University Students' Perceptions on Effectiveness of Female Lecturers in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
In this study we address pertinent cultural issues in the academia: the influence of upbringing and cultural contextual factors on perception and attitude to human relationships and capabilities. In the study we examine the perception of both male and female university students on the competence of their female lecturers. We randomly sampled two universities in Zimbabwe for this study: one state university and one private university. Although the study was guided by the mixed research design, the dominant approach to data collection and analysis was the qualitative design. In fact, the qualitative design was the most appropriate approach in dealing with perceptions, emotions and feelings. The study establishes that, on average, university (male and female) students rate their female lecturers lowly when compared to their rating of male lecturers. We thus conclude that students look down upon female lecturers and view them as ineffective. This perception has been found to be a result of culture and socialisation. There is therefore need to de-socialise and re-socialise children and youth so that they grow up with positive attitudes towards women and their capabilities in their communities.
Key words: perceptions, effectiveness, gender, gender-bias, sex, culture, academia, lecturer, stereotyping.

1. Introduction
Gender is a cross-cutting aspect of human life across all sections of society. The same applies to gender bias. There are increasing calls for gender sensitivity, gender equality, gender equity and progressive realisation of human rights across the world. However, despite these calls and programmes of social, political and economic re-engineering to attain gender equality and equity, gender biases persist in the evaluation of men and women at work. In this study we examined the perceptions of both male and female university students on the effectiveness of female lecturers in different faculties in the universities in Zimbabwe as represented by the sampled two universities, one state university and one private university.

2. Orientation of the Study
Barr and Tagg (2005) argue that for too long, college and university faculties have focused their instructional efforts on their own teaching performance and effectiveness, disregarding the influence of students' perceptions on evaluation of effectiveness of staff and the subsequent learning. As a result, faculties and researchers in general have paid insufficient attention to ways they might successfully manage students' perceptions to encourage positive perceptions on both male and female lecturers. This would boost lecturers' motivation and self-confidence, particularly female lecturers who for a long time were 'culturally' looked down upon by university students.

The American National Educational Foundation (2011) explains that the goal of all educational institutions is to equip learners with knowledge and skills for national and self development regardless of the sex of the teacher or lecturer. There is increasing realisation that students' perceptions on lecturers affect relations between lecturers and students and the subsequent learning process (Adelman, 2008). It is not surprising that poor perceptions negatively affect students' understanding of the course(s) and their continuation with programmes.

Self-efficacy is the expectation that one can accomplish specific behaviours necessary to produce a desired outcome (Bandura, 1986). Most research on university students' self-efficacy and other self-perceptions has focused on the extent to which self-perceptions affect educational outcomes (Pajares, 1996). For example, university students' self-perceptions influence their cognitive engagement (Pajares and Miller, 1994), their academic performance, choices of majors and careers (Drew, 1996; Hackett and Betz, 1992; Sax, 1994), and their intent to persist in the so called 'hard sciences' such as chemistry, medicine and engineering (Seymour and Hewitt, 1997). A meta-analysis of 39 studies in the United States of America found that self-efficacy beliefs account for about 14 percent of the variance in students' academic performance and 12 percent of the variance in their academic persistence (Multon, Brown, and Lent, 1991).

Student self-perceptions and perceptions on their lecturers are better predictors of academic performance than objective measures of ability (Hackett et al., 1992; Pajares and Miller, 1994). Gender

apparently is related to the accuracy of self-perceptions (Bandura, 1986; Pajares 1996). Even when university female lecturers have higher academic qualifications than their male counterparts, they are more likely to be looked down at and to be labelled as ineffective by the majority of male and female students (Drew, 1996; Felder et al., 1995). This underestimation of female academics has a negative effect on students' performance and their interaction with female lecturers (Meece and Courtney, 1992; Pajares and Miller, 1994).

3. Study Objectives
This study was guided by the following objectives:
- identifying the perceptions of university students on the effectiveness of female lecturers;
- analysing the source of the perceptions; and
- examining the effect of male university students perceptions on learning.

4. Theoretical Framework
This study is guided by feminism. The study is therefore couched in the discourses of gender and development. Feminist theories locate their roots in the universal concept of human rights. According to Lewin, as cited in Kolmar and Bartkowski (2005), feminism is a theory that calls for women's attainment of social, political, and economic rights and opportunities equal to those possessed by men. Feminism basically challenges the hegemony of patriarchy, which poses as the major impediment to the advancement of women.

5. Literature Review
A lot has been written on beliefs, behaviours and attitudes expected of different groups as determined by their sex, race or age in our communities (Bennett, 1982). This leads Kite (2001) to the suggestion that there may be cultural biases when students evaluate their lecturers. Kite (2001) argues that strong cultural conditioning on sex and gender roles influences the evaluator. By identifying bias we can determine the effects they have on students' perception of their lecturers.

In this study, bias is defined as the tendency to interpret information incorrectly. According to George and Jones (2005), where bias exists, perceivers form inaccurate perceptions of the target.

The symptom of bias is what is referred to as contrast effect. According to Oskamp and Schultz (2005), when social stimuli are within a person's scope of rejection, contrast will result. For example, when behaviour is close to what is acceptable to us, judgement tends to be favourable. When the attitude is remote from our own, we observe it as a contrast and rate it unfavourable. Therefore, in the evaluation of lecturers, students may be influenced by their own biases and make judgemental errors of the lecturers. The contrast effect enhances or diminishes perceptions related to performance. It thus affects the rating of the target population.

The second source of bias is stereotyping. According to George and Jones (2008) stereotype is a body of abstract knowledge that is often targeted at visible characteristics such as age, race or gender. For Hancock et al. (1993) the difference in gender specific rating may be attributed to gender expectations and therefore gender biases.

The third source of bias is known as selective perception. Pulakos and Wexley (1983) state that during performance appraisals there is a higher rating of subjects who share similar traits to those of the evaluator. For instance, if the student is male with similar interests and likes as his male lecturer, then it is expected that the student would rate the lecturer higher than a woman who shares no obvious common interest with that of the student even though both lecturers share similar teaching styles and subject matter.

Sprague and Massoni (2005) found that students held teachers accountable to certain gendered expectations. These expectations place burdens on all teachers, although burdens placed on women were found to be more labour intensive. They also established that there was greater hostility toward women than toward men who did not meet students' gender-role expectations.

6. Methodology
In this study we made use of mixed approach to data gathering and data analysis. Creswell (2003) points out that mixed methods help bridge the schism between quantitative and qualitative research. Although the study was guided by the mixed research design, the dominant approach to data collection and analysis was the qualitative design. In fact, the qualitative design was the most appropriate approach in dealing with perceptions, emotions and feelings.

6.1 Study participants
We have ten state universities in Zimbabwe: University of Zimbabwe (UZ); National University of Science and Technology (NUST); Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU); Midlands State University (MSU); Great Zimbabwe University (GZU); Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE); Harare Institute of Technology (HIT); Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT); Lupane State University (LSU); and Gwanda State University

(GSU). We also have five church and private universities in Zimbabwe: Africa University (AU); Women University in Africa (WUA); Catholic University (CU); Solusi University (SU); and Reformed Church University (RCU). Of these fifteen universities only two universities in Harare were conveniently sampled for the study: one state university and one private university.

Respondents were equally distributed throughout the seven faculties of each of the two universities sampled for this study (see Table 1). All the faculties of the two universities were included in the study to ensure generalisability of the findings.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

University	Sex	Total Respondents
State University	Male	28
	Female	28
Private University	Male	28
	Female	28
Grand Total		**112**

6.2 Research instruments

This study made use of a simple three questions questionnaire followed by general discussion of questionnaire responses. The two questions in the questionnaire were as follows:

- Are female lecturers effective in lectures? a) Yes. b) No.
- Whom do you prefer to be your lecturer? a) Male lecturer. b) female lecturer
- Name the best lecturer among your lecturers.

On 1 October 2014 two of the researchers visited the two participating universities (one to each university respectively) to gather data. They distributed the questionnaires to participating students through the students' representative council offices. The council was asked to make sure that there was equal representation of both the faculties and sexes in the university.

After completion of the questionnaire the researcher convened a meeting to discuss students' views as expressed in the questionnaire. Students completed questionnaires in the morning and the researcher browsed through the completed questionnaires just to grasp the trend of students' perceptions before convening the discussion meeting with the participating students in the afternoon.

7. Study findings
7.1 Students' perceptions on effectiveness of female lecturers

Responses to the effectiveness question were as shown in Fig. 1. The Fig shows that 58 (52%) of the 112 respondents thought female lecturers were effective and the remaining 54 (48%) thought that female lecturers were not effective in delivering lectures.

Fig. 1: Perceptions on female lecturers' effectiveness
(Source: Primary data)
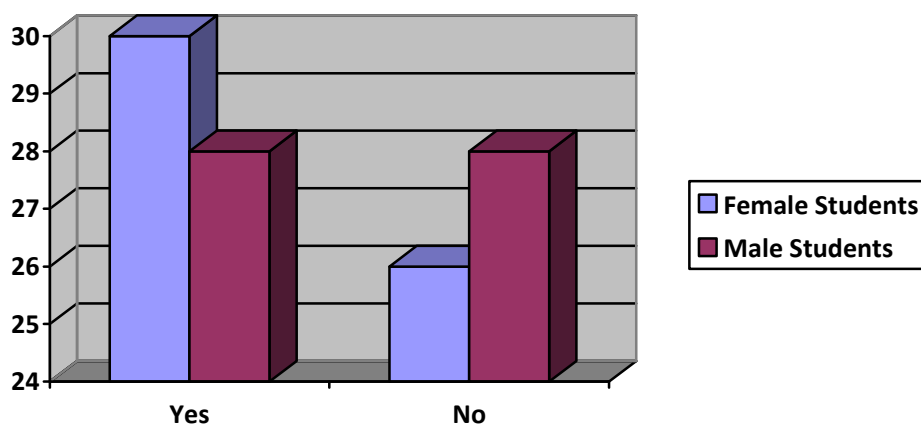
Of these respondents, about 30 female students answered the question in the affirmative and 26 answered the question in the negative, whereas for male students it was half in the affirmative and the other half
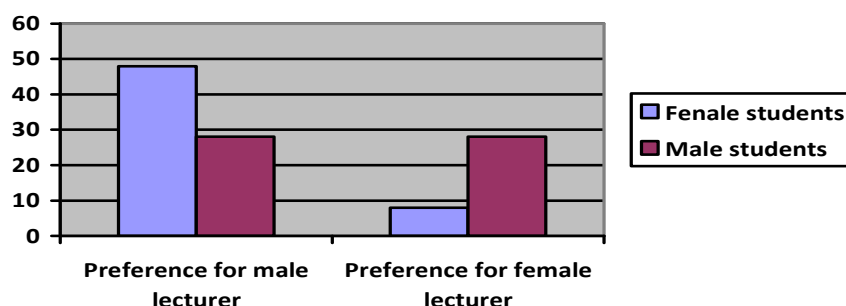
in the negative.

Although the majority of respondents (52%) thought female lecturers were effective in their work performance, 48% responses in the negative is too big a figure to be brushed aside. The figure tells us that there is high rate of negative perception on female lecturers' performance in the two universities. We thus conclude that, on average, university (male and female) students rate their female lecturers lowly. Therefore, in Zimbabwe, university students look down upon female lecturers and view them as ineffective.

Responses to sex of the lecturer preference were as in Fig. 2. Male respondents remained consistent with 50% preferring male lecturers and the other 50% preferring female lecturers. There was drastic change among female students with some of them who thought female lecturers were effective in their lectures preferring male lecturers to female lecturers. Only 8 (14%) of the 56 female respondents preferred female lecturers to male lecturers.

Fig. 2: Preferred lecturer
(Source: Primary data)

At the surface, the fact that 86% of female respondents preferred male lecturers to female lecturers tells us that these respondents have negative attitude towards female lecturers. A deeper analysis tells us a different story. This contradiction might be a result of female lecturers being stricter to female students than male lecturers who seek abusive and sexual favours from female students. How else can we explain the contradiction between these responses from female students?

Fig. 3 shows distribution of the sex of respondents' best lecturer. Here the responses remained consistent with the findings on sex of the lecturer preference. The same explanation given above applies to this scenario once again.

Fig. 3: The sex of respondents' best lecturer
(Source: Primary data)
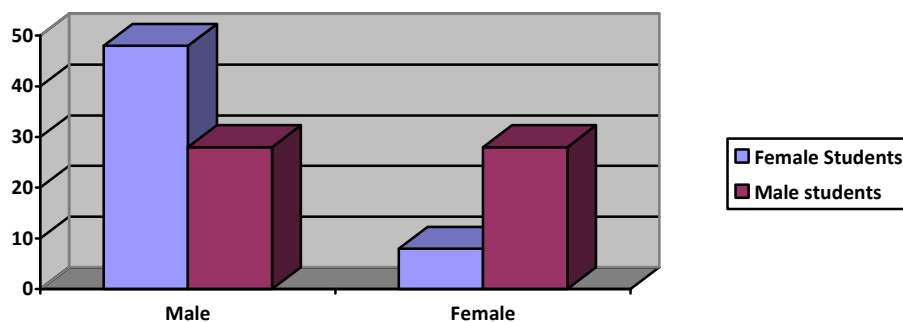
These responses were equally distributed throughout the faculties of the two universities. It is therefore not necessary to break down the distribution of responses by type of university (state / private). Neither is it important to show the distribution by faculty of students. The distribution of respondents' perception remains the same.

Our overall conclusion in this section is that students have negative perceptions to their female lecturers especially when compared to their perceptions of male lecturers.

7.2 Sources of negative perceptions on female lecturers
As regards female students' perceptions on female lecturers, the above discussion implies that the abusive

relationship between male lecturers and female students may be one of the sources of negative perceptions towards stricter female lecturers. If female students get marks for their thighs, then we have a much deeper problem. Women exploitation will continue even after university education as the female graduates will certainly find it difficult to match the donated certificates with performance. This scenario makes us identify the imbalance in power relationships between men and women as one of the sources of the negative perceptions towards women performance at both the work place and in our communities.

The follow-up discussion with respondents revealed that negative perceptions on female lecturers' effectiveness emanate from the way we were brought up (culture and socialisation). One of the female respondents said, 'Our parents and the community have taught us that a male child should always get first preference ahead of a female child. If a family does not have a male child, then that family is cursed if not already dead---.'

Cultural bias towards the girl child is therefore one of the central factors leading to negative perception on women's work performance. From a cultural point of view, men and boys are socialised to view themselves as superior to women and girls. They are therefore always seen as better than girls and women (Musingafi, 2008). Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society and continues to be so regardless of increasing calls and actions for gender equality and equity. Girls and women are also socialised to accept a secondary position in families, households, workplaces and wider society.

7.3 Effects of the negative perceptions on female lecturers

The discussion that followed completion of the questionnaire shows that students' perceptions on female lecturers affect relations between lecturers and students and the subsequent learning process. Poor perceptions by students negatively affect students' understanding of the course(s) and general performance in the programme. Moreover, negative perceptions on female lecturers affect female lecturers' confidence as they conduct lectures and tutorials, resulting in mediocre or poor delivery regardless of the fact that they are masters or doctors or professors in the particular course(s) they teach.

8. Conclusions

Based on the above discussion and findings, this study makes the following conclusions:
* university students perceive female lecturers as ineffective in lectures;
* culture and socialisation are the main sources of the negative perceptions on female lecturers;
* women are socialised to accept a secondary position in families, households, workplaces and wider society;
* students' perceptions on female lecturers affect relations between lecturers and students and the subsequent learning process;
* poor perceptions by students negatively affect students' understanding of the course(s) and general performance in the programme; and
* negative perceptions on female lecturers affect female lecturers' confidence resulting in mediocre performance regardless of the fact that they are doctors or professors in the particular course(s) they teach.

9. Recommendations

In line with the above findings and conclusions, this study makes the following recommendations:
* reengineering of culture and socialisation in and outside educational and academic institutions;
* reconfiguration of culture and socialisation will result in positive ways of perceiving and valuing women and girls as equal partners to men and boys in all spheres of life;
* gender sensitive education programmes should be implemented or intensified in all educational and academic institutions so that male and female staff and pupils and students develop and apply positive perceptions for effective learning; and
* all universities should have gender policies that are well monitored and evaluated in response to current needs of men and women at the workplace: the mere presence of a gender policy at university level is not enough.

We however, note that our results are limited, and further studies at a wider range of universities in Zimbabwe are required to assist scholars understand the gender factors that affect student ratings.

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