# Gender Dynamics in University Classrooms in Ghana: The Academic, Social and Psychological Effect on the Quality of Student Learning

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*Abstract*

*The aim of this study was to investigate how gender dynamics in university classrooms affect the quality of students' learning experiences academically, socially and psychologically. The study was informed by the perception that gender biases are perpetuated in university classrooms. A case study approach involving 553 students randomly selected from four faculties of a University in Ghana was taken given that, the context of institutions differs. The quantitative data collected using a semi-structured questionnaire was analysed using descriptive and correlation analysis aided by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data on the other hand was analysed using thematic analysis. The study showed that gender biases were often exhibited in areas such as classroom participation, lecturer-student relationships, discipline and assessment. Key academic, psychological and social effects identified included students' inability to answer questions in class, loss of self-esteem, inferiority, shyness, timidity, feelings of exclusion and nervousness. The study is expected to help educators and stakeholders alike to better understand the gender dynamics present in tertiary classrooms so as to design and implement instructional interventions that mitigate such, and improve the quality of students' learning experience.*

## Introduction

The classroom climate or environment is the social, emotional and the physical aspects of the classroom or the "invisible hand" in the classroom (Bierman, 2011). In fact, previous studies have argued that lecturers affect student' learning and behaviour as they interact with them in the classroom based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, disability etc. The behaviour of lecturers in the classroom is therefore, very important. This is because a rich body of Social Psychology research shows that we are all vulnerable to biases that operate without our awareness and this impacts on our interactions and decision making in the classroom. Indeed, from a young age, stereotypes related to race, gender, sexuality, and religion (to name a

few) are learned, reinforced and internalised through daily exposure to embedded societal messages and social interactions (Collins, 2008). What can be sometimes surprising and upsetting is that, ingrained stereotype-based biases can habitually influence our thoughts and behaviours, even when those biases conflict with our personal beliefs and values that control us (Carnes, *et al.,* 2012; Devine, *et al.,* 2012). Stereotype threats for example, have been found to have possibly lead under represented students to feel additional mental and emotional pressure to succeed, which increases cognitive load, depletes working memory and induces physiological stress (Spencer, Logel & Davies, 2016).

A classroom environment where the level of interaction benefits all students is accordingly often encouraged to ensure that all students improve their performance (Lorenzo, Crouch & Mazur, 2006). However, while some researchers argue that faculty traits such as teacher gender do not affect classroom interactions (Crombie, *et al.,* 2003; Krijnen & van Bauwel, 2015), other researchers have found otherwise. Canada & Pringle (1995), in an observational study of classroom interactions found that "The behaviours of female students and of both male and female professors were strongly related to whether or not male students were present in the classroom". Other studies have similarly reported marked differences in classroom participation due to the influence of faculty gender, race and ethnicity (Statham, Richardson, & Cook, 1991; Nunn, 1996; Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Boysen, *et al.,* 2009). Fassinger (1995a) using a questionnaire survey administered to students and professors in 51 classes, similarly concluded that, the participation of female students in class was affected by the emotional climate in the classroom. He further explained that the observed gender differences were the results of gender politics that were largely absent in same sex environments.

These gender dynamics in the classroom are what Crombie *et al.* (2003) describe as a "chilly climate." According to them, the term "chilly climate" refers to "the aggregated impact of a host of micro inequities and forms of systemic discrimination that disadvantage women in academic environments." For instance, it can impact negatively on student performance, emotional well-being, sense of belonging and motivation to persist in an academic field (Walton and Spencer, 2009; Killpack & Melón, 2016; Spencer, *et al.,* 2016). Pascarella, *et al.* (1997) therefore exhibit a modest support "for the hypothesis that a perceived chilly campus climate can, in fact, have negative implications for women's cognitive growth." Such a

climate, in a university classroom, according to Brainard & Carlin (1998), serves as a barrier blocking the route of women to degrees. This, if not checked, may deepen the already existing divide between men and women on the campuses of many African universities as women fight to succeed under these gendered circumstances to get their diplomas, degrees, and job opportunities. Another possibility is that it may serve as a direct threat to the already existing gendered human resource on the African continent (Hallam, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Ndlovu, 2001).

The various forms of gender biases exhibited in the tertiary environment may include the sexist use of language; stereotyping, disparaging views of women; differential interaction patterns of professors as a function of student gender; paucity of women faculty as role models and mentors and gender-based differential attributions (Spencer, *et al.,* 2016). In Ghana, Prah (2002) argues that educational systems are gendered in terms of culture, rules and expected outcomes. This is because gender inequalities are seen in the attitude of teachers, textbooks used and the educational policies used. Unfortunately, these biases are continued even to the higher education level (Adomako, 1993; Sutherland-Addy, *et al.,* 1995). Sutherland-Addy *et al.* (1995) identified several ways through which teachers adversely affect the performance of females through discouragement and intimidation, sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation of females. Other gender inequalities identified in Ghana and Africa at large include gender stereotyping of courses/subject (Mama & Barnes 2007).

Another dimension to this discussion is sexual harassment, which according to Bickerstaff (2005) cannot be ignored because of its consistency towards women by male colleagues and professors. A review of African literature indicates the prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence on the campuses of many African universities — Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa to mention but a few (Sutherland-Addy, *et al.,* 1995; Sall, 2000; Mama & Barnes, 2007). Perhaps, the most infamous case of sexual harassment in Africa involved the heckling of a female student at the University of Dar Es Salaam to an extent that it is generally believed that, it forced her to commit suicide (Sall, 2003). Mama & Barnes (2007) further argue that these sexually harassing behaviours, which are often routine and persistent come in different forms including direct physical violence — rape and assault which sometimes result in death as earlier mentioned. Reports of widespread occurrence of sexual harassment and sex for grades have also been made (Morley, 2011).

In the view of Hallam (1994), gendered hostility towards female students and staff in African higher education is almost endemic. The main purpose of these unethical acts is often to silence and intimidate an individual woman in particular and women in general. These biases in institutional culture according to Killpack & Melón (2016), if not checked can prevent diverse students from thriving and persisting in for example, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, which are currently needed for economic development.

In terms of current measures put in place to address gender biases in the tertiary sector, literature shows that guaranteeing equal access and opportunity for all, in the areas of education and training regardless of gender is a major priority for many stakeholders (Gentry, *et al.,* 2002; Coates, 2015; Leslie, *et al.,* 2015; MacNell, *et al.,* 2015). Accordingly, inside and outside Africa, private and public policies are increasingly being aimed at broadening access and participation in higher education for all. For instance, the American Association of Colleges and Universities has proposed an "Inclusive Excellence" model aimed at institutional change in which case institutions must strategically invest in and coordinate inclusivity efforts and create a campus culture that welcomes and values cultural diversity among all students (Bauman, *et al.,* 2005; Milem, *et al.,* 2005).

Similarly, for the better part of the past fifty years, the African academy has recognised (if not always responded to) the need to transform the composition of academic and management staff, students, and curricular content, most often in terms of race and gender (Mabokela & King, 2001; Mabokela, 2000). The Network of Southern African Tertiary Institutions Challenging Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence, was as a result formed in 1996 in Gabarone, Botswana. Also, an investigation into the effectiveness of sexual harassment policies between 2004 and 2006 in some African countries, was conducted by Bennett, Gouws and Kritzinger (University of Stellenbosch), Hames (University of the Western Cape), and Tidimane (University of Botswana); to deepen our understanding of the challenges facing such interventions (Mama & Barnes, 2007). A key recommendation made was that all the institutions have to formally establish procedures through which complaints of sexual harassment could be handled (Bennett, *et al.,* 2007). These interventions are meant to ensure that institutions militate against stereotype threat in classrooms and cultivate intellectual and social environments, where all students have equal opportunity to achieve academic success (Killpack & Melón, 2016).

Granted, previous studies have looked at the issue of gender severally; nevertheless, the present study is still important because gender issues have often been discussed in not less than binary definitions of gender in areas such as media literacy, sexuality, race, violence, and masculinities *(*Healey, 2013; Krijnen & van Bauwel, 2015). Besides, the focus of most of these studies has been at the pre-tertiary level (primary and secondary school) and not at the higher education level. Studies at the tertiary level are in fact, few (Fassinger, 1995a; Brainard & Carlin, 1998; Sall, 2003; Blickenstaff, 2005; Mama & Barnes, 2007). It is for these reasons that the present study focused on gender biases during interactions in the tertiary classroom and how it affects students academically, socially and psychologically.

The term "classroom interaction" is consistently used in this article to describe the form and content of behaviour or social interaction between lecturers and students in a classroom setting. Such interactions may occur during classroom discussions, debates, question and answer sections, conversations, small-group interactions as well as entire classroom interactions. Of course, classrooms are complex social systems and can be even multifaceted (Pianta, *et. al,* 2012). Hence, such interaction may go beyond the classroom setting as lecturers try to provide counselling and coaching services, supervise student projects and navigate students through their career and professional experiences. Specific areas of classroom interaction explored by this study include encouraging female classroom participation, student-lecturer relationships, discipline, assessment and sexual issues.

Documenting whether lecturers reflect and perpetuate such biases in the classrooms of the University was considered necessary given that, if it exists, it can potentially affect the quality of students performance and learning experience (Thrupp, 1999; Mortimore, 1998). This study is therefore expected to provide an insight into how students view their interaction with lecturers both inside and outside the classroom. The study findings are expected to aid educators and researchers alike to better understand the gender dynamics present within the university context so that instructional interventions meant to mitigate such and improve student performance can be designed and implemented.

Specifically, the following four objectives were examined:

- To find out whether gender biases exist in the classrooms of one Ghanaian University (GU) and how these are manifested.

- To examine the relationship between student gender and faculty on the one hand and the selected variables — encouraging female classroom participation, teacher-student relationships, discipline, assessment and sexual issues, on the other.
- To identify the specific effect of such biases on students — academically, socially, and psychologically.
- To make recommendations based on the study findings.

**Methodology**

### Study design, sample and sampling technique

Only one GU was chosen for the case study because an in-depth knowledge was desired and the context of institutions differs. Four out of the University's five faculties were selected. Two departments were selected from each of the selected faculties using simple random sampling techniques, except for the faculty D which had just two departments out of which one was selected. Samples from each department were selected using convenience sampling techniques (all second- and third-year students present for lectures arranged a priori with lecturers participated in the study). The second and third-year students were best suited for the study because of their relatively rich experience in terms of gender biases during classroom interactions.

### Data Collection Method

The semi-structured questionnaire utilised had 36 items in the following six main sections: (1) Encouraging classroom participation. (2) Teacher-student relationships. (3) Discipline. (4) Assessment. (5) Sexual issues. (6) Associated academic, psychological, social and other related effects. The structured part of the questionnaire had a five-point Likert scale ranging from "always" to "not at all". The instrument was developed after an extensive literature review, peer review and piloting using first year students in the unselected faculty. The piloting informed corrections and revisions made on the questionnaire before the final administration in December, 2018. Inappropriate questions were dropped and few additions made based on the suggestions given during the peer review and piloting. The study participants were met by appointment — meeting appointments were made with lecturers teaching the selected departments. A 100 per cent response rate was obtained. For ethical reasons, the purpose of the study was

explained, voluntary participation and confidentiality were emphasised, and students were given the opportunity to ask questions during the administration of the instrument.

## Method of data analysis

The quantitative part of the data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, and percentages) and correlation (spearman correlation because of the non-parametric nature of the data) with the aid of SPSS 16.0. The qualitative component was analysed using thematic analysis. Emerging themes highlighting areas of biases were accordingly coded and the relationship between the various themes and the research questions summarised. The use of thematic analysis aided flexibility in selecting appropriate issues and putting the interpretations in context. In carrying out analysis, the following five stages of thematic analysis recommended by Lacey and Luff (2001) were adapted — transcription, organisation of the data, familiarisation, coding and creation of themes.

## Transcription

Each questionnaire was given a code easily traceable to the respondent. The respondent' answers were transcribed verbatim according to the order, in which the questions appeared on the questionnaire.

## Organisation of the data

After the transcription, repeated answers were deleted and remaining ones ordered according to the order in which the questions appeared on the questionnaire.

## Familiarisation

The transcribed data was severally read to ensure familiarisation with the data before the detailed coding of the content started.

## Coding

Each item on the questionnaire was given a code. The characteristics (e.g. gender) of the respondents were also assigned codes (letters were used to represent each respondent and numbers were used to present their

characteristics). Emerging major themes were also assigned codes (numbers). Overall, the following four major themes emerged — academic, psychological and social effects, and sexual distractions.

## *Creating the Themes*

The major ideas/themes emerging from each major theme were further coded to develop more refined categories (sub-themes). These coded responses were then compared, contrasted and reported on.

## Results

This section has four main parts. First, the biographic data is presented. The next parts are presented in the order of the research questions as shown below:

- **B.** The existence and manifestations of gender biases in the classroom (RQ1).
- **C.** The relationship between student gender/faculty and the selected variables (RQ2).
- **D.** The effect of gender biases on students (RQ3).

## A. Biographic data

Overall, there were 553 students involved in the study — 402 (73%) males and 151 (27%) females. Out of this 163 (29%) were from faculty A, 142 (26%) from faculty C, 127 (23%) from faculty B and 121 (22%) from faculty D (see Table 1).

**Table 1:    Biography of the Respondents**

| Department | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Faculty | | | | | | | | |
| A | 115 | 48 | | | | | | 163 |
| B | | | 110 | 17 | | | | 127 |
| C | | | | | 127 | 15 | | 142 |
| D | | | | | | | 121 | 121 |
| Total | 115 | 48 | 110 | 17 | 127 | 15 | 121 | 553 |

**Source:** 2018 Field survey.

## B. The existence and manifestations of gender biases in the classroom (RQ1).

As indicated on Table 2, the majority (39%) view was that gender biases sometimes occurred in the various classrooms of the University. The rate of occurrence however, varied according to the course and the gender of the lecturer concerned. For example, to the majority of (62%), gender biases were more characteristic of male lecturers. With regard to specific areas where the lecturers showed biases, the following four areas stood out: encouraging female participation, student-lecturer relationships, discipline and assessment. Details are as follows:

### *Encouraging female participation*

This sub-theme focused on leadership, presentations, coaching and the promotion of professions in the classroom as well as the inclusion of students in various classroom activities. In the area of leadership, the majority (40%) view was that positions were *most times* rotated among students *mostly* by male lecturers (47%). Many of the students (71%) also indicated that the male lecturers most of the time (53%), ensured presentations were made in turns by all students. The same was true when it came to coaching students (78%) and actively encouraging females to participate in class activities (72%). Another interesting finding was that, the male lecturers (50%) avoided stories/jokes/comments that disparaged females. The majority (34%) were of the view that, the male lecturers especially talked about women in humorous ways. Regarding the promotion of gender stereotype in the classroom, the majority (30%) view was that this occurred *sometimes* and was more characteristic of male lecturers (See Table 2).

### *Class assessment*

Student assessment is another area purported to have given the lecturers the opportunity to show gender bias. The fact as indicated by the majority (38%) however was that lecturers *seldom* called more on male students than female students during classroom discussions. The male lecturers (46%) in particular, mostly looked for the hands of all students irrespective of gender. Besides, the lecturers *seldom:* (a) Asked male students factual questions and female students easy questions (42%). (b) Expected male

**Table 2:    Encouraging female participation**

| Participants | Gender | Always | Most times | Sometimes | Seldom | Not at all | Characteristic of male lecturers | Characteristic of female lecturers | Undecided |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  Gender biases varied by class or subject. | Male | 9 | 17 | 36 | 13 | 25 | 62 | 16 | 22 |
| | Female | 10 | 19 | 47 | 5 | 19 | 38 | 44 | 18 |
| | Total | 11 | 17 | 39 | 10 | 23 | 56 | 23 | 21 |
| 2.  Lecturers: Regularly rotated leadership positions. | Male | 21 | 16 | 28 | 12 | 23 | 50 | 27 | 23 |
| | Female | 22 | 23 | 36 | 6 | 13 | 39 | 40 | 21 |
| | Total | 22 | 18 | 30 | 10 | 20 | 47 | 31 | 22 |
| 3.  avoided gendered forms of professions; | Male | 22 | 15 | 27 | 14 | 22 | 52 | 26 | 22 |
| | Female | 22 | 18 | 37 | 10 | 13 | 39 | 42 | 19 |
| | Total | 22 | 15 | 30 | 13 | 20 | 48 | 31 | 21 |
| 4.  avoided denigrating stories/jokes to females; | Male | 20 | 14 | 25 | 12 | 29 | 54 | 24 | 22 |
| | Female | 25 | 21 | 30 | 11 | 13 | 42 | 41 | 17 |
| | Total | 21 | 16 | 26 | 12 | 25 | 50 | 29 | 21 |
| 5.  talked about women in humorous ways; | Male | 6 | 9 | 23 | 15 | 47 | 61 | 14 | 25 |
| | Female | 9 | 18 | 34 | 7 | 32 | 54 | 26 | 20 |
| | Total | 7 | 12 | 26 | 13 | 42 | 59 | 17 | 24 |
| 6.  used examples that excluded females; | Male | 9 | 13 | 19 | 9 | 50 | 54 | 19 | 27 |
| | Female | 11 | 17 | 27 | 12 | 33 | 45 | 35 | 20 |
| | Total | 9 | 14 | 22 | 10 | 45 | 52 | 23 | 25 |
| 7.  actively encouraged female participation; | Male | 52 | 21 | 16 | 5 | 6 | 55 | 25 | 20 |
| | Female | 46 | 26 | 19 | 6 | 3 | 36 | 46 | 18 |
| | Total | 51 | 22 | 16 | 6 | 5 | 50 | 30 | 20 |
| 8.  coached both female and male students; | Male | 61 | 17 | 13 | 5 | 4 | 55 | 23 | 22 |
| | Female | 50 | 23 | 17 | 7 | 3 | 46 | 35 | 19 |
| | Total | 58 | 19 | 14 | 5 | 4 | 52 | 26 | 22 |
| 9.  ensured all students did presentations. | Male | 52 | 21 | 13 | 6 | 8 | 56 | 22 | 22 |
| | Female | 41 | 25 | 20 | 11 | 3 | 42 | 37 | 21 |
| | Total | 49 | 22 | 15 | 7 | 7 | 53 | 25 | 22 |

**Source:**  2018 field survey.

students to do better (38%) (c) Graded male and female students differently (47%). (d) Ensured female students got more marks than their male counterparts (38%). In fact, many (65%) of the students indicated that, their lecturers believed all students can succeed academically (see Table 3).

**Table 3:   Assessment**

*Discipline*

| Item | Gender | Always | Most times | Sometimes | Seldom | Not at all | More of male teachers | More of female teachers | Undecided |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Lecturers:* | | | | | | | | | |
| 1.  Called more on male students. | Male | 8 | 12 | 23 | 17 | 40 | 58 | 16 | 26 |
| | Female | 14 | 16 | 27 | 11 | 32 | 42 | 36 | 22 |
| | Total | 10 | 13 | 24 | 15 | 38 | 54 | 21 | 25 |
| 2.  Looked for the hands of all students. | Male | 46 | 17 | 19 | 7 | 11 | 50 | 24 | 26 |
| | Female | 35 | 21 | 30 | 5 | 9 | 34 | 44 | 22 |
| | Total | 43 | 18 | 22 | 6 | 11 | 46 | 29 | 25 |
| 3.  Asked females factual and easy questions. | Male | 12 | 15 | 17 | 11 | 45 | 50 | 18 | 32 |
| | Female | 13 | 16 | 25 | 11 | 35 | 50 | 24 | 26 |
| | Total | 12 | 16 | 19 | 11 | 42 | 50 | 19 | 31 |
| 4.  Graded male and female papers differently. | Male | 12 | 13 | 18 | 10 | 47 | 54 | 13 | 33 |
| | Female | 13 | 13 | 20 | 8 | 46 | 36 | 36 | 28 |
| | Total | 12 | 13 | 18 | 10 | 47 | 50 | 19 | 31 |
| 5.  Expected males to perform better. | Male | 17 | 21 | 23 | 9 | 30 | 55 | 16 | 29 |
| | Female | 15 | 25 | 23 | 7 | 30 | 45 | 33 | 22 |
| | Total | 14 | 16 | 20 | 12 | 38 | 52 | 20 | 28 |
| 6.  Ensured female students got more marks. | Male | 13 | 15 | 20 | 14 | 38 | 55 | 15 | 30 |
| | Female | 12 | 20 | 19 | 9 | 40 | 44 | 31 | 25 |
| | Total | 14 | 16 | 20 | 12 | 38 | 52 | 20 | 28 |
| 7.  Believed all students could succeed. | Male | 69 | 11 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 45 | 27 | 28 |
| | Female | 54 | 19 | 14 | 5 | 8 | 36 | 39 | 25 |
| | Total | 65 | 13 | 11 | 4 | 7 | 42 | 30 | 28 |

**Source:** 2018 field survey.

The majority (31%) view in the area of discipline was that lecturers *seldom* took the initiative to respond to students' needs — usually, the students complained first. Nevertheless, lecturer *most times* (53%) responded swiftly and firmly when male students disrespected female students in the classroom. Many of the students (66%) were also of the view that lecturers *most times* disciplined all students, regardless of gender and ensured all behaved well. This notwithstanding, the majority view was that discipline was *most times*. In the view of others however, (30%) discipline was *sometimes* skewed towards male students. See Table 4 for more details.

**Table 4:    Discipline**

| *Item* | *Gender* | *Always* | *Most times* | *Sometimes* | *Seldom* | *Not at all* | *More of male teachers* | *More of female teachers* | *Undecided* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Lecturers:* | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Did not wait for females to openly complain. | Male | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 50 | 21 | 29 |
| | Female | 18 | 21 | 31 | 11 | 19 | 44 | 32 | 24 |
| | Total | 13 | 16 | 29 | 11 | 31 | 48 | 24 | 28 |
| 2. Responded swiftly and firmly when males were disrespectful to females. | Male | 25 | 21 | 24 | 10 | 20 | 57 | 18 | 25 |
| | Female | 19 | 28 | 31 | 11 | 11 | 42 | 38 | 20 |
| | Total | 23 | 23 | 26 | 10 | 18 | 53 | 24 | 23 |
| 3. Saw to it that all genders behaved well. | Male | 70 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 34 | 33 | 33 |
| | Female | 56 | 24 | 15 | 3 | 2 | 35 | 43 | 22 |
| | Total | 66 | 15 | 11 | 4 | 4 | 48 | 29 | 23 |
| 4. Made discipline mostly skewed towards men. | Male | 19 | 22 | 31 | 9 | 19 | 54 | 20 | 26 |
| | Female | 18 | 28 | 28 | 8 | 18 | 42 | 35 | 23 |
| | Total | 18 | 24 | 30 | 8 | 20 | 51 | 24 | 25 |

**Source:**  2018 field survey.

## *Student-lecturer relationships*

Regarding student-lecturer relationships, the overall picture was not very good. Even though 29 per cent of the students shared the view that all were friends of the lecturers *sometimes*, the majority (37%) pointed out that, the lecturers *seldom* invited students for private chats. This was true for both male

and female lecturers. Nevertheless, students were *seldom* unconsciously shunned (28%) or prejudiced against (27%) by their lecturers. Another interesting claim by the majority (30%) was that the lecturers *sometimes* behaved differently toward male and female students (24% were undecided on the issue). Also, the lecturers were said to have paid more attention to female students *sometimes* (29%) and that particular groups of female students *seldom* received more attention than they should (25%). See Table 5.

**Table 5:    Student lecturer-association/relationship**

| Item | Gender | Always | Most times | Sometimes | Seldom | Not at all | More of male teachers | More of female teachers | Undecided |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  Male students were unconsciously shunned. | Male | 9 | 19 | 26 | 18 | 28 | 53 | 20 | 27 |
|  | Female | 13 | 21 | 31 | 9 | 26 | 46 | 30 | 24 |
|  | Total | 11 | 19 | 27 | 15 | 28 | 51 | 23 | 26 |
| 2.  All were friends of lecturers. | Male | 30 | 22 | 27 | 10 | 11 | 51 | 21 | 28 |
|  | Female | 21 | 26 | 35 | 9 | 9 | 37 | 43 | 20 |
|  | Total | 28 | 23 | 29 | 9 | 11 | 47 | 27 | 26 |
| 3.  Lecturers invited all students for private chats. | Male | 12 | 10 | 25 | 15 | 38 | 51 | 18 | 31 |
|  | Female | 11 | 16 | 25 | 13 | 35 | 48 | 29 | 23 |
|  | Total | 11 | 13 | 25 | 14 | 37 | 50 | 21 | 29 |
| 4.  Lecturer behaviour toward males was different. | Male | 19 | 18 | 30 | 9 | 24 | 57 | 17 | 26 |
|  | Female | 18 | 25 | 30 | 12 | 15 | 42 | 37 | 21 |
|  | Total | 18 | 20 | 30 | 10 | 22 | 53 | 23 | 24 |
| 5.  Lecturers were prejudiced against males. | Male | 10 | 17 | 32 | 13 | 28 | 53 | 20 | 27 |
|  | Female | 9 | 18 | 33 | 17 | 21 | 48 | 30 | 22 |
|  | Total | 10 | 17 | 31 | 14 | 27 | 52 | 23 | 25 |
| 6.  Lecturers gave females a lot of attention. | Male | 24 | 19 | 27 | 9 | 21 | 67 | 13 | 20 |
|  | Female | 19 | 28 | 34 | 5 | 14 | 72 | 13 | 15 |
|  | Total | 22 | 21 | 29 | 8 | 20 | 68 | 13 | 19 |
| 7.  Particular groups of female students received more attention than they should. | Male | 21 | 20 | 21 | 10 | 28 | 64 | 11 | 25 |
|  | Female | 27 | 23 | 24 | 9 | 17 | 56 | 26 | 18 |
|  | Total | 23 | 20 | 22 | 10 | 25 | 62 | 15 | 23 |

**Source:** 2018 field survey.

## *Sexual issues*

The study further showed evidence of sexual undercurrents in the classroom. Although the majority (43%) mentioned that sexual assaults were *seldom* reported, a minority (9%) indicated these were *most times* reported. Mention was also made of unwanted sexual contact, as indicated by the majority (38%) though this occurred *seldom*. A minority (6%), however, pointed out that this was *most times* experienced by students. The same was true of sexual violence against women. Thus, whereas the majority (41%) claimed that, sexual violence was seldom reported; a minority (8%) pointed out that sexual violence against women was *most times* reported. Interestingly, most of these sexual assaults were *seldom* against male students as indicated by the majority (48%), *seldom* (41%), reported cases were against women See Table 6.

**Table 6:   Sexual issues**

| Item | Gender | Always | Most times | Sometimes | Seldom | Not at all | More of male teachers | More of female teachers | Undecided |
|------|--------|--------|-----------|-----------|--------|------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Women reported being sexually assaulted. | Male | 8 | 10 | 22 | 10 | 50 | 50 | 23 | 27 |
|  | Female | 10 | 22 | 33 | 10 | 25 | 51 | 26 | 23 |
|  | Total | 9 | 13 | 25 | 10 | 43 | 50 | 24 | 26 |
| 2. Women experienced unwanted sexual contact. | Male | 4 | 14 | 24 | 15 | 43 | 58 | 17 | 25 |
|  | Female | 10 | 23 | 34 | 11 | 22 | 55 | 25 | 20 |
|  | Total | 6 | 16 | 26 | 13 | 38 | 57 | 19 | 24 |
| 3. Sexual violence was reported by women. | Male | 7 | 13 | 19 | 13 | 48 | 41 | 32 | 27 |
|  | Female | 11 | 23 | 32 | 11 | 23 | 36 | 44 | 20 |
|  | Total | 8 | 16 | 23 | 12 | 41 | 40 | 35 | 25 |
| 4. Men have been victims of sexual assault. | Male | 5 | 10 | 20 | 14 | 51 | 40 | 29 | 31 |
|  | Female | 8 | 12 | 24 | 17 | 39 | 41 | 35 | 24 |
|  | Total | 6 | 10 | 21 | 15 | 48 | 40 | 31 | 29 |

**Source:**  2018 field survey.

To further investigate the issue, the correlation between the occurrence of sexual related issues and faculty was carried out.  The results are presented

on Table 7. As expected, the Table shows evidence of sexual related issues such sexual contact, assault and violence in all four selected faculties though relatively small. For instance, although many (82–85%) of the students indicated that the above sexual abuses did not occur in their faculties; quite a substantial number of them (15–18%) also pointed out the opposite. A comparison of the faculties suggest that the most occurrence was in faculty B and the least occurrence was in faculty C.

**Table 7:   The Occurrence of Sexual Related Issues by Faculty**

| Faculty | A | B | C | D | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sexual contact* | | | | | |
| Always | 44 | 36 | 16 | 4 | 15 |
| Not at all | 32 | 11 | 34 | 23 | 85 |
| Total | 34 | 15 | 31 | 20 | 100 |
| *Sexual assault* | | | | | |
| Always | 21 | 28 | 26 | 26 | 17 |
| Not at all | 18 | 15 | 38 | 29 | 83 |
| Total | 18 | 18 | 36 | 29 | 100 |
| *Sexual violence* | | | | | |
| Always | 29 | 31 | 24 | 16 | 18 |
| Not at all | 19 | 15 | 38 | 28 | 82 |
| Total | 21 | 18 | 36 | 26 | 100 |

**Source:**   2018 field survey.

## C.   The relationship between student gender and faculty on one hand, and the selected variables — on the other hand

According to Table 8, there was a significant relationship between student *gender* and the selected variables (correlations were significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed). The Table (the figures in bracket), shows that student gender shared 6 per cent of the variability in the unwanted sexual contact experienced by females, 5 per cent in sexual assaults reported by females, and 5 per cent in sexual violence reported. A student's faculty on one hand shared, 7 per cent of the variability in unwanted sexual contact experienced by female students, 5 per cent in sexual assaults reported by females, 4 per cent in sexual assaults reported by females and 4 per cent in lecturer utterances, that made female students feel uncomfortable. These estimates

though small, suggest that the variability in the selected variables is accounted for by other variables other than those examined by the study.

**Table 8: Correlations between the selected variables**

| *Selected Variables* | *Correlation Coefficient for or Faculty* | *Correlation Coefficient for Gender* |
|---|---|---|
| Lecturers voided stories/jokes/comments derogatory to females. | .080 | –.151** (2.28) |
| Lecturers used examples that made females feel excluded. | .107* | –.133** (1.77) |
| Lecturers talked about women in ways that made them uncomfortable. | .189** (3.57) | –.181** (3.27) |
| Lecturers allowed jokes/stories that made females objects of laughter/ridicule. | .142** (2.02) | –.111** (1.20) |
| Women reported being sexually assaulted. | .216** (4.67) | –.221** (4.88) |
| Women experienced unwanted sexual contacts. | .265** (6.55) | –.238** (5.66) |
| Sexual violence was reported. | .198** (3.90) | –.214** (4.57) |
| Male students were unconsciously shunned. | .152** (2.31) | –.067 |
| Particular groups of female students received more attention than they should. | .145** (2.1) | –.105* |
| Lecturers called on male students more than female students. | .134** (1.79) | –.114** (1.23) |
| All students were made to believe they could succeed. | –.054 | .130** (1.69) |

**Note:**  *  Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
    ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
    •  $R^2$ is in the bracket

## D.    The effect of gender biases in the classroom

The discussions under this section, are from the unstructured section of the semi-structured questionnaire employed by the study. The responses of the students regarding the effects of gender biases in the classroom were generally classified into following four categories — academic, psychological, social and sexual effects.

## *Academic effect*

Academically, the students had the perception that lecturers expected more from male students than female students. The male students in particular felt females were often favoured in assessments because of their relationship with lecturers. For example, it was mentioned that, some females intentionally do not work hard because they know some lecturers will surely pass them. These perceptions had different effects on the students based on their gender. Whereas the female students were motivated to work hard to prove their male counterparts wrong, the male students were discouraged and did not put in their best because they felt the assessment processes were not fair. This according to the students has led to poor academic performance. Others felt unhappy and bad and even absented themselves from lectures handled by such lecturers or planned leaving the university. Some of the students' comments were as follows:

A: "Sometimes they exchange marks to suit ladies."

B: "Sometimes female students are given some free marks due to their relationship with lecturers."

C: "When I am learning I know that they always favour females so I study hard to get more marks."

D: "It doesn't urge me to learn hard because after all, the females will be favoured."

E: "Sometimes students prefer not to study hard because they know they would get higher grades."

F: "It has killed the learning spirit in male students and I have lost my love for the course."

G: "It contributes to poor performance."

## *Psychological effects*

The psychological effects of gender biases in the classroom mentioned by the students were: loss of self-esteem, inferiority complex, shyness, timidity,

exclusion, nervousness and the inability to answer questions in class. Other effects identified were feelings of not being capable of doing well academically, lack of attention during lectures involving a lecturer who is biased in one way or the other, loss of interest in the course, and unwillingness to approach biased lecturers for further discussions and clarification outside the classroom. These were some of the comments from the students:

H:    "It makes me lose my self-esteem sometimes."
I:    "Makes me feel inferior."
J:    "It makes one timid and shy."
K:    "It causes inferiority complex."

### Social Effects

With respect to unfairness or unequal treatment, the general perception was that the male students were often treated badly especially, in the presence of female students. According to the students, male students were often disrespected, disgraced, insulted, looked down upon, ignored or given less attention. For example, when students were late for a class, the females were allowed in, but the males are sacked. Thus, the male students often felt nervous approaching lecturers. The supposed "favoured" female students presumably showed an air of superiority and this brought division and unhappiness among the students. These were some of the students comments:

L:    "We all deserve to be treated equally, right?"
M:    "Male students are treated badly especially in the midst of girls?"
N:    "Male students get humiliated by female teachers in class."
O:    "They look down on us, males".
P:    "It makes some people see themselves as superior in class."
Q:    "It has brought about class division."
R:    "Students find it difficult to share their problems or what worries them with lecturers."

### Sexual distractions effects

According to the students, the way some male students talk about sex and orally "harass" female students in class made concentration very difficult in

the classroom. The same was true of how some female students and lecturers dressed to class and the way and manner some female students disrespected male students in the classroom just because of their "supposed" relationship with male lecturers? These were some of the responses from the students on this issue:

> S:    "Some lecturers are dating female students and the male students harass the female students"
> T:    "Female students and lecturers' dressing seduce male students"
> U:    "Female students disrespect male students because of their relationship with male lecturers"
> V:    "It has made focusing and concentrating in class very difficult."
> W:    "Teachers forcefully take students' phone numbers to call and toast them with proposals, all in the name of giving them good grades."

**Discussion**

Regarding the first objective, as to whether gender biases existed, the overall finding was that gender biases did occur in the classroom sometimes and that they varied depending on the course and the lecturer concerned. Although such biases in the classroom can generally be covert or overt, the focus of this article was on overt bias which often tends to be intentional and obvious and may contain subtle insults and offenses (Sue, Capodilupa, Nadal, & Torino, 2008; Boysen, *et al.,* 2009). Boysen, *et al.* (2009) in a survey assessing the perceptions of 2,523 professors, graduates, instructors, and undergraduates on classroom bias, similarly reported that students on several occasions, experienced things they didn't like, were perhaps, a little or more than subtly derogative or things that made them uncomfortable. The study finding is further supported by Boysen, *et al.* (2009), who showed that "One place that students face overt and subtle forms of bias is the college classroom". Marcus, *et al.* (2003) showed that students experienced higher levels of biases in the classroom than outside it further supporting the finding of this study. These findings were rather unfortunate given that the teaching profession requires all students to be treated equally regardless of their background; gender or any other characteristics which could be a basis for discrimination.

In terms of how such biases were manifested, two areas stood out: (1) which teacher gender generally made students uncomfortable in the

classroom and (2) issues surrounding sex perpetuated by male students and lecturers. As indicated by 58 per cent of the respondents, gender biases in the classroom were more characteristic of male lecturers than female lecturers. For example, the male lecturers did not avoid stories/jokes/ comments that denigrate females. This finding is not surprising because, gender biases in society though, generally perpetuated by all genders have often been against women (Sartore and Cunningham, 2007).

Regarding the second issue on sex, the study showed that sexual assault was always (8%), most of the time (13%) or at least sometimes (25%) reported. The gender that generally experienced more of these assaults was females as indicated by some of the students who indicated that females *always* (9%) or *most of the time* (13%) experienced sexual assaults. Sonnert (1995b) in similar study involving 191 female fellowship recipients similarly found 12 per cent of the females reporting being sexually harassed during their graduate school or early professional experience. The study findings are also supported by earlier arguments that women encounter more sexism than men (Swim, *et al.,* 2001, Kalof, *et al.,* 2001).

Regarding the second objective which sought to find out the relationship between the selected variables, the study showed that a student's faculty on one hand shared 7 per cent of the variability in unwanted sexual contacts experienced by women, 5 per cent in sexual assaults reported by women on the other hand. These suggest that sexual related issues were more prevalent in some faculties than others. Whether such sexual issues were reported or not similarly depended on the faculty involved. As previously mentioned, sexual contact, assault and violence mostly occurred at the faculty of Applied Sciences although some faculties have fewer female students (e.g. Engineering) than others. This notwithstanding, further research is necessary to ascertain why sexual issues were relatively more prevalent in some faculties than others.

The third objective was to identify the specific effect of such biases on students. The study findings indicated that male students were often disrespected, disgraced, insulted, looked down upon, ignored or given less attention. These lecturer behaviours are unethical given that the Code of Ethics Policy (2016) of the university section 4.0 prohibits intentionally causing reasonable apprehension or harm. These included but not limited to abusive language and/or physical or verbal intimation, harassment, decimation, coercion and fairness for all students. Boysen, *et al.* (2009) in a survey assessing the perceptions of 2,523 professors, graduates,

instructors, and undergraduates on classroom bias, similarly reported that on several occasions, students referred to things they did not like or were perhaps a little or more subtly derogative, making them uncomfortable. Such biases included indirect confrontation, discussion and ignoring.

The effect of these as evidenced by this study can be academic, psychological, social etc. Such biases according to Benson and Thomson (1982) can cause female students in particular to begin to carefully look for, monitor and even avoid lecturers with such attitudes. Some may even not choose courses, programmes and careers that involve such lecturers. Staff who engaged in such relationships on the other hand may lose self-respect among students or may even be ineffective in class.

## Conclusions

This study set out to investigate how gender biases in a tertiary classroom environment affect the quality of students' learning experience academically, socially and psychologically. It is clear from the study findings that gender biases sometimes occurred in the classroom though these were often dependent on the lecturer and the course concerned. Classroom participation, student-lecturer relationships, discipline, and assessments were some of the activities that provided lecturers the opportunity to show such gender biasness in the classroom. Among the many effects of such classroom biases were academic, psychological, social and sexual effects which specifically ranged from ignoring students to sexual assaults. Promotion of students' academic welfare, professionalism in the classroom, adequate supervision and monitoring and a medium for students to channel their concerns were some of the recommendations made to address the challenges identified.

## Recommendations

• *Promotion of students' welfare academically*
Lecturers should expect equal performance from all genders and respect the male students as much as they respect females. They should also try and be fair to all students. Students on the other hand, should be encouraged to appreciate each other and to work hard.

• *Lecturer Professionalism*
Management through the Human Resource Unit should educate and

encourage lecturers to be professional in the classroom by respecting themselves and giving all students equal opportunity regardless of their gender. Lecturers should also try to be interested in the general welfare and feelings of students.

• *A medium for channelling students' concerns*

An office should be set up for students to report or share their problems, worries, concerns and grievance for redress. Perhaps, suggestion boxes could be located within vantage points so that student can report lecturers anonymously when need be.

• *Adequate supervision Monitoring*

The university authorities particularly, Heads of Departments, Deans and colleague lecturers should be interested in the behaviour of lecturers in the classroom by regularly checking on them during class hours, interacting with students, allowing student to assess lecturers or using electronic media (e.g., C.C.T.V. cameras) to gain insight into what is happening in the various classrooms.

• *Sanctions*

Appropriate sanction should be given to lecturers who engage in professional misconduct or those found to be engaged in wrong doing.

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