Students' Perceptions of Lecturers' Presentation and
Interpersonal Skills in the School of Educational Studies at Universiti
Sains Malaysia

انطباعات طلاب كلية التربية بجامعة العلوم الماليزية نـحو
مهارات العرض والتعامل مع الآخرين للكادر التدريسي

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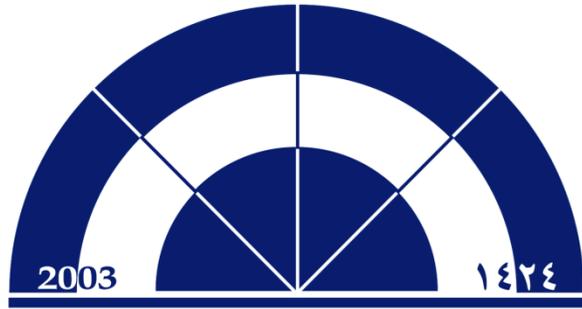
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Abstract :

This study aims at gauging Malaysian undergraduates' perceptions of their lecturers' ability in using presentation and interpersonal skills. To achieve the research objectives, a questionnaire was administered to a group of students in the School of Education at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia. The findings, generally, revealed that the majority of the students had high perceptions regarding their lecturers' efficiency in using almost all the skills. However, variations in the results pinpointed areas in which some attention should be given by the lecturers to increase their students' satisfaction.*

***Keywords**: Students' perception, education studies program, lecturers' presentation skills, lecturers' interpersonal skills.*

الملخص :

يهدف هذا البحث لمعرفة انطباعات طلاب الجامعة بماليزيا بالنسبة لمهارات الكادر التدريسي عند العرض والتعامل مع الآخرين. لتحقيق الهدف، تم توزيع إستبانة على مجموعة من طلاب كلية التربية يخ جامعة العلوم الماليزية بماليزيا. وقد أشارت النتائج ،إجمالا ، الى الانطباع العال لدى غالبية الطلاب حول مستوى الكفاءة المتقدم للكادر التدريسي يخ معظم المهارات، كما حددت بعض الاختلافات يخ النتائج وبدقة المجالات التي تتطلب مزيدا من الاهتمام من قبل المحاضرين لنيل رضاء و قناعة الطلاب.

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1. Introduction :

In this era of competition and globalization, higher education is viewed as business-like enterprise, where the student as a customer seeks a business-like relationship with the producer (lecturer) that delivers knowledge, skills and competencies he or she wants (Newton, 2002). Therefore, improving the quality of teaching and learning becomes one of the central issues faced by all universities in the world. One of the areas of primary concern is the quality of the teaching staff which is considered fundamental to successful teaching and learning process and therefore, providing effective lecturers to students becomes an utmost consideration in higher institution of learning (Gelula, 1997; Jordan et al, 1997; Lowman, 2006; Onwuegbuzie et al, 2007; Chuan & Heng, 2014). Realizing this, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia emphasizes on the quality and teaching effectiveness of educators so that they produce graduates who are able to apply skills, knowledge and abilities that they have acquired through the learning process in the real working environment (Syahrina et al, 2015). As a result, a great deal of attention has been devoted by the Malaysian universities to evaluate their own effectiveness in delivering educational services, in particular, teaching and learning to their clients (Jamaliah Abdul Hamid & Zaidatol Akmallah, 2004).

Evidence shows that there have been countless discussions and debates on the effectiveness of teaching in higher institutions of learning. On this regard, students' perceptions of lecturers are considered by many researchers as representing relevant and valid information regarding lecturer effectiveness (Walklin, 1992; Seldin, 1993; Marsh et al. 1997; Dia, 1998; Centra and Gaubatz, 2005; Lowman, 2006; Onwuegbuzie et al, 2007; Wei et al, 2009; Fisher et al, 2011, Yeoh et al, 2012). This is because they can provide data which could be used to understand and meet learners' demands and needs. In other words, it can be assumed that students 'learning and motivation are determined to a large degree by their perceptions—and perhaps even more so than by teacher intentions or researcher perceptions (Shuell, 1996; Fraser, 1998; Brok et al, 2005a). With this in mind, this study is conducted to investigate the effectiveness of

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teachers' presentation and interpersonal skills as perceived by their students in an education program at a public university in Malaysia.

2. Statement of the Problem :

In fact, a number of studies on undergraduates' views of the desirable qualities which characterize effective instructors, found that lecturers' ability in handling ***presentation and interpersonal skills*** top the list of the qualities and skills which "exemplary lecturers" should use effectively (Lowman, 2006; Ismail et al, 2009; Chuan & Heng, 2014). As far as the Malaysian context is concerned, Chuan and Heng (2014), who investigated the perceptions of 4768 Malaysian undergraduates on their lecturers' teaching effectiveness, found that lecturers' ability in presentation skills received the lowest ranking by the students. Therefore, they demonstrate that lecturers should be equipped with good presentation skills in order to present the material in a clear and logical sequence. This will definitely assist students' learning process and would help them to fully understand and comprehend the new information and knowledge (ibid).

Regarding lecturers' interpersonal skills, Hassan et al (2015) who conducted a study among 258 Malaysian lecturers at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), found that there is a significant relationship between interpersonal skills and teaching effectiveness. This concurs with the results of a number of studies (e.g. Fraser, 1998; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 1998; Brok, 2001) which revealed that lecturers' interpersonal skills are strongly related with ESL students' achievement and motivation in different subject areas. In addition, healthy teacher-student interpersonal relationships are viewed as a prerequisite for engaging students in learning activities (Wubbels & Levy, 1993; Brekelmans et al. 2000; Brok, et al. 2004; Hassan et al. 2015). In particular, teaching in a multicultural context, like Malaysia, requires that ESL teachers possess a higher level of communicative competence compared to what ESL teachers in other contexts might need (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Brok & Levy, 2005; Hassan et al, 2015). This is because, in such a context there is a greater need for intercultural communication, with the corresponding risks of misunderstanding, conflict and disappointment (Brok & Levy, 2005; Hassan et al, 2015). Hassan et al (2015) argue that the environment of local universities in Malaysia has been characterized as being very

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challenging due to the increasing demands, standards, and
expectations of the public, stakeholders and the Ministry of Higher
Education. As a result, lecturers are overwhelmed with multiple roles
and tasks such as conducting research for promotion purposes,
attending seminars, project presentations and engaging in students'
and community service activities (Hassan et al, 2015; Miyagamwala,
2015).

Taking all the above situations into account, the researchers concur
with Ismail et al (2009), Chuan and Heng (2014), and Hassan et al
(2015) in that it is vital for Malaysian lecturers to equip themselves
with ***presentation and interpersonal*** skills and abilities to ensure the
optimum transfer of knowledge and to be able to achieve effective
teaching. However, Chuan and Heng (2014) aver that although
numerous empirical studies on students' evaluation of teaching
performance have been conducted, both locally and internationally, a
limited or possibly none has been conducted in Teacher Education
Institutes in Malaysia. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, students'
views of teachers' teaching effectiveness are considered by many
researchers and writers as being one of the most valid sources of data
which contributed much to measure teaching effectiveness and
improve the learning/teaching process (Seldin, 1993; Dia, 1998; Telli
et al, 2007; Wei et al, 2009; Fisher et al, 2011, Yeoh, et al, 2012).
Seldin (1993) avers that students' ratings of lecturers receive more
scrutiny and attention from administrators and faculty than do other
measures of teaching effectiveness (e.g., student performance,
classroom observations, faculty self-reports).

Therefore, the current study is conducted to investigate the
effectiveness of lecturers' presentation and interpersonal skills as
perceived by their students in the School of Education at Universiti
Sains Malaysia (USM). The researchers are also inspired by the lack
in literature in the Malaysian context as Sarjit Kaur (2003:34) clearly
posited "while teaching itself began to be more vigorously and openly
examined, the teaching-learning process as students experienced it
remained hidden from view". The study would contribute to fill in this
gap and add to the sparse literature related to teachers' performance in
this ESL context. It is also hoped that the results could help in raising
teachers' awareness of their weaknesses, if any, based on the
perceptions of the group of students who participated in this study.

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3. Objectives of the Study :

The present study aims to:
- Identify the perceptions of the students in the School of Education at USM regarding their lecturers' ability in *presentation skills*.
- Identify the perceptions of the students in the School of Education at USM regarding their lecturers' ability in *interpersonal skills*.

4. Questions of the Study :

To achieve the objectives, the study attempts to address the following research questions:
1. What are the perceptions of the students in the School of Education at USM regarding their lecturers' ability in *presentation skills*?
2. What are the perceptions of the students in the School of Education at USM regarding their lecturers' ability in *interpersonal skills*?

5. Significance of the Study :

This study aims to explore and highlight Malaysian undergraduates' perceptions regarding their lecturers' presentation and interpersonal skills. As teachers are significant in the lives of students, understanding the characteristics of effective college teachers is crucial for every educational setting. In addition, the importance of the study springs out from the scarcity of research which investigated Malaysian undergraduates' perceptions about their lecturers' presentation and interpersonal skills. Therefore, this research will contribute to add to the current, yet scant, body of literature in this ESL context.

The findings could also serve as a reference for instructors and administrators to improve the teaching situation, if needed, based on the students' points of view. According to Dia (1998), students' ratings of lecturers is one of the most important ways of generating vital information for course improvements and also useful for making lecturers aware of their strengths and weaknesses in relation with their teaching and interactions with students.

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6. Limitations of the Study

This preliminary investigation has a number of limitations. First, because of the small sample size and the diversity of participant sociocultural contexts, these findings may need to be generalized with care. Second, due to time and travel constrains, this investigation is based on a survey questionnaire. Finally, the findings are limited to the perceptions of the current participants and generalisations should be made with caution. However, despite these limitations, the present study has pioneered the investigation of exploring Malaysian undergraduates' perceptions regarding their lecturers' presentation and interpersonal skills, particularly, at an education program at a public university. Therefore, this investigation will enrich the existing literature on the study of the characteristics of effective teachers and would help to open avenues for further studies.

7. Theoretical Framework

The learning paradigms which underpin the present investigation are based on the **Social Constructivism** and the **Social Cognitive theories** of learning. For the **social constructivists**, they view the concept of learning as a social construct which is mediated by language via social discourse. According to Hein (1991), the dramatic consequences of the learning paradigm of constructivism are twofold: 1) the learner should be the centre of the learning process and 2) there is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience (constructed) by the learner, or community of learners. Following this paradigm, the current study attempts to bring students' experience and knowledge of the lecturers' ability in presentation and interpersonal skills in the foreground of discussion. Understanding students' knowledge and experience would help lecturers and syllabus planners to improve the teaching-learning process in a learner-centred environment as suggested by the constructivists (Brooks and Brooks, 1999).

Concerning the **social cognitive theory**, it seeks to understand the thoughts people generate as a result of being given some information about something (Chepchieng et al, 2006). The key assumption of the cognitive response view is that people are active processors of information who generate cognitive responses to messages but not just

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passive recipients of the messages that they happen to be exposed to (Taylor et al., 1997). This implies that when students receive information concerning relations with their lecturers, they cognitively process and perceive it as either good or bad (Chepchieng et al, 2006). This will eventually make them to either like or dislike their relations with the lecturers, which further influence their perceptions (ibid). As a result, the researchers in this study adopted the **social cognitive theory** as a theoretical basis for identifying students' perceptions of their teachers' presentation and interpersonal skills. According to Bandura (2005), the social cognitive theory is very well suited to explain the development of complex behaviour such as oral presentation and interpersonal skills. Complex human behaviour is – according to the theory – learned by observation through modelling (Bandura, 1986). Via *observational learning*, learners compare their teachers' performance with more or less *explicit standards* of a good behaviour (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2001).

Consequently, in the present study, teachers' ability in *presentation* and *interpersonal skills* are determined by achieving a better match between the *standards* and the teachers' current performance level as perceived by the students. For the teachers' *presentation skills,* the students will be required to rate their teachers' ability in seven presentation skills. The skills are used based on a review of related studies (Wagenaar, 1995; Gelula , 1997; Patrick & Smart, 1998; Aniswal Abd. Ghani et al., 2005; Langan et al, 2008; Grez et al,2009; AL-Tamimi & Shuib, 2016) and match the main delivery skills proposed by Lucas (2004) on his work "*the Art of Public Speaking*", which is considered the leading and most reliable text used by many researchers in the field of public speaking (AL-Tamimi & Shuib, 2016).

Regarding the teachers' *interpersonal behaviour*, seven skills are selected from related works (e.g. Aniswal Abd. Ghani et al., 2005; Brok et al, 2005a; Fisher et al., 2005; Fisher et al, 2011). The skills seem to tap four out of the eight categories of Wubbels et al.'s (1991, 1993) *model for interpersonal teacher behavior* (see **Appendix "A"** for a brief description of these eight categories). These four categories are: **1. Leadership**, **2. Helpful/friendly**, **3. Understanding** and **4. Student responsibility/ freedom**. The four categories are chosen because they appear to represent the *interpersonal behaviour* of an

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ideal teacher as perceived by many ESL/EFL students in in various countries such as *Brunei* (Brok et al. 2005a), *China* (Wei et al. 2009), *India* (Brok et al. 2005b), *Indonesia* (Margianti 2002), *Korea* (Lee et al. 2003), **Singapore** (Goh and Fraser 1998), *Thailand* (Wei et al. 2007) and *Turkey* (Telli et al. 2007), among other countries. For example, Wei et al. (2009) identified the perceptions of 160 Chinese EFL students about their EFL teachers' interpersonal behaviour. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants described the characteristics of a Chinese '*ideal*' EFL teacher as a strong leader, understanding and helpful/friendly, and give some freedom to students.

8. Research Methodology :

8.1. Research Design :

This research is quantitative and descriptive in nature. A survey questionnaire was used to gather data to determine the lecturers' ability in using presentation and interpersonal skills as perceived by their students in the School of Education at USM.

8.2. Research Instrument :

A questionnaire was employed as the primary method of inquiry in this research. It consists of three sections. **Section A** is used to collect information about the students' background. **Section B** aims to identify the students' perceptions regarding the lecturers' ability in using seven *presentation skills*. As mentioned earlier, the skills are selected based on a review of related studies (such as; Wagenaar, 1995; Gelula , 1997; Patrick & Smart, 1998; Aniswal Abd. Ghani et al., 2005; Langan et al, 2008; Grez et al,2009; AL-Tamimi & Shuib, 2016).

Finally, **section C** is designed to elicit information concerning lecturers' ability in using seven *interpersonal skills*. The skills are developed according to four categories of Wubbels et al.'s (1991, 1993) *model for interpersonal teacher behavior*. The categories are: **1. leadership** (*able to influence students* and *able to solve problems without losing control of his/her emotion*), **2. helpful/friendly** (*able to develop trust and confidence with students* and *able to demonstrate friendliness in class*), **3. understanding** (*able to empathize the students* and *able to communicate with students from different*

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backgrounds) and **4. student responsibility/ freedom** (*able to appreciate what have been presented by students*).

In sections 2 and 3, the respondents were given five choices to specify their ratings regarding the lecturers' ability in presentation and interpersonal skills with 1 indicating unsatisfactory performance and 5 for excellent performance.

8.3. Validity and Reliability of the Questionnare :

The categorisation of the presentation and interpersonal skills was based on relevant questionnaires as well as well-known and standard models. Therefore, the instrument used in this study was assumed to possess content validity. This is because the questionnaire items appeared to be "relevant to measurement of the intended content area" (Gay and Airasian, 1992:136). In addition, the questionnaire was piloted before being used. This was for the purpose of establishing both the content and construct validity of the research instrument.

Reliability of the instrument, on the other hand, is defined as as "the extent to which the results can be considered consistent or stable" (Brown, 1988:98). Alpha coefficients for the questionnaire items were generated for the sample in the present study as indices of scale reliability. It is found that, the reliability level of Cronbach alpha for the student responses is 0.78 which is in the acceptable range.

8.4. Research Sample and Procedure :

Thirty female students mostly between the ages of 22 and 26 years were purposively selected as a sample from the School of Education at USM, Malaysia. In terms of ethnicity, the majority (90%) of the subjects were Malays and the remaining were Chinese. The questionnaire was self-administered to the students and all of them (n=30) completed and returned the questionnaire.

With reference to sample size, Cohen et al. (2005) argue that there is no clear-cut answer for the preferable sample size as it depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under scrutiny. However, they aver that a sample size of *thirty* is held by many to be the minimum number of cases if researchers plan to use some form of statistical analysis on their data.

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9. Findings and Discussion

In this section, findings of students' results regarding the lecturers' ability in presentation and interpersonal skills are presented and discussed separately.

9.1 Students' Perceptions of Lecturers' Ability in Presentation Skills

To answer the first research question, the students' results regarding the lecturers' ability in presentation skills are shown in Table 1 below. The data revealed that the students perceived their lecturers as *very good* in performing most of the presentation skills.

Table1: Students' Results Regarding Lecturers' Ability in Presentation skills

No.	Questionnaire Items	Mean
1	Lectures are able to use *Bahasa Malaysia (BM)* fluently & accurately	4.3667
2	Lectures are able to use the English language fluently & accurately	4.3000
3	Lectures are able to express own ideas clearly & spontaneously	4.1000
4	Lectures are able to present ideas in a well-organized manner	4.0667
5	Lectures are able to give effective oral presentation	4.0667
6	Lectures are able to use body language effectively	3.9667
7	Lectures are able to respond to students appropriately	3.8000

The highest mean scores are 4.3667 and 4.3000 for the lecturers' ability in using *BM* and *English languages*, respectively. This indicates that the lecturers are efficient in using both the official language of the country (BM) and the lingua franca of the world (the English language) as perceived by their students.

Other presentation skills which are highly rated by the students are as follows: lecturers' ability *to express own ideas clearly & spontaneously* (M= 4.1000), to *present ideas in a well-organized manner* (M= 4.0667), and *to give effective oral presentation* (M= 4.0667). This demonstrates that the current subjects perceived the lecturers as 'very good' in giving clear presentation of course content and getting their message across. This finding is consistent with that of Chuan & Heng's (2014) study which was conducted among 4768

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students from various teacher education programmes in the Teacher
Education Institute at Batu Lintang Campus, Malaysia. Definitely, as
Chuan & Heng (2014) argued, lecturers' ability to give clear
presentation will assist students in making sense of and absorbing new
knowledge and skills taught.

On the other hand, the lower mean scores tended to cluster around
items that described lecturers' ability to *use body language effectively*
(M= 3.9667), and to *respond to students appropriately* (M= 3.8000).
This suggests that the lecturers were viewed as having lower ability in
terms of using non-verbal communication skills, such as body
language, and answering students' enquiries. Yet, the mean scores of
lecturers' performance in these skills are still high indicating that they
were rated as "good" by most of the subjects in this study.

9.2 Students' Perceptions of Lecturers' Ability in Interpersonal Skills

The findings in Table 2 below show that the students in the
education program highly agreed to the good use of interpersonal
skills by their lecturers. Lecturers' ability to *influence students* and *to
demonstrate friendliness in class* had received the highest mean scores
(M= 3.8667). However, the lowest mean values were 3.7000 and
3.6667 for the lecturers' ability to *empathize the students* and
communicate with students from different backgrounds, respectively.

**Table 2: Students' Results Regarding Lecturers' Ability in
Interpersonal Skills**

No.	Questionnaire Items	Mean
1	Lectures are able to influence students	3.8667
2	Lectures are able to demonstrate friendliness in class	3.8667
3	Lectures are able to develop trust and confidence with students	3.7667
4	Lectures are able to appreciate what have been presented by students	3.7667
5	Lectures are able to solve problems without losing control of his/her emotion	3.7333
6	Lectures are able to empathize the students	3.7000
7	Lectures are able to communicate with students from different backgrounds	3.6667

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Of the four categories of Wubbels et al.'s (1993) *model for interpersonal teacher behavior,* the students' perceptual scores of their teachers reveal their favourable perceptions for the Leadership (item 1), Helping/Friendly (items 2 & 3) and Student Responsibility/Freedom (item 4) scales. In other words, the findings show that the students in this study generally perceived their teachers as good leaders, helping/friendly, and allowing student responsibility and freedom. In such an environment, the students are assisted to develop those qualities that go with good learning skills and leadership (Okwilagwe, 2002). This is perhaps due to the students' identification with lecturers as role models, which has been acknowledged as vital to the acquisitions of good learning skills and behaviours (Ronning, 1997). As a result, like their lectures as role models, the students could have similar good learning and leadership skills. More importantly, equipping university students with these skills have been emphasized by the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF).

On the other hand, the findings indicated that the lecturers had lower ability in terms of understanding (items 6 & 7). Perhaps, teachers in a multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic society, like that of Malaysia, need to learn more about how to to empathize the students and understand their different backgrounds to obtain effective communication and enhance the teaching-learning process. In fact, many writers (e.g. Rogers, 1962; Taskafa, 1989 as cited in Wei et al. 2007; Goleman, 1998; Burgoon & Bacue, 2003) consider understanding and empathy among the important competencies that ESL/EFL teachers should acquire and use effectively. Taskafa (1989) as cited in Wei et al, 2007, for example, interviewed 43 middle-school students in Turkey and asked them to identify teachers' desirable and non-desirable characteristics. Giving positive reinforcement, being friendly to the students and understanding students' feeling were the most frequently mentioned desirable characteristics.

To recapitulate, the overall mean score of the students' ratings of their lecturers' interpersonal skills appears to be somewhat lower than that on lecturers' presentation skills. This suggests that lecturers' ability in interpersonal skills is relatively lower than their levels in presentation skills as perceived by the students. In line with the findings of the present case study, many ESL/EFL teachers are found

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to generally operate at a low level of interpersonal skills (Burns, 1992; Siu-ping, 1994). Yet, there is a need for teachers to become aware of this upsetting behaviour and try to improve their level in using such interpersonal skills (Siu-ping, 1994). This view has been supported by a considerable body of research which show that successful learning requires teachers to create supportive interpersonal relationship with students which could bring positive benefits in the form of improved teacher-student interaction, stress reduction and increased self-awareness (Rogers, 1983; Burns, 1992; Siu-ping, 1994; Syahrina et al, 2015). Rrecognizing students' feelings and establishing rapport with them will definitely help to increase their motivation and performance in the classroom as shown by previous research (e.g. Telli et al, 2007; Wei et al, 2009). Moreover, teachers' empathy too proves to give emotional support in a relationship and opens the doors to good interpersonal communication skills with their students (Ikes, 1997; Vail, 2005).

10. Conclusion :

The present study was conducted to determine the lecturers' ability in using presentation and interpersonal skills as perceived by their students in the School of Education at USM. The findings, generally, revealed that the students had high perceptions regarding their lecturers' efficiency in using almost all the skills. However, the students appeared less satisfied with their lecturers' use of two presentation skills (*responding to students appropriately* and *using body language effectively)* and two interpersonal skills *(empathize the students* and *communicate with students from different backgrounds).* Therefore, these skills should be given more attention by the lecturers to increase their students' satisfaction and improve the learning environment.

As this study was restricted to a small group students i.e. 30 female students, more in-depth which comprehensively investigate the views of a large number of students' (males and females) regarding lecturers' ability in presentation and interpersonal skills need to be conducted to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Likewise in the methodological context, the study can be extended to qualitative aspects such as classroom observations and in-depth interviews with

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both lecturers and students to capture the real-life scenario in this area of student-lecturer relationship issue.

11. Acknowledgement :

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Appendix A
A brief Description of the Eight Categories of Wubbels et al.'s (1991, 1993) *Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behavior*

Categories	Description	Items in the current questionnaire
Leadership (DC)	In this class, the teacher provides leadership to the class and holds students' attention.	- Lectures are able to influence students - Lectures are able to solve problems without losing control of his/her emotion
Helping/Friendly (CD)	In this class, the teacher is friendly and helpful towards students.	- Lectures are able to demonstrate friendliness in class - Lectures are able to develop trust and confidence with students
Understanding (CS)	In this class, the teacher shows understanding/ concern/care for students.	- Lectures are able to empathize the students - Lectures are able to communicate with students from different backgrounds
Student Responsibility/ Freedom (SC)	In this class, students are given opportunities to assume responsibility for their own activities.	- Lectures are able to appreciate what have been presented by students.
Uncertain (SO)	In this class, the teacher exhibits his/her uncertainty.	No items used in the current questionnaire
Dissatisfied (OS)	In this class, the teacher shows unhappiness/ dissatisfaction with students.	No items used in the current questionnaire

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Admonishing (OD)	In this class, the teacher shows anger/temper/ impatience in class.	No items used in the current questionnaire
Strict (DO)	In this class, the teacher is strict with and demanding of students.	No items used in the current questionnaire

Adapted from Wubbels and Levy (1991)