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Teaching excellence in the context of business and management education: Perspectives from Australian, British and Canadian universities

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ABSTRACT

Teaching excellence is a multidimensional and highly contested concept among stakeholders in higher education (HE) environments. Thus, there is no universally accepted definition of, nor consensus of opinion on what constitutes, teaching excellence in HE environments. Moreover, there exists a paucity of empirical research on teaching excellence in the context of tertiary level business and management education particularly from the perspective of senior level academics. Accordingly, this study explores notions of what constitutes teaching excellence in the context of business and management education based on semi-structured interviews with 10 senior level academics in Australian, British and Canadian university business and management schools. The paper presents practitioner attributes, research activeness, the involvement of key stakeholders, the learning environment, students as active partners, the learning journey and the informed curricula as 7 perspectives on teaching excellence relating to business and management education that are shaped by how senior management (leadership) teams interpret, articulate, promote, lead, support, monitor and review a shared notion or framework of teaching excellence within business and management schools, and the faculty subculture and wider institutional culture within which they operate. The implications of the study provide credible and meaningful suggestions for promoting teaching excellence in the provision of tertiary level business and management education based on the 7 perspectives of teaching excellence presented in the paper. The research contributes to, and furthers, our understanding of teaching excellence in HE pertaining to business and management education.

1. Introduction

The notion of teaching excellence and how to measure it among higher education institutions (HEIs) has been a significant debate globally that has gathered momentum over the past two decades or so (Land & Gordon, 2015; Skelton, 2009). Yet, Wood and Su (2017) contend that what is meant by teaching excellence can be difficult to interpret. Notwithstanding, the requirement for HEIs to focus on teaching quality within the remit of their activities has increased significantly in recent years (Filippakou, 2011). While multiple stakeholders within higher education (HE) environments; such as HEIs, government agencies, students, employers, alumni, donors, funding agencies, professional associations, accreditation agencies, academic staff, and unions; have some influence on the provision and quality of teaching (Dunkin, 1995; Harvey & Green, 1993; Skolnik, 2010), they invariably disagree on the relative importance of

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certain factors that they perceive to constitute teaching excellence (Marshall, 2016).

1.1. Teaching excellence undefined

Teaching excellence, as a measure of quality in HE, appears to be an ambiguous concept given that it is contingent on how it is defined and the various metrics that are used to assess it by various stakeholders, such that Gunn and Fisk (2013, p.9) note that “how excellence is defined, operationalised, and measured in relation to teaching and learning still lacks a clear consensus.” Consequently, there is no mutually agreed upon definition of teaching excellence (Piascik, Pittenger, et al., 2011). Indeed, Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale and Reif (1987, p.67) assert that “teaching excellence is manifested in many ways, perhaps as many ways as there are excellent teachers.” Likewise, Biggs (2012) suggests that what constitutes teaching excellence is often contingent on individuals’ conceptions of what teaching excellence entails. For example, Sawatzky, Enns, Ashcroft, Davis and Harder (2009) suggest that teaching excellence consists of a proven ability to deliver high quality teaching, scholarship and leadership in HE. Prisacariu and Shah (2016) propose that ethical and moral values are missing from current measures of teaching excellence. Ramsden (1991) suggests that student evaluation of teaching should be an integral key performance indicator of assessing teaching quality. Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009) suggest that the engagement of teaching staff with students is a core factor that informs teaching excellence. Accreditation by professional associations is often perceived to symbolise a notion of excellence within some academic faculties (Saunders & Blanco-Ramírez, 2017) as accreditation associations often foster the development of competences and skillsets within the curriculum that are required by employers (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010). However, some (e.g., Emiliani, 2005; Francisco, Noland, & Sinclair, 2008) suggest that accreditations by professional associations and agencies may not necessarily denote teaching excellence, particularly as requirements and standards change over time (Gunn & Fisk, 2013). Given the multidimensional characteristics of the concept of teaching excellence and the lack of consistency as to what it entails (Chism, 2006), there is a distinct need for research on teaching excellence in a HE context to provide a clearer understanding of, and to conceptualise what is meant by, the term teaching excellence and any implications it may have for HEIs.

1.2. The rationale for the research

Teaching excellence is of critical concern among academics and tertiary level education providers (Dixon & Pilkington, 2017) and, as such, research on the concept of teaching excellence in a HE context is important. Notwithstanding, there exists a paucity of research pertaining to teaching excellence in some academic disciplines (Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009). Indeed, according to Land and Gordon (2015), it has been noted in the academic literature that it is difficult to define teaching excellence without the field of study context in which such teaching occurs. Accordingly, there is a need to bring about a greater understanding of the concept of teaching excellence, particularly where it relates to a specific field of study context such as business and management education, because, as Piascik, Pittenger et al. (2011, p.238) note, “quality teaching is greatly enhanced when the institution establishes standards for teaching excellence and develops valid and reliable methods to assess and evaluate it.”

There are many varied preconceptions about what constitutes teaching excellence (Harvey & Williams, 2010) such that it has become a “highly contested concept” for some time (Skelton, 2009, p. 108). Madriaga and Morley (2016, p. 166) assert that “there is lack of agreement as to what constitutes teaching excellence.” Yet, notions of teaching excellence are pertinent for HEIs globally (Wood & Su, 2017) given that assessment and ranking of academic quality occurs within HE communities globally (Bergseth, Petocz, & Dahlgren, 2014). This research seeks to explore how teaching excellence in HE is articulated and interpreted in the context of business and management education from an intercontinental perspective. It also addresses the paucity of research on teaching excellence in some academic fields of study, as noted by Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009), by examining the concept in the field of business and management education. The rationale for pursuing a study that spans three continents is that it enables a diversity of perspectives from three distinct country contexts to be explored, examined and triangulated in order to provide credible perspectives on teaching excellence.

In light of the preceding paragraphs, this paper will seek to answer the following research question: What constitutes teaching excellence in the context of tertiary level business and management education?

In so doing, the paper will explore conceptions of teaching excellence in three distinct country contexts; distil and interpret the shared notions of teaching excellence among participants; and synthesise credible and meaningful insights and suggestions for promoting teaching excellence in business and management schools.

1.3. Aims, objectives and scope of the research

The aim of the research project is to explore and expound the factors that constitute teaching excellence in university business and management education in three disparate HE contexts. The objectives of this study are to critically examine the literature on teaching excellence; explore the concept of teaching excellence among senior level academics who are responsible for the design, delivery and administration of business and management education in publicly funded Australian, British and Canadian universities; to categorise

and interpret their narratives; to present perspectives on teaching excellence that emerge from the data; and present implications for institutional practice that have the propensity to promote the delivery of teaching excellence within business and management education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teaching excellence explored

Teaching excellence is a multidimensional construct (Chism, 2006; Elton, 1998) that is wider in scope than delivering excellent teaching in the classroom. In a HE context, teaching excellence is a measure of quality relating to different elements that comprise teaching, learning and assessment that are contingent on the stakeholder group defining it given that each group has some sphere of influence. Indeed, there is no universal nor standardised consensus on what constitutes teaching excellence within HE environments (Gunn & Fisk, 2013). While studies on excellent teaching in HE environments have been conducted for over half a century (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004), there have been reoccurring calls and subsequent attempts to improve teaching quality among North American and British universities for over five decades (Elrick, 1990).

Elton (1998, p.3) notes that “teaching excellence’ is not a simple concept and, as a concept, lacks precision”, while Brockerhoff, Stensaker, and Huisman (2014) suggest that the concept requires critical debate. Andrews, Garriso, and Magnusson (1996, p.86) summarised that “excellent teaching is based upon valuing students, valuing subject matter and valuing the process of teaching [and that the ...] transfer of learning was seen to involve the development of self-reflective and self-directed learners.” In other words, teaching excellence is expressed by the extent to which learning occurs and is contingent on students’ engagement and commitment to developing their knowledge through being independent learners. One of the reasons why teaching excellence is difficult to define is that it is an evolving concept. For example, some elements of what comprises teaching excellence change over time to reflect changes in industry, practice and innovative approaches to teaching and learning (Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009).

Teaching excellence cannot be separated from the context in which it is being examined. Gunn (2018, p.6) explains that teaching excellence is “... context specific, meaning different things in different disciplines and institutions, where definitions can be nebulous and contradictory.” In the context of business and management education, McFarlane (2014, p.126) expresses this notion eloquently as follows:

“Achieving excellence in education is no easy matter as there is no universal formula as in $E = mc^2$ or any proven body of knowledge so designed to achieve definitive excellence in teaching, learning, and practice [and, as such,] there are different standards of quality applied in defining and attaining “excellence” in business education.”

Sawatzky et al. (2009, p.260) suggest that teaching excellence frameworks are discipline or subject-specific by noting that “there are no published conceptual frameworks for teaching excellence in nursing”. Likewise, conceptual frameworks for teaching excellence in business and management education are not currently evident in the academic literature. Given the increasing importance of, and interest in, teaching excellence in HE environments on a global scale (Brockerhoff et al., 2014), there is a requirement now, more than ever before, for frameworks that improve teaching excellence in HE environments (Kay, Moncarz, Petroski, & Downey, 2008).

2.2. External factors influencing teaching excellence

A number of external factors have an impact on teaching excellence within HEIs, such as an increasingly diversified student population, competition within HE environments, governmental HE policies and the teaching quality agenda, and the predominance of research within external ranking systems, which are discussed as follows.

2.2.1. The diversified student population and faculty diversity

The substantial rise in the number of students entering HE, especially during the last two decades, the inclusion and widening participation agenda, diversification of student cohorts, internationalisation of the curriculum, and the requirement to meet disparate needs in student engagement have had a significant impact on resource allocation within HEIs. For example, Gopaul et al. (2016, p.58) speak of the “massification” of HE in Canada while Rowley, Fook and Glazzard (2018) and Charles (2018) also make mention of the massification of HE in a UK context. Charles (2018, p.26) notes that the “increasingly broad and diverse student body” presents “new demands upon teaching”. The increasing numbers of students entering HE has implications in terms of finding ways in which excellent teaching can be delivered effectively given that it is implausible that a ‘one size fits all’ mode of delivery can cater to increasingly diverse student cohorts with disparate needs.

In a similar vein, several studies (e.g., Llamas, Nguyen, & Tran, 2019; Moshiri & Cardon, 2016; Stout, Archie, Cross & Carman, 2018) note a lack of diversity among faculty members in HEIs or the need to increase diversity among faculty members. For example, Stout et al. (2018) allude to the tendency for the level of diversity among faculty and administration within HEIs to lag significantly behind that of their diversified student populations. Moshiri and Cardon (2016, p.244) explain that “students need to have role models

and leaders with whom they relate to in order to engage most effectively in their collegiate efforts.” Moreover, [Moshiri and Cardon \(2016\)](#) suggest that increasing diversity among faculty members within HEIs can enhance students’ educational attainment. Stated more plainly, as [Llamas et al. \(2019, online\)](#) suggest, “faculty diversity has benefits for all students.” Faculty diversity in HE provision, as a proposed component of teaching excellence, is important because having a diverse group of academic teaching staff within faculty departments can enable students to receive a broad array of authentic perspectives on business and management subjects; which are often beyond their personal norms ([Stout et al., 2018](#)); that enrich their learning experiences and provide them with profound and valuable insights that are likely to be beneficial during, and after the completion of, their studies. This is especially pertinent given the increasingly complex organisational environments within which graduates now work and the ever more globalised nature of business and management careers.

2.2.2. *The competitive HE environment and students’ evaluation of programmes*

To furnish the burgeoning student populations within many countries, publicly funded universities face rising competition from domestic and international non-traditional for-profit tertiary education providers entering the HE environment ([Emiliani, 2005](#); [Gunn, 2018](#)). Indeed, [Marks, Haug, and Huckabee \(2016\)](#) suggest that there is a high degree of competition among business and management schools. Such competition is likely to be more pronounced in the quest of HEIs to recruit more international students. Polkinghorne, Roushan and Taylor (2017, p.213) note that “the marketization of higher education has ensured that students have become consumers.” Others (e.g., [Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017](#); [Gunn, 2018](#)) also note that students either perceive themselves as consumers of HE or are being perceived as consumers by other stakeholders within HE environments. Therefore, prospective students are likely to choose business and management school programmes that they perceive to offer the best value for money in terms of educational experience and post-graduation employment prospects. Moreover, they are also likely to look for what they may perceive as credible evidence of the utility of business and management programmes from current and previous students’ evaluation of such programmes from external sources of information such as the National Student Survey and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education results in the UK; the National Survey of Student Engagement and National Graduates Survey results in Canada; and the Student Experience Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire and Graduate Outcomes Survey results in Australia. Indeed, [Su and Wood \(2012\)](#) suggest that the student voice should be an integral part of conceptualisations of teaching excellence. Consequently, as [Tomlinson \(2017, p. 466\)](#) notes, “expectations of teaching and learning are clearly rising”, which is likely to be of concern to those who are responsible for the design, delivery and administration of teaching and learning within business and management schools.

2.2.3. *Governmental HE policies and the teaching quality agenda*

A number of studies (e.g., [Ives, McAlpine, & Gandell, 2009](#); [Samad, Fraser, Fish, & Fraser, 1995](#); [Wong, 2015](#)) have noted that a greater emphasis on accountability is one of the factors that have been driving teaching quality initiatives among HEIs to justify the learning outcomes of their students to be market-ready. [Rowley et al. \(2018\)](#) also note that the employability agenda has forced HEIs to consider ways in which HE courses can prepare students for the world of work. Experiential learning; i.e., learning by doing, has been one approach to teaching and learning that is espoused to equip students with transferable and career-relevant competences and skillsets that are pertinent to real world occupations that increase their employment prospects upon graduation. For example, it is claimed that experiential learning can endow students with real life work experience that can increase their interest in, and motivation to learn, a given business course ([Erselcan, 2015](#)); develop their “cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies,” ([Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019, p. 62](#)); increase their confidence ([Caza, Brower, & Wayne, 2015](#)); improve their engagement in learning ([Bell, 2015](#); [Li & Chao, 2013](#)) and satisfaction in learning a given course ([Bell, 2015](#); [Caza, Brower, & Wayne, 2015](#); [Li & Chao, 2013](#)) compared to traditional non-experiential approaches to teaching and learning. It is also asserted that experiential learning can enable students to attain their educational aspirations ([Li & Chao, 2013](#)); cultivate career-related competences ([Li & Chao, 2013](#)); enhance their capacity to make better decisions regarding their careers ([Caza, Brower, & Wayne, 2015](#)) and experiential group-based activities can foster team-working skills among students ([Finch, Peacock, Lazdowski, & Hwang, 2015](#)) compared to traditional non-experiential approaches to teaching and learning.

It is argued that accountability related to the need for HEIs to better prepare students to be market-ready are largely influenced by governmental HE policies intended to increase teaching quality among HEIs. For example, [Alderman \(2016\)](#) notes that a change in the Australian government tends to result in a review and implementation of reform in the HE sector. National and devolved HE policies also tend to shape HE teaching and research policies and practices among HEIs ([Brockhoff et al., 2014](#); [Gunn, 2018](#)). [Gopaul et al. \(2016, p.58\)](#) note that, in Canada, “national circumstances influence how accountability and managerialism frameworks impact universities within individual jurisdictions”, but the tightening of provincial HE budgets due to economic uncertainty has translated into concerns regarding the current model of HE provision among universities in several provinces ([Gopaul et al., 2016](#)). Similarly, for some time, there has been sentiment regarding the model of HE provision among universities in the UK, their capacity to raise tuition fees and for students to make a greater financial contribution towards their education. In response to such concerns, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was introduced by the Conservative government in 2016 as a means of evaluating, accounting for and promoting the delivery of quality in addition to other quality assurance agencies and processes that exist within and across the UK HE environment ([Gunn, 2018](#)). The TEF would also enable English HEIs that demonstrate excellence in teaching to be able to raise their

tuition fees in line with inflation (Gunn, 2018; Shattock, 2018). The TEF rating allocated to each HEI may have implications for student recruitment because it presents prospective students with more information that they can use when deciding on which business or management school to attend. Likewise, in the event that the TEF is extended to rate individual programmes of study, it would also present prospective students with more information on which business or management programme to study. Thus, prospective students' perceptions of the quality or 'excellence' associated with a business or management programme has implications for recruiting students to those programmes and provides HEIs with incentives to improve the quality of the educational experience students receive.

2.2.4. *The predominance of research within external ranking systems*

Universities are traditionally evaluated and ranked on both research quality and output which goes some way towards establishing their prestige and reputation both nationally and internationally. Similarly, career progression tends to be based on the quality and volume of research outputs (Artés, Pedraja-Chaparro & Salinas-Jiménez, 2017; Cadez, Dimovski, & Groff, 2017; Premeaux & Mondy, 2002). Premeaux and Mondy (2002, p.338) suggest that "tenure permits bad teaching because many universities grant tenure to professors who are only marginal or average teachers but are prolific researchers." Moreover, administrative roles increase and teaching roles decrease as academics with a remit for teaching (academic teaching staff) progress through the ranks from assistant professor, instructor or lecturer positions to associate professor or senior lecturer through to full or tenured professor positions. Research conducted by Ramsden and Moses (1992) on the correlation between research excellence and teaching excellence among 18 Australian HEIs found no association between excellent research and excellent teaching at either an individual or departmental level across 9 subject areas and concluded that scholarly prestige does not necessarily denote excellence in teaching. On the one hand, a disproportionate focus on research may lead to a decrease in teaching quality (Artés et al., 2017) while, on the other hand, Canadian academics perceive that their teaching is enhanced by their research (Elrick, 1990). The Artés et al. (2017) study of the relationship between the teaching scores of research-focused teaching staff and their less research-focused counterparts in a medium-sized Spanish university found that, on average, research-focused teaching staff scored higher on teaching evaluations compared to less research-focused teaching staff. Conversely, research conducted by Cadez et al. (2017, p.1455) at a Slovenian university suggest that more experienced faculty members who were research active (e.g., full professors) scored less well on teaching evaluations compared with their less experienced research colleagues (e.g., associate and assistant professors, and lecturers), but reasoned that "research productivity is not related to teaching quality, whereas research quality is positively related with teaching quality." In other words, there is no conclusive evidence to corroborate a positive correlation between research and teaching performance (Cadez et al., 2017).

2.3. *Internal factors influencing teaching excellence*

A number of internal factors have an impact on teaching excellence within HEIs, such as the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), the accreditation of business and management programmes, and the characteristics of teachers in HEIs, which are discussed as follows.

2.3.1. *The scholarship of teaching and learning*

There have been calls to improve teaching quality within universities from internal stakeholders (Wright & O'Neil, 1994). Devlin, Smeal, Cummings, and Mazzolini (2012) note that discipline-specific research was favoured over teaching-related research within Australian institutions and that there may be tensions within universities, particularly in those that have traditionally been research-intensive institutions, to dedicate resources, such as time and funding, to more teaching-related or pedagogical research. Teaching staff who engage in SoTL activities and research can gain more knowledge of teaching theories and practices that help them to become more effective teachers, and to develop and demonstrate their excellence in teaching (Medina et al., 2011). The status of SoTL research can be raised to promote teaching excellence within HE environments by academic teaching staff disseminating their research such that it is open to public review (Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009). Notwithstanding, research by Bennett, Roberts, Ananthram, and Broughton (2018) found that academics on teaching-focused contracts within an Australian university held the notion that discipline-specific research was being conveyed as having more prestige than engaging in SoTL activities. Moreover, teaching-focused academics also perceived that there was a requirement for more funding, time and training for SoTL activities within their institution (Bennett et al., 2018). Kolomitro, Laverty, and Stockley (2018) found evidence that academic teaching staff at a Canadian university, who were pre-tenured, focused on conducting discipline-specific research with the aim of publishing their research in top tier journals in their field in order to increase their likelihood of being tenured and, in some instances, there were perceptions among some academic teaching staff that research on SoTL was not coveted as discipline-specific research within the institution. One reason why discipline-specific research could be perceived as being more important than SoTL research within universities is that the latter often does not typically attract large funding grants from national research councils because, as Charles (2018) notes, SoTL has come to indicate pedagogic research. Moreover, attracting large research income is likely to feature in the array of metrics that are used to rank the reputation of universities as mentioned above.

Notwithstanding, Hubball, Collins, and Pratt (2005) note that there is growing recognition of the need for academics involved in

teaching to evidence their engagement in reflective teaching practice as an important component of the tenure, rewards and promotion process within HEIs operating under a tenure-track system. However, an institutional culture that reinforces and rewards teaching excellence has to exist (Su and Wood, 2012). For example, offering teaching staff continuous professional development opportunities that provide them with new knowledge and skillsets is one way of promoting teaching excellence within HEIs (Blackie, Case, & Jawitz, 2010). Dunkin (1995) suggests that teaching qualifications inform teaching excellence. For example, teaching staff within UK HEIs are usually required to complete a postgraduate certificate pertaining to teaching and learning in HE and obtain Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in the UK. Indeed, Skelton (2003) suggests that teaching fellowship schemes are a means by which teaching excellence can be fostered within HEIs, while Piascik, Bouldin et al. (2011) suggest that teaching awards can raise the status of teaching within universities. However, Schindler et al. (2013) suggest that it is doubtful whether teaching awards can effect a faculty-wide culture of teaching excellence when only a few teaching staff are honoured annually. Likewise, Cox and Swanson (2002) note that the scholarly vigour and intellectual diligence that goes into achieving teaching excellence is often unacknowledged and seldom rewarded. Therefore, an ethos and culture of teaching excellence should permeate HEIs which is eloquently stated by Wood and Su (2017, p.462) who note that “there is a need for the development of a shared ‘currency’ in terms of understandings of teaching excellence”, particularly as the achievement of teaching excellence should occur throughout the whole organisation as alluded to by Brockerhoff et al. (2014).

2.3.2. The accreditation and teaching quality debate

In addition to SoTL and continuous development initiatives, accreditations may also have a bearing on teaching excellence. Accreditation by recognised business and management accreditation agencies, such as professional associations within the HE environment, can be seen as a “mark of distinction” for business and management schools’ programmes (Hedrick, Henson, Krieg & Wassell, 2010, p. 284). Yet, some argue that achieving accreditation by leading accreditation agencies does not automatically designate teaching excellence or translate into students receiving a quality learning experience as there is no universal standard by which teaching excellence is evaluated among accreditation agencies. For example, Francisco, Noland, and Sinclair (2008, p.25) state that the AACSB “... is supposed to be a symbol of excellence for business schools,” but questions whether “accreditation by the AACSB promotes quality in business education or has accreditation become just a marketing tool?” McFarlane (2014, p.126) notes that “excellence in business education means different things to different business schools, colleges, and accreditation agencies”. Dennison (2006, p. 115) supports this view by arguing that “being “accredited” by no means guarantees excellence in program quality and competence of graduates.” Similarly, accreditation by professional associations and agencies pertaining to the field of business and management education differ from country to country. McFarlane (2014, p.128) suggests that meeting and maintaining compliance with some accreditation agencies and standards can result in business and management schools neglecting “other potential value-adders and value drivers” that benefit programmes and students’ educational outcomes. Notwithstanding, while seeking accreditation can be a worthwhile activity for business and management schools (Francisco, Noland, & Sinclair, 2008), it should remain a small component in the mix of factors that determine excellence in business and management education (McFarlane, 2014).

2.3.3. The perceived characteristics of excellent teachers in HEIs

The delivery of teaching excellence requires academic teaching staff who are equipped with subject-specific knowledge in addition to multiple skillsets and personal attributes that lend themselves to being an excellent teacher. Sherman et al. (1987) suggests that enthusiasm, clarity, preparation/organisation, stimulating, and love of knowledge as five characteristics that are frequently and consistently attributed to excellent teachers. Medina et al. (2011) note that effective teachers promote student learning and engagement, while Elton (1998) suggests that being innovative in, and reflecting on, teaching practice and engaging in SoTL and subject-specific research are attributes of excellent teachers. Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009) suggest that highly effective teachers design better learning experiences because everything they do stem from a strong understanding and concern for the development of their students. Furthermore, effective teachers also seek to develop students as independent learners and critical thinkers that would extend to critical analysis and writing (Elrick, 1990; Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009; Rowley et al., 2018; Shephard, Harland, Stein, & Tidswell, 2011). Wood & Su (2017, p.462) suggest that an “excellent teacher influences learners such that they develop their desire to learn and experience ‘safe’ learning spaces where they can try out ideas, share thinking, make mistakes, innovate and experiment”. Developing good rapport between teaching staff and students may contribute to excellent teaching (Elrick, 1990). Some studies (e.g., Elrick, 1990; Wood & Su, 2017) suggest that teaching excellence involves the delivery of expert knowledge or, according to Elrick (1990, p.63), “competence in one’s discipline” on the part of academic teaching staff. Hill, Lomas, and MacGregor (2003) found that subject knowledge and style of delivery were perceived by students as important attributes of teaching quality in HE. Students also perceived that a curriculum that aligns theory with real world settings was an important component of teaching quality (Hill et al., 2003). Su and Wood (2012) analysed four winning essays and six runners-up essays students submitted to the 2008 Higher Education Academy open student essay competition on ‘what makes a good university lecturer?’ and condensed their findings into 13 factors pertaining to students’ perceptions of teaching excellence that are summarised in Table 1. However, it should be noted that academic teaching staff are unlikely to demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in all areas of teaching competence that comprise teaching excellence (Elton, 1998).

Table 1

Su and Wood's summary of the characteristics of good university teaching.

Students' Perceptions of the Characteristics of Excellent Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to apply knowledge to real-life scenarios. • Being authoritative and expert in knowledge and skills. • Being a good communicator. • Being good at using educational technologies. • Having a sense of humour. • Being able to interact with students. • Being a reflective practitioner. • Being passionate and inspiring. • Being supportive. • Being able to provide a safe [learning] space for students. • Being able to facilitate students' independent learning. • Being approachable. • Being able to provide timely feedback.

Source: Su and Wood (2012, p.147–150)

Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009) suggest that teaching excellence is a dynamic process that involves the active participation of both students and teaching staff. In other words, students cannot simply assume the role of passive recipients of knowledge. Table 2 outlines generic factors Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009) associate with achieving teaching excellence.

Table 2

Johnson-Farmer and Frenn's factors associated with teaching excellence.

Factors Associated with Teaching Excellence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The faculty being vested in lifelong learning, thereby staying current and knowledgeable. • Using multiple strategies in teaching the content (i.e., storytelling, videos, humour, sadness, pictures, reflection, role playing, role modelling, guest speakers, group interaction, rehearse, etc.). • Being clear in communication of objectives/outcomes. • [Being] student centred. • Creating an environment in which active learning can occur. • Being able to draw all students into active questioning and learning so that the process of discovery is enjoyable.

Source: Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009, p.269)

2.4. Summary

Teaching excellence is a highly debated concept with no agreed upon definition within academe. Nevertheless, it has been argued that teaching excellence cannot be separated from the context in which the concept is being examined. Indeed, in the context of tertiary level education, some have argued that the notion of, and frameworks for, teaching excellence are specific for certain fields of study such as in the provision of business and management education. It has also been suggested that factors which are external and internal to HEIs exert influence on shaping the achievement and delivery of teaching excellence. For example, external factors include increased diversification among student populations, competition among HE providers, governmental policies to increase teaching quality and the perceived importance of discipline-specific research as it relates to external ranking systems. Likewise, internal factors include the increased recognition of the importance of SoTL activities, the perceived importance of gaining accreditation with stakeholder agencies and the attributes and characteristics of academic teaching staff that are considered to be conducive to delivering teaching excellence.

The remainder of the paper will explore the concept of teaching excellence in the context of providing business and management education and interpret and present 7 perspectives afforded by senior level academics based on the following methodological approach.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research project background

This paper is based on the qualitative findings of an exploratory research project on teaching excellence in the context of business and management education that was completed in January 2019. A review of the literature pertaining to teaching excellence in the HE domain was conducted to explore the debates within academe and how they may relate to the provision of business and management education in order to determine the research objectives and articulate a set of initial interview questions. The research project went through an ethical approval process and received ethical approval from the Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business

and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee on 19 February 2018. The key ethical considerations of the project pertain to sending participants a participant information sheet and consent form as outlined in section 3.6 below, and that excerpts from their interview transcripts may be used in publications as outputs of the research project whereby participants and their organisations would be anonymised.

3.2. Philosophical considerations

The concept of teaching excellence, due to its multidimensional characteristics (Chism, 2006; Elton, 1998), is “open to myriad interpretations and understandings” (Wood & Su, 2017, p. 463) and, as such, different stakeholders (social actors) in the HE domain disagree as to what they perceive teaching excellence entails (Marshall, 2016). In other words, ontologically, teaching excellence is a socially constructed concept whereby multiple realities exist among and within specific groups of stakeholders as to its nature and, epistemologically, the meaning different stakeholders ascribe to the concept is based on their subjective interpretations of it. In any case, while researchers should be mindful that there is a distinct tendency for social actors to be influenced by the social, cultural and organisational contexts in which they exist and operate; axiologically, researchers should also be cognisant of, and mitigate against, any bias they may have during the course of their research project (King, 2004). The axiological considerations of the study are discussed under the data collection section below.

Studies that seek to examine poorly understood phenomena are particularly suited to a qualitative means of inquiry that are interpretive in nature and based on methods, such as in-depth or semi-structured interviews, which are congruent with inductive approaches to answering the research question (Holley & Harris, 2019; Rose, Spinks & Canhoto, 2015). The strength of inductive approaches is that they demonstrate a strong “ability to address complex topics in interesting ways” which can subsequently generate meaningful insights on the phenomenon being explored (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016, p. 1113) and shape our comprehension of the research topic (Holley & Harris, 2019). Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2016, p.145) explain that an inductive approach is utilised where a researcher commences a research project by “collecting data to explore a phenomenon and generate or build theory (often in the form of a conceptual framework).” Although the research does not seek to develop a theory of teaching excellence, an inductive approach to theory development was adopted as the approach is consistent with the research objectives outlined in the Introduction section of the paper because, as Rose et al. (2015, p.80) indicate, inductive approaches are very suitable for qualitative studies aiming to “develop an in-depth understanding of a situation from the perspective of those involved in a situation”. The situation in this instance is the design, delivery and administration of business and management education that effects teaching excellence.

3.3. Methodological approach

A qualitative interview-based data collection approach was adopted to explore participants’ conceptions of what constitutes teaching excellence. A cross-sectional research strategy was deemed to be the most appropriate for achieving the research objectives and answering the research question due to the timescale allocated for completing the research project.

3.4. Sampling

The purposive sampling technique was utilised to recruit participants for the study because the credibility of findings relies primarily on the characteristics of the sample (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012) and because statistical inferences and generalisations from the sample in relation to the population was not an objective of the research project (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012; Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2016). Purposive sampling has been used in other studies pertaining to teaching excellence in tertiary level education to recruit and engage participants in the research process (e.g., Dixon & Pilkington, 2017; Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009) and was, thus, considered to be an appropriate means by which participants could be recruited for this study. Saunders, Thornhill, and Lewis (2016) suggest that a purposive sample size of between 5 and 25 participants is sufficient for research based on semi-structured interviews. The sampling frame was comprised of senior level academics with a remit for teaching, learning and administration within a business or management school who would be able to provide commentary on the research topic. Senior level academics were chosen to comprise the sampling frame because, given their positions within their respective business or management school’s leadership (i.e., within the senior management team), they were deemed to be knowledgeable about the research topic due to their considerable years of experience within their respective HE environments. Potential participants, who fit the sampling frame, were identified by visiting the websites of publicly funded university business and management schools in Australia, Britain and Canada. Ten participants, 4 females and 6 males, agreed to participate in the research. In alphabetical order, and to provide anonymity, the Australian sample was comprised of an Assistant Dean for Teaching and Learning, an Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning and a Director of Teaching and Learning. The British sample was comprised of an Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning, an Associate Director for Teaching and Learning and a Dean. The Canadian sample was comprised of an Associate Dean (Academic) with a remit for teaching and learning, an Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning, a Dean and a Vice Dean. The participants had considerable years of tertiary level teaching experience in the field of business and management that ranged from 10 to 21 years and had held their current senior level academic position for between 1 year and 7 years at the time of being interviewed.

3.5. Evaluation considerations for qualitative studies

It has been argued that the conventional approaches used to evaluate the quality of research (i.e., generalisability, reliability and validity), while being appropriate for quantitative studies, are not universally recognised as apposite approaches for assessing the quality of qualitative studies (Rose et al., 2015). Instead, alternative concepts and perspectives such as authenticity (Fade, 2003) and conformability, credibility, dependability and transferability, as four dimensions of trustworthiness, are proposed as being more appropriate approaches for appraising the quality of qualitative research (Newby, 2014). These terms are described in Table 3.

Table 3

Criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative studies.

Definition of Criteria
Authenticity: [...] the extent to which the research reflects the experiences of the respondents as they lived them and perceived them (Fade, 2003, p. 144).
Confirmability: Showing that the findings of the study are shaped by the respondents and not by researcher bias, motivation or interest (Rose et al., 2015, p. 392).
Credibility: Giving confidence in the 'truth' of the findings, in terms of the alignment between the researcher's findings and the lives and experiences of respondents (Rose et al., 2015, p. 393).
Dependability: Demonstrating that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Rose et al., 2015, p. 394).
Transferability: Providing sufficient information to allow the reader to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts; analogous to generalizability (external validity) in traditional quality criteria (Rose et al., 2015, p. 406).

Schwandt (2011, p.14) argues that authenticity, in the context of qualitative research, is "an approach to inquiry that aims to generate a genuine or true (i.e., 'authentic') understanding of people's experiences." Schwandt (2011, p.14) suggests that the concept of authenticity can be also be viewed as "... our fundamental (authentic) way of experiencing and engaging the world as human beings is through structures of meaning or significance." In other words, authenticity in qualitative research relates to researchers being able to demonstrate their competence in accurately perceiving, interpreting, ascribing meaning to and portraying a social occurrence from the perceptions of research participants. Authenticity can be demonstrated where qualitative research papers present a range of participants' perspectives (i.e., their realities) relating to the phenomenon being examined (Seale, 1999) and where such studies cite significant portions of participants' transcripts to validate the claims being made within and about the research (Fade, 2003).

Jensen (2012, p. 112–113) affords a definition of confirmability as being "concerned with providing evidence that the researcher's interpretations of participants' constructions are rooted in the participants' constructions and also that data analysis and the resulting findings and conclusions can be verified as reflective of and grounded in participants' perceptions". Stated differently, a study's findings must reflect "the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the subjectivity of the researcher" in order to demonstrate confirmability (Curtis, Murphy, & Shields, 2014, p. 172). Confirmability also conveys that any claims made in a study are corroborated by the data (Given & Saumure, 2012) such that an audience is inclined to concur with the conclusions of the study (Newby, 2014). Therefore, documenting the methodological steps utilised to collect and analyse the data and providing data to support the findings is an effective approach to achieving confirmability (Rose et al., 2015).

Credibility can be demonstrated by triangulating different sources of data (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007) to gain deep insights into a complex research topic from no less than two perspectives (Flick, 2018). Credibility is achieved in this study by interviewing senior level academics with a range of teaching and learning and academic management experience who comprise the leadership team within their respective business or management school in three disparate countries to ascertain and expound their shared understanding of, and the meaning they ascribe to, the concept of teaching excellence. According to Curtis, Murphy, and Shields (2014, p.174), "your analysis needs to be credible, and this means that enough of the data needs to be present in order for the reader to be satisfied with the trustworthiness of the analysis being claimed." The analysis of the qualitative interview data is outlined in the data analysis section below and contextual excerpts from that data (i.e., participants' commentaries) are presented in the Research Findings section of the paper to demonstrate the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Dependability can be demonstrated through standardising, and providing an audit trail of, all the procedures deployed during the course of the research project (Curtis, Murphy, & Shields, 2014). Although this requirement for dependability is outlined throughout the Methodology section of this paper, Newby (2014, p.129) asserts that "the only real test of dependability is whether the researcher explains the context for the research sufficiently for the audience to agree with the conclusions." However, according to O'Donoghue (2019, p. 110), dependability "means that the reader should concur with the research findings, taking into consideration the data collected." Thus, taking Newby's (2014) and O'Donoghue's (2019) perspectives on dependability into account connote that the link between the coherence of the research approach used with the findings and conclusions of a study should be evident to the audience.

The transferability of a qualitative study can be improved by purposively selecting a variety of participants, who match the sampling frame, from distinct research locations (Holley & Harris, 2019) and by using open-ended interview questions (Malterud, 2001). Holley & Harris, 2019 also suggest that transferability can be demonstrated in qualitative studies by providing thick

descriptions in their findings. According to Guba and Lincoln (1982, p. 248), thick descriptions means "... providing enough information about a context, first, to impart a vicarious experience of it and second, to facilitate judgments about the extent to which working hypotheses from that context might be transferable to a second and similar context." Indeed, Curtis, Murphy, and Shields (2014, p.174) advise that "the data you use [in your findings] should be rich examples of the points that you wish to convey." This enables other individuals or stakeholder groups who exist or operate in similar contexts to be able to relate, at least in part, to the exposition that is imparted in the findings, discussion and implications of a study. The participants were selected from the leadership (senior management) teams within business and management schools in three disparate continents and from universities that are often categorised as being research-intensive, comprehensive or teaching-focused but can also be categorised as being traditional or young depending on when they were designated a university. Likewise, participants were interviewed using open-ended questions as noted below and rich examples (i.e., thick descriptions) of participants' interview data are provided in the Research Findings section of the study.

3.6. Data collection

Qualitative studies using in-depth or semi-structured interviews are pervasive in research on tertiary level education. Such is the strength of semi-structured interviews that King (2004, p.11) notes that "the interview remains the most common method of data gathering in qualitative research". The use of semi-structured interviews enables a research topic to be explored with participants that can uncover latent themes and identify relevant and contemporary real world issues. Saunders, Thornhill, and Lewis (2016) suggest that the opinions and narratives provided by social actors can be considered as acceptable knowledge. Thus, in the absence of a universal definition of teaching excellence, participants' beliefs, opinions, perceptions, viewpoints, reflections and experience-based narratives on teaching excellence are construed as constituents of, and acceptable knowledge on, teaching excellence.

Potential participants who had been identified through purposive sampling were called and briefed on the merits of the research project. Potential participants who agreed, in principle, to participate in the project were invited to participate in the research project by email and sent a participant information sheet outlining the remit of the research project and a consent form to record their consent to participate in the research as attachments. A date and time was subsequently arranged that would be convenient for participants to be interviewed once they had returned their signed consent forms indicating that they had read the participant information sheet, agreed to be audio recorded and agreed that their comments could be used in outputs from the research project. Ten interviews were conducted via Skype between 21 March 2018 and 9 August 2018 that were digitally audio recorded. Participants were asked to provide commentary on their experiences, opinions, reflections and viewpoints on various aspects of teaching excellence pertaining to the provision of business and management education. The interviews lasted between 37 and 87 minutes as shown in Table 4. The set of open-ended interview questions relating to this paper are contained in the Appendix. From an axiological standpoint, open-ended interview questions were used because they enabled the researcher to maintain neutrality regarding the research topic and enabled participants to speak at liberty and contribute their varied conceptions of teaching excellence pertaining to the research context. This approach aligns with Newby's (2014, p.131) notion that "objectivity must always be a goal for every researcher." In essence, using open-ended interview questions is likely to generate interpretations and expressions of teaching excellence that are unlikely to be influenced by any preconceived notions of teaching excellence that the researcher may have held prior to, or during, the data collection stage of the study. In other words, qualitative researchers who adopt an inductive interpretivist approach should seek some objective distance between themselves and the data they collect by approaching their research project without any preconceived ideas of what they are likely to find, through being mindful not to force or project their influence on participants by enabling participants to express themselves freely during the data collection process and to allow concepts to emerge out of the data they collect when analysing it (Jones & Noble, 2007).

Table 4
Interview participants.

Participant Code	Administrative Region/Province/State	Years Teaching in Business and Management	Years in Current Position	Interview Date	Interview Duration
Australia					
A1	Western Australia	16	1	05.07.2018	56 minutes
A2	Queensland	20	7	16.07.2018	76 minutes
A3	Victoria	16	1	09.08.2018	66 minutes
Britain					
B1	Scotland	21	2	15.06.2018	52 minutes
B2	Wales	16	6	29.06.2018	87 minutes
B3	England: North West	14	2	02.07.2018	76 minutes
Canada					
C1	British Columbia	17	2.5	21.03.2018	54 minutes
C2	Alberta	14	1	10.05.2018	37 minutes
C3	Alberta	11	3	18.05.2018	62 minutes
C4	Ontario	10	6	22.05.2018	64 minutes

3.7. Data analysis

The ten semi-structured interviews with participants were transcribed verbatim. The qualitative data was subsequently analysed using manual inductive analysis to uncover key words, phrases, statements and themes from the semi-structured interviews with participants and statements relating to the factors they perceived to constitute teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education. The inductive analysis process enables the “research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Qualitative research is generally viewed as a process of splicing pieces of data together to synthesise answers to research questions based on pragmatic approaches (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009), perhaps due to the lack of an established convention, or standardised method, for analysing and interpreting qualitative data (Curtis, Murphy, & Shields, 2014; Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2016). Notwithstanding, the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data involves coding the data in order to make sense of it (Daniel & Harland, 2018). The coding process is a means of reducing the raw interview data so that it is possible to identify relevant concepts within, and connections, patterns or themes between, participants’ commentaries to uncover credible and meaningful insights (Rose et al., 2015).

The first interview transcript was examined and each discrete factor (i.e., key word, phrase or statement) that was deemed to constitute a distinct attribute, characteristic or component of teaching excellence was coded with a conceptual tag relating to its meaning (Clark, Foster, & Bryman, 2019; Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2016) with the aim of identifying factors with the same (or a similar) meaning and new factors in subsequent interview transcripts. The shared beliefs, opinions, perceptions, viewpoints, reflections and experience-based narratives among participants were categorised into 7 mutual perspectives on teaching excellence in business and management education after the 10 interview transcripts had been coded. The 7 conceptual codes related to (1) practitioner attributes, (2) research activeness, (3) the involvement of key stakeholders, (4) the learning environment, (5) students as active partners, (6) the learning journey and (7) the informed curricula. At least 2 interview transcripts had to share a conceptual tag relating to teaching excellence to qualify as a shared perspective. Stated differently, the 7 conceptual perspectives emerged out of the data or, as Locke (2007, p. 882) contends, they were “formed inductively, from observing reality.” Excerpts of participants’ interview transcripts that exemplify their individual conceptions of teaching excellence are cited in the Research Findings as follows. Furthermore, given that an outcome of the coding process is that it should enable the research findings to be contextualised or interpreted in association with the literature review (Clark, Foster, & Bryman, 2019; Daniel & Harland, 2018), participants’ shared notions of teaching excellence are discussed in the context of the literature in the Analysis and Discussion section that follows the Research Findings.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Introduction

The findings are arranged by country to permit teaching excellence to be explored in the three disparate HE contexts as outlined in the aims, objectives and scope of the paper and to enable the veracity of any shared conceptions of teaching excellence among the three distinct groups of participants to be observable to the audience. Moreover, this arrangement of the findings also enables the wider scope of participants’ perspectives on teaching excellence to be presented than that imparted in the Analysis and Discussion section of the paper such that readers can assess the authenticity and credible of the interpretations and implications of the study. In other words, as Woiceshyn and Daellenbach (2018, p. 187) note, “evaluators of inductive research can always refer back to the empirical evidence presented in a manuscript”. Furthermore, in order to demonstrate authenticity, Fade (2003, p.144) suggests that “qualitative researchers should ensure that their research reports include enough raw narrative to convey a vivid picture and support each of the points they are making from the analysis.”

4.2. Teaching excellence in the Australian context

Notions of what constitutes teaching excellence in the context of business and management education varied between the Australian participants. Participant A1 believed that teaching excellence occurs where academic teaching staff possess a number of skillsets such as being super-organised and having great communication skills to inspire, motivate and support students to be independent learners and to develop students’ interpersonal and transferable skillsets that they will be able to utilise in their future careers and in their personal lives. In other words, teaching excellence goes beyond the delivery of discipline or subject expertise and becomes a holistic approach to developing students’ full potential.

I think it is a range of things. In my experience, the really good teachers, they do a lot of coaching, supporting of students, they do a lot of engaging and motivating students to really encourage students to seek their own understanding of things in business and to provide support for students as and when they need it. They are super-organised, have great communication skills, and they have a willingness to go over and above for their students. [...] It is helping students to be the best that they can be [...] and for each individual student that will be different. [A1].

Participant A2 suggested that the number of graduates gaining quality jobs and that working back from that outcomes-based measure is a function of teaching excellence. Participant A2 also provided an interpretation of teaching excellence that focuses on

the skillsets of academic teaching staff and their ability to facilitate learning among different audiences or cohorts of students, such as undergraduates, postgraduates, post-experience or executive education students, research students or students pursuing their studies through blended-learning, flipped-classroom or purely online, as they require different types of skillsets and experiences to address the disparate needs of each cohort. For example, teaching excellence can come from an academic being able to engage students in practical active conversations where there is a real co-contribution of the students' current workplace experience, past experiences, perceived future troubles, current conversations that they might be having in their industries or in their workplace and be able to weave that into contemporary research and thinking in order to be able to provide some very applied and practical outcomes and critique for those students. Equally valid, teaching excellence can stem from an academic being an online content expert when delivering flipped-classroom or blended-learning programmes.

So, for me, [teaching] excellence is quite different and it does depend upon the cohort, the environment that they are working in, so, whether we've got a cohort of 2000 in a lecture or we have got a group of executives in a small classroom being facilitated for a workshop all day or we have got research students who are working independently on their own project and being mentored by an academic. [A2].

Participant A2 also noted that while learning experiences will differ from cohort to cohort, each cohort should essentially achieve the learning outcomes that have been set.

Have our students achieved the learning outcomes we have set for them and if they have and they have been satisfied with the way in which they have achieved that and employing organisations are saying that they have been satisfied with what our students are able to do and the academics are satisfied with the way the students have been engaging and participating in those learning activities, then I think we are on the way to having something of higher quality but I don't think it's one thing [i.e., teaching excellence]. I think it is a difficult question to answer in many ways. [A2].

In addition to being able to cater to different cohorts of students, participant A2 suggested that teaching excellence also involves creating a very active learning environment that enables students to trial and test their expertise, and students having a go, learning through practice and failing in a safe environment so that they have opportunities to develop and extend their capabilities and receive feedback. Moreover, being able to address diversity within the student population was an important aspect of teaching excellence. In other words, in this particular context, participant A2 suggested that teaching excellence relates to academic teaching staff being able to understand the different requirements of international students where English may be a second language or where there are cultural differences in the way students have been schooled prior to attending university.

Participant A3 suggested that teaching excellence is based on being able to create a safe, challenging and positive learning environment where students are motivated to learn. Moreover, participant A3 also believed that where academic teaching staff are active researchers in the subjects that they teach, it enables them to relate to current research in their teaching and that engaging in SoTL research also contributes to teaching excellence as follows.

I think part of teaching excellence is being able to engage the students in a positive learning environment where there is open exchange between the students, and the facilitator and the students. I think creating that environment is important for teaching excellence. [...] I think if you can engage students, you've won half the battle – so I would say positive interactions between students and teaching staff, inspiring and motivating students and demonstrating passion and enthusiasm are the most important. Once the students are on the journey with you, you can take them where they need to go. [...] I think being an active researcher is important so that you are able to speak to a lot of the current research projects going on and current publications and those sorts of things and you being engaged with the body of study that you are interested in. I think also conducting your own research in the scholarship of teaching is important so having an implicit sort of understanding of pedagogy, and how students are learning, the classroom environment, the impact of technology on student learning and behaviour, and I think all of those things packaged together kind of result in teaching excellence. [A3]

4.3. Teaching excellence in the British context

The British participants also provided diverse perspectives on what they believed constitutes teaching excellence in the context of business and management education. Participant B1 described teaching excellence as being “multidimensional” but notes it involves encouraging students to be more active partners in their learning, engaging students in practical business projects, achieving student satisfaction by setting subject-relevant learning objectives and outcomes, and helping students achieve them by providing them with a good learning experience.

I think the dimensions for us are to cover the learning objectives, the learning outcomes associated with a particular course, within a particular programme, all the activities that go along with getting the students to achieve those in a way that preferably both the students and the lecturer enjoy for the satisfaction but also being able to apply that to the business setting. [...] It is the application isn't it. [...] We

do industry-led projects, industry-sponsored projects, we have all sorts of ways for our students to engage and I think that is really important for business and management, [that] it is very much rooted in the business community outside of academia. [B1]

However, B1 also notes that it is difficult to engage some of the students who may have additional responsibilities outside of their academic studies and, hence, part of the challenge of engaging some students is that they need to be motivated to pursue their studies.

Participant B2 presents a perspective of teaching excellence as being “multifaceted” but centred on the business and management curriculum meeting the needs of key stakeholders such as students, employers, external examiners and the benchmark standards of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) that oversees the quality of higher education provision across the UK. This perspective of teaching excellence involves assimilating the views of key stakeholders in the design and delivery of business and management programmes.

The curriculum must be up to date and the curriculum must be informed by business, employers and also meet the benchmark standards of the QAA [...] but also that the programme itself is created and is live and is evolving and taking on the views of business and also taking on student feedback. In addition to business, you are taking on the views of professional bodies and so on. [...] Another big voice is the voice of the external examiner. [...] So, I think, the excellence there is in terms of what we teach and in terms of how we teach. I guess that you are informed by the latest developments in pedagogical research, the best ways to teach in terms of teaching craft. I think the excellence comes in two areas. It's what you teach and how you teach. [B2]

Participant B3 notes that in addition to setting acceptable baseline service level agreements and exceeding them, teaching excellence involves academic teaching staff developing and motivating students to be independent learners but intimated that teaching excellence cannot really occur unless students actively participate in their learning as follows.

So, to me, [teaching] excellence is about, it will always encourage the students to do more themselves otherwise it is just a performance. [...] I can be very entertaining in a lecture theatre but if, fundamentally, I am entertaining for an hour and then the students think wow that was good but it does not spur them to go away and do anything themselves, it was pointless. They might as well just stay at home and read a book. I will give you an example how you know teaching excellence has occurred. It is when students come to you later and say, 'actually after your lecturer I went away and I found this paper and I was reading this paper and it is slightly different to what you said'. Fundamentally, they come to you with follow up questions or they've gone away and thought I need to do a bit more research on this myself because this is interesting. [B3]

In other words, teaching excellence involves academic teaching staff providing enriching learning experiences and being a catalyst that encourages students to dig deeper in their learning.

4.4. Teaching excellence in the Canadian context

Canadian academics also presented various conceptions of teaching excellence relating to the provision of business and management education. Participant C1 suggested that although academic teaching staff must have mastery in the subject matter they teach, learning is not a unilateral event whereby academic teaching staff provide all the knowledge and students are passive recipients of that knowledge. Instead, knowledge is co-created and, as such, students are active participants in their learning journey.

Engaging the students in the learning journey and co-creating knowledge with students that leads to students having a different understanding of the world around them. [...] A high level of respect both ways between the instructor and the learner in terms of what they both bring to that learning experience. The instructor who may have content and the learner who may have content and increasingly I am seeing situations where the learning is co-created between the professor [or] the instructor and the student as well. [C1]

Participant C1 was of the view that teaching excellence involves academic teaching staff being able to provide relevance to the real world in what they teach and being able to create relationships that build mutual respect and trust between themselves and their students. He also believed that teaching excellence occurs where senior management support academic teaching staff to take risks and trial innovative approaches to teaching whereby failures should be recognised as opportunities for learning.

Participant C2 suggested that teaching excellence entails academic teaching staff engendering enthusiasm among students about the subject matter they are learning. In other words, the ability of academic teaching staff to engage students in learning is a key component of teaching excellence.

We also need them [academic teaching staff] to be able to engage with the students and get students interested in, if not, excited about the material. [C2]

Participant C3 proposed that teaching excellence could be examined in terms of ‘learning excellence’ – i.e., the extent to which academic teaching staff engender students to learn the subject matter being taught. Notwithstanding, he perceived teaching excellence as a combination of factors that centred on academic teaching staff developing students’ abilities to be independent learners and problem solvers.

We are actually seeing a move away from teaching excellence being the focus. And what I mean by that is that, historically, I think, we have thought of teaching excellence as people who deliver content very effectively and I think what we are seeing a lot more now is a greater recognition of learning excellence, perhaps, rather than teaching excellence. [...] I think really, for me, a facilitator of learning is what an excellent teacher is. So maybe it is that we move towards learning excellence but I think the measure of teaching excellence is not about charismatic content delivery, it is not about entertainment, it is not about having fun, it is not necessarily about being an expert in the topic; however, I think all of those things feed into creating an environment where students can develop their learning tools and their own ability to assess problems and challenges. [C3]

Participant C4 noted that teaching excellence occurs where a business and management programme curriculum reflects contemporary issues in the business world and provide students with an applied learning experience. He also held an outcomes-based view of teaching excellence whereby the role of academic teaching staff is to facilitate student learning and the cultivation of key skillsets and a positive mind-set in students during the course of their studies which is analogous to a transformational process.

[...] whether it [the curriculum] is up to date, whether it is engaged with the real world, whether it has an active learning approach to it, whether it uses real information and not just text books, and experiential learning being a key part of it, things like that. [...] A part of teaching excellence, to me, is it is more about supporting learning as opposed to teaching per se and that has always been one of the challenges. [...] It is how well you facilitate the learning and the quality of that comes out with the graduates at the other end and what they are able to achieve. It is not about necessarily content per se but it's the skill-base, it's the knowledge and skills and the attitude that you develop [in the students]. [C4]

5. Analysis and Discussion

The findings reveal that teaching excellence in the context of business and management education is a complex and multidimensional concept. Notwithstanding, the 7 interrelated thematic perspectives that emerged out of participants’ interview commentaries are discussed as follows.

5.1. The characteristics and skillsets of teaching staff perspective of teaching excellence

Eight of the 10 participants had made references to the characteristics and skillsets of academic teaching staff as factors that help to define teaching excellence. The ability of academic teaching staff to engage students in their learning was the most noted attribute that participants (A1, A3, C1 and C2) considered as being conducive to teaching excellence. This aligns with the view of [Medina et al. \(2011\)](#) who suggest that effective teachers promote student learning and engagement. Participant A1 noted skillsets such as coaching, supporting, engaging, encouraging and motivating students, being super-organised, having great communication skills, and a willingness to help students achieve their full potential as the key attributes of excellent teachers, some of which are documented in the literature (see [Su & Wood, 2012](#)). Other attributes, characteristics and skillsets that participants considered academic teaching staff should have as important aspects of teaching excellence include being able to address the disparate needs of different students (participant A1), different cohorts of students and being able to address diversity within the student population (participant A2), which have been alluded to by [Charles \(2018\)](#); being able to encourage and develop students to become independent and proactive learners (participants B3 and C3); and developing problem solving abilities within students (participant C3), some of which are documented in the literature (see [Elrick, 1990](#); [Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009](#); [Rowley et al., 2018](#); [Shephard, Harland, Stein, & Tidswell, 2011](#)). Furthermore, the ability of academic teaching staff to create positive interactions (i.e., having good rapport) between themselves and students (participant A3), as noted by [Elrick \(1990\)](#); to demonstrate passion and enthusiasm in their teaching (participant A3); to engage, enthuse, inspire and motivate students in their learning (participants C1 and C2); and to enable students to co-create knowledge within the learning environment (participant C1), some of which correspond to the some of the characteristics of academic teaching staff that [Sherman et al. \(1987\)](#) note as being consistently attributed to excellent teachers. Yet, it is noteworthy that participant C4 specifically mentions the ‘attitude’ that academic teaching staff cultivate in students, in addition to equipping them with knowledge and skillsets, as a feature of teaching excellence.

Thus, to summarise, teaching excellence involves taking a holistic approach to teaching that adds value to student learning which goes beyond the delivery of subject expertise and academic teaching staff need to possess an array of attributes, characteristics, skillsets and traits in order to achieve this. However, this holistic approach to teaching contrasts with the view of [Elton \(1998\)](#) who suggests that individual teaching staff are unlikely to possess a high degree of proficiency in all areas of teaching competence that comprise teaching excellence. It follows that HEIs need to recruit academic teaching staff who demonstrate several of the aforementioned

characteristics individually and all of them collectively.

5.2. *The research-based perspective of teaching excellence*

The research-based perspective of teaching excellence espouses the notion that there is a close association between teaching and research whereby teaching excellence is reinforced by both subject-specific research and pedagogic/SoTL research. For example, participant A2 suggests that teaching excellence relates to academic teaching staff being able to align contemporary research in their area of specialism with current phenomena occurring in the real world to address the disparate requirements of different cohorts of students, as alluded to in Table 1 (see Su & Wood, 2012). Participant A3 advocates the view that teaching excellence stems from academic teaching staff being active researchers in the field of what they teach in addition to being active in pedagogic/SoTL research. Participant B2 also believes that academic teaching staff should be knowledgeable about what they teach and the best ways to teach by informing themselves of the latest developments in pedagogical research. This perspective of teaching excellence endorses the idea that achieving teaching excellence is enhanced by academics with a remit for teaching being knowledgeable about their subject specialisms (i.e., what they teach) and pedagogic/SoTL research (i.e., how they teach), as posited by Elton (1998), to address the suggestion provided by Premeaux and Mondy (2002, p.338) that “tenure permits bad teaching because many universities grant tenure to professors who are only marginal or average teachers but are prolific researchers”. Furthermore, this perspective of teaching excellence also reconciles the notion that a disproportionate focus on research output, as opposed to research quality, may lead to a decrease in perceived teaching quality (Cadez et al., 2017) with the notion that teaching is enhanced by research (Artés et al., 2017; Elrick, 1990). Valuing pedagogic/SoTL research and subject-specific research equally within HE environments could enable some academic teaching staff to become more proficient in their teaching craft, as suggested by Medina et al. (2011); allay sentiments regarding the perceived prestige of discipline-specific research over pedagogic/SoTL research that is present in some HEIs as noted in the literature (see Bennett et al., 2018; Devlin, Smeal, Cummings, & Mazzolini, 2012; Kolomitro et al., 2018); and enable pedagogic/SoTL research to be recognised, evaluated and rewarded in the same way as subject-specific research is in the progression and promotions process within HEIs (see Cox & Swanson, 2002; Hubball et al., 2005). In essence, teaching excellence emerges from teaching being supported by both subject-specific research and pedagogic/SoTL research.

5.3. *The key stakeholder perspective of teaching excellence*

This perspective promotes the view that achieving teaching excellence involves the input of key stakeholders in the design and provision of business and management education. For example, participant A2 suggests that outcomes-based measures such as the level of satisfaction of employing organisations with the demonstrable skillsets of graduates¹ and the number of graduates gaining quality jobs is a function of teaching excellence. Participants A2 and B1 note the level of satisfaction students and graduates have regarding their learning experience as factors related to teaching excellence. Moreover, participant B1 believed it is very important for business and management programmes to be rooted in the business communities outside of academia such that they provide opportunities for students to engage in industry-led projects and industry-sponsored projects. Participant B2 provided a more comprehensive account of key stakeholders, such as employers, government agencies with a remit for setting and monitoring quality standards within HE (e.g., the QAA in the UK and TEQSA² in Australia); student feedback representing the student voice, which is suggested as being integral to conceptualisations of teaching excellence (see Su & Wood, 2012); professional associations and agencies that provide accreditation and external examiner feedback, who help to inform the delivery of teaching excellence within business and management education. The key stakeholder perspective of teaching excellence aligns with the view that a greater emphasis on accountability is a significant factor driving teaching quality initiatives among HEIs to justify that the learning outcomes of their programmes enable students to be market-ready as noted in the literature (see Ives et al., 2009; Samad, Fraser, Fish, & Fraser, 1995; Wong, 2015), given that the employability agenda has obligated HEIs to consider ways in which their programmes prepare students for employment beyond their studies as noted by Rowley et al. (2018). Accordingly, this perspective of teaching excellence is closely linked to the business and management curricula perspective of teaching excellence.

5.4. *The learning environment perspective of teaching excellence*

Four participants (A2, A3, C1 and C3) mentioned the learning environment as a factor related to teaching excellence. For example, participant A2 believed that the components for achieving teaching excellence are different for different cohorts of students and the environment they are working in; however, the environment should be very active in terms of enabling students to trial and test their expertise, have a go, learn through practice and fail in a safe environment so that they have opportunities to develop and extend their capabilities and receive feedback on their learning. Participant A3 believed teaching excellence results from creating a positive learning environment where students can engage in their learning and there is open exchange among students, and between students and academic teaching staff. This notion of teaching excellence aligns with view of participant C1 who suggests that students being able to co-create knowledge in their learning environment is a component of teaching excellence. Participant C3 also relates teaching excellence to creating environments where students can develop their learning tools and their own ability to assess problems and

¹ Developing skills in students was also mentioned by participant C4.

² Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

challenges. However, the learning environment should also be safe and positive for academic teaching staff to trial innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as expressed by participant C1. This perspective of teaching excellence aligns with the notion that being able to provide a safe space for students to learn is a component of teaching excellence as noted in the literature (e.g., [Su & Wood, 2012](#); [Wood & Su, 2017](#)) and the views of [Johnson-Farmer and Frenn \(2009\)](#), noted in [Table 2](#), that creating an environment in which active learning can occur and being able to draw all students into active questioning and learning in a process of discovery that is enjoyable as factors associated with teaching excellence.

5.5. *The active partnership perspective of teaching excellence*

The active partnership perspective views students as co-creators of, or co-contributor to, knowledge and learning, and being active partners or independent learners on their learning journey. Participants A2 and C1 intimated that students can actively contribute to their learning environment and, in so doing, co-create knowledge with academic teaching staff within the learning space. Participant A2 suggested that students can make real co-contributions to the learning environment based on their current or past workplace experiences or conversations that are occurring in the industries in which they work and participant C1 suggested that academic teaching staff and students can co-create knowledge in a learning environment because students can bring content to that learning experience. Participants B1 and B3 made references to students playing an active role as partners in their learning. Participant B1 saw students as active partners in their learning and participant B3 associated teaching excellence with encouraging students to learn more independently. This perspective on teaching excellence places some responsibility on students to be independent and self-motivated in their learning, and to be active contributors to their learning environments, as opposed to being passive recipients of content and instruction, and it aligns with the view of [Johnson-Farmer and Frenn \(2009\)](#) that teaching excellence involves the active participation of students.

5.6. *The learning journey perspective of teaching excellence*

It is noteworthy that both Australian and Canadian academics (participants A3 and C1, respectively) perceived teaching excellence in terms of a learning journey that students undertake. The journey metaphor is interesting because, *prima facie*, it could be presumed that students are mere passengers on their learning journey. However, the context of the journey metaphor places emphasis on the role of academic teaching staff to engage students in their learning such they are able to reach the destination of achieving the learning outcomes of their programme of study. In essence, students should not assume the role of passive recipients of knowledge during their learning ([Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009](#)). The journey perspective aligns with the notion that students need to be active partners on their learning journey toward learning excellence in order for teaching excellence to occur, as alluded to by [Andrews et al. \(1996\)](#). Stated differently, teaching excellence is accompanied by learning excellence and one cannot exist without the other being present.

5.7. *The business and management curricula perspective of teaching excellence*

Four participants mentioned teaching excellence in relation to business and management curricula. Teaching excellence relates to students being able to achieve the learning objectives within a particular module or course (participant B1), the learning outcomes of a business and management programme (participants A2 and B1), and provide students with real world applied learning experiences (participants B1 and C4) as posited in the literature (see [Erselcan, 2015](#); [Hill et al., 2003](#)). Moreover, business and management curricula should be informed by key stakeholders (participant B2) and continuously evolve to reflect current phenomena occurring in the business world (participants B2 and C4). Importantly, participants A2 and B1 also suggest that students being satisfied with the way the learning outcomes have been achieved in relation to teaching excellence.

5.8. *Inferences from the study*

The analysis of the findings reveals that there are shared notions as to the meaning of teaching excellence pertaining to business and management education among the Australian, British and Canadian participants that span 7 perspectives outlined in the preceding paragraphs. However, much of the evidence, set out above, suggest that the characteristics and skillsets of academic teaching staff appears to be the main factor that has a bearing on teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education. This is unsurprising given that most of the interactions students will have during the course of their studies with a provider of business and management education will be with academic teaching staff, whether those interactions occur in a lecture theatre, seminar class, flipped classroom or online. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that a number of factors outlined in the literature review were not overtly mentioned in relation to articulating a description of, or defining, teaching excellence. This lends support to the notion that there are primary and secondary factors that individuals associate with, or assign to, the concept of teaching excellence. Primary factors may include the attributes, characteristics, skillsets and traits of academic teaching staff, which are at the forefront of academics' minds and central, or critical, to their perceptions of what teaching excellence entails. Secondary, or peripheral, factors that academics associate with teaching excellence may include business and management programmes being accredited by professional associations such that graduates are permitted to work in certain professions or industries. There may even be tertiary factors relating to teaching excellence, which may emerge with time, such as greater recognition of the capacity for underrepresented groups among faculty and administration within HEIs to be able to act as role models (as alluded to by [Moshiri & Cardon, 2016](#)) or provide students with authentically diverse and distinct perspectives on business and management topics that enrich their learning experience and

provide them with insights that could be useful in their future careers. The subject matter of diversity was partially addressed by participant A2 who suggested that being able to address diversity within the student population was an important aspect of teaching excellence. While participant A2's commentary was framed in the context of being able to understand and address the needs of international students, [Moshiri and Cardon \(2016, p.243\)](#) state that diversity "... has many facets: racial, gender, age, ethnicity, and—some would argue—opinion". Notwithstanding, diversity includes other facets; none of which are mutually exclusive.

Nevertheless, the perspectives provided by the participants in this study reflect a wide range of characteristics that include, but are not limited to, the experience of participants; the geographical location of their institution; the extent to which their institution is teaching-focused or research-focused; the level of autonomy afforded to HEIs in their country; internal policies and procedures; whether government HE policies are centralised nationally or decentralised to devolved administrative regions; the existent and influence of quality assurance agencies; and the influence of other key HE stakeholders. While the researcher is mindful to remain neutral regarding the research topic, the researcher is cognisant that such influences will inevitably have a bearing on participants' perceptions of what constitutes teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education. Thus, teaching excellence is exhibited and expounded in various ways ([Sherman et al., 1987](#)) because the concept is largely contingent on individuals' perceptions of what teaching excellence entails ([Biggs, 2012](#)). It follows that, there is unlikely to be a single definition of teaching excellence that will satisfy all stakeholders in HE environments and, correspondingly, it is unlikely that a single framework of teaching excellence can be equally applicable to all HEIs.

5.9. Implications of the study

In terms of the methodological implications relating to the evaluation considerations for qualitative studies, the research is considered to have demonstrated authenticity by presenting a range of participants' perspectives that reflect their perceived realities of the meaning of teaching excellence in the context of business and management education ([Fade, 2003](#); [Schwandt, 2011](#); [Seale, 1999](#)). The study has also demonstrated confirmability by providing verbatim excerpts of participants' interview data to support the findings and has presented the methodological steps utilised to collect and analyse the data ([Rose et al., 2015](#)) and to affirm the interpretations and claims made in the research ([Jensen, 2012](#); [Given & Saumure, 2012](#)) such that readers are inclined to concur with the conclusions of the study ([Newby, 2014](#)). Credibility has been demonstrated in the research by triangulating the interview data from three distinct cohorts of participants who hold a leadership (i.e., senior management) role within their respective business or management school from three different continents ([Schwandt et al., 2007](#)) to gain deep, meaningful and credible insights on teaching excellence pertaining to the context of the study ([Flick, 2018](#)). Likewise, dependability has been demonstrated in the study by standardising, and providing an audit trail of, all the procedures deployed during the course of the research project ([Curtis, Murphy, & Shields, 2014](#)) as outlined in the Methodology section of this paper such that readers are likely to agree with the research findings ([O'Donoghue, 2019](#)) and conclusions of the study ([Newby, 2014](#)).

It is asserted that the criteria for achieving and demonstrating transferability has been met in this study for the following reasons. A variety of participants who fit the sampling frame were purposively recruited for the study ([Holley & Harris, 2019](#)) and they were interviewed using a standardised set of open-ended interview questions ([Malterud, 2001](#)) that enabled participants to speak at liberty and contribute their varied conceptions of teaching excellence pertaining to the research context. Thick descriptions of participants' accounts of what constitutes teaching excellence in the context of business and management education have been provided in the findings of the study ([Holley & Harris, 2019](#)). Given that participants were selected from business and management schools in three different continents and from a combination of research-intensive, comprehensive, teaching-focused, traditional and young universities, it is very likely that other individuals or stakeholder groups who exist or operate in culturally similar contexts are able to relate, at least in part, to the notions of teaching excellence that are depicted in the findings, discussion and implications of the study. Thus, there is a high likelihood that where the study is replicated in other countries that share similar teaching practices and social contexts, similar findings are likely to be found to that of the current study. Yet, while there is a tendency for social actors to be influenced by the social, cultural and organisational contexts in which they exist and operate, it should also be noted that the findings, interpretations and suggestions for promoting teaching excellence in business and management education found in this paper may also align with, and be transferable to, HE contexts that are culturally and socially dissimilar because, as [Guba and Lincoln \(1994\)](#) allude, elements of the socially constructed and experience-based realities of the participants in a study may be relatable to individuals and stakeholder groups across cultures. Notwithstanding, this latter point is addressed in the Limitations and Further Research section of the paper.

In terms of the institutional implications, several suggestions that have the propensity to promote the delivery of teaching excellence within business and management education emerge from the research findings. In addition to job candidates meeting the essential elements of job descriptions, departmental recruiting managers and their interview panels (recruiting panels and search/selection committees) within business and management schools should seek to recruit job candidates, for positions with a remit for teaching, who have a diverse range of skillsets that extend beyond delivering subject expertise. They should seek to recruit job candidates who demonstrate an interest in, and experience of, conducting research relating to both their subject specialism and pedagogical/SoTL research. In other words, academic teaching staff should be knowledgeable about what they teach and different modes of teaching, "teaching craft", to engage effectively with the different audiences that they teach and to engender their students to become independent learners. This aligns with many of the perceived attributes, characteristics and qualities associated with excellent academic teaching staff as outlined in the literature review (see [Erick, 1990](#); [Elton, 1998](#); [Hill et al., 2003](#); [Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009](#); [Medina et al., 2011](#); [Rowley et al., 2018](#); [Shephard, Harland, Stein, & Tidswell, 2011](#); [Su & Wood, 2012](#)).

Departmental recruiting panels should also seek to recruit job candidates who demonstrate a broad range of abilities to address the requirements of diverse cohorts of students; in terms of their social, cultural, international and work-experience characteristics, and

those from non-traditional or underrepresented backgrounds; to facilitate the development of key employability and transferable skillsets within them and to engage and motivate them in their learning. Moreover, given the growing significance of global citizenship within HE, the increasingly globalised nature of HE provision, particularly in business and management education, and the diverse makeup of student populations, departmental recruiting panels should, particularly where certain groups of individuals are underrepresented within their departments, align with the rising importance of equity (equality), diversity and inclusion and seek to recruit job candidates who reflect the diverse makeup of their student populations (Llamas et al., 2019; Moshiri & Cardon, 2016; Stout et al., 2018) because, as Moshiri and Cardon (2016) explain, “traditional methods of recruitment are not working” (p.248) and, as such, “business schools need to revisit their search committee guidelines and structure and incorporate diversity goals into the hiring practices directly where legally possible” (p.249). Moreover, it is equally important to also retain and develop individuals in underrepresented groups among faculty and administration (Llamas et al., 2019; Moshiri & Cardon, 2016; Stout et al., 2018). The value of presenting students with authentically diverse perspectives on business and management that prepare them for working in increasingly complex and globalised career environments is self-evident. Similarly, departmental recruiting panels should seek to recruit job candidates who demonstrate awareness and understanding of the needs of key stakeholders such as regional, national and global employers; professional associations and agencies; external accreditation, quality assurance and regulatory agencies; and the ‘student voice’ at local, regional and/or national levels where relevant.

The business and management curriculum should be kept current, be relevant to the real world, and enable students to engage in experiential learning and apply their learning to real-world contexts (noted by Hill et al., 2003) given the competitive environment in which business and management schools operate (Marks et al., 2016), the merits of students engaging in experiential learning (Bell, 2015; Caza, Brower, & Wayne, 2015; Erselcan, 2015; Finch, Peacock, Lazdowski, & Hwang, 2015; Li & Chao, 2013; Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019), the employability agenda requiring graduates to be work-ready (Rowley et al., 2018) and the need to justify the learning outcomes of graduates to be market-ready (Ives et al., 2009; Samad, Fraser, Fish, & Fraser, 1995; Wong, 2015). Accordingly, the design, delivery and perceived value of business and management programmes should be of paramount importance to HEIs offering such programmes because prospective students are likely to evaluate the extent to which a particular business or management programme offers them the best value for money in terms of the quality of educational experience and post-graduation employment prospects when finalising their decision on which business or management programme to study. Stated more plainly, the value proposition that business and management schools offer prospective students should be grounded in excellence pertaining to the design, delivery and experiential utility of their programmes. This is particularly pertinent in the contexts of the massification (Gopaul et al., 2016; Rowley et al., 2018; Charles, 2018) and marketisation (Polkinghorne et al., 2017) of HE and growing sentiments that identify students as consumers of HE (Bunce et al., 2017; Gunn, 2018; Polkinghorne et al., 2017).

Senior management teams within business and management schools should endorse the notion of positive and safe active learning environments, as indicated in the literature (Su & Wood, 2012; Wood & Su, 2017), in terms of enabling students to engage in experiential learning, learn by trial and error, develop their own learning tools, develop new capabilities and skillsets and extend existing ones and receive constructive feedback on their learning. One way of achieving this is for senior management teams to support academic teaching staff who trial innovative approaches to teaching and learning, particularly where such initiatives subsequently result in poor module (course) evaluations by students. While this concurs with the notion that teaching excellence involves adopting innovative approaches to teaching as alluded to in the literature (Elton, 1998; Johnson-Farmer & Frenn, 2009; Wood & Su, 2017), instances of trialling innovative approaches to teaching and learning that result in poor module (course) evaluation should be viewed by academic teaching staff and their departments as opportunities to learn, instead of failures, and should not adversely affect the annual performance review of academic teaching staff, their promotion prospects nor their opportunity to secure tenure. Likewise, innovative approaches to teaching and learning that are deemed as successful or good practice within a given department should be shared across the wider business or management school in order to foster the delivery of teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education and, where appropriate, also shared with the wider HEI. However, institutional culture (Su & Wood, 2012) and faculty subcultures (Schindler et al., 2013) often have a bearing on the achievement of teaching excellence. It follows that, how senior management (leadership) teams interpret, articulate, promote, lead, support, monitor and review a shared notion or framework of teaching excellence within business and management schools, and the faculty subculture and organisational culture within which they operate are paramount to the delivery of teaching excellence in business and management education.

5.10. Contributions of the study

This study addressed the paucity of research that currently exists on teaching excellence, as noted by Johnson-Farmer and Frenn (2009), in the context of business and management education. The concept of teaching excellence was explored from the perspective of senior level academics in university business and management schools and provides credible and meaningful insights into teaching excellence pertaining to business and management education from three distinct country contexts and an intercontinental perspective. The implications of the study provide suggestions for promoting teaching excellence in the provision of tertiary level business and management education. The research also contributes to, and furthers, our understanding of teaching excellence in HE relating to business and management education.

6. Conclusions

The literature review established that the concept of teaching excellence in HE is complex and multidimensional as many stakeholder interpretations abound. Correspondingly, there is no consensus of opinion on, nor universally agreed upon definition of, what

constitutes teaching excellence among HE stakeholders. Indeed, the findings of this study concur with the literature that teaching excellence is a complex and multifaceted concept even when it is being examined in a single academic field of study. Nonetheless, there are shared notions of what teaching excellence entails among participants in the different countries in this study that go beyond the belief that teaching excellence is synonymous with excellent teaching. Exploring the concept of teaching excellence in the context of business and management education from the perspective of senior level academics in Australian, British and Canadian universities revealed the following. Teaching excellence is likely to occur where business and management academics with a remit for teaching possess a broad range of abilities, competences, skillsets and characteristics that engender learning excellence among different cohorts of students; reflect the diverse makeup of student populations that they teach; conduct research on both their subject specialism and SoTL to inform what they teach and how they teach; are cognisant of the requirements and viewpoints of key stakeholders when developing, delivering and revising business and management curricula; and are enabled and supported by senior management to trial innovative approaches to teaching and learning within a positive and safe learning environment. Thus, the leadership attributes of senior management, the faculty subculture and wider institutional culture are imperative elements of translating and effecting teaching excellence within business and management schools. Teaching excellence is also likely to occur where academic teaching staff encourage, motivate and support business and management students to expand their existing skillsets and to develop new capabilities; be active partners in the co-creation of knowledge; and be active participants (i.e., independent learners) on their journey towards learning excellence. However, it is equally important that business and management students possess the self-motivation to pursue their full potential. Moreover, teaching excellence is also likely to occur where business and management curricula are kept current and provide students with opportunities to engage in experiential learning and apply their learning to real world contexts within positive and safe learning environments. It follows that, the extent to which teaching excellence in business and management education can be realised within business and management schools will be contingent on a combination of numerous contextual factors outlined in the Analysis and Discussion section above. Thus, while the implications of this study may prove to be useful for promoting teaching excellence in the provision business and management education, as [McFarlane \(2014\)](#) indicates, there is no universal formula for achieving teaching excellence among all HEIs in all contexts.

7. Limitations and Further Research

7.1. Limitations of the study

The research examines teaching excellence through the lens of only one group of stakeholders within the HE domain; namely, senior level academics with a remit for teaching, learning and administration in Australian, British and Canadian university business and management schools. Given that there are numerous stakeholders involved in the continuous debate on what constitutes teaching excellence, this research has presented a one-sided stakeholder perspective on a multifaceted discussion that requires the perspectives of other stakeholders to further elucidate the factors that constitute teaching excellence in the context of tertiary level business and management education. Similarly, notions of what constitutes teaching excellence in the context of business and management education may differ in other country contexts due to social, cultural and organisational differences and in other academic fields of study.

7.2. Further research

Given the scope of this exploratory research project, and in light of its limitations, it would be very useful for future studies to explore teaching excellence in the context of business and management education in other similar and dissimilar country contexts; examine how teaching excellence is evaluated in business and management schools; explore how senior management in business and management schools lead and manage the delivery of teaching excellence within their institutional domain; evaluate factors critical to the success of achieving teaching excellence; and to develop a conceptual framework of teaching excellence to evaluate, and further explicate, the factors that constitute teaching excellence in the delivery of business and management education. Likewise, exploration of the policy and practice implications of teaching excellence for business and management schools and any influence that global, national, regional and institutional factors have on teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education are also avenues for further research. Questions exploring whether teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education reflects excellence in academic leadership; and if so, in what ways, to what extent and what constitutes leadership excellence within the context of business and management schools were beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, they are important questions for future research to address. Finally, it would also be very useful for further research to explore the concept of teaching excellence in other fields of study and with other stakeholders in HE communities.

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Appendix. Interview Questions Relating to This Paper

1. How long have you been a faculty member (i.e., teaching and researching) in the field of business and management in higher education?

2. How long have you been the Dean (Assistant/Associate/Deputy/Vice Dean) of the business/management school or faculty? – Question for participants with Dean in their position. How long have you been the Director (Assistant/Associate Director or Assistant/Associate Dean) for Teaching and Learning in the business/management school or faculty? – Question for participants with Teaching and Learning in their position.
3. In your experience, what constitutes teaching excellence in the field of business and management education?
4. Of the factors you have mentioned, which do you think are the most critical factors for attaining success in teaching excellence in business and management education? In other words, what do you think are the critical success factors for teaching excellence in the provision of business and management education?
5. Reflecting on the answers to the previous two questions, how would you define teaching excellence?
6. Is there anything, that I have not asked you, that you would like to add because you think it would be relevant to the study?

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