THE BENEFITS FROM SERVICE LEARNING: THE EFFECT OF GENDER

BY

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Abstract

Service learning is increasingly being accepted as a pedagogy in business classes. Although there has been research that examines many aspects of service learning, there has not been research that examines whether male and female students perceive that they receive similar benefits from participating in service learning. The findings of research discussed in this article suggests that female students perceive they

receive more benefits from participating in service learning than male students do.

Increasing attention is being placed on the quality of business school education. including the questioning as to whether business schools are producing graduates with the knowledge and skills required by the business community. Are business school graduates able to apply the knowledge and skills they possess to real world situations? Many believe that the answers to these questions are "no" (Emiliani 2004). In response, multiple constituencies, including the AACSB (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), the primary accrediting body of collegiate schools of business, have become increasingly vocal about the need for business schools to focus more attention on the outcome of the educational process in order to address these questions (Callahan, Strandholm, and Dziekan 2009; Steiner and Watson 2006). Specifically, AACSB has identified several shortcomings in the education provided by many business schools (AACSB 2002). Service learning has been suggested as a pedagogy able to directly address many of these shortcomings and better prepare business students for their future careers (Angelidis, Tomic, and Ibranhim 2004; Kenworthy-U'Ren 2008).

Research on service learning in business schools has identified the benefits that students perceive they receive from participating in service learning (Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen 2006). The greater the benefits that students perceive they receive from their involvement in service learning, the more likely the experience has better prepared them for their future careers (Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen 2006). Given the differences that exist between how males and females perform in higher education (Sheard 2009), do differences in the benefits perceived from participating in service learning exist between male and female students? This study begins to examine this issue. First, the effectiveness of business education is explored. Second, service learning in business education is examined. Finally, hypotheses are developed, tested, and conclusions are drawn.

Business Education

Education has traditionally been viewed as the successful conveyance of information from faculty members to students. Within this perspective, the role of faculty members is to provide students with knowledge (Freire 1998). Hence, the most common educational pedagogy employed has been lecture, where success is measured by students' performances on exams. Although the transfer of knowledge is obviously a goal of education, is the traditional pedagogy of lectures and exams able to successfully accomplish this goal? Are students actually remembering the course material after the course comes to an end? Are students able to meaningfully apply this information to appropriate situations in a productive fashion? Many believe that business schools are not able to fill the needs of business and society (Emiliani 2004). The data seem to support this contention since many view business education not to be

overly effective (Pfeffer and Fong 2002).

Several academicians are raising these and similar questions (e.g., Bringle and Hatcher 2003). Some suggest that instead of adequately preparing students for their careers, traditional pedagogy is actually doing the opposite. Guyton (2000), for instance, suggests that traditional pedagogical methods turn students into passive underachievers. Similarly, Bransford and Nye (1989) speak of an "inert knowledge problem" – even if traditional pedagogical methods are able to transfer knowledge, students are unable to apply the knowledge to real world problems. Consequently, the view that classroom pedagogy must change if education is to be truly effective is gaining many adherents. Indeed, Tapscott and Williams express the belief that the current model of pedagogy is obsolete and suggest that universities need a "new modus operandi for how the content of higher education is created" (2010, p. 21).

The same concerns have been raised concerning the nature of business education by both business practitioners and by the AACSB. Farazmand, Green, and Miller (2010), for instance, believe that although recent business graduates have been exposed to significant information and theories during their education, they are generally not prepared to solve problems and make decisions. Similarly, Angelidis, Tomic, and Ibrahim (2004) perceive a growing disconnect between what they view to be an abstract and theoretical bias of business schools and the dynamic practical business environment. Consequently, recent business graduates are viewed as being unprepared to succeed in the business world.

As a result, some are calling for changes in business school pedagogy to better prepare students for the needs of the business community (e.g., Kenworthy-U'Ren 2008). A key outcome to the call for revised pedagogy is an increased focus on experientially based pedagogy. In response to weaknesses that have been identified, the curricula and the pedagogy of many collegiate business schools have undergone extensive changes in recent years (Mitchell 2007; Weldy and Turnipseed 2010). One of the primary changes observed are changes in pedagogy which permit students to engage in the real world and apply their knowledge to actual business situations. One such pedagogy that is receiving increasing attention is service learning (Kenworthy-U'Ren 2008; Metcalf 2010).

Service Learning

Service learning has been suggested as an alternative educational pedagogy to traditional lectures and exams (Govekar and Rishi 2007). Service learning is thought to be able to address several of the apparent shortcomings of higher education, including the shortcomings observed in business education (Kenworthy-U'Ren 2008). It is "a pedagogical process whereby students participate in course-relevant community service to enhance their learning experience" (Petkus 2000, p. 64). Service learning is not a form of forced volunteerism nor is it merely students becoming involved in projects

outside of the classroom. Instead, service learning is an "educational methodology which combines community service with explicit academic learning objectives, preparation for community service, and deliberate reflection. Students participating in service learning provide direct and indirect community service as part of their academic coursework, learn about and reflect upon the community context in which service is provided, and develop an understanding of the connection between the service and their academic work" (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, and Kerrigan 2001, p. v). Service learning is an experientially based pedagogy that provides students with opportunities to gain experience applying course material to actual situations – students are not just passive observers in their education, but are active participants (Munter 2002). In pursuing service learning, students are often required to examine cross-disciplinary problems that requires them to utilize the knowledge they have gained from their classes integratively and directly addressing many of the problems identified in business graduates.

Service learning has been shown to be a valuable pedagogy in many business disciplines (Wilson 2008) See Table below 1 for several examples. Indeed, Papamarcos states "service learning represents perhaps the most effective teaching tool available to the contemporary business school professor" (2002, p. 31).

Table 1

Service Learning in Business Classes

Class/Discipline	Selected Studies	Activity
Accounting	Buckhaults and Fisher 2011	Apply accounting principles to the real world
	Chiang 2008	Develop accounting systems
Business Communication	Gale, Crews, and North 2007	Communication plans for nonprofits
	Littlefield 2006	Build communication skills by working with small nonprofits
Business Ethics	Kohls 1996	Volunteering at an area nonprofit
	Vega 2007	Volunteering at discipline-appropriate nonprofits
E-Commerce	Abrahams and Singh 2010	Create new not-for-profit organizations
	Evans and Sawyer 2009	Assist small retail businesses establishing e-commerce
Finance	Dahlquist 1998	Financial literacy education to underserved populations
	DeLaune, Rakow, and Rakow 2010	Financial literacy education to freshman
Information Systems	Hall and Johnson 2011	Interact with end users when developing information systems
	Kangning, Siow, and Burley 2007	Develop information systems in the capstone course
Management	Dixon 2011	Project management for non-profits
	Madsen 2004	Service learning in human resource management
Marketing	Domegan and Bringle 2010	Social marketing
	Mottner 2010	Marketing plans for non-profits

Empirical evidence attests to the benefits to students from participating in service learning (Holtzman, Stewart, and Barr 2008). Table 2 below displays a sampling of the benefits that have been empirically observed.

Table 2

Selected Benefits From Service Learning

Benefits from Service Learning	Selected Studies
Respect for Diversity	Thompson 2000
Critical Thinking	Thompson 2000
Higher Motivation	Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, and Zlotkowski 2000
Intellectual and Emotional Growth	Blackwell 1996
Increased Social Responsibility	Eyler and Giles 1999
Interpersonal Skills	Eyler and Giles 1999
Effective Learning	Kupiec 1993
Deeper Understanding of Course Material	Bhaget and Ahmed 2000
Teamwork Skills	Zlotkowski 1996
Communication Skills	Zlotkowski 1996
Problem Slolving Skills	Batchchelder and Root 1994
Deeper Understanding of Oneself	Kaye 2004
Leadership Skills	Gujarathi and McQuade 2002
Academic Performance and GPA	Astin, Vogelgesang, and Yee 2000

In addition to the beneficial educational results, students have been observed to prefer courses containing a service learning component. Specifically, Berson and Younkin (1998) note that students report greater satisfaction with courses, the instructors, and the reading assignments for courses containing a service learning component. Packer (2009) observed similar higher student evaluations for the course and the instructor. Moreover, results from student evaluations and from alumni surveys indicate that students desire opportunities to bridge the gap between theory and practice, such as the opportunities provided by participating in service learning (Vander Veen 2002).

It should be noted that although service learning appears to provide a number of benefits, there can be drawbacks. Service learning classes, for instance, often involve scheduling conflicts and communications issues not encountered in traditional classes (Morin 2009). Similarly, instructors often find that service learning classes are more difficult to organize and structure (Govekar and Rishi 2007). Students are also often ill-equipped to handle the less-structured nature of many service projects and feel that the classes involve too much work (Morin 2009).

Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen (2006) comprehensively examined the issue of the benefits students perceive that they receive from participating in service

learning. They identified four underlying dimensions or factors: critical thinking and application skills (practical skills); ability to communicate and work with others (interpersonal skills); social responsibility and making a difference (citizenship); and trustworthiness and sensitivity to the needs of others (personal responsibility).The benefits that students perceive they receive from participating in service learning are an important area for study. The magnitude of the benefits students perceive they receive from participating in service learning is likely an indicator of the value that they receive from the experience and the degree to which they profited from the activity (Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen 2006).

Do male and female students view the benefits they receive from participating in service learning similarly? It has been argued that gender-sensitive instruction is necessary to accommodate the needs of different learners (Wing Fat Lau and Hoi Kau Yuen 2010). If male and female students differ in the benefits they perceive to receive from participating in service learning, there may be a need to offer differing service learning opportunities to students to maximize the value of such opportunities.

Role of Gender in Education and Service

The role of students' gender in education is receiving growing attention by researchers and practitioners (e.g., Coate and Lehman 2005; Wing Fat Lau and Hoi Kau Yuen 2010). The performance of male and female students in higher education, for instance, has been shown to differ. Specifically, male students have been shown to consistently perform more poorly than their female counterparts (Baker 2003; Sheard 2009; Strahan 2003). Furthermore, female students have been shown to adapt more easily to traditionally accepted learning behaviors in higher education (Smith 2004) and being more motivated towards, and to more readily engage with, academic goals and activities (Baker 2003; Reisberg 2000; Wintre and Yaffe 2000). Moreover, past research appears to agree that female students tend to be more comfortable with the traditional academic environment than male students and work harder and more consistently therein (Sheard 2009; Woodfield, Jessop, and McMillan 2006). This gender split is reflected in their evaluation of their classes – female students place greater importance on most aspects of the educational process, particularly the role of instructors and their expectation for a structured class (Hills, Naegle and Bartkus 2009).

However, since service learning experiences occur outside of the typical academic classroom, do the differences observed between male and female students in the academic classroom extend to service learning activities? There has been research at the primary and secondary grade levels suggesting there is a growing consensus that the conventional classroom is more conducive to female students than male students (Mulvey 2009). Male students, however, are thought to prosper academically if their activities possess more application and "doing," such as is possible in service learning courses (Keri 2002; Wehrwein, Lujan and DiCarlo 2007). Does this tendency extend to higher education? In other words, does the application or doing component of service

learning cater more to the need/desires of male students than female students in high education settings? If not, female students can be expected to perceive that they receive greater benefits from participating in service learning activities than their male counterparts. If so, the opposite results can be expected, namely that male students would perceive that they receive greater benefits from participating in service learning activities than their female counterparts. Relatively little research has examined the issue of gender and service learning.

The little research that has examined student's assessment of service learning and the benefits gained therein in primary and secondary school settings seem to suggest that differences may exist based on students' gender. Interestingly, the differences observed are contrary to the expectation that male students will benefit more than female students. A study of middle-school-age students, for instance, observed that female students consistently report higher expectations for service-learning opportunities and expect more personal growth from engaging in the activity than male students (Hecht and Fusco 1995). Miller (1994) observed similar results for high school students. In gerontology classes at the collegiate level, Nichols (2001) observed that female students perceive greater relational benefits from participating in service learning than male students, whereas male students are more focused on gaining credit toward graduation.

The research on the effect of gender on volunteering and views toward service provides little additional insight. Shiarella, McCarthy, and Tucker (2000) observed that female students hold higher perceptions of service and Burns, Reid, Toncar, Anderson, and Wells (2008) concluded that female students are more motivated to volunteer than male students. These findings suggest that female students may find more benefit from participating in service learning. Little (1997), however, suggests that male students are more likely to volunteer than female students if it supports their career. Given that one purpose of service learning is to better prepare students for their subsequent careers, this finding suggests that male students may value participating in service learning more highly than female students.

The Study

The objective of this study is to examine whether differences exist in the perceptions of male and female business students of the benefits they receive from participating in service learning. Past research seems to suggest that differences in perceptions may exist between male and female students. There is some confusion, however, regarding the direction that such a relationship, if it exists, takes. Although male students have been viewed to be more application oriented and more apt to benefit from an applied component in their education, the limited research that has examined a gender effect in service learning did not observe this effect. Instead, the research suggests that female students perceive greater benefits. Hence, the following hypothesis will be tested.

H: Female students rate academic service learning experiences more favorably than males.

Methodology

Sample

The sample was comprised of students pursuing higher education in colleges and universities. Questionnaires were distributed to students enrolled in marketing courses at ten colleges and universities located in the U.S. representing different philosophical/religious approaches to education to include a broad cross-section of business students. The schools represent commuter public, residential public, Catholic, Protestant, and historically African-American universities. The resulting sample was comprised of 686 responses, with 310 male respondents (45.2 percent) and 356 female respondents (54.8 percent). Sample sizes for each university is included in Table 3 below. Fifty percent of the sample reported that they are employed part-time and 19.6 percent reported that they are employed full-time. Over fifty-six percent of the sample reported a GPA of 3.00 or above and 42 percent reported a GPA between 2.00 and 2.99. Finally, nearly eighty percent of the respondents indicated that they were juniors or above.

Table 3

Sample Sizes

University	Sample Size
Commuter Public	124
Residential Public	98
Catholic	37
Protestant	104
Historically African-American	76
Commuter Public	31
Catholic	88
Residential Public	46
Residential Public	21
Commuter Public	61

The questionnaires were completed in classroom settings. Virtually no non-response was noted.

Instrument

The benefits students perceive they receive from service learning have been assessed via several scales. Most of the scales used, however, measure only a specific aspect or benefit of service learning. Therefore, Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen (2006) developed the SELEB (SErvice LEarning Benefit) scale as a valid instrument capable of fulfilling this need. The SELEB scale consists of 12 items measuring four underlying dimensions or benefits that students perceive they receive from service learning: critical thinking and application skills (practical skills), social responsibility and making a difference (citizenship), trustworthiness and sensitivity to the needs of others (personal responsibility), and ability to communicate and work with others (interpersonal skills). See Table 4 below. Participants were asked to indicate the importance of each benefit on a seven-point scale with one representing not at all important and seven representing very important.

Table 4

The SELEB Scale

Practical Skills
1. Applying Knowledge to the "Real World"
2. Workplace Skills
3. Organization Skills
Citizenship
4. Understanding Cultural and Racial Differences
5. Social Responsibility and Citizenship Skills
6. Ability to Make a Difference in the Community
Personal Responsibility
7. Social Self-Confidence
8. Ability to Assume Personal Responsibility
9. Gaining the Trust of Others
Interpersonal Skills
10. Ability to Work with Others
11. Leadership Skills
12. Communication Skills

Care was taken during the instrument development process to insure the development of a valid and reliable instrument. A three-study investigation was used to develop the instrument. (Additional evidence attesting to the discriminant and convergent validity of the SELEB scale is discussed in Toncar, Reid, and Anderson 2005)). The resulting scale factors correspond with those identified by Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, and Zlotkowski (2000), thereby lending support to the factors identified. The SELEB scale has been used in a number of studies attesting to the

reliability (e.g., Spraul 2010; Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker and Wells 2008) and validity (Anderson, Reid, and Toncar 2010; Christensen, Schmidt and Wisner 2010; Drougas and Harrington 2010; Mercer 2010) of the scale. Metcalf (2010) reports its successful use in course design and improvement.

For this study, the factor structure was examined via factor analysis.The results explained 69.3 percent of the variance and supported the original four factor solution. The reliabilities of each of the SELEB factor as found in this study are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5
SELEB Scale Reliabilities

	Reliabilities
SELEB Scale	.891
Practical Skills	.686
Citizenship	.787
Personal Responsibility	.698
Interpersonal Skills	.845

The SELEB scale was developed to assess the benefits of service learning, thereby inherently assuming that that students' perceptions of the benefits that they receive from participating in service learning represents an objective measure of the benefits received. Although students are likely good judges of the benefits they receive, the ability of students to make an objective assessment of the benefits they receive has not been definitively established. Acknowledging this reality, this study is expressly examining the "benefits students believe they receive" as opposed to the "benefits students receive" as the findings of the instrument are commonly interpreted

The SELEB scale is used in this study in the same manner as it was designed and was administered to a sample similar to those used during scale development (Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen 2006). Consistent with Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen (2006), given the widespread use of service learning as a pedagogy, it is safe to assume that all respondents have encountered several service learning opportunities in the past.

Analysis

The hypothesis was tested via t-test.

Results

The results of the t-tests to test the hypothesis are displayed in Table 6 below. The results support the hypothesis – female students appear to perceive they receive significantly (at the .05 level) more benefits from participating in service learning than do male students. When the four factors of the SELEB scale are examined separately, similar results were observed. In each instance, female students viewed service learning as providing significantly (at the .05 level) more benefits than did male students. The hypothesis, therefore, is accepted.

Table 6

Results

	Mean Response	**t-value Significance**
SELEB Scale	Males 5.890 Females 6.189	-5.043 .000
Interpersonal Skills	Males 6.188 Females 6.344	-2.280 .023
Personal Responsibility	Males 6.074 Females 6.324	-3.780 .000
Citizenship	Males 5.309 Females 5.769	-5.107 .000
Practical Skills	Males 6.014 Females 6.318	-4.693 .000

In order to gain additional insight, the results for students from each of the colleges and universities were examined individually. For each of the colleges and universities, except for one, the results were similar to those observed for the entire sample. Although the differences were not always significant (at the .05 level), in each instance (for the entire SELEB scale and for each of the four factors), females students viewed service learning as providing more benefits than their male counterparts. Different results were observed for only one college. In that instance, although none of

the differences observed were significant (at the .05 level), the mean response for the entire SELEB scale and for each of the four factors for males exceeded that for females. This college was the only historically African-American institution in the sample.

Discussion

Service learning seems to have the ability to increase the effectiveness of business school education – it is a pedagogy that allows students to apply their knowledge to real-world situations. The rapid diffusion of service learning in business education reflects this reality. Service learning has been employed in a number of different business and organizational settings. In accounting, for instance, service learning opportunities include working with nonprofit organizations and small businesses to improve their accounting procedures and organizing/participating in VITA programs. In marketing, service learning opportunities may include working with community revitalization efforts and helping self-help organizations develop markets for their products. In management, service learning opportunities can include developing transition plans for nonprofit organizations and serving the clients of nonprofit organizations to facilitate developing more efficient processes. The service learning opportunities available in business education are virtually limitless.

Service learning is also viewed positively by the participating students. This study reinforces this – on a seven-point scale, the average response exceeded six. Students seem to clearly perceive the benefits they can receive from participating in service learning. Although students appear to perceive the fewest benefits associated with the making of a difference (citizenship) benefit from service learning, the mean responses still exceeded five.

Although both male and female students perceive that they receive significant benefits from participating in service learning, female students appear to perceive greater benefits from service learning than do male students. The difference extends to each of the specific benefits – for each of the benefits students perceive they receive from service learning, female students were found to perceive receiving more benefits than did male students. It is interesting to note that female students also perceive that they receive more practical skills than male students. Since practical skills relate most directly with career and given that male students are often viewed as valuing career-oriented activities more than female students as was discussed earlier, the results appear to indicate that female students rate academic service learning experiences of all types more favorably than do males.

If corroborated by future research, the findings raise some interesting questions. Do male students receive less value from participating in service learning than females? Does the difference in perceived benefits arise from a difference in previous experience

with nonprofit organizations or a difference in previous employment experience?

Seemingly, the most likely explanation for the results is that the difference observed between male and female students arises from the relative academic performance levels of males and females. Although the differences in academic performances between male and female students have been viewed primarily in the context of the conventional classroom, the findings suggest that the differences observed between males and females in the academic classroom may also extend to academic undertakings, such as service learning, that take place outside of the conventional classroom. Do male students perceive fewer benefits from participating in service learning since it is a part of the academic environment where they tend to perform more poorly, or could it be from conditioning from the many years of education where they have regularly performed more poorly than their female counterparts?

Given that the greater the benefits which students perceive they receive from their involvement in service, the more likely it is the experience has better prepared them for their future careers (Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen 2006), the results suggest that female students profit to a greater extent from service learning than do male students. The findings suggest a number of areas for future research. For instance, what is the basis for the differences observed – do they originate from the different ways that males and females approach higher education, or does it originate in the different levels of preparedness that may result from their differing approaches to higher education? Furthermore, do males and female students approach service learning activities differently? If so, do the differences in approach affect the value students perceive they receive from the experience? With the desire to maximize the value all students receive from all of their educational experiences, the effect and role that gender may have on students' service learning experiences appears to be an important area for future research.

Not to be forgotten is the observation that the findings observed in this study may not extend to students attending historically African-American colleges. Are the different findings specific to the institution examined or do they extend to students attending other historically African-American colleges and universities? Are male students attending historically African-American institutions predisposed to perceiving that they receive more benefits from service learning than female students, or do the perceptions arise from something specific to the educational process?

Implications

The results suggest that female business students may view service learning experiences as more valuable than do male business students. Given the increasing numbers of female students pursuing business education, service learning appears to be a suitable pedagogy in business education.

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It has been argued that individually attuned instruction is necessary to accommodate the needs of different learners, including differences associated with gender. This study appears to suggest that differences do exist in how students perceive the benefits they receive from service learning.

Examples exist of how service learning courses have been designed to accommodate the special needs and desires of different groups of students. McCrea, Nichols, and Newman (2000) report several examples where different service-learning opportunities were offered to different demographic groups of students to maximize their benefits. Although no empirical evidence exists, anecdotal evidence appears to suggest that the affected students benefited by the approach. To the best of the author's knowledge, demographically focused service learning courses have not been attempted in a business school setting. Miller (1994) makes a similar suggestion for service-learning programs offered at high schools.

The results from the study appear to suggest that service learning may not be a remedy for the lesser academic achievement observed among male students. Although past research indicates that male students perform better and perceive greater educational benefits from participating in educational experiences with applied components, the results suggest the service learning is not a pedagogy particularly suited for male students. Indeed, female students appear to perceive greater value from participating in service learning than do males.

Although the differences observed in perceptions of males and females where not great (approximately .3 on a 7-point scale), the differences are significant nevertheless. Both male and female students appear to perceive that service learning is beneficial to their education. This supports the use of service learning in business education.

The results suggest some guidelines to use when developing service learning projects for business classes. First, given the widespread emphasis on the need to better develop the interpersonal skills of business students, it is good to see the both males and females perceive they receive more interpersonal benefits from participating in service learning than any of the other four SELEB factors. Furthermore, the differences between the perceptions of males and females were least for interpersonal skills. Therefore, it appears that service learning experiences which provide opportunities to build students' interpersonal skills should be explicitly pursued for both male and female students.

Furthermore, male students perceived that they receive fewer citizenship-based benefits from participating in service learning. Moreover, the differences observed between the perceptions are greatest for citizenship-based benefits. Consequently, instructors may want to target service learning opportunities with a high citizenship component to classes with a relatively high percentage of female students. In classes

characterized by groups of students with each faced with a different service opportunities, instructors may want to let the student groups choose their own opportunity from those available. Given that female students will likely perceive the opportunities promising citizenship-based benefits more highly, they will be more likely to choose those opportunities which provide these benefits. Seemingly, the choice would allow for the greatest amount of benefits from the service learning opportunities.

However, a question which remains involves male students. Female students have been shown to appreciate the conventional classroom setting and appear to benefit more than male students. This study suggests that female students also perceive that they receive more benefits participating in service learning than male students. What pedagogies, then, may be best suited to male students? This issue appears to warrant further research.

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