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The Effect of Lecturer's Gender On Student's Interest in Learning: Malaysian Students' Perception Towards Indian Teachers.

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ABSTRACT

There are studies proposing that lecturers play an important role in stimulating students to learn. Therefore, current research study was undertaken to study the effect of lecturer's gender on student's interest in learning. This study was conducted to find out whether students would prefer lecturers of the same gender or not. Besides, this study was also conducted to determine other factors that would influence student's interest in learning. A cross sectional survey was done by distributing questionnaires to 368 MBBS undergraduate students studying in first and second Year of their medicine course at Melaka-Manipal Medical College. Their response were collected and tabulated before being analyzed. More than 75% of the students disagree that lecturer's gender do have an effect on their interest in their learning while for those small percentage who agreed are mostly from first year. The student's disagree with our hypothesis giving reason that other factors like lecturer's knowledge, attitude, the subject taught itself as a more important factor compared to lecturer's gender. We conclude from the study that lecturer's gender has no significant effect on student's interest in learning while other factors such as subject taught, lecturer's teaching method, knowledge, skills are more significant factors affecting their interest in learning.

Keywords: Gender, Teaching, learning, student, lecturer

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INTRODUCTION

Gender interactions have always been a fascinating subject that constitutes a wide array of studies and researches, trying to prove or disprove the effect of this interaction on most aspects concerned with education. Various novel strategies and plans have been implemented in our education system with the aim to improve, enhance and engage student's interest in learning. However, little work has been done on finding out the effect, if any, of lecturer's gender on student's interest in learning. Few studies that ventured into this field have expounded insightful theories on the correlation between a teacher's gender and student's academic performance, granted there were radical contradictions amongst these profound studies.

According to *Haley et al.*, the students taught by a lecturer of the opposite gender have less interest and fare significantly worse than students taught by a professor of the same gender in introductory business study courses [1]. Nevertheless, some studies have shown that the student- lecturer gender interaction is found to be different in various subjects or disciplines. For instance, it has been revealed that both male and female students perform better with a female teacher in reading while both male and female students perform better in mathematics with a male teacher [2]. It has also been hypothesized that a "role-model effect" [3], wherein students respond positively to same gender professors was the basis on which professor-student gender interaction was found. In stark contrast, there were some studies that suggested that there is no correlation between a teacher's gender and student's motivation to study. They proposed that male teachers and students generally perform poorer than female [4].

Despite all the above theories, there is an obvious lack of knowledge in the exact root cause of student sensitivity to same or opposite gender lecturer. In addition, no research has been conducted to explore how student and lecturer genders interact influence the learning environment and student performance.

Therefore, it is deemed justifiable that a study based on the effect of lecturer's gender on student's interest in learning be carried out for better understanding of how and why this interaction occurs. Apart from that, knowledge about this interaction would help in pursuing sound, gender-neutral pedagogical practices, and resolve the problem of academic departments with unbalanced gender distribution of faculty bearing an adverse effect upon students of a particular gender.

With this background current research study was undertaken on Malaysian students' population being taught by Indian teachers in India with the following objectives.

- To investigate whether the same or opposite gender of lecturer has more influence on student's interest in learning and
- To evaluate the differences in response in the effect of lecturer's gender on student's interest in learning between senior and junior students
- To determine the other factors which influence students' interest in learning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Current study, being a cross sectional survey that included opinion of 368 Malaysian students MBBS curriculum studying in India and being taught by teachers / lecturers of Indian origin. A newly developed and faculty validated questionnaire having both close (in 5-points scale) ended and open ended questions was distributed to the students. Students were requested to respond appropriately to the questionnaire after taking their informed consent. Institutional Ethical Clearance was obtained.

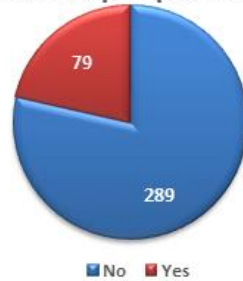
Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 16. The categorical variables were described as median and interquartile range. The responses to open ended questions were tabulated in the decreasing order of frequency of their appearance. The data were also interpreted with the graphs and charts.

RESULTS

As many as 289 among 368 students (79%) disagree on lecturer’s gender has an effect on students’ academic learning issues while 79 students were in favor of gender linkage in their learning attitude (Graph 1).

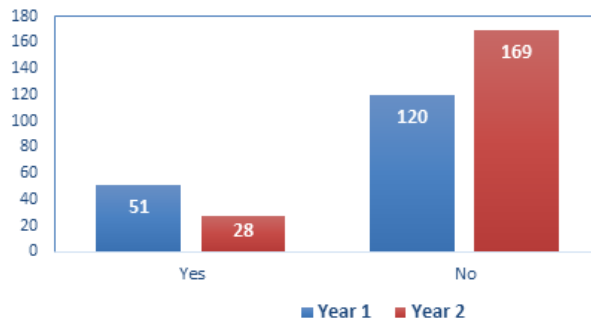
Effect of Lecturer's gender based on students perspective



Graph 1: Students profile on effect of lecturer’s gender in curricular activities

Class wise distribution of this opinion showed 120 out of 171 (70%) of Year 1 and 169 of 197 (88%) students of year II were not in favor of this. Remaining 51 students of year 1 and 28 students of year II were in agreement of lecturer’s gender effect on curricular activities. (Graph 2)

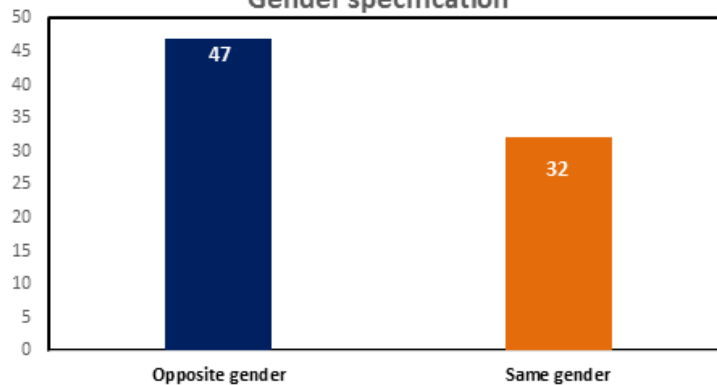
Academic year wise distribution



Graph 2: Year wise opinion data about the lecturer’s gender on learning attitudes

On further analysis of 79 students who agree that, gender of the lecturer /instructor does influence the learning process, 47 of them were in favor of lecturers of opposite gender as according to them, it stimulates them in their curricular learning interest while remaining 32 students prefer teachers of same gender for better understanding of subjects (Graph 3).

Gender specification



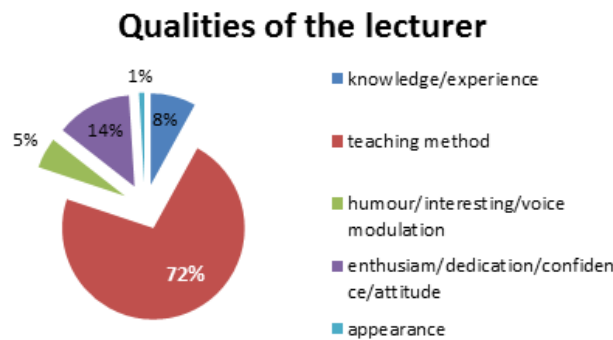
Graph 3: Students opinion on gender preference of lecturers

Curricular learning interest does not only depend on teachers teaching skills or methods, rather it is the responsibility of students who must put their effort for effective learning. In this regard, 73% of students opine that, teachers contribution is impar than students interest (14%) in learning (Graph4).



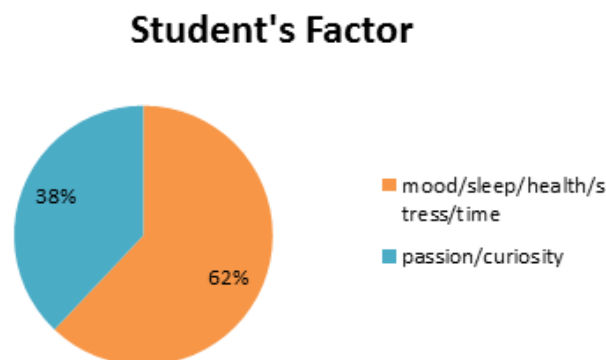
Graph 4: Main factors affecting student's interest in learning.

On further probe to the factors that make the students learning interest more, majority stands for the teaching method of the teachers (72%) followed by teacher's enthusiasm and dedication (14%), knowledge and experience (8%) and sense of humor, voice modulation (5%). Remaining 1% accounted for the appearance of teachers (Graph 5)



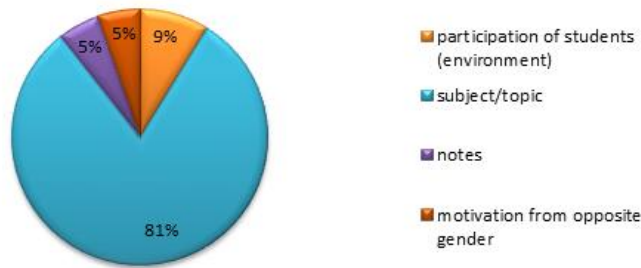
Graph 5: Lecturer's Quality that stimulates Student Interest in Learning

Among the students, who do not believe in the effect of lecturers gender on curricular activity; 62% of them think that the personal factors such as mood, health, stress, passion, curiosity and time of students play a vital role in kindling their interest in learning while 38% of the student strength believe in the students passion and curiosity that makes them more attentive in the curricular activities (Graph 6). In an overall evaluation on non-gender preferred students, majority of students (81%) consider the subject / topic of the class is one of the major factor that makes students learning interest more (Graph 7). Whereas, 5% of students prefer lecture notes, 5% students opine and there were few students who considered lecture notes, active class participation and motivation from opposite gender batch mates encouraged their interest in learning (Graph 7).



Graph 6: Factors that affects Students Learning

Other Factors



Graph 7: Other factors affecting student’s interest in learning.

DISCUSSION

In view of the literatures that supports the fact that lecturer’s gender has a significant effect on student’s learning attitude, it is evident that same gender student-lecturer matching has more implication on student’s interest compared to opposite gender student-lecturer matching [3].

Amongst the most plausible explanation for the same gender relationship is the idea of gender specific role model. Pertaining to the stated theory, students are more engaged, behave more appropriately, and perform at a higher level when taught by one who shares their gender. This is further affirmed by the research done by Thomas Dee (2006) with the conclusion stating, “Girls have better educational outcomes when taught by females, and boys are better off when taught by males [3]. When a class is headed by a woman, boys are more likely to be seen as disruptive. When taught by a man, girls were more likely to report that they did not look forward to a subject” [3]. Besides, there exists a greater complementarity in teaching and learning styles between student and lecturer of the same gender. This is because lecturers are able to elicit higher outcome by increasing student’s motivations, expectations and other factors that contribute to students’ learning. Apart from that, lecturer’s treatment of students and reaction to student classroom behavior may depend on the gender of students in classroom as well.

On the contrary, evidences pointing to the greater significance of opposite gender student-lecturer matching highlight the importance of teaching styles employed by lecturers of opposite gender [5]. Lecturers may be acutely aware of any potential bias towards their own gender’s learning style. Consequently they may overcompensate and teach other learning styles, thus benefiting the opposite gender. Similarly the lecturers may change their teaching style in order to accommodate either the dominant gender in the classroom or perhaps the minority gender instead [6].

Despite the convincing results from the above researches, our study has proven otherwise. There appears to be no correlation between lecturer’s genders on student’s interest in learning. This fact is in agreement with the few of previous studies as reported by Ehrenberg et al., [7], who used the National Education Longitudinal Study(NELS 1988) and Holmlund and Sund [8], has no evidence in the relationship between gender of an instructor and the student outcomes.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that there is no apparent effect of lecturer’s gender on student’s interest in learning. This is because there are various other factors playing more significant role in stimulating a student’s interest in learning such as teaching method of lecturer and their knowledge, enthusiasm, dedication and confidence, content of subject, mood and health of students, stress, and humor shared during lecture. There is no co-relation between genders of lecturer on student’s interest in learning.



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