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## **Impact of Lecturers' Gender on Learning: Assessing University of Ghana Students' Views**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Studies conducted since the late 1970s have sought to describe students' conceptions of learning especially how gender of lecturers affected the learning of students. However, not many studies have been done in Ghana concerning how gender of lecturers affected learning among students. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of gender of lecturers on students learning. The study was conducted at the University of Ghana, Legon among undergraduates in levels 200, 300 and 400. Respondents were selected using the multi stage sampling procedure including quota and purposive sampling. Data were collected by the means of a self administered questionnaire and analyzed using the SPSS with interpretation in the form of tables, bar charts and followed by discussions. The findings revealed that male lecturers were rated higher as having positive impacts on learning whilst female lecturers were rated higher on class participation. Generally, however, most students agreed with existing literature that gender of lecturer really did not matter and that lecturers' lecturing skills and personality were more important.*

### **1. Introduction**

In the last decade, there has been an increase in studying students' opinions about various aspects of their university or college experience. One of the most fashionable topics for this purpose is that of college or university's students' ratings of their teachers. Research interest in student-faculty evaluation has increased markedly in recent years. This seems to be a result of the increased use of these evaluations either for administrative decisions (promotion, tenure, and salaries) or for feedback and self-improvement (Neumann and Neumann, 1981).

Although a majority of studies have found that male and female college teachers do not differ in the global ratings they receive from their students, more of them favor women than men when statistically significant differences are found. According to Feldman (1992), across studies, the average association between gender and overall evaluation, while favoring women (average  $r = +.02$ ), is so small as to be insignificant in practical terms. Considering specific instructional dimensions of evaluations, female teachers receive slightly higher ratings on their sensitivity to and concern with class level and progress than do men (average  $r = +.12$ ).

Furthermore Feldman (1992) indicated that students tend to rate same-gendered teachers a little higher than opposite-gendered teachers. Across rating areas, more studies found indications of students' perceptions of female teachers being influenced by these other factors (the teacher's expressiveness, physical attractiveness, mode of teaching, and academic field, and the like) than the perceptions of male teachers being so influenced.

Preconceptions of male and female college or university teachers or lecturers shows that, in the majority of studies, students' global evaluations of male and female college teachers as professionals were not different. In a minority of the studies, however, male teachers received higher overall evaluations than did female teachers. For the most part, the perceptions and ratings of the two genders in most other areas either showed no differences or in-consistent differences across studies. Moreover, most studies found that male teachers and female teachers were not perceived differently by their male and female students. Interaction effects found in a particular study between the teacher's gender and other factors (teacher's expressiveness, physical attractiveness, mode of teaching, academic field and the like) usually were not confirmed by findings in other studies.

Classroom participation is considered by both female and male students to be one of the factors related to effective learning and results in more positive views of the learning experience (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Differences in the form of student participation are important, because certain types of participation are expected to be more responsible for students' impressions of the university classroom (e.g., more intrusive styles such as interrupting), to contribute more to effective learning and positive experience, and to be more likely to demonstrate gender differences of lecturers (Crombie, Pyke et al 2003). Therefore class participation based on gender of lecturers is also very important for this article. Cornelius, Gray, and Constantinople (1990) and Fassinger, (1995a, 1995b) have emphasized that student participation in class which in turn influences learning of students are determined by

multiple factors and, unless these factors are examined, the nature of student-lecturer interaction in the university or college classroom will most likely be misrepresented.

“Do female lecturers have to set questions like the way they think?” (A student). This was the question a male level 200 student asked after the end of a semester examination which for most students had been quite difficult and was taught by a female lecturer. The researchers quietly mused over the statement the student had made on the way to the hall of residence and wondered if there was any validity in the statement made. Often you hear such statements on campuses about the perceived difficulty of questions of female lecturers are as opposed to male, though most of these same students generally assert that women are more interesting at lecturing as opposed to men. Some students would also say female lecturers are more demanding in class; asking questions regularly which keeps students on their toes academically than male lecturers. The essence of this article thus, is to find out the answers to these assertions which are widespread amongst students. It is therefore important to examine if there is any relationship between the gender of lecturers and learning among students especially of the University of Ghana. What is the general perception of students concerning the gender of lecturers and teaching? Is there any relationship between gender of lecturers and class participation of students? Is there any relationship between the gender of lecturers and the perceived difficulty of how examination questions are set? Is there any link between gender of students in relation to lecturer preference (male or female)? Answers to these pertinent questions would constitute solutions to the problem statement for this article.

## 2. Objectives of Study

The main objective of this paper is to evaluate the views of students concerning the impact of gender of lecturers on learning among University of Ghana students.

Specifically the study seeks;

- To evaluate the perception of students on the gender of their lecturers and their teaching styles and methods.
- To explore relationship between the gender of lecturers and class participation of students
- To assess the relationship between the gender of lecturers and the perceived difficulty of examination questions.
- To examine linkage between student's gender and the gender of preferred lecturers.

## 3. Theoretical Anchorage

Theoretically, in discussing gender of lecturers and impact on student's learning it is very important to understand what informs an individual's evaluation of others. The stereotyping theory helps one to understand how people evaluate and form perceptions of others. Journalist Walter Lippman introduced the term stereotype in 1922. A stereotype is a generalization about a group of people in which identical characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group, regardless of actual variation among the members. (Aronson, Wilson and Akert 2007). Stereotypes are not necessarily emotionally laden and do not necessarily lead to discrimination. Frequently stereotyping is merely a way to simplify a complex world (Allport 1954).

Stereotypes are "*overgeneralized beliefs about people based on their membership in one of many social categories*" (Anselmi and Law 1998: 195). Gender stereotypes vary on four dimensions: traits, role behaviors, physical characteristics, and occupations (Deaux and Lewis 1983). For example, whereas men are more likely to be perceived as aggressive and competitive, women are more likely to be viewed as passive and cooperative. Traditionally, men have been viewed as financial providers, whereas women have been viewed as caretakers. Physical characteristics and occupations have also been considered consistent or inconsistent with masculine or feminine roles.

Gender stereotypes are still pervasive in our society today. Women are seen as more nurturing and less assertive than men; this may be due to their involvement in the homemaker role. Evolutionary psychologists argue that the difference is due to a basis in the behaviors required for reproductive success. Whatever the cause of the difference, this stereotype does have some basis in truth. Work by Eagly & Wood, 1991; Swim, 1990) shows that there are indeed behavioral differences between men and women such that women are more concerned with the welfare of others and men are more independent and dominant.

These studies point to the fact that women as lecturers might have a more positive influence on students, the fact however remains that in our society the stereotypical idea of a professor or senior lecturer is that of a man and not a woman and even though the numbers of women in the teaching field in tertiary institutions in Ghana keep on increasing, a greater number of lecturers are male. This might therefore create male stereotypes of lecturers in tertiary institutions which would make students automatically prejudiced to female lecturers as opposed to male lecturers and make students score male lecturers higher than female lecturers. This may not necessarily be the case but as the definition of stereotype indicates, it is "a generalization about a group of people in which identical characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group, regardless of actual variation among the members" (Aronson, Wilson and Akert 2007) thus students might actually attribute certain characteristics either to female lecturers which might not necessarily be the case as opposed to male who are the stereotypical university lecturers.

The potential abuse engendered by stereotyping can be subtle as well as blatant, and involve positive as well as negative characteristics. The abuse involves ignoring the overlap of distributions and ignoring individual differences in characteristics. Nonetheless, gender stereotyping often does depart from reality and can cut deeply. For example, people tend to see men's ability and women's motivation as responsible for their success and men's lack of effort and women's lower ability as responsible for failure. These results, originally found in the 1970s, continue to be replicated in work in the late 1990s.

Gender roles and stereotypes affect men and women in other ways. Specifically, men and women may be judged by how well they conform to traditional stereotypes. Gender stereotypes can also affect men and women's performance. Gender of lecturers and how it affects learning can be seen as a typification of gender stereotyping as evidenced above. Traditional notions about women being more nurturing and caring might lead students to say that female lecturers have a positive impact on learning as opposed to

male lecturers that are thought to be quite strict and not interested in the affairs of their students but this might not be a reflection of reality.

#### 4. Research Methods

The target population comprised undergraduate students of the University of Ghana. Students were drawn from levels 200 to 400. The selected students were from courses of study that had gender of lecturers fairly distributed. The researchers therefore targeted such students to find out their views on gender of lecturers and impact on learning. Level 100 students were not included because they had just experienced one semester of teaching at the time of the research.

A sample of one hundred and twenty (120) students made up of 60 males and 60 females of the University of Ghana, Legon was selected. Ideally ten percent (10%) of the total population had to be used as the sample size because the study is largely a quantitative one but due to time constraints and expenditure, a sample of one hundred and twenty was used.

The non-probability method of purposive sampling was used to identify degree programs offered which had a fair distribution in terms of gender of lecturers. The degree programs were Bachelor of Arts; Bachelor of Sciences; Bachelor of Fine Arts; Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. The quota sampling method was then used to select 50, 35, 20 and 15 respectively for each of the degree programs. For the selection of the individual respondents in each quota, availability and willingness to participate influenced the selection of respondents which made this stage non-random.

Data collection was done through self-administered questionnaires. This was because respondents to the questionnaire were university students who were literate and as such were able to grasp questions and answer them as required. Another reason for choosing the questionnaire was that students feel more at ease answering questions that provides some form of anonymity since some of the questions were quite personal and as such an interview would be felt by the respondent as a violation of his/her privacy. The questionnaires included both open and close-ended questions. The closed ended questions provided limited responses whilst the open ended questions gave respondents the opportunity to provide several answers, which yielded valuable insight into what the respondents' views and opinions were of gender of lecturers and impact on learning complementing the closed ended questions.

The Statistical Product for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 16) was used to analyze the data. The researcher chose this package because it's simple and easy to use. Also, simple descriptive analysis would be used to analyze the study based on the responses gathered. Coding of the study will be based on the questions and responses obtained from the respondents. The study lasted for a period of eight months; however the field work covered about four weeks. The data was collected by the use of self-administered questionnaires.

#### 5. Findings and Discussion of the Study

##### 5.1. Students' Perception of Lecturers' Gender and Teaching Methods

The study revealed that 45% of students preferred male lectures to female lectures whilst 15% preferred female lecturers as opposed to male lectures and 40% did not care about gender. All 3 groups gave diverse reasons for their preference of male or female lecturers. Reasons for the preference for male lecturers were that, taught better and were more interactive. Others were of the view that male lecturers were friendly, approachable and more open. They also said male lecturers were more efficient, effective, competent and more understanding. Others liked male lectures because male lecturer's awarded better grades, female lecturers were too sentimental and male lecturers were not biased. Other respondents thought that whilst, male lecturers have deeper voices and were easier to listen to, female lecturers were annoying and proud.

For respondents who preferred female lecturers, their justifications were that, female lecturers were more understanding, patient, more interesting, more interactive and taught better. Some also thought female lecturers were motivating and more demanding which kept them on their toes. For others, female lecturers were driven by the need to prove that they are good lecturers and more regular in attendance to class.

##### 5.2. Differences in teaching skills of Male and Female lecturers

Students' preference for either male or female lecturers led the researchers to find out from respondents whether they thought there were differences in the teaching skills of male and female lecturers. Thirty-five respondents (32%) responded in the affirmative, whilst 17 (16%) responded in the negative and 57 (52%) were not sure.

Respondents gave several reasons why they thought there were differences between male and female lecturers in terms of teaching skills. Many of the students said there were differences in teaching skills and went ahead to rate male lecturers more positively than female lecturers. For some of the respondents, males were more confident and explained better. Furthermore, others indicated that male lecturers were more complicated, had a good sense of humor, were more interactive and were able to control larger classes better.

The respondents who thought female lecturers had better teaching skills indicated that, female lecturers were more patient with explanations, more professional and diplomatic, more assertive and bossy and more interactive. These students claimed male lecturers preferred to dictate notes whiles female lecturers are interactive. Some respondents also thought that teachings skills was dependent on the subject being taught. These views confirm the findings of Chamberlain and Miller (2000), who argues that, "students' perceptions are subjectively experienced, yet they reflect accurately the exact social order, characterized by gender stereotypes and stratification within colleges and universities..."

Besides this some students were of the view that there were no differences in teaching skills between male and female lecturers. This was consistent with existing literature by Scheon, Sirowatka and Winocur (1989) whose analyses revealed that students'

perceptions of lecturers are largely dependent on lecturing style. The results from their study suggested that within a teaching environment students do not distinguish between male and female lectures except in relation to teaching.

The findings of this study revealed that, respondents who did not consider any differences in teaching skills between male and female lecturers felt that personality, style of teaching, knowledge of course etc. and not gender of lecturers mattered most Others thought some male and female lecturers were lazy thus there were no differences in teaching skills.

### 5.3. Gender of Lecturers and Students' involvement in Class Participation

Classroom participation is considered by both female and male students to be one of the factors related to effective learning and to result in more positive views of the learning experience (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Respondents were asked of their opinion as to whether the gender of lecturers influences student involvement in class participation. Many of the respondents (49%) said female lecturers involved students more in class whilst, 31% said male lecturers involved students more in class and 20 % were not sure which gender involved students more in class. This finding corroborates the assertion of Basow and Howe (1987), that the female lecturers were seen as warmer as and more expressive than the male lecturers. Basow and Distenfeld (1985) also found female lecturers to be rated higher than was male lecturers on warmth and personality. Respondents gave several reasons why they thought male or female lecturers involved students more in class participation.

For respondents who indicated that male lecturers involved students more in class, their reasons were that male lecturers were more active and interactive, were more passionate, had a good sense of humor which involves students more in class and conducted periodic assignments.

For respondents who said female lecturers involved students more in class, their reasons were that female lecturers were talkative and frequently ask questions which is consistent with survey research from Crawford and MacLeon (1990). Others indicated that female instructors were perceived in general as being more effective in creating a participatory climate for all students because they were more sensitive to the needs of students, more interesting, were stricter therefore making students more serious and involved. For others, female lecturers took their time to let students understand lectures as well as organizing abrupt tests and lots of assignments.

The researchers also wanted to find out if there was a relationship between gender of students and the gender of lecturers who were thought to involve students more in participation in class. This was to test the assertion of Gail, Pyke et al (2003) that although there were no main effects of instructors' gender on student perceptions of their own or their instructor's behavior, female students with male instructors reported a significantly less favorable overall impression of their instructors than did females with female professors or males with either male or female professors. Consistent with the study, female students rated female lecturers higher in class participation than male lecturers.

The findings indicated that, 31 female respondents (28 %) rated female lecturers higher in class participation than male lecturers as opposed to 22 out of 52 male respondents (20%). The male respondents also rated the male lecturers higher than female lecturers at 18 % and 13 % respectively.

Some students engage in class discussion willingly and eagerly. Others freely offer comments or raise questions. What makes these students differ from their peers who sit silently in class? Can this be influenced by the instructor who is teaching the course? The researcher sought to answer this puzzle by posing this question to participants, "would the gender of a lecturer increase your participation in class?" Respondents were given the options of "Yes", "No" and "Not Sure". The majority of the respondents (81%) answered in the negative; 17% agreed that the gender of a lecturer would affect their participation in class whilst 1.8% was not sure. The various reasons given by respondents included the fact that, it was their responsibility to contribute in class and as such gender of lecturer should not matter. Others said they participated in class based on issues discussed and interest in course, whilst for some they participated based on style of lecturing, competence and demeanor of lecturer. Others intimated that they were focused on the course and not the lecturer, since the personality of the lecturer was more significant than the gender of the lecturer.

For the respondents who responded in the affirmative to the question "Would the gender of a lecturer increase your class participation", some indicated that said male lecturers would increase their participation in class because they make them more relaxed to answer questions while for others, female lecturers increase their class participation because they were more comfortable with them, because female lecturers asked a lot of questions so they always go to class prepared and the last group said female lecturers organized their classes in a more interactive manner thereby enhancing their class participation.

### 5.4. Gender of lecturers and Perceived difficulty of examination questions

The study was interested in providing an answer to a question posed by a student after an end of semester examination which for most students had been quite difficult and was taught by a female lecturer. "Do women have to set questions like the way they think?" (A student). What the researchers sought to do is to find out if indeed there was any relationship between gender of lecturers and the perceived difficulty of examination questions set.

The researchers set off to find out the validity of the above statement by asking respondents about the gender of lecturers and perceived difficulty of examination questions in their opinion. The findings revealed 23% perceived that female lecturers set more difficult examination questions than male lecturers (13%). This is consistent with the widely held opinion that female lecturers set more difficult questions than their male counterparts. However, 64 % of the respondents were of the view that the gender of a lecturer had no influence on how examination questions are set. In the quest to satisfy the curiosity about whether the perception of male and female students varied, the researcher conducted a cross tabulation analysis of *gender* and *exam questions*. The table below shows the results

Gender Of Respondents	Whose Difficult?	Questions	Are Perceived	as more
	Male lectures	Female Lecturers	Not Sure	Total
Male	8	14	30	52
Female	6	11	40	57
Total	14	25	70	109

Table 1: Crosstab Analysis of gender and exam questions.

Source: Field work, 2013

The result indicated that 14 male students (13%) perceived females lecturers as setting more difficult examination questions as opposed to male lecturers. Eleven female students (10%) said female lecturers set more difficult examination than their male counterparts whilst whopping 37 % female students and 28% male students totaling 64% were not sure.

Existing literature placed emphasis more on how grades lecturers awarded affected ratings of students. Feldman (1976) concluded that college students' anticipated or actual grades in class are positively related to their evaluation of their courses and teachers. If students' rate lectures better due to good grades, there is a high probability that the examination questions were relatively easy to answer and that will mean that they liked the way the examination questions were set. In this case, this is consistent with earlier findings which gave a more positive evaluation of male than female lecturers. This might be as a result of the perception of female lecturers setting more difficult questions.

The researcher went ahead to ask respondents to give reasons for their various responses as to which gender set more difficult questions. For the respondents who indicated female lecturers set more difficult questions, their reasons were because they were more demanding and as such expect more from students. For others, they thought that female lecturers were controversial and so were their questions. For respondents who felt male lecturers set difficult questions, their reasons were that male lecturers set more difficult questions that are sometimes outside the area of study and also male lecturers let students do more research making exams more difficult.

Respondents who were not sure which gender set more difficult questions gave varying reasons for their position. For some, both male and female lecturers set difficult questions and that "difficulty of the questions" depended on the preparation of student for exams as well as the level and course of study. For others they were not sure which gender set more difficult questions because the aim of exams is to examine students and not derail them.

The researchers wanted to find out from respondents whether they thought there was a relationship between gender of lecturers and how examination questions are set. Interestingly, even though majority in an earlier question indicated that female lecturers set more difficult questions, majority of respondents (70.6%) responded in the negative that they did not think there was any relationship between gender of lecturers and the way examination questions are set. A minority of 18.3% answered in the affirmative that there was indeed a relationship between gender of lecturers and how examination questions are set whilst 11.0% were not sure if there was a relationship between gender of lecturers and perceived difficulty of examination questions.

##### 5.5. Gender of students and preference for male or female lecturers

The study asked respondents whether they would rate a lecturer higher because they were the same gender as the lecturer. An overwhelming 102 respondents (94 %) answered in the negative. This perhaps accounts for the inconsistencies in reviewed literature testing gender of student and gender of lecturer. The remaining 7 (6 % answered in the affirmative. For those who answered in the negative, their reasons were that they will rate a lecturer based on performance and style of lecturing. This is consistent with findings of Scheon, Sirowata and Winocur (1989) that perceptions of lecturers are dependent largely on lecturing style. For others their rating of a lecturer is based on the personality of the lecturer and not gender.

Those respondents who responded affirmatively to the question gave reasons such as "I love members of the opposite sex" and "I like same sex lecturers". Their answers confirmed findings of both Morrow (1978) that indicated that students rated same gendered lecturers more positively and Basow and Sibling (1897) that students rated opposite gendered lecturers more positively.

Respondents were asked if they agreed that male students like female lecturers better than male lecturers. It is evident from the data that male students rated female lecturers a little higher at 15 % than female students at 12 %. This is consistent with findings from Tieman and Rankin-Ulock (1985) which found male students rating female lectures higher (4) between a scale of 1 to 4 but the difference as can be seen here is minimal. Furthermore, out of the total 108 respondents who answered the question, 47 % were males and 53 % were females which perhaps led to the skewed figure towards the female lecturers. There was no differentiation between male and female students who said male students did not like female lecturers than male lecturers. About 60% of respondents were not sure if male students liked female lecturers better than male lecturers. Respondents who answered in the affirmative gave reasons such as male students prefer female lecturers because opposites attract and female lecturers were more approachable. Those who answered in the negative also gave reasons such as male students complain bitterly about female lecturers and effective teaching skills is more important not gender.

Furthermore respondents were asked if they agreed that male students liked male lecturers better than female lecturers. The findings revealed that 7 % of respondents agreed that male students do like male lecturers better than female lecturers whilst 19% of respondents indicated that male students do not like male lecturers better than female lecturers. And 73 % of respondents were not sure. The huge percentage answering "not sure" is consistent with reviewed literature that students do not pay lot of attention to gender but rather to teaching skills of lecturers. Some reasons respondents gave for answering in the affirmative include male

students like male lecturers because they were more tolerating of deviant behaviour and also male students liked their style of teaching and relationship with students. Those who answered in the negative also gave reasons such as male lecturers do not show concern for students welfare and thus male students find it difficult approaching male lecturers and like poles repel.

Respondents were also asked if they agreed that female students liked male lecturers better than female lecturers. From the data, 15 % responded in the affirmative that female students indeed prefer female lecturers to male lecturers. Interestingly, the male students had a higher percentage of 8% than female students which is consistent with existing literature by Feber and Huber (1975) and Kay (1979) which saw male students rating female lecturers between “1” and “4” with 4 for both studies. This study also points to the same finding. A very small minority of 7 % responded in the negative that female students do not like male lecturers. They cited reasons such as gender of lecturer did not matter and preference of lecturer is based on personality still pointing to the fact that students place loads of emphasis on other characteristics than gender during their evaluation of faculty members. Those respondents who responded in the affirmative gave reasons such as opposites attract and females like male lecturers because they are more approachable. A huge majority of 79% were not sure if female students preferred male lecturers to female lecturers.

Respondents were asked if they agreed that female students liked female lecturers better than male lecturers. The findings indicated that, only 5 % of respondents responded in the affirmative that female students like female lecturers better than their male counterparts, 20% of respondents answered in the negative that female students do not like female lecturers. Interestingly 13 % of the respondents who answered in the negative were females, which is consistent with findings by Kay (1979) which saw female students ranking female teachers at “1” on a scale of 1 and 4. A great majority of respondents (75%) said they were not sure if female students liked female lecturers than male lecturers. Those who answered in the affirmative gave reasons such as female students participate more in same gendered classes and females are more comfortable with female lecturers. Those who responded in the negative gave reasons such as rivalry among females meant that female students did not enjoy female lecturers, female students enjoy classes of the opposite sex more, gender of lecturer is not important and lecturing skills is more important than gender of lecturer.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings showed that most of the respondents felt that male lecturers were more preferred than females because they enhanced academic performance which is consistent with findings in the study that rated male lecturers a little higher than female lecturers. A majority of respondents however felt that gender of a lecturer does not matter, a view which was consistent with reviewed literature. They gave other reasons they thought was more important such as mastery of course, lecturing style, seriousness of student and interest in course, personality of lecturer and lectures would be more impactful if class size was reduced. Others also thought that both male and female lecturers were good and they both had their highpoints, females were stricter and authoritative whilst men were more tolerant. Female lectures on the whole got negative ratings with some saying that female lecturers do not award grades and female lecturers had a negative impact on students. Others also thought both genders were good but rated male lecturers a little higher “Both Genders are good but male more positive impact”. Others also thought that gender of lecturers affect teaching and learning.

The findings of the research confirmed that, the findings made by other researchers in the reviewed literature were true for the university of Ghana students as well. Thus, although male and female lecturers on the average may not be evaluated much differently globally, women tend to be rated higher on certain instructional considerations whilst men may tend to be evaluated higher than women on certain instructional considerations as well. In this study however, male lecturers were rated a little higher than female lecturers but female lecturers were thought to involve students more in class than male lecturers with a huge number of students who thought gender of lecturers did not have any impact on learning. Most students however were more concerned about teaching skills and personality of lecturer because for them that was what impacted learning positively. Students therefore looked at lots of factors when evaluating lecturers however gender of lecturers which this study sought to find out how it impacted students was the lowest ranking factor in rating lecturers. Students had lots of interesting opinions of gender of lecturers and impact on learning.

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