Wagner et al., 2011). Scholars have not specifically touched upon how the curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and assessment means are interlocking with one another in the learning and teaching of research methodology (Earley, 2014). For those who examine the curriculum design of research methodology education, they usually focus on the relative weighting of quantitative and qualitative components (e.g., Schwartz-Shea, 2003; Thies & Hogan, 2005) or the teaching of a specific method (e.g., Carsey & Harden, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Da Fonseca, 2021). All these fail to address the most fundamental aspects, namely the planning and linking of content (e.g., concept maps, topics, and themes), purpose (e.g., intellectual, social, and personal), and organisation (e.g., scope and sequence) as the building blocks of the curriculum.

Practically speaking, comparing and contrasting the research methodology course structure and content across the universities in the territory will allow teachers to better comprehend how their own course is now delivering when compared to their counterparts. This can also expose them to a wider range of approaches to learning and teaching of research methodology that they are previously unaware of, especially when teachers will teach the knowledge base of research methodology but select the content based on their personal knowledge, preferences, opinions, or demands placed on the course by their

institutions (Homa et al., 2013). This can also promote a spontaneous and sustainable climate of systematic debate, investigation, and evaluation of the learning and teaching of research methodology in the context of political sciences (Gunn, 2017). To this end, one of the accessible ways is analysing the course syllabi (King et al., 2021). This is mainly because the course syllabus delineates and describes the course's purposes, contexts, and expectations, and the teacher's intentions of what, why, and how they will teach certain topics in the course (McNally et al., 2020). It is also an important document for enabling students to organise the components of a course into a conceptual whole (Matejke & Kurke, 1994). As the syllabus represents the initial contact between teachers and students, and functions as a public and permanent product that reflects on the faculty, department, and institution, course syllabi deserve more systematic and frequent review and evaluation (Garavalia et al., 1999).

Currently, there is no extant literature discussing the political science research methodology courses offered by universities in Hong Kong. There are several reasons for choosing Hong Kong as the context of this study, which could help understand how political science research methodology courses could be planned and designed. Given the nature of research methodology courses, in universities in Hong Kong, these courses are most often taught by senior and renowned professors in the field who have extensive experience and high productivity in research as reflected by their funding and publication track record. Their insights into political science research could better situate them to scaffold students approaching research methodology in a more accessible and nuanced manner. For example, they can discuss their first-hand experience of applying certain methods with the students in detail, so as to help them understand the merits and limitations of that method. Moreover, Hong Kong orients itself to both the East and West, which allows it to capitalise on and navigate through the potentials associated with both intellectual traditions and social background. This applies to both the sides of teachers and students as they come from very

diverse backgrounds, which can present valuable opportunities for the learning and teaching of research methodology. All these allow them to offer a rich learning experience for their undergraduate students in their own ways. All these elements reflect the need for one to understand the similarities and differences between universities when actualising political science research methodology education. To these ends, this qualitative study aims to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do teachers from the publicly funded universities in Hong Kong structure and sequence their political science research methodology courses for their students?
2. What are the educational considerations underlying the ways of structuring and sequencing these political science research methodology courses?

This paper is structured as follows. Followed by the contextual background, the next section will review the literature on research methodology education and the content of university course syllabus. The following section will outline the research methodology employed in this study, followed by reporting the series of findings and analyses that emerged from the political science research methodology course syllabi. The paper will then offer some discussions and implications underlying the aforementioned findings and analyses, and eventually end by highlighting the conclusions and limitations of this study.

Literature Review

Research Methodology Education

Some voices call for shaping a cumulative curriculum organised around research methodology as a connecting thread between content and method as well as teaching and research. The underlying principle of such voices is that research methodology class should

not be merely an add-on or an afterthought, but should be integral to the student learning process (Ryan et al, 2014). Nonetheless, in reality, universities still frame it as a stand-alone and one-shot course between introductory and gateway courses, as well as advanced and capstone courses, which often run for a semester or a year and are usually in the sophomore year (Shostak et al., 2010). This reflects universities' failure in balancing the importance of continuous and coherent research methodology education in students' learning. According to Schofield and Burton (2011), a lack of understanding of research methods may reduce student comprehension and potential evaluative skills in other modules with more substantive content. All these illustrate an overarching pedagogical dilemma when it comes to framing research methodology education. While students should build up certain professional and intellectual research knowledge and skills before they move on to other substantive courses, they simultaneously find it formidable to learn research methodology without exploring a specific content area as the requisite foundation (Hardway & Stroud, 2014). Therefore, there is now a growing debate and reflections on research methodology education by the literature.

Although there is no definitive approach exists to promoting student learning of research methodology, Engbers (2016) reiterates four fundamental principles that can be employed when developing the curriculum, which include focusing on the consumption of information, encouraging active engagement, addressing a diverse range of methods, and showing the relevance of the practice for individual advancement. Meanwhile, Whiteman and Oliver (2008) outline three approaches to teaching research methods, namely the practical approach that emphasises rehearsing research techniques and skills, the critical approach that focuses on cultivating critical perspectives towards reading and analysing research, and the practice-based approach that requires reflecting on research-related decisions and actions. Given the concepts, principles, and processes involved in research methodology courses as well as the series of interrelated tasks and complex activities, such learning and

teaching often impose conceptual, procedural, and technical demands on both students and teachers (Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2021). Erlinda and Dewi (2022) further summarise four major challenges of the learning and teaching of research methodology in undergraduate education, namely complex and tiresome course materials, slump interest to comprehend the course materials, lack of connection between methodology and students' education and future career, and dominance of theoretical, passive, and teacher-centred learning and teaching methods. Therefore, this study will evaluate to what extent these principles and approaches are translated to practices, and how the challenges are addressed in practices.

Political Science Research Methodology Education

Many political science scholars increasingly agree that research methodology education is crucial for helping students to learn how they go about answering important questions in the discipline as well as how it is that they have come to know what they know (Bernstein, 2021). A similar perception is manifested in the Wahlke Report (1991), which can be regarded as a fundamental and common guide for political science undergraduate curriculum planners and designers. It highlights that the overarching goal of political science education is to maximise students' capacity to examine the significance and dynamics of political events and governmental processes. Both da Fonseca and Segatto (2019) also suggest the need to show the connection between concepts and practice and encourage students to critically reflect on political science problems when teaching research methods. Therefore, in order to ensure that all students can possess the political science majors and acquire the analytic capacity, knowledge, and skills necessary to read and comprehend contemporary political analyses, universities have to help students gain knowledge in diverse and alternative methods of inequiry, including elements of research design, methods, and analysis. Similarly,

Foster and Gunn (2017) highlight that research methodology courses help students acquire the practical skills necessary for solving a wide range of real-life problems and challenges related to political science. Given the scope and nature of research methodology education, its delivery often poses challenges that are somewhat different from many other more content-based courses in the university curriculum (Adriaensen et al., 2015).

While the discipline itself has appreciated the importance of mastering research methods, many undergraduate students still come across difficulties in completing a research method course and fail to understand its long-term usefulness in and outside academia. For instance, Bergbower (2017) highlights that students find it intimidating to learn a wide range of new topics and abstract concepts like variables, hypotheses, validity, measurement, and regression. Meanwhile, Howard and Brad (2015) suggest that many students treat the course as a series of isolated facts and mechanical skills that are trivial or irrelevant to their study or topical enquiry. This is especially a problem to the political science discipline since students often expect to delve into their topical interest and dramatical political events rather than understanding how each method or each mechanical skill works. An illustrative instance would be that students would rather learn why the Soviet Union falls rather than understand when a regression test fails. This problem is summarised by Oldmixon (2018, p. 249) that '[students'] sense of the discipline is heavy on the "politics" and light on the "science'.' Eventually, students may not even wish to learn the more detailed and nuanced techniques of analysis (Dickovick, 2009). All these findings point to a need to help students maintain their interest in research methodology and help them understand the course's importance.

Another important point made by literature examining political science research methodology education is that the curriculum should remain comprehensive and balanced to reflect the complex and nuanced nature of the wide range of political science research and problems. Sogunro (2002) suggests that a number of students often revert the order of

methods and problems as they start to think what is/are the method(s) that they have learnt, rather than what method(s) is/are the most appropriate for their research. This could be problematic, given the multi-faceted nature of political science problems. In view of this situation, Coronel Lamas and Boza (2007) point out that research methodology course teachers should arm students with the knowledge and expertise to choose and utilise the research methods available to them, and recognise and address the specific objectives and limitations of the investigations themselves. Meanwhile, advocating methodological diversity and pluralism can resolve the problem addressed by Sullivan and De Bruin (2023), which is the case that many political science students are often unaware of the wide range of research methods available for conducting their inquiry in an innovative and original manner when they are completing their senior thesis. Addressing the curriculum design helps inform whether students can potentially grasp a clear understanding of different research methods and possess the ability to investigate a particular problem using an appropriate lens.

Content of the University Course Syllabus

As the first point of interaction, the primary goal of a syllabus is to communicate the course information (Brown et al., 2013). To students, they are interested in what the course covers, how the course is taught, and most crucially how they are assessed. To teachers, they will focus on planning for the course, setting expectations and requirements for students, and fitting the course with the larger curriculum. To administrators, they want to ensure that there are mechanisms on how to resolve potential disputes, and evidence for maintaining programme accreditation (Wagner et al., 2022). Therefore, Parkes and Harris (2002) summarise three key functions of a syllabus, namely serving as a contract, a permanent record, and an aid to student learning. This is also echoed by Dickovick (2009) who suggests

that political science students are motivated to treat syllabi as “primary source documents” about course organization, so there is a need to clearly outline the topical content treated and the scientific principles being taught. Although every instructor offers their students a course syllabus, the variations and differences reflect that there is no standardised way of writing up an effective syllabus (Kazimi et al., 2019). Therefore, evaluating these syllabi is an important means for this study to first sample how courses are structured and presented to students, followed by understanding how to strengthen and improve them accordingly.

Nonetheless, Meulen (2017) summarises some dimensions that are commonly appearing in a typical syllabus. The first dimension is general course information, which includes the course title, terms and semesters of offering, as well as name and contact details of instructors, tutors, and demonstrators. The second dimension is course nature and purposes, which highlights the course description, course goals, objectives, and outcomes, as well as alignment with the curricular, programme, and degree requirements. The third dimension is a detailed course plan and schedule, which outlines all the relevant topics and dates. The fourth dimension is learning expectations and environments, which involve the relevant pedagogical activities and assessment tasks. The last dimension is course policies, which include detailed information about the technical, classroom, and institutional aspects. Most importantly, all these five dimensions should be carefully and constructively aligned for the sake of positioning students into a dense web of learning. Therefore, this analytical framework is helpful for examining the patterns and variations that emerged from the series of research methodology course syllabi contributed by teachers in this study.

Course syllabi have now become more extensive, detailed, and learning-centred, which become an important source of information for revealing teachers’ articulated learning and teaching goals and means (Grauerholz & Gibson, 2006). There are a series of prior empirical studies conducted on the research methodology course syllabus in the social

sciences discipline, such as criminology (e.g., Sullivan & Maxfield, 2003), journalism (e.g., Lu, 2007), psychology (e.g., Landrum & Smith, 2007; Seligman, 2020a), and sociology (e.g., Payne et al., 1989; Valentin & Grauerholz, 2019). While the political science discipline has generally agreed that research methodology constitutes an essential part of the discipline, there is scant attention on the analysis of research methodology syllabus as part of the learning and teaching elements. Meanwhile, a number of these aforementioned discussions are either generically justifying the principles and directions underlying general experience or briefly comparing the features across multiple courses. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of various courses and unfold their underlying considerations at the same time. All these empirical research gaps lead to the overarching design of this study, which is comparing the undergraduate political science research methodology course syllabi offered by the publicly funded universities in Hong Kong, followed by discussing the educational implications of the offering of political science research methodology education.

Research Methodology

Sampling Frame

This qualitative study focuses on the research methodology course offered for political science students among the publicly funded universities in Hong Kong, which is in either the fall or spring semester in the 2022/2023 academic year. These publicly funded universities are chosen as a cluster because of their comparably higher recognition over privately funded universities and self-finance colleges which most of them do not even have international standing and global ranking (Lo et al., 2016; Wut et al., 2022). In Hong Kong, a local concept of the ‘Big Eight’ was coined in society and widely used in media articles to collectively refer to these eight publicly funded universities. Given the long-standing practices of institutional

autonomy and academic freedom, there is never a centralised system imposed on governing individual universities in Hong Kong. Each of them can freely come up with their own programmes and curriculum for their students. In the case of political science, although individual teachers may not be involved in the planning and design of the overall curriculum at the faculty or departmental level, they still have the agency to write up their own syllabi for their own courses, which involves their pedagogical considerations and judgments.

In order to obtain the course syllabi for analysis, both authors first reviewed the faculty/department websites and utilised the course catalogues or descriptions from the programme websites to identify the relevant course. The course syllabus from each university was determined to be a unit of analysis. All the syllabi included in this study are collected from two sources. The first is those available online for free public access (Universities A to C), while the second is those requested by both authors via individual email contact with the identifiable course teacher (Universities D to G). In the end, only one university course teacher turned down the request on the grounds of copyright and the university's policies regarding course documents. This results in seven course syllabi from seven different universities, whereas their identification codes are randomly allocated by both authors from Universities A to G. To protect confidentiality, given the small sample size of this study, the details for each of the universities and courses will not be revealed.

Both authors acknowledge the inevitably small sample size of this study. It is noted that there are only eight publicly funded (University Grants Committee-funded) universities in Hong Kong (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Lingnan University, and The University of Hong Kong). Moreover, undergraduate programmes across these universities tend to offer general research methods courses instead of advanced specific

methods courses (e.g., an individual course on sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and discourse analysis, etc.), so the sample size of courses is also limited.

Data Analysis

The data involved in this study is the written collected syllabi, which were further analysed by the thematic analysis approach with inductive and deductive coding of the content. To begin the coding process, the five dimensions of a typical course syllabus proposed by Meulen (2017) were first constructed into coding frames to guide the initial analysis. Both authors subsequently defined and refined the inductive categories and codes that had emerged from the data by going through all the syllabi back and forth to ensure the overall completeness and accuracy of all the categories and codes. Both authors have eventually finalised the final seven categories with the subsequent codes, namely course title, course description, intended learning outcomes, course topics and content, readings and references, assessment tasks, and course format. As assisted by the NVivo 11 software, the whole coding process applied three concurrent flows of data analysis components, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification as suggested by Miles et al. (2014). To ensure the trustworthiness and rigorousness of this qualitative study, both authors started analysing an initial subset of syllabi, followed by inviting two colleagues with relevant and extensive research and teaching experience in the field of political science education to analyse the same subset. Both authors met both colleagues separately multiple times to review, discuss, refine, and finalise the categories and codes (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Meanwhile, both authors created an audit trail by reporting all the details on the research instruments, data collection, and data analysis in order for this study to be easily reproduced by other interested researchers in the future (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004).

Findings and Analyses

Course Title

Course title allows one to form an initial impression towards the course as it is the first and most direct thing to focus on. Students often use it as a cue to make inferences about the course's essence and value. Therefore, the course title should adequately reflect the overarching course content and approach (Kulkarni & Vinuales, 2020). In this study, University D is the only case that puts forward the notion of 'research methodology' in the course title, which signifies the emphasis on its more epistemological and ontological understanding of the research concepts and knowledge. The remaining universities simply use the notion of 'research methods' to highlight the various procedural and technical skills and strategies in conducting research (Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2021). It should be noted that the terms 'methodology' and 'methods' are theoretically different in scope, form, and function. The former is a broader term which refers to the totality of all methodological discussions, while the latter is a narrower term which refers to the tools that enable the scientific identification of facts (e.g., regression analysis, content analysis, sentiment analysis) (Lauer, 2021). Nonetheless, it is now becoming more common for one, even among many experienced researchers in the field, to use both constructs in an interchangeable manner (Daniel et al., 2018). Another case is University G which includes the notion of 'empirical political analysis', which signifies that the course goes beyond theories and logics, but is based on and concerned with observation and experience derived from concrete and verifiable evidence. This is quite different from other courses which are more general in nature. As the targeted audience for each course slightly varies with the specific institutional arrangement, some courses like Universities A, B, C, and E are broadly framed under the domains of society and social sciences, while some courses like Universities D, F, and G are

specifically framed under the domains of politics and public administration. All these reflect that there are slightly different emphases on the overall framing of research methodology courses as the targeted recipients for each of the universities.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Course Description

Course description is another important piece of information about the course, apart from the course title. The course description offers a brief and general overview of the course, which shows students the basics of what will be focused on and covered in the course, and allows them to understand the potential benefits and relevance to them (Merchán Tamayo et al., 2022). In this study, there are three common components highlighted by all universities, namely assumptions and rationales as well as logic and intuition behind different kinds of research methods, ways of measuring variables and collecting data, as well as procedures for analysing and interpreting data. In general, some universities like Universities B, C, and G offer a more succinct description of less than 100 words, while some universities like Universities A, D, E, and F offer a more elaborate one of more than 100 words. All these align with the entanglement of knowing, doing, and being throughout the whole course (Botelho & Felis, 2022). Meanwhile, the aforementioned three components are coherent with some of the general directions of educating political science students to systematically and rigorously apply the basic scientific method of asking questions, generating theories and hypotheses, collecting data, and analysing results, with the consideration of the underlying epistemological assumptions, methodological requirements, as well as reasoning logics that lead to the resulting body of knowledge (Elman et al., 2015). As research methodology is

learnt and taught along these general directions, students can become both critical research consumers and knowledgeable research producers (Earley, 2014).

Meanwhile, equipping students with relevant methodological literacy can address their imbalanced sense of the discipline as heavy on the side of politics while light on the side of science (Oldmixon, 2018). This requires teachers to touch upon how the rules of science are borrowed and incorporated into the study of politics (Bergbower, 2017). In this study, five universities, namely Universities A, B, D, F, and G, highlight the imperative for students to learn politics objectively, rationally, and systematically through scientific methods. The incorporation of rigorous logic, application of systematic scientific methods, learning of meticulous data analysis techniques, and the emergence of evidence-based conclusions are all important for eradicating students' misconception that the learning of political science consists solely of superficial and speculative discussions of various political topics and issues (Coronel Llamas & Boza, 2011). The understanding of the basic and central concept of empirical research in political science is important for students as it is an essential part of all substance knowledge and scientific thinking. They need to understand how these knowledge and thinking emerged, which is what constitutes methodology. The problems with understanding on a general methodological level may also precede the problems in a more detailed manner, meaning that students have problems with a research-related concept that may not only be caused by the concept itself, but also by the challenges of placing and understanding it in the wider context. While research methodology learning and development of scientific thinking should always come together as a holistic whole, the latter has always been separated from the former in everyday learning and teaching (Murtonen, 2015). Nonetheless, both share similar perspectives in terms of possessing a mature understanding of the epistemological foundations of science, recognising scientific knowledge as constructed by humans, and engaging in skilled argumentation (Kuhn et al., 2008). Therefore, it is

important for the research methodology courses to emphasise the scientific nature of political science.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Intended Learning Outcomes

The intended learning outcomes refer to the knowledge, skills and dispositions, as well as values and attitudes that students take with them from the learning experience. They set the tone for the course and relay expectations for student outcomes (Schoepp, 2019). They also indicate to students what to expect from the flow and content of the course, and guide the pedagogy and assessment they will receive (Hussey & Smith, 2003). In Hong Kong, the outcomes-based approach to student learning is adopted across all Hong Kong universities (Kennedy, 2011). In this study, all the universities state around three to four intended learning outcomes for their courses. Four universities, namely Universities A, C, F, and G, connect their course learning outcomes with respective assessment items to assess students' attainment of these outcomes at the end of the course. Meanwhile, two universities, namely Universities A and F, further connect and align these course learning outcomes with the wider programmatic and even institutional learning outcomes. While there are many active verbs used by each course teacher when framing the intended learning outcomes for their methodology courses, there are some common patterns by mapping against the six levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). The first level is remembering and understanding, which includes identify; recognise; understand; describe; articulate; and specify. Students need to be able to retrieve relevant knowledge and determine the meaning of the series of research concepts. The second level is application and analysis, which includes select; write; formulate; collect; follow; demonstrate; use; find; show; conduct; and

pilot. Students need to be able to carry out the relevant research procedures and use the instruments. The third level is analysis and evaluation, which includes evaluate; assess; critique; and appreciate. Students need to be able to analyse and formulate research-related judgments based on criteria and standards. The last level is creation, which includes design; conceptualise; develop; construct; and explore. Students need to be able to put all the elements together to form novel, coherent, and original research-related products. All these reflect the optimal balance of factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge in a typical research methodology course.

[Insert Table 3 Here]

Course Topics and Content

Many universities oppose the diametrically opposed paradigm stance by presenting students with a qualitative-quantitative continuum, such that they can learn, use, and appreciate both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies simultaneously at different levels within a mixed methods framework (Christ, 2009). In this study, all universities have a balanced coverage of both areas, except for University B which is primarily covering survey, experimentation, and quantitative analysis. This is important as the use of multiple methods has emerged as a trend in the discipline (Emmons & Moravcsik, 2020). Political science teachers should prepare their students for a professional world that increasingly uses mixed methods and demands of such competencies. Nonetheless, it is found that some political science methodology courses tend to concentrate on quantitative designs and statistical analyses, and ignore qualitative methods and techniques (Schildkraut, 2004). There was also

a misconception that qualitative methods are less generally applicable and involve less math, so students can easily pick up such methods and no faculty guidance is needed (Schwartz-Shea, 2003). Students should understand that both quantitative and qualitative analyses can be systematics, rigorous, and subtle, but also superficial, misapplied, and ineffective on some occasions (Schwartz-Shea, 2003). By understanding that quantitative and qualitative methods are not inherently incompatible but can be complementary, students and future researchers can learn to combine the strengths of different methods and avoid their corresponding shortcomings (Gerring, 2017).

Many undergraduate students often feel stressed, uncertain, and anxious when they are being introduced to mathematically and statistically based ideas. Even doctoral students would often avoid mathematics topics, not to mention undergraduate students doing social science (Schwartz-Shea, 2003). This is especially the case in the political science discipline because many students consider it a qualitative subject and they take political science to avoid math and statistics (Murphy, 2015). Such statistical anxiety also often characterises many students' predisposition regarding a methods course (Adriaensen et al., 2015), whereas these negative perceptions could further extend to and influence other parts of the research methodology learning trajectory (Papanastasiou & Zembylas, 2008). Therefore, in this study, one of the effective approaches used by Universities A and F is starting the qualitative before the quantitative side. For example, University F covers field research and case studies before survey research and survey-experimental research. To students, learning one method per week can reduce their cognitive load and allow them to better process the complex information in a more efficient manner. As aligned with Bernstein and Allen (2013), these universities start the course with qualitative methodologies and then proceed to quantitative techniques, such that students can start off within their comfort zone before pushing them outside it. A more accessible and successful start allows students to feel more encouraged and

confident before progressing to the more challenging part of the course. Another approach used by all universities is focusing on one method or component of the research process each week. For example, University E divides some of the weeks based on conceptual themes like research topics and questions, literature review, research integrity and ethics, questionnaire design, statistical software, and in-depth interviews. Either way is conducive for students to build their abstract and complex research-related knowledge gradually and progressively in more complex cognitive schemata, given that these knowledge are presented in a network of more accessible knowledge, and there is sufficient time and space for these abstract knowledge to mature and deepen along their learning trajectory. After all, the key is that the very basics of research knowledge need to first be understood before students can develop more sophisticated views of research in their senior years (Broers, 2002).

The inclusion of hands-on workshops with both demonstrations and practical exercises is always important for allowing students to know how to process, analyse, and interpret the data collected, which nonetheless are matters that cannot easily be learnt by reading books (Bourque & Bourdon, 2017). In this study, for all universities, there is a separate component of data analysis workshop which aims to equip students with the competence to undergo data analysis. For the quantitative part, while all universities offer IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS) workshops, which is an introductory statistical software for processing and interpreting data, University F is the only exception that offers R workshops instead, which is a more common yet sophisticated statistical computing and graphics software in the political science research community (Li, 2021). The issue of statistics anxiety is prevalent among students, which can have a negative impact on student satisfaction, performance, and retention. Therefore, the use of novice-friendly SPSS in smaller classroom settings allows teachers to offer students explicit support and direct interventions by reviewing materials, answering questions, and offering feedback, which can

better improve cognitive understanding and attitudinal perceptions among students. Students can install and operate the software, and familiarise themselves with its interface, basic functions, and different operations and processes before using it to complete their course assignments (Dinauer, 2018). For the qualitative part, some Universities C, D, E, and G, particularly include a few sessions on conducting qualitative data analysis. This is crucial for addressing students' limited and biased experience of qualitative analysis, which can lower their appreciation of qualitative analysis, and lead them to possess an ill-perception that qualitative methods are much easier and less rigorous than quantitative methods (Turner et al., 2018).

[Insert Table 4 Here]

Readings and References

University courses often include a few accessible textbooks for students' general references for the learning and teaching of research methodology. The aim is to offer students a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the content explored and discussed throughout the course, such that students can consult whenever they have any questions and refer to them as they are working on the course assignments (Seligman, 2020b). In this study, three of the most commonly used reference books are *The Basics of Social Research* (Universities A and B) and *The Practice of Social Research* (Universities B, C, D, E, and F) written by Earl Babbie as well as *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* written by Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten (Universities F and G). All three books serve as a standard introduction to empirical social science or even specifically political science research by presenting the basics and fundamentals, and exposing students to the research language, principles, methods, and strategies. However, it is also seen that each of the universities offers their

students a common learning ground by selecting core readings from various sources to facilitate students' engagement with substantive issues of the subject. One of the common practices is assigning traditional textbooks in the form of excerpts rather than the entire book, especially when there is no standardised or even the best way of covering, structuring, and presenting the content within the field of research methodology, given that each approach has its positive aspects and its deficiencies (Hubbell, 1994). Another common practice is selecting articles from both academic and non-academic sources which are more recently published or updated, which can ensure that the learning and teaching can keep abreast of the most recent developments in the field (Rathod & Cassel, 2012).

In this study, in University F, there are several additional applications readings each week, which aims to give students a sense of how various experienced researchers approach different interesting questions using the method covered in that week. Many of these are articles carefully chosen from top-tiered political science journals, which aim to capture student interest and attention, and expose them to methodological considerations and issues in the individual and specific context of the research problem concerned (McKelvie & Standing, 2018). Students can realise the rationales and justifications offered by the researchers for the methods that are selected and the ways in which they are used. They can also start to familiarise themselves with and internalise the relevant research language and culture as reflected by these authentic works. At the same time, the sharp awareness of what remains unknown in the research world is the core of political science scholarship, which is critiquing the possible weaknesses in the fabric of current knowledge, and looking for better knowledge and understanding (Verburgh et al., 2007). Therefore, these readings expose students to the edges and limits of knowledge, and how researchers are attempting to tackle the gaps and issues, students can be better induced into the process of limits and the

relationships of the subject, and the steps needed for acquiring and validating knowledge (Winch, 2013).

Another instance in this study is University D which offers an appendix outlining a list of useful online political science methods resources for students' further references. The list includes the Asian Barometer Survey, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House, YouGov, British Election Study Data Playground, FiveThirtyEight, Polity IV Project, V-Dem Institute, Introduction to Statistics Softwares (Econometrics Academy), Discovering Statistics Using SPSS, European Social Survey, and Eurobarometre. The provision of such additional resources facilitate students' exploration of statistical analysis software and data sets useful for researching political science topics, such as democracy, civil liberty, and public opinion. It is also useful for experienced researchers to compile a systematic list of the relevant resources that remain fragmented in the online world, which match the learning expectations and needs of the novice students (Pencek, 2000). As research methodology courses should build a solid foundation that allows students to explore, comprehend, and analyse different aspects of political science by themselves, directing them to these credible, professional, and navigable tools and resources, either general or discipline-specific ones, are important. This can empower students as the digital natives of the new generation to locate, use, manipulate, and cite these useful online resources along their future political science inquiry trajectory, which are important aspects of self-regulating their learning appropriately in the long run (Maybee, 2015).

[Insert Table 5 Here]

Assessment Tasks

Assessment must inform and be an integral part of the learning and teaching process, but not simply a final and judgemental event, meaning that it should remain consistent with and afforded by the corresponding understanding of learning and teaching (Wiliam, 2011). In the context of research methodology education, the incorporation of research-related assessment tasks is one of the most direct ways to get students familiar with what, why, and how to do research (Vandiver & Walsh, 2010). Therefore, one of the most common assessments across universities is requiring students to write up a research proposal by the end of the semester. This is a common alternative to small complete studies or projects that involve obtaining ethical approval as well as collecting and data analysis, which is not possible in a semester-long course (Saeed et al., 2021). To this end, students need to utilise a real-world topic for applying, testing, and reflecting on the academic principles historically taught in research methodology classes (Engbers, 2016). Under the principle of learning-by-doing, such experiential and hands-on projects allow students to complete practice steps of conducting research, which involves considering what to include and how to structure a clear plan for research. As students can focus on a topic that engages them the most, this exercise can foster their feelings of inspiration, ownership, and accomplishment throughout the whole process (Crowe et al., 2014). In this study, a number of universities like Universities B, D, E, and F break down the proposal into different sections that are due at intervals over the semester, such as research question, literature review, and research design. By breaking such an intimidating task into smaller and more manageable parts, novice students can engage and master the course material incrementally and relatively painlessly (Graves et al., 2010). Meanwhile, anchoring the course around the proposal allows teachers to scaffold through the use of iterative exercises leading to the final research proposal, which can further reinforce the proper apprehension of the often-challenging materials (Slocum-Schaffer & Bohrer, 2021). Furthermore, the continuous provision of feedback allows any issues among students

to be promptly addressed, which can further encourage engagement and self-regulation (Horey et al., 2022). Students can also foster their fluency and proficiency in utilising research language in a low-stake manner when they are writing individual sections of their proposals with multiple drafts before their final submission (Pfeffer & Rogalin, 2012).

Another common assessment utilised by many universities in this study is the use of quizzes, tests, and examinations to assess students' understanding of the basic concepts, case studies, and debates encountered throughout the course (Turner et al., 2018). University D offers in a formative manner throughout the semester, Universities C, E, F, and G offer in a summative manner at the end of the semester, and University A uses both types of assessment. Therefore, among all universities, University A is an illustrative example to understand the rationales behind the use of in-class quizzes as well as take-home mid-term and final tests in the course. The former in the format of multiple-choice questions can ascertain students' understanding of research design and specific methods, while the latter in the format of open-ended questions ascertain students' research-related knowledge and ability to apply it to social research questions. All these align with Seligman (2020c) who claims that examinations in research methodology courses can be delivered in multiple formats to test for students' knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. At the same time, formative assessments can offer information about where students are in their learning, and diagnose and address their gaps and errors in the subsequent step of teaching. Meanwhile, summative assessments can determine how well students have mastered the content at the end of the semester (Boaler & Anderson, 2018).

An interesting assessment incorporated by University B in this study is its reading report, which requires students to read three papers chosen from the reading list under the same topic and write a three-page report. They need to summarise the papers, including their

research questions, contributions, data, methods, and conclusions; verify how the data or method help address the problem; and think about the reasons for choosing the methods in the papers and whether other methods are applicable using the same data for the same research question. According to Chen et al. (2016), the diversity and complexity of research outcomes, especially knowledge generated and conclusions drawn, are due to the variations in research objectives, paradigms, and orientations adopted. Therefore, students need to be systematically and properly trained on how to conduct an evaluation that balances breadth and depth, rigour and consistency, clarity and brevity, as well as analysis and synthesis. This is also an ideal transitional task for increasing students' readiness to turn from a critical consumer of research to an effective product of research, which requires them to have a deeper understanding of the research process (Gunn, 2017). As political science curricula emphasise understanding various aspects of research, students should develop critical awareness when engaging with and communicating about the scholarship (Maybee, 2015).

In this study, another interesting assessment incorporated by University F is its weekly applications diary, which requires students to identify one of the most important ideas they learnt that week, and undergo creative and thoughtful reflections on how they have applied it or seen that idea applying itself in their own life encounters. This aligns with Wishkoski et al. (2022) who argue for the importance of students acquiring perspectives on how research might benefit them individually and professionally, and realising how an empirical mindset is a means of understanding and constructing the world surrounding them. Meanwhile, students are encouraged to contextualise these newly learnt concepts that might appear abstract and theoretical as well as mechanical and dry at first glance into a variety of more familiar and engaging topics in the real-world context (Fisher & Justwan, 2018). Such student-centred assessment also invites students to be creative and expressive by using tables, drawings, diagrams, pictures, and comics to present their ideas and thoughts, which can

further encourage students' motivation and engagement as well as ownership and voice in their learning as something personal and unique as constructed by their own actions and experiences. Since sense-making is always subconscious, active reflection is needed for students' mental models and knowledge awareness to become explicit. Therefore, the incorporation of reflection allows students to observe, crystallise and document the different parts of the research methodology learning journey and how they fit together, which include their positions, thoughts, feelings and changes (Schraw & Dennison, 1994).

[Insert Table 6 Here]

Grading Rubrics

Grading rubrics with specific criteria and weighting proportions are often presented in tabular form or prose to show students what instructors would seek, expect, and evaluate in their assignments (Smith & Razzouk, 1993). These rubrics can also make the learning targets for complex tasks much clearer, ensure the assessment process is more accurate and much fairer, and offer students a tool for self-assessment and peer feedback (Wolf & Stevens, 2007). This is particularly important for methodology teaching because the format of methodology assessments is often presented in a different format when compared to traditional essays, reviews, presentations, or policy papers that are more popular in political science learning and teaching. For instance, research methodology assessments might be taken in the form of research proposals, problem sets, and group research projects that are encountered by students for the very first time in their study (Hosein & Rao, 2014).

Nonetheless, in this study, some universities like Universities D and F are seemingly cut-and-pasted from the template offered by the university, faculty, or department, which

show no specific details or applicability to the individual assignment in the course (Graves et al., 2010). Some universities like Universities B and C even include no grading rubrics at all. The three exceptional cases are Universities A, E, and G, which show the detailed scoring rubrics for the research proposal in University E as well as all assessment components in Universities A and G. For instance, in University E, a research proposal scoring a distinction (Grade A) need to satisfy all the following criteria, namely the focus or problem statement is clear and concise, and brings out the significance of the project; the summary of the literature is clear and concisely written; the research question and/or objectives or hypotheses are clearly stated and are answerable; the research methods used are appropriate for answering the research question and are described in adequate details; as well as the visual presentation of the proposal (citation, spelling, punctuation, line spacing, and paragraphs) is clear, tidy, and accurate. Another example is in University G, where an excellent class participation (Grade A) needs to satisfy all the following criteria, namely initiation of contribution more than once in each session; comments are always insightful and constructive, balanced between general impressions and opinions, and specific and thoughtful criticisms or contributions; as well as attentive listening when others present as shown by comments that build on others' remarks. Therefore, the provision of all these explicit and clear rubrics in the context of research methodology classes helps teachers not only to assess students' work effectively but also helps students better learn knowledge (Chowdhury, 2019). It is also crucial for eliminating students' anxiety about the learning of methods and the assessment of their knowledge, especially when they often find this subject mundane and confusing as discussed.

[Insert Table 7 Here]

Course Format

One of the conventional practices adopted by universities covered by this study is splitting the course into lectures and tutorials. In general, more-structured and teacher-centred lectures serve as the broad and solid foundation for equipping students with the factual knowledge to engage in various less-guided and student-centred learning tasks during tutorials (Archer & Miller, 2011). For the lectures, some universities like Universities B and E adopt a blended or flipped learning approach by preparing a series of online lecture videos, which allows students to watch before the face-to-face tutorials as preparation or even revisit them again after tutorials as consolidation. As for the tutorials, some universities like Universities B and F frame them on the basis of the research methodology proposal that students need to work on throughout the semester. For instance, in University B, students need to present their research proposal twice, whereas the first one in the middle of the semester is about their preliminary area and significance, while the second one at the end of their semester is about their research question, data, and promising research design. A similar approach is found in University F as students need to present a project blueprint in the middle of the semester, which shares some preliminary ideas and directions of the research proposal, and a final presentation at the end of the semester, which offers a vivid summary of the core contents of the research proposal. As methodology tends to be taught lecture by lecture, students may easily separate the theory and practice of research by perceiving that particular methods have generic strengths and weaknesses that can be learned by rote rather than through practice and/or critique (Ryan et al., 2014). Nonetheless, conducting novel research involves formulating real decisions and tough compromises in the context of mild or moderate ambiguity and complexity, it is necessary to support students' pragmatic and emotional needs in a smaller classroom setting (Lundahl, 2008). The continuous interactions afforded by the tutorials allow students to understand how real-world problems can be answered using

different approaches, especially how each approach produces different results and/or emphases. Students can subsequently engage in reflection and discussion of their sharing to further internalise and deepen their learning as they highlight the advantages and disadvantages as well as contributions and trade-offs of each unique approach (Engbers, 2016). Meanwhile, the reading and critique of their counterparts' work allow students to obtain critical and constructive comments and suggestions in a comfortable collegial setting. Students can explore different perspectives and think more broadly when preparing their own research proposals (Horey et al., 2022). All these collaborative learning and information sharing can reduce students' feelings of isolation and alienation, especially in a large class setting (Longmore et al., 1996). Such ethos of collective engagement and collaboration shaped and sustained by students in the knowledge-building community can further enhance their enthusiasm and ability regarding research methodology (Shostak et al., 2010).

In this study, another good practice reflected by University E and F is the inclusion of guest speakers to further illustrate to students the broad diversity of methodological approaches as well as the nexus of research and practice applied by both scholars and practitioners in the real world. It also aims to show students that researchers are never flawless and all-knowing experts, but inquiring and life-long learners who will also struggle, fail, make mistakes, and twist as students when learning research methods. This is the personal backstage that should be unfolded and shared with students at the start of their research trajectory (Harvey et al., 2017). In these sessions, students even receive the opportunity to ask questions and interact with these speakers regarding their first-hand and tactical research experience, which involves all sorts of decision-making and compromises (Pfeffer & Rogalin, 2012). Such sharing also reflects the messiness and complicated issues that researchers deal with as part of their daily practices, which are nonetheless missing among many publications due to the latter's sanitised and idealised nature (Mckinley, 2019).

Students can subsequently learn to become more comfortable in admitting gaps in their knowledge and understanding, and more open-minded in bearing risks to try out new ways of thinking, questioning, and challenging the well-established authority and dogma through research (Peters et al., 2003). As research methodology is an incomplete and ever-evolving enterprise, students should walk away from the course with the ability to continue learning about it and keep up with the trends. They need to be equipped with a researcher's mind that allows them to further explore and grow as their knowledge and practice with research continue and deepen (Earley, 2007).

[Insert Table 8 Here]

Discussions and Implications

As syllabi have become increasingly mandatory, contractual, and elaborate in the university setting, they are now becoming more valuable material artefacts for further investigation among many educational researchers and practitioners (Valentin & Grauerholz, 2019). These syllabi created prior to the course are as crucial as what happens during the course, which requires teachers to step back and reflect on what they have created (Earley, 2007). After all, all the elements that exist within the syllabus indicate what the instructor considers to be the most important and central to their courses (Grauerholz & Gibson, 2006). However, the examination of political science research methodology course syllabi is not easily observed, not to mention those in the context of Hong Kong. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to explore how teachers from the publicly funded universities in Hong Kong structure and sequence their political science research methodology courses for their students. It can also offer some insights in terms of how to address the three major domains of controversies associated with research methodology education, which are research knowledge dispositions

and methodological competencies; the complexity of epistemological understanding of research and its applicability in life, as well as a variety of ideological conceptions of research held by teachers (Matos et al., 2023). These insights are not only useful for universities in Hong Kong to learn from each other's best practice and identify their shortcomings, but they also allow institutions from other countries to refine and modify their research methodology education. Meanwhile, research methodology education is also playing a more important role in nurturing future talents and enriching the political science discipline. Therefore, the enhancement of the methodology curriculum would improve the richness, comprehensiveness, rigour, and diversity of the discipline (Emmons & Moravcsik, 2020), while also enhancing students' research-method skills for addressing theoretical and practical political and policy problems after their graduation (da Fonseca & Segatto, 2021). This implies that studying how different institutions implement their research methodology education helps the wider political science community, regardless of their specific learning system, advance their ambition of training professional researchers and successful practitioners. By unfolding the importance of research methodology education, the education community can also eliminate political science students' misconception that such courses are useless or unrelated to their study and personal development.

Based on the course syllabi prepared by the seven publicly funded universities in Hong Kong as this study's sample, there is a diversity of components, tasks, and activities that are designed to actively engage students' individual exploration and collaborative learning towards research methodology. This continues to justify Hong Kong's diverse intellectual traditions which offer distinct learning experience to students from different institutions. Teachers also enjoy opportunities to plan their own teaching according to their teaching philosophy and experience. Meanwhile, students will receive, discover, consolidate, apply, present, and reflect on a series of new research methodology concepts, while teachers

will motivate, engage, scaffold, guide, and support them by offering them a conductive learning environment and abundant learning opportunities throughout the learning trajectory (Zhou, 2022). In general, the complex, nuanced, and multi-layered design of these undergraduate political science research methodology courses reinforce the observations made by Curtin and Hall (2018), whereas learners are agentive and intention, learning context is complex with affordances and constraints, and the sets of relations surrounding the context are full of various implicit and enmeshed values, agendas, and meanings. All these are aligned with Bilsland et al. (2023), who comment that political science research methodology educators should find ways of not simply introducing students to the factual understanding of research methods, but of integrating the reflection on and the practice of research throughout the learning trajectory. Accordingly, students will become more capable of understanding how research methods are relevant and also complementary to their study of political science.

Several principles could be deduced from the findings of this study for the planning of an effective undergraduate political science research methodology course. First and foremost, teachers should commence with a strong and solid framing of the course with a relevant course title. Meanwhile, they need to offer a well-oriented course orientation by unfolding a series of diverse and clear intended learning outcomes that touch upon the knowledge, behavioural, and affective dimensions, which involve knowing, doing, and being. These outcomes are further translated to the various course topics and content, which cover a series of specific dimensions along the wide methodological spectrum, such as philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices, techniques, and procedures. Given the diversity and complexity of the content involved, there should be a careful staging and sequencing of classes, meaning that all components should be arranged in a logical progression with smooth transitions and facilitated scaffolding, such as covering one research method or component each week, and starting from the qualitative before the quantitative dimensions. In order to

actualise the outcomes, there is also a mix of diverse, authentic, and up-to-date instructional materials, such as reference textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and credible online sources, as well as active, interactive, and participatory learning and teaching activities arranged for students to engage with the course, such as guest speaker sessions across various fields as well as qualitative and quantitative data analysis workshops. While what counts as effective assessments in research methodology may vary across teachers, it seems that they all embed both formative and summative as well as individual and collaborative assignments into their courses, including class participation, presentation, reading report, projects, diaries, as well as quizzes, tests, and examinations. All these assessment formats are common in terms of allowing students to put complex and abstract academic theories into accessible and concrete real-life practices, catering to diverse students' learning needs and expectations, as well as maintaining and deepening students' interests and engagement, which are aligned with the course intended learning outcomes as well as course topics and content.

Conclusions and Limitations

This study contributes to both the scholarship and practice of political science education by offering evidence that emerged from the results of a thematic analysis of the undergraduate political science research methodology course syllabi offered by the seven publicly funded universities in Hong Kong. Building on existing literature about general research methods courses and challenges political science students face when learning methodology, it addresses the literature gap of the lack of discussion about research methods teaching in the political science discipline and introduces some of the general principles for improving the syllabus. This study's baseline data offers an empirical foundation of how political science instructors are dealing with seven distinct yet interrelated dimensions of course title, course

description, intended learning outcomes, course topics and content, readings and references, assessment tasks, and course format in their research methodology courses. Despite the small sample of this study, similarities and differences between the approaches to writing the syllabus among course instructors are observed, which allows both authors to compare and contrast, and identify and illustrate ideal practices that can be referenced.

This study adopts the approach of examining syllabi to evaluate political science education, thereby broadening the spectrum of research on relevant courses. While other disciplines have already been looking into syllabi to examine their corresponding education, the political science discipline has long been ignoring the values of examining the course syllabi in details. Although these political science course syllabi do not necessarily include all information about the research methodology courses, they still serve the purpose of reflecting on what teachers have put into the course, why they put them there, and how all these relate (Earley, 2007). They are also highly comparable, which can facilitate researchers' examination of the best practice. Therefore, the authors suggest that political science educators can look into syllabi to fully understand the merits and demerits of a specific course and the current design. Meanwhile, writing a well-constructed syllabus requires instructors to crystallise, articulate, organise, and communicate their thoughts about the course, especially implicit and subtle ones, which are helpful for planning and clarifying the course content to students (Appleby, 1994). The finding and analysis of this study agrees with the current literature that research methodology courses have to sharpen students' analytical skills, broaden their critical perspectives, address their technical demands, unfold complex concepts while maintaining interest and encouraging engagement in an organised and interactive way (Whiteman & Oliver, 2008; Coronel Llamas & Boza, 2011; Engbers, 2016). It is hoped that the empirical findings offered by this paper can contribute to scholarship by offering greater clarity and consistency in understanding the learning and teaching of research

methodology in the context of undergraduate political science education. These findings can also inform future practices in terms of course design, pedagogical best practices, lesson preparation, and assessment development among educators and practitioners. This implies that various learning systems can learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus introduced by Hong Kong publicly funded universities, therefore improving the clarity, richness, comprehensiveness, rigour, and usefulness of their corresponding political science research methodology education. With the development of a more refined political science research methodology education, students' overall motivation and engagement in the courses can be stimulated, and they can understand and appreciate that the learning outcomes can be fruitful instead of being irrelevant to or unhelpful for their aspirations.

Nonetheless, there are several limitations associated with this study. One of the major assumptions underlying this study is that the planned course syllabi accurately reflect what really occurs in the enacted classroom. However, syllabus is only one type of the diverse source materials to examine the learning and teaching process. It would also be interesting to consider how teachers present and explain the content stated in the course syllabus to students in the classroom, as well as the extent to which students perceive and articulate the content as planned. There could be various potential gaps, issues, and challenges emerging when the syllabus is enacted at the classroom level, whereas these fine-grained details could not be captured by the analysis of the syllabus itself. Therefore, future empirical research should be conducted with teachers and students on their individual perceptions and experience with the learning and teaching of research methodology, so as to verify and expand on the empirical results presented by this study. At the same time, there could be some pre- and post-tests as well as longitudinal research studies done at the student level to consider how effective these planned elements are done at the course level in changing students' understanding and performance as well as attitude and perceptions towards the subject matter of political science

research methodology. Furthermore, as research methodology may be connected with and integrated into other political science courses in the curriculum (e.g., introducing textual analysis in a lecture of a big data politics course), there should also be larger data sets collected across all political science courses to examine how research methodology is now learnt, taught, and assessed within the undergraduate curriculum as a whole. This allows the more detailed consideration of both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the curriculum, namely the different courses and the years of academic study respectively.

Ethical Approval

No ethical approval is required for this study as it involves the thematic analysis of the written political science research methodology course syllabi collected from the seven publicly funded universities in Hong Kong.

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