Chinese University Student Perceptions of Teacher Quality

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the qualities and characteristics of Chinese university students' favorite and least favorite professors. The paper looks to answer the question: What qualities and personal characteristics do favorite and least favorite professors have and how does that affect Chinese university students? In surveying over 280 students from 3 different universities, 226 surveys were completed and analyzed. The research found that Chinese students favored professors who are entertaining, who help them learn more and who provide them with helpful feedback on their assignments. Students do not favor professors who are boring, arrogant and do not provide helpful feedback or help them learn more. Since many studies showed that students were motivated by their relationship with their teachers, it is important for universities to find professors who are not only experts in the field, but also engaging and personable. It is also important for current professors to develop relationships with their students in order to enhance students' learning experiences.

Keywords: teacher quality, motivation, characteristics of teachers, favorite professors, least favorite professors, professor traits, teacher impact

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Introduction

Education in China has long been held in high regard. Stemming from a Confucian worldview, teachers have traditionally been honored in Chinese society and students have studied in order to meet the rigorous requirements of different examination systems throughout history (Hayhoe, 1984). The Confucian worldview places importance on a hierarchical form of obedience in which students are submissive to teachers as children would be submissive to parents. It also places morality and memorization as the cornerstones of learning. In the past, students who were able to memorize the classics and carry themselves with a high standard of moral uprightness were granted high places in government offices (Lee, 1985). Beginning in the mid 19th century, China began to experience a variety of tumultuous changes that drastically influenced its education system. The influx of foreign powers, the instability of the Chinese government and the Communist revolution led to multiple reforms in Chinese education that have impacted how students in China learn today.

Among the most influential changes in Chinese education in the past 150 years has taken place during what is now being called the reform era. This was the time period from 1979 until the present day. The reform era was initiated by Deng Xiaoping and has been characterized by modernization, globalization and economic reform. Education in the reform era has gone through many changes in its own regard, but has generally been known for its emphasis on competition (Parker &Parker, 1986). Students compete against one another in their performance on the all important *Gaokao*, the standardized test taken at the end of a students' high school career. How well one does on the *Gaokao* determines what schools one will be accepted into and what direction one's life will take.

Teachers in China have traditionally been trained to teach to the test; to help students memorize the information that is needed to do well on what will be the most important test of their lives. Recently however, research has indicated that rote memorization and standardized testing may not be the all-encompassing indicator of a productive or successful individual (Zhao & Ting, 2013). Although Chinese students rank high in standardized test scores when compared to the rest of the world (Al Jazeera, 2013), their perceived ability to innovate and think creatively is lacking. This is seen in China's Ministry of Education's desire to improve critical thinking skills (Ministry of Education, 2001). The traditional Chinese "virtuoso" teacher (Paine, 1990), a teacher with a vast knowledge base who teaches students to recite what he knows, is becoming less relevant in an increasingly globalized China.

As education in China changes, so does the concept of good teaching. Tam, Heng and Jiang (2009) noted that Chinese official policy have pushed toward a *jiaoren* (to teach the people) view of teaching and away from a *jiaoshu* (to teach books) view. Although some teachers and professors still hold to a more traditional view of what good teaching ought to be (Walsh &Maffei, 1994), there is a notable move towards student centered teaching. Much of the western world, countries without a Confucian worldview, has embraced a more student centered way of teaching that seems to correlate with higher levels of critical thinking skills (Socha &Sigler, 2012). In these countries, teachers are finding ways to aid students in their learning by providing motivation that goes beyond a grade.

Primary Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine university student perceptions of teacher quality in contemporary China. What are Chinese students' perceptions of their teachers and how do these perceptions affect Chinese students? In this study, teacher quality is defined as the teacher's "personality traits that help to build strong rapport with students,"knowledge about subject content, curriculum, instruction, and professional skills (Tam, Heng,&Jiang, 2009). Specifically, the study aims to learn what characteristics university students like in a teacher, what characteristics they do not like and how this might affect these students' academic performance.

Other research questions to consider

The study also aims to know the reasons behind the preferences students have and if professor characteristics influence the academic performance of the students. Do students work harder for professors they like? Do they learn more in their favorite professor's classes? What is the significance of student and teacher relationships? What do Chinese university students value in their professors? A study done by Tam, Heng and Jiang (2009) suggested that students in contemporary China are seeking not only a transformation of the mind, but also of the heart. Therefore, Tam, Heng and Jiang (2009) argued that the importance of relationship and affective teaching in China has been raised to "another level". This study will explore student-faculty relationships and determine if these relationships are as important as Tam, Hen, and Jiang (2009) make them out to be.

This study is relevant to university human resources departments, professors, teachers and lecturers in China because it shows what Chinese students are looking for in teachers. Because of globalization, it is also relevant to university human resources departments, professors, teachers and lecturers in other nations as well. This study is relevant to those who wish to know the characteristics of favorite professors in China for the sake of research or other academic purposes. Those who want to, or currently live, work or teach in a cross-cultural context may also find this study interesting because it's a glimpse into what cross-cultural students think about and prefer.

Literature Review

Student Motivation. Student motivation is one of the most powerful determining factors of student success in the classroom (Dorneyi, 1994, 2000; Jung, 2011; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams, 1994). It greatly influences student involvement and achievement (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). When students are not motivated, they fail to grasp the concepts being taught. This is reflected in their grades and feedback from their instructors (Gan, Humphreys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004). There are many kinds of motivation and ways to motivate students. In this study, motivation will be categorized into two types, namely extrinsic and intrinsic. The study will primarily deal with intrinsic motivation and how teachers play a role in intrinsically motivating students. Teachers also provide extrinsic rewards such as grades or special days for turning in assignments or good behavior, which is worth examining briefly for the purposes of the research. An understanding of how students perceive teachers' motivational styles is imperative when evaluating the quality of a teacher.

Extrinsic Motivation. Extrinsic motivation can be defined as the energy and desire one directs towards a certain task; it is fueled by the possibility of external gains such as money, good grades, rewards, praise, and so on (Brown, 2007; Rugutt & Chemosit,

2009). Extrinsic motivation is also fueled by the avoidance of punishment (Brown, 2007). Many students are motivated extrinsically through grades, praise from their instructors, and the prospect of securinga good job in the future (Pratt, Agnello, & Santos, 2009; Rugutt & Chemositt, 2009). Extrinsic motivation helps to push students toward a goal when there is a loss of intrinsic motivation. A study by Pratt et al. (2009) found that the strongest motivator among Spanish language students to continue taking Spanish classes was grades. Students who received high marks persisted in studying the language because they thought it would be relevant for their future and they felt competent in the task of learning Spanish (Pratt et al., 2009).

Another extrinsic motivator, which may also be categorized as intrinsic, is personal relationships. Students are motivated by the relationships they have with other students and faculty (Pratt et al., 2009; Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). It is possible to determine whether a relationship represents an intrinsic or extrinsic motivation by asking the following questions: Do students achieve for the sake of gaining positive relationships, or do the positive relationships intrinsically motivate them to achieve? Do positive relationships correlate with academic success and learning? Relationships as a motivation to achieve are important to the findings of this study.

Intrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic motivation represents the energy and desire directed toward a particular task; it is fueled by an innate sense of satisfaction (Brown, 2007; Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). Of course, intrinsic motivation is often stronger than the extrinsic motivation mentioned in this study. Intrinsic motivation does not require a reward or a punishment; rather, it involves innate desire. Students who desire to learn have a high aptitude for a certain subject, adequate prior knowledge of a certain field of study, strong attention skills, and strong critical thinking skills; based on such intrinsic motivators, they also have a statistically greater chance of academic success (Rugutt & Chemositt, 2009; Socha & Sigler, 2012). This makes academic choice an important factorin motivating students. When students have options related to what they can study, they choose fields that suit their interests. This adds intrinsic motivational force to their chance of academic success.

Teachers and Students

The interaction between teachers and students has a noticeable effect on students' motivations, attitudes, and success (Micari & Pazos, 2012). In more difficult university courses, students may have less peer support and must rely on the relationships they have with their professor (Micari & Pazos, 2012). However, the impact of student–teacher interaction stretches beyond difficult courses. Greater and more positive student–teacher interaction results in more engaged students and a higher academic self-concept (Komarraju, Musulkin, &Bhattacharya, 2010; Micari & Pazos, 2012;Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). When considering this interaction, it is important to take into account the relationships that teachers develop with their students and the effects these relationships have.

Teachers' relationships with students. Relationships are significant in all spheres of life. How we interact with others has consequences that influence the behaviors and outcomes of ourselves and others. Academia is no different. In the context of an organic chemistry course, a study by Micari and Pazos (2012) showed that students who felt they had a positive relationship with their professor scored higher in the course than those who felt they did not have a positive relationship. In the study, Micari and Pazos (2012) defined a positive relationship as "looking up to the professor, feeling comfortable approaching the professor, and feeling that the professor respects the students." In other words, according to Micari and Pazos (2012), positive influence yields positive results. Another study by Estepp and Roberts (2013) also showed an interesting relationship between teachers and students. In terms of teacher–student rapport, Estepp and Roberts (2013) found a positive relationship between such a rapport and student expectancy for success. Students who have good relationships with their professors tend to think they will succeed in class. However, the quality of the teacher–student relationship does not rest solely on the efforts of the professor; rather, students must also make effort to create the best opportunity for success.

Teachers' influence on student motivation. Studies have shown that an emphasis on student–faculty interaction, encouraging students, providing positive feedback to students, developing personal connections with students, and cultivating a positive environment in the classroom all strongly affect student motivation (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009; Hardre, 2012; Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009; Tam, Heng, & Jiang, 2009). Positive teacher interactions with students are a statistically significant predictor of student motivation, thereby influencing positive academic change (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). A teacher's role in the motivation of a student is to identify why students are unmotivated and create effective strategies to motivate them. Some students need to know the relevancy of what is being taught, some need the subject matter to be interesting and others need to have a genuine personal connection with their teacher (Hardre, 2012; Hardre& Sullivan, 2009). One study showed that uninteresting classes and lack of will to study discouraged students from learning (Jung, 2011). Another found that overarching themes of caring and high expectations motivated at-risk adolescent students to graduate from high school (Rowan, 2013). Students need teachers who are genuinely interested in them as people, not just pupils.

Teacher Qualities

The personal and professional qualities and characteristics of teachers influence the motivation and output of students at all school levels (Gennerman, 2009; Liu & Meng, 2000; Miller, 1987; Reynolds & Tedlie, 2000). Teachers who have positive social, professional, and organizational qualities tend to have students that are more likely to be motivated and produce quality learning outcomes (Buchanan, 2007; Liu & Meng, 2009; Miller, 1987; Reynolds &Tedlie, 2000; Tam et al., 2009). When teachers are unorganized, unprofessional, apathetic, and boring, student learning outcomes and motivation are negatively affected (Foote, Vermette, Wisniewski, Agnello, & Pagano, 2000; Strickland, 1998). It is important to consider the personal and professional qualities of a teacher in light of the motivation and learning outcomes of students.

Characteristics of great teachers. Great teaching is instruction communicated to students that is effectively processed by students and applied to their studies and life. According to students in a study by Miller (1987), great teachers have contagious enthusiasm, time for student questions and comments, control of the classroom pace, and competency in their chosen field. Great teachers are humorous, encouraging, patient, caring, creative, and challenging (Miller, 1987). Effective teaching processes include time management, classroom organization (preparing lessons in advance), explaining the purpose and structure of the lesson, using effective teaching practices, and adapting practices to different sets of learners (Liu & Meng, 2009; Reynolds & Tedlie, 2000). Great teachers put forth a persistent effort to see students achieve and want to grow in their own profession as well (Gennerman, 2009). A 2009 study by Gennerman found that great teachers share both internal and external characteristics. The internal characteristics include a strong view of self, a positive view of others and the work of teaching, use of humor in the classroom, desire to learn continuously, and commitment to giving students what they need (Gennerman, 2009). The external characteristics that Gennerman (2009) found to be evident in great teachers were as follows: working in a risk-taking environment, using research-based practices, having a strong connection with students, and working together with colleagues and administration. In other studies, students' views support Gennerman's (2009) findings; they reported that they want teachers to have a strong connection with their students, to be humorous in class, and to be positive (Buchanan, 2007; Liu & Meng, 2009; Miller, 1987; Reynolds & Tedlie, 2000; Tam et al., 2009).

In contrast, poor teaching is instruction that is ineffectively communicated by the instructor and cannot be applied to students' studies or life. Weak teachers do not have adequate knowledge of the subject they are teaching, have poor classroom control, act unprofessionally, focus on inappropriate teaching goals or have no goals at all, and emphasize methods rather than students (Foote et al., 2000; Strickland, 1998). Poor teachers make students dislike the subject matter by making it seem boring or irrelevant (Foote et al., 2000). One obvious characteristic that weak teachers share is inconsistency (Foote et al., 2000; Strickland, 1998). They may be too strict at times and too lenient at other times. Some are temperamental and have little self-control when displaying their displeasure with students. Poor teachers do not work well with their colleagues and administration and are found to be lazy (Foote et al., 2000). Many of the characteristics of great teachers are the opposite of those of poor teachers.

Student perceptions of teachers. How students perceive and interact with teachers has an effect on how they perform (Buchanan, 2007; Hardre, 2012; Hardre & Sullivan, 2009; Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009; Tam et al., 2009). Research has shown that Chinese undergraduate students want teachers who are enthusiastic about their class, have a sense of humor, are competent, show a certain degree of expertise, are caring, are entertaining, use different teaching methods, are able to communicate effectively, are fair and approachable, are able to make students feel smart, are organized, use relevant material, lead lively discussions, and encourage students to be creative (Levy & Peters, 2002; Mu, 2002; Tam et al., 2009). Mu (2002) classified qualities of a good teacher into three categories, namely personality, competence, and delivery. Medical students in Mu's (2002) study reported that their favorite teachers were those who possessed these qualities. Although some of these attributes are congruent with the traditional view of a Chinese teacher, many have been influenced by reform and globalization. Chinese undergraduate students in the 21st century have the world at their fingertips. Because of the internet, different social and political ideologies are a finger click away. They exercise a greater amount of freedom than their parents and have not experienced major social or political commotion in their lifetime (Tam et al., 2009). These factors, among others, influence what Chinese undergraduate students want from their professors. Students want teachers who are competent and knowledgeable, genuinely interested in the subject, and challenge their thinking. Students want a close relationship with their teacher (Buchanan, 2007).

In contrast, students do not want teachers and professors who are arrogant, selfish, and teach directly from the book (Buchanan, 2007; Hardre, 2012; Hardre & Sullivan, 2009, National Public Radio [NPR], 1977). They want to be interested in the subject they are studying, and they want their teachers to make the subject interesting.

Methodology

Sampling

This study used convenience sampling and purposive sampling, similar to the sampling employed by Tam et al. (2009). Surveys were sent out to three different universities in Shanghai, and Chinese students ages 18–36 were recruited as participants. The purpose of the research was to survey students who had completed at least one year of university, as they would be more familiar with what they preferred in a professor's attributes. Both male and female students were surveyed, and the participants were primarily English majors or needed to have a strong command of the English language because the survey was written in English.

Approach

In order to have a strong English base, students in a few English elective courses and on the campus of a medical university were surveyed. Classroom access was gained through colleagues at a university in Shanghai. At the medical university, participants were found in high traffic areas of the campus. The total number of surveys distributed was 279. Only 226 surveys were completed thoroughly enough to provide significant information. Therefore, the total number of participants used in this study was N=226. Data were collected from January to March 2014.

Instrument

Participants were asked about their age, gender, major, average grade point average (GPA), home province, and year of school. They were then asked to identify the ethnicity of their favorite teacher and their least favorite teacher, the subjects they taught, and three qualities to describe each of the two teachers. A five-point Likert scale was then employed to determine whether students completely disagreed or completely agreed with a set of 10 statements about their favorite professor and their least favorite professor. The first five statements were about professor characteristics: expertise, caring, entertaining, high expectations, and good lecturing ability. The next five statements focused on student feelings in the class: feeling smarter, learning more, feeling respected, receiving helpful feedback, and trying harder.The final question was open ended and asked students to finish the statement taken from the survey by Tam et al. in their 2009 study: "I wish my university professor would…" Student identity remained anonymous and the information provided was given voluntarily. Similar to Tam et al. (2009), the qualitative data collected were analyzed, coded, and categorized according to similar words, phrases, and sentences.

Demographics

Teacher quality is essential for the educational growth and development of students (Korur & Eryilmaz, 2012; Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). To determine teacher quality, one must look at the product the teacher is generating. Are teachers motivating their students to learn? Are they competent in the subject matter they are teaching? Can students depend on their teachers to transfer valuable skills and information to them? The best way to examine the quality of a teacher is to question the students they teach (Tam et al., 2009). As stated previously, this study surveyed 226 students from universities in Shanghai in order to identify the qualities of good teachers and assess how students respond to what they consider good teachers.

Age of Participants

The initial age breakdown of students surveyed is as follows: The youngest student surveyed was 18 years old and the oldest was 36 years old at the time of the survey. The range of ages spanned 18 years. The mean age of students surveyed was 21.5 years (SD=2.8). The median age of students surveyed was 20.5 years. The mode age of students surveyed was 20 years.

Gender of Participants

Of the students surveyed, 55% (119) were male and 45% (97) were female. Ten respondents did not answer the question on the survey. In 2009, the ratio between males to females in Shanghai was 103–107 males to every 100 females (Caguioa, 2010), and between 50.3% and 51.9% of college admissions in China were female in 2013 (Xinhuanet.com, 2013). The data collected slightly exceeded the normal population distribution as reported by Caguioa (2010). It was also off by approximately 5% in relation to the male to female ratio among students in Chinese universities.

Household Income of Participants

The Chinese national monthly income is 2,600 RMB; however, Shanghai has a higher average monthly income, at 3,200 RMB (NY Times, 2013). The vast majority of student households earned above the national average of 2,600 RMB per month. In fact, they earned more than double the national average. Only 16% (30) participants

earned similar to or less than the national average. Exactly 84% (152) of participants earned more than the national monthly average, while 51% of participants earned more than double the national monthly average. The average monthly income in China varies greatly depending on location (rural or urban, coastal or inland) and educational background (Gaokao, college graduates).

Participants' Majors

Because of the variety of majors, this demographic was broken down into seven categories. Participants were categorized as medical, humanities/communications, engineering/technology, language, life/physical sciences, math, or economics/business majors. The medical major category ranged from nursing to pre-med students and included medical fields such as surgery and gynecology. Humanities included law, art history, and philosophy. Language majors (of which there were only 10; 5% of the sample) were studying Chinese language, English, and teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages. Life and physical science majors included biology, physics, chemistry, and anatomy. Math and economics/business majors are self-explanatory. Of the 226 students surveyed, 28 (12%) left the question of college major blank, which left the participant pool at N=198. Most of the students were majoring in the fields of technology/engineering (33%) and medicine (29%). As stated above, only 5% of participants studied a language. However, the lowest percentages were found in economics/business and math; only 8% of participants majored in either math or economics/business. In 2010–2011, the most popular major among American postsecondary students was business. A different was evident in the students I surveyed. Most of the participants were science majors.

Data Analysis

The following data will give a basic analysis of what undergraduate college students in Shanghai think of their favorite and least favorite teachers. The primary type of analysis I used for these data were frequency tables and descriptive statistics. The goal during analysis was to determine the qualities of students' favorite teachers and least favorite teachers and identify attributes that favorite teachers have in common with one another and that least favorite teachers have in common with one another. Frequency tables show how common answers were distributed among survey participants.

Favorite Professors

The first five items related to characteristics of favorite professors and the next five related to how favorite professors made students feel. The first five items were as follows: "My favorite professor is an expert in his/her field," "My favorite professor cares about students," "My favorite professor is entertaining," "My favorite professor has high expectations of his/her students," and "My favorite professor is a strong lecturer." As shown in Figure 1, students indicated greatest agreement concerning three characteristics of favorite teachers, namely expertise (85%), being entertaining (84%), and caring (83%).

Figure 1. The percentage of participants in agreement or complete agreement with each of the five statements about characteristics of favorite professors (*N*=226).

The next five statements concerning favorite professors were directed at how the professors made the student feel and act. These statements were as follows: "As a student, I feel smarter in my favorite professor's class," "I learn more in my favorite professor's class," "I feel respected by my favorite professor," "I receive helpful feedback from my favorite professor," and "I try harder for my favorite professor." As shown in Figure 2, students indicated greatest agreement with three effects on students, as follows: feeling respected (82%), learning more (79%), and receiving helpful feedback (78%).

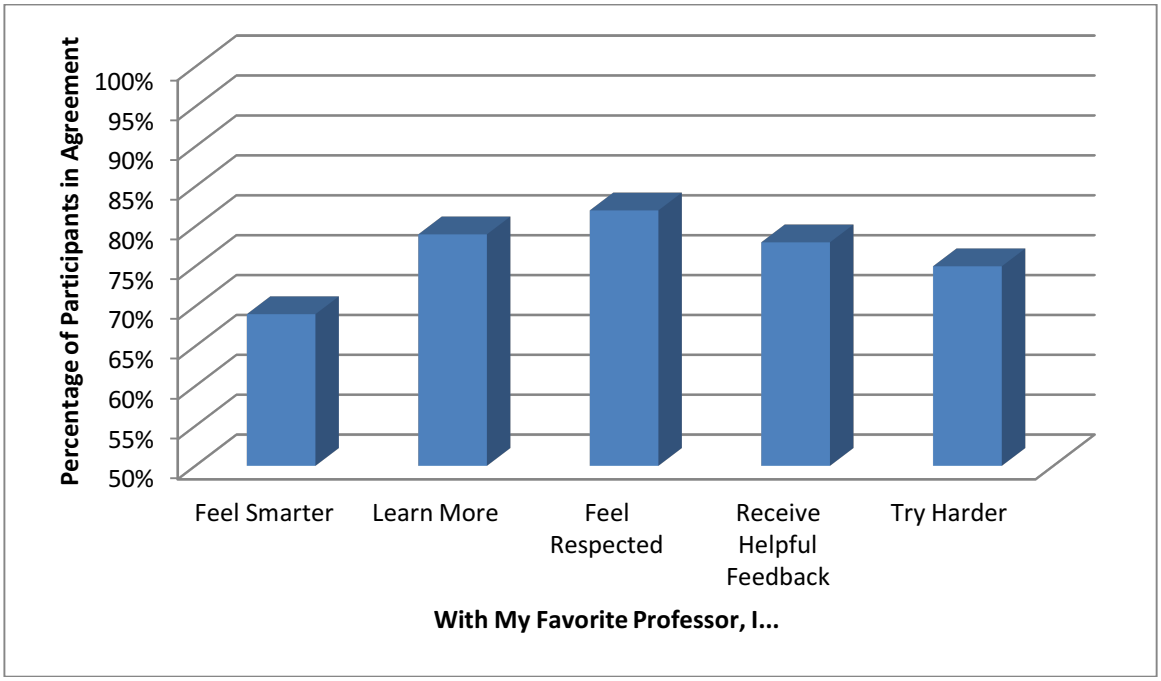

Figure 2. Bar graph showing the percentage of participants in agreement or complete agreement with each of the five statements about favorite professors' effects on students (*N*=226).

Linear correlations for respondents' favorite professor. When running linear correlations, the data for favorite professors revealed significance between what students thought about the characteristics of their favorite professors and how they were affected by these characteristics.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of How Participants Think and Feel about Their Favorite Professors

Teacher Quality	Mean	Standard Deviation
Expert in the Field	4.34	(0.99)
Cares about Students	4.23	(0.98)
Entertaining	4.28	(1.04)
Has High Expectations	4.07	(0.99)
Strong Lecturer	4.15	(1.01)
Professor's Effect on Student		
Feeling Smarter	3.89	(1.02)
Learn More	4.19	(1.01)
Feel Respected	4.21	(1.03)
Receive Good Feedback	4.12	(0.99)
Try Harder	4.04	(1.03)

Note. Participant responses were measured on a Likert scale where 1=completely disagree and 5=completely agree.

Table 2
Correlations between Five Teacher Qualities and Five Effects on Participants for Favorite Professors

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Expertise	-									
2. Caring	0.68	-								
3. Entertaining	0.62	0.68	-							
4. Expectations	0.57	0.58	0.46	-						
5. Good Lecturer	0.64	0.61	0.61	0.59	-					
6. Feel Smarter	0.57	0.58	0.55	0.44	0.58	-				
7. Learn More	0.59	0.57	0.50	0.39	0.56	0.63	-			
8. Feel Respected	0.63	0.68	0.61	0.51	0.52	0.51	0.64	-		
9. Good Feedback	0.58	0.61	0.51	0.45	0.59	0.52	0.64	0.69	-	
10. Try Harder	0.55	0.56	0.45	0.44	0.56	0.51	0.62	0.59	0.66	-

Note. Participant responses were measured on a Likert scale where 1=completely disagree and 5=completely agree.

Note. All p-values = <0.05.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the correlation coefficient between students feeling smarter andprofessor caring was r=0.58, p<.05. Students feeling smarter and professor expertise was r=0.57, p<.05, and students feeling smarter and professor being a good lecturer was r=0.58 p<.05. The correlation between students' reporting learning more and professor expertise (r=0.59, p<.05) was statistically significant. The correlation between students' reporting learning more and professor being a good lecturer (r=0.56, p<.05) was also statistically significant. Students' reporting that they felt respected correlated well with professor caring (r=0.68, p<.05), expertise (r=0.63, p<.05), and entertaining (r=0.61, p<.05). Students receiving positive feedback from teachers was strongly correlated with caring (r=0.60, p<.05), expertise (r=0.58,

p<.05), and being good lecturer (r=0.58, p<.05). Students'trying harderwas strongly correlated with professor being a good lecturer (r=0.56, p<.05), caring (r=0.55, p<.05), and expertise (r=0.55, p<.05).
The favorite professor characteristics that had the strongest correlations with student effects and behaviors were caring (r=0.59, p<.05), expertise (r=0.58, p<.05), and good lecturing (r=0.56, p<.05). The correlation between favorite professor characteristicsand high expectations was the weakest (r=0.45, p<.05).

Favorite professor qualities. Student participants were asked to name three qualities of their favorite professor.Through a process of categorization, nine types of qualities that students attributed to their favorite professor were identified. These were as follows: appearance, class simplicity, enthusiasm, experience, ability to hold students' interest through entertaining classes or humor, intelligence, professional skills, personal relationship, and negative qualities. The following graph shows the frequency of participants' responses to the first of three favorite professor quality prompts (Figure 3). Keeping students interested (42%) and connecting relationally (24%) were the top two categories of responses.

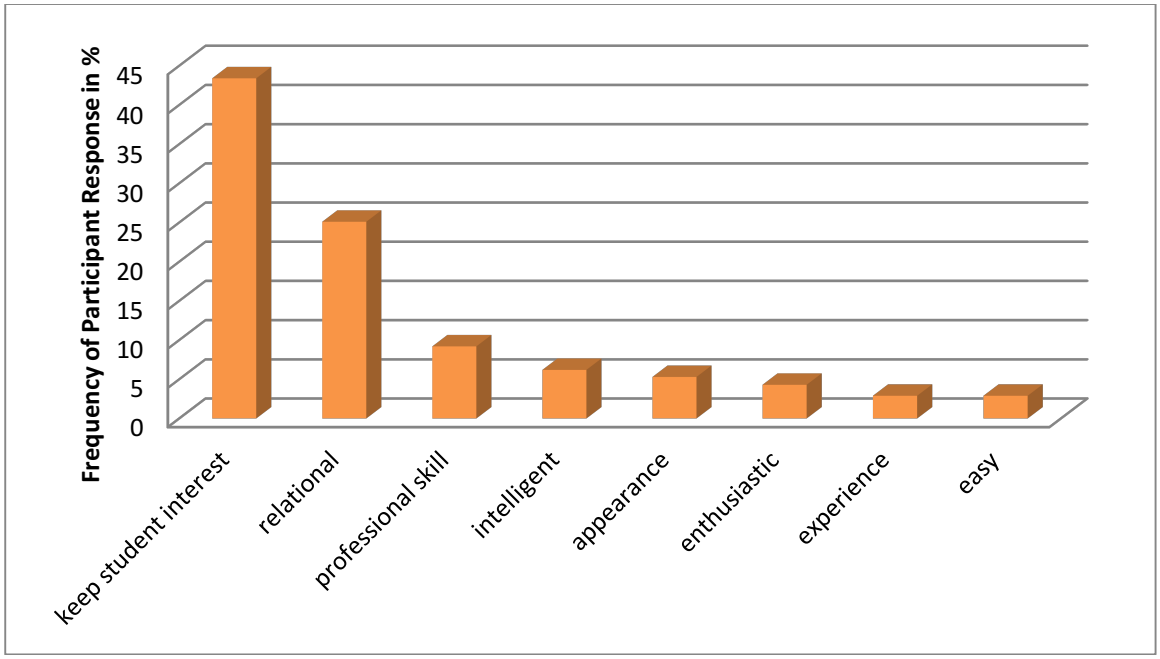

Figure 3. Percentage of first responses to the prompt "Name three qualities of your favorite professor" (N=207).

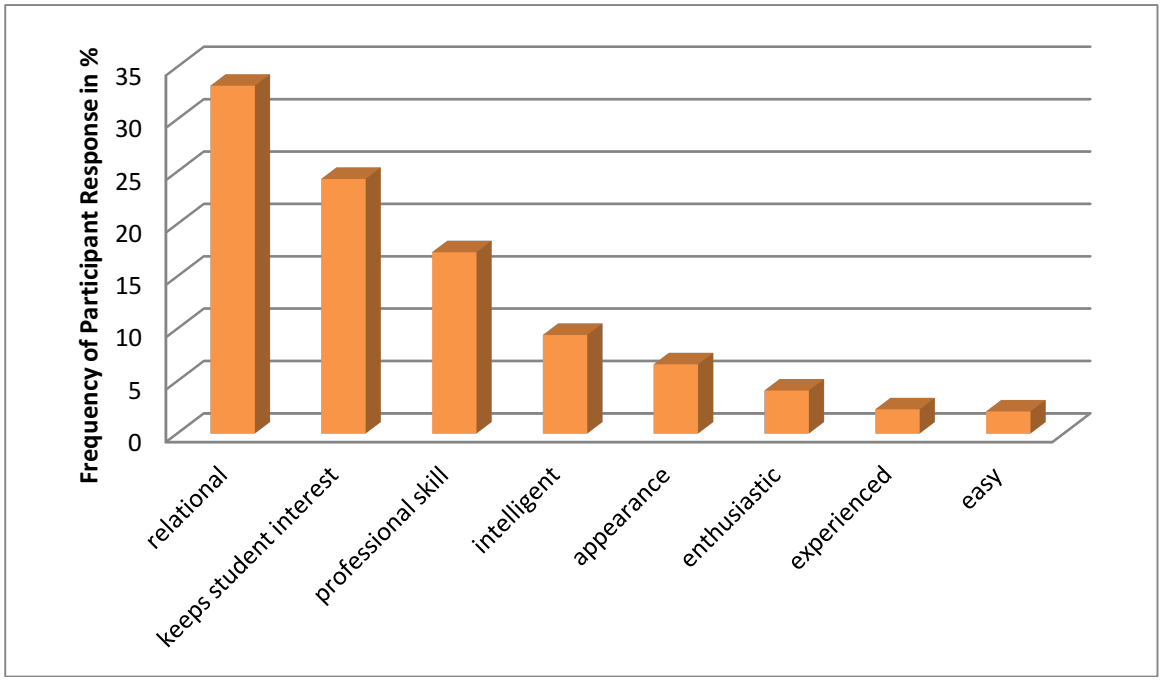

Figure 4. Percentage of all responses to the prompt "Name three qualities of your favorite professor"(N=207).

When we aggregated all three responses from each student (see Figure 4), the results were nearly the same, with only two responses switched—relational connection (32%) and keeping students interested (24%). Also noteworthy is the number of participants who listed a quality that fit into the category of professional skill (9% and 17% respectively). To a lesser degree, students also seemed to value organization, responsibility, class structure, and the ability to deliver meaningful lessons.

Least Favorite Professors

The first five items in this section of the survey related to characteristics of least favorite professors and the next five related to how least favorite professors made students feel. The first five items were as follows: "My least favorite professor is an expert in his/her field," "My least favorite professor cares about students," "My least favorite professor is entertaining," "My least favorite professor has high expectations of his/her students," and "My least favorite professor is a strong lecturer." As shown in Figure 5, students indicated greatest agreement with two characteristics of least favorite teachers, namely expertise (45%) and good lecturing (30%).

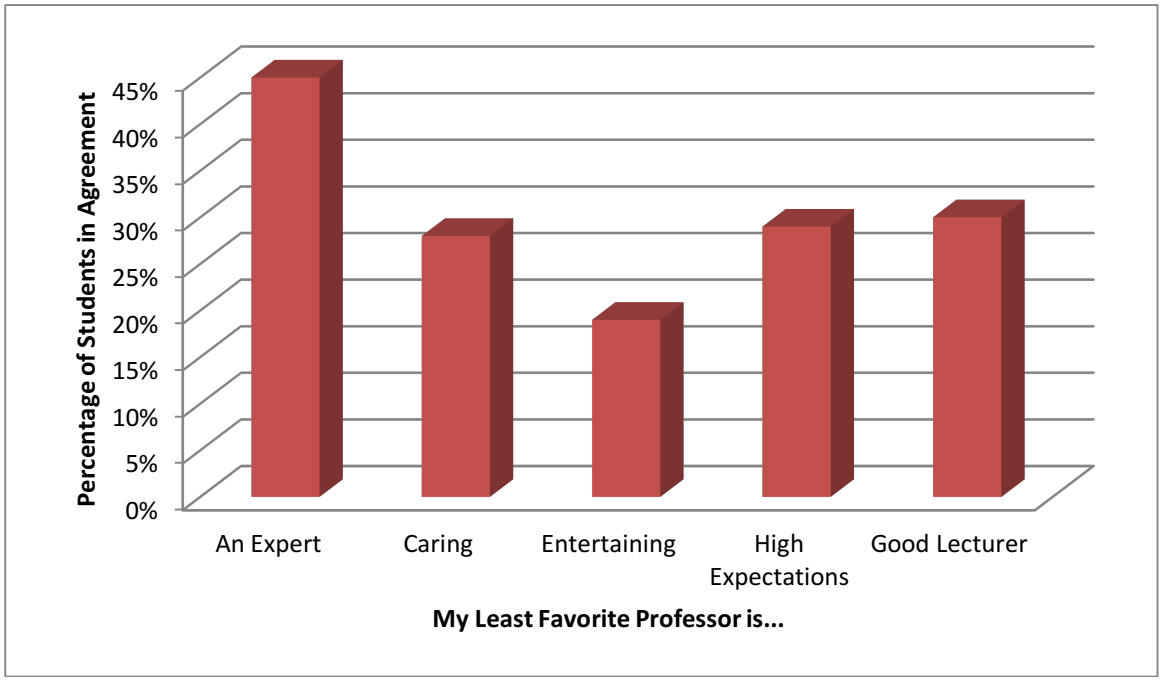

Figure 5. Percentage of participants in agreement or complete agreement with each of the five statements about least favorite professors (N=209).

The next five statements concerning least favorite professors were directed at how the professor made the student feel and act. These statements were as follows: "As a student I feel smarter in my least favorite professor's class," "I learn more in my least favorite professor's class," "I feel respected by my least favorite professor," "I receive helpful feedback from my least favorite professor," and "I try harder for my least favorite professor." As shown in Figure 6, respondents indicated the greatest agreement with two effects that the least favorite professor had on students—feeling respected (24%) and trying harder (23%).

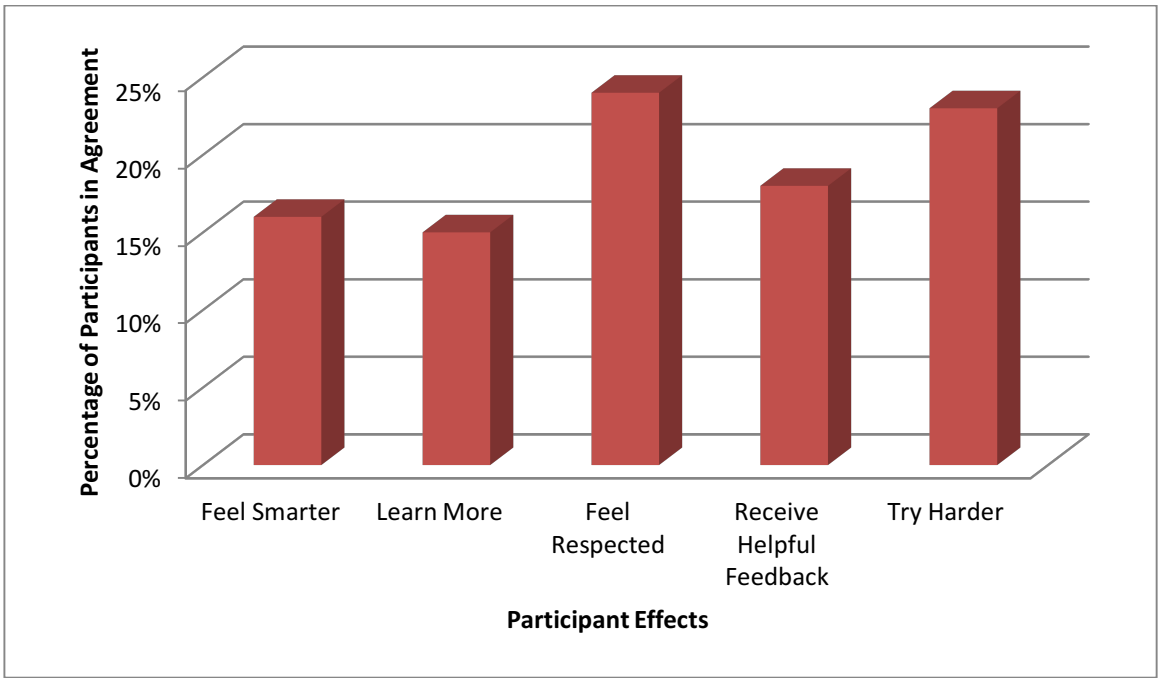

Figure 6. Percentage of participants in agreement or complete agreement with each of the five statements about least favorite professors' effects on students (N=209).

Linear correlations for the least favorite professor. When running linear correlations, the data for favorite professors revealed a significant association between what participants thought about the characteristics of their least favorite professors and how these characteristics affected them.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of How Participants Think and Feel about Their Least Favorite Professors

Teacher Quality	Mean	Standard Deviation
Expert in Field	3.33	(1.71)
Cares about Students	2.80	(1.13)
Entertaining	2.34	(1.25)
Has High Expectations	2.90	(1.20)
Strong Lecturer	2.78	(1.23)
Professor's Effect on Students		
Feel Smarter	2.55	(1.15)
Learn More	2.53	(1.17)
Feel Respected	2.73	(1.15)
Receive Good Feedback	2.54	(1.16)
Try Harder	2.68	(1.20)

Note. Participant responses were measured on a Likert scale where 1=completely disagree and 5=completely agree.

Table 4
Correlations between Five Teacher Qualities and Five Effects on Participants Related to Least Favorite Professors

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Expertise	-									
2. Caring	0.53	-								
3. Entertaining	0.28	0.53	-							
4. Expectations	0.40	0.45	0.43	-						
5. Good Lecturer	0.50	0.52	0.46	0.52	-					
6. Feel Smarter	0.23	0.45	0.49	0.35	0.41	-				
7. Learn More	0.27	0.56	0.58	0.42	0.55	0.73	-			
8. Feel Respected	0.35	0.58	0.49	0.38	0.45	0.59	0.53	-		
9. Good Feedback	0.33	0.53	0.59	0.47	0.50	0.66	0.72	0.64	-	
10. Try Harder	0.35	0.47	0.51	0.44	0.51	0.55	0.64	0.53	0.62	-

Note. Participant responses were measured on a Likert scale with 1=completely disagree and 5=completely agree.
All p-values = <0.05.

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, students' reporting feeling smarter was strongly correlated with professor being entertaining ($r=0.48$, $p<.05$) and caring ($r=0.45$, $p<.05$). Students' reporting theylearned more was strongly correlated with professor being entertaining ($r=0.58$, $p<.05$), caring ($r=0.58$, $p<.05$), and being a good lecturer ($r=0.54$, $p<.05$). Students' reporting feeling respected was strongly correlated with professor caring ($r=0.68$, $p<.05$) and being entertaining ($r=0.49$, $p<.05$). Students'reporting receiving positive feedback was strongly correlated with professor being entertaining ($r=0.59$, $p<.05$), caring ($r=0.53$, $p<.05$), and being a good lecturer ($r=0.50$, $p<.05$). Students' reporting trying harder was strongly correlated with professor being a good lecturer ($r=0.51$, $p<.05$) and being entertaining ($r=0.50$, $p<.05$).

The least favorite professor characteristics that had the strongest correlations with student effects and behaviors were professor being entertaining ($r=0.53$, $p<.05$), caring ($r=0.52$, $p<.05$), and good lecturing ($r=0.48$, $p<.05$). The least favorite professor characteristic with the weakest correlation was expertise ($r=0.30$, $p<.05$).

Qualities of the least favorite professor. Student participants were also asked to name three qualities of their least favorite professor. Through a process of categorization, nine types of quality that students attributed to their least favorite professor were found. These were as follows: poor appearance, classes with difficult material, irresponsibility, unfriendliness,dullness, arrogance, lack of qualifications,communication issues, and positive qualities. Figure 7 shows the frequency of participant responses to the first of three least favorite professor quality prompts: Dullness (40%) and positive qualities (14%) were the top two categories of responses. Other notable categories were class difficulty, arrogance, and poor communication.

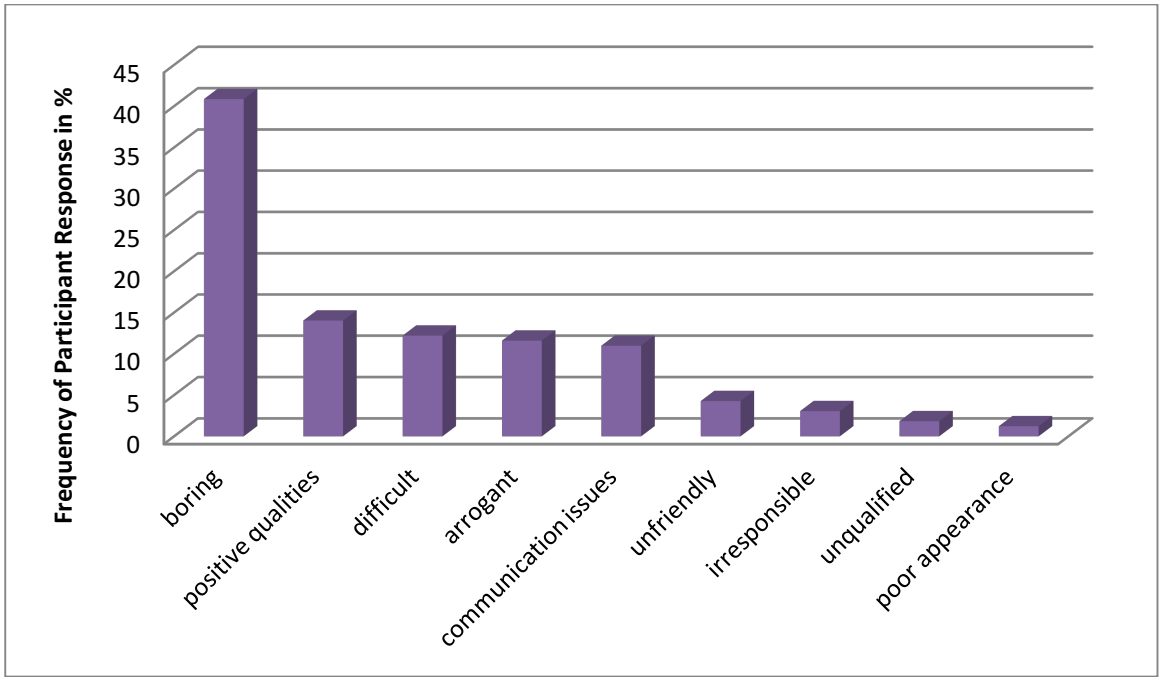

Figure 7. Percentage of first responses to the prompt, "Name three qualities of your least favorite professor" (N=164).

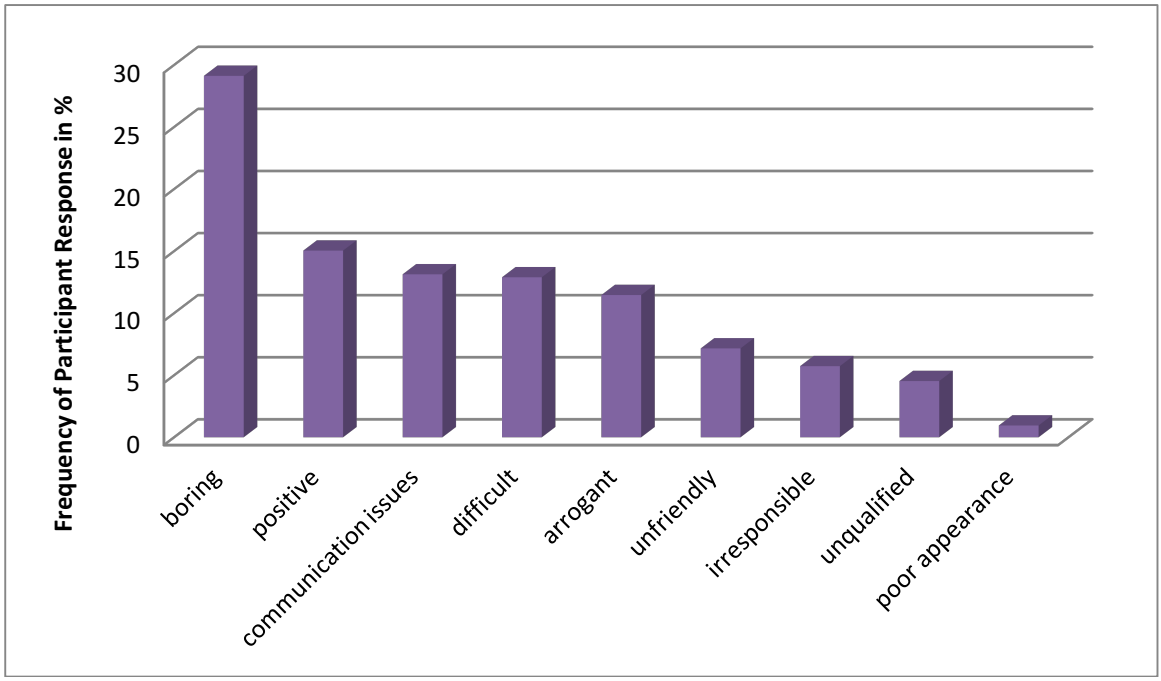

Figure 8. Percentage of all responses to the prompt, "Name three qualities of your favorite professor" (N=164).

When we aggregate all three responses from each student (see Figure 8), the results are nearly the same. The percentage of student response evens out in favor of other responses and the top five responses change position, but the top two remain in the same order. To a lesser degree, students also seem to consider their least favorite professors to be unfriendly, irresponsible, and unqualified.

Comparing Favorite and Least Favorite Professors

The two graphs below comparing answers to the statements about favorite professors and least favorite professors. Figure 9 combines the data received from the "My favorite professor…" and "My least favorite professor…" statements. The other graph combines the data received from the "With my favorite professor, I…" and "With my least favorite professor, I…" statements.

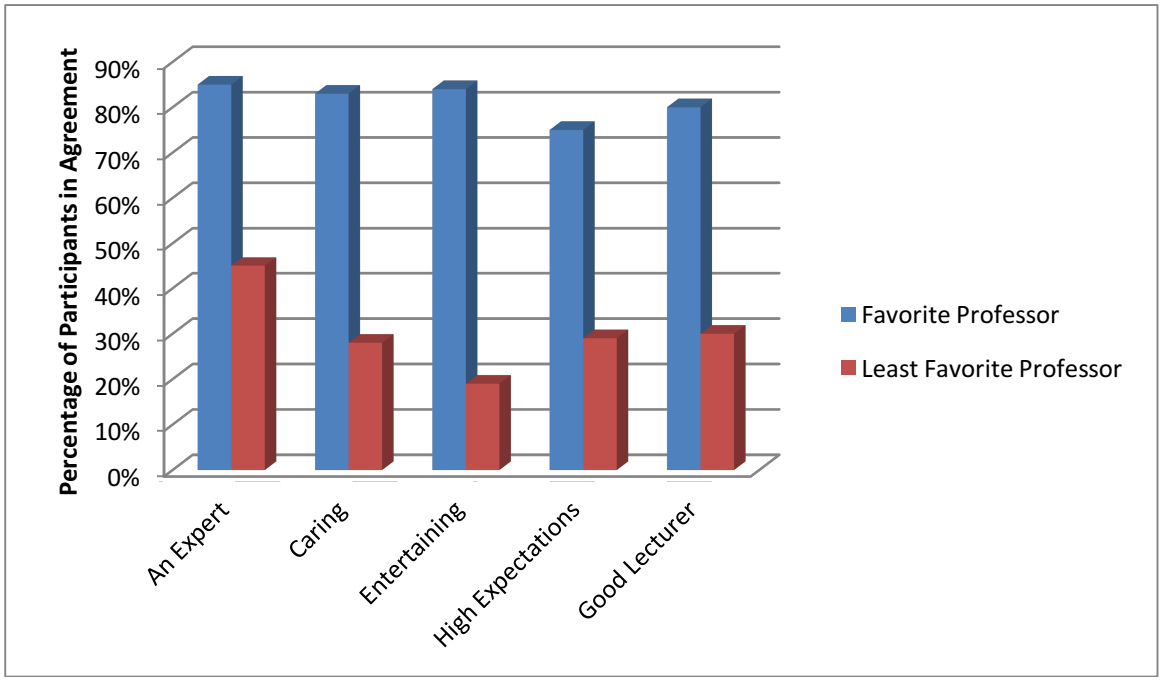

Figure 9. Percentage of participants in agreement or complete agreement with each of the five statements about the favorite and least favorite professors (N=209).

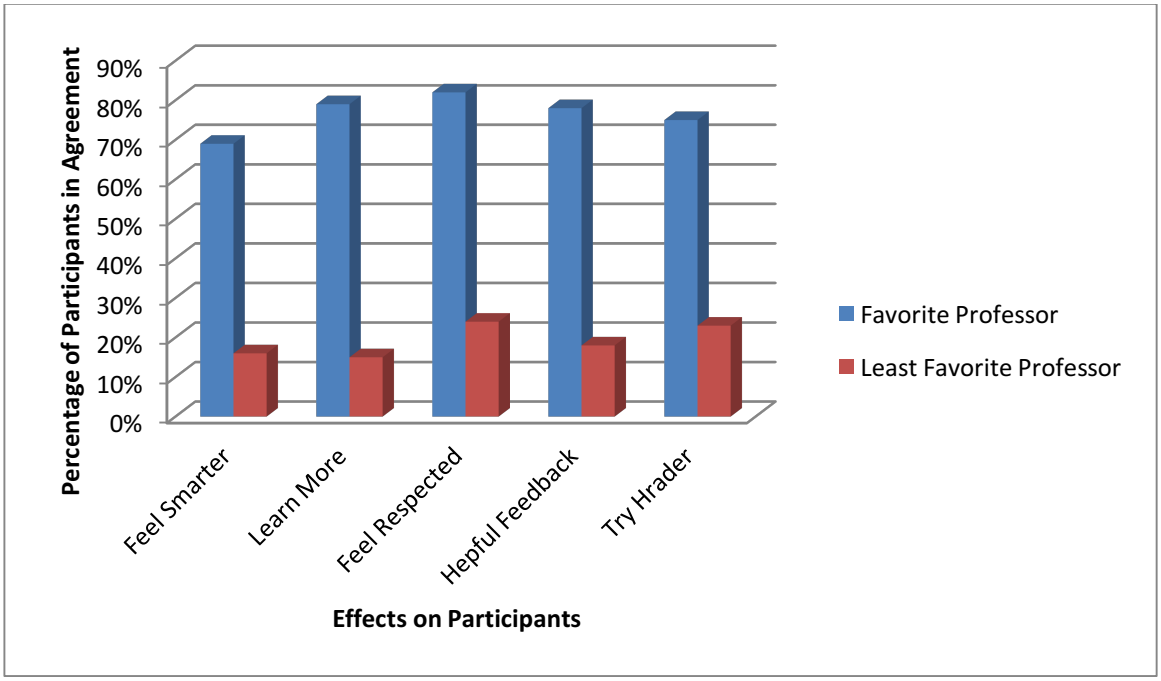

Figure 10. Percentage of participants in agreement or complete agreement with each of the five statements about favorite and least favorite professors' effects on students (N=209).

Considering figures 9 and 10, the greatest difference between statements of agreement or complete agreement was found in the category of "My favorite and/or least favorite professor is entertaining." Eighty-four percent of participants agreed or completely agreed that their favorite university professor was entertaining, while 19% of participants agreed or completely agreed that their least favorite professor was

entertaining. The closest margin was found in the category "My favorite and/or least favorite professor is an expert in his/her field." Eighty-five percent of participants agreed or completely agreed that their favorite professor was an expert in their subject, while 45% of participants agreed or completely agreed that their least favorite professor was an expert. Two other notable differences were found in the categories of "I receive helpful feedback from my favorite and or least favorite professor" and "I learn more from my favorite and/or least favorite professor." The percentage differentials for those two categories were 60 percentage points and 64 percentage points, respectively.

Conclusions

Summary

The presented data allow some conclusions to be reached. First, according to the participants surveyed, university students' favorite professors are those who are entertaining, help students learn more, and provide helpful feedback. Students also value professors who care about and respect them. Large percentage gaps indicating student agreement between the characteristics of least favorite and favorite professors were the best indicator of what students value in their professors. The largest percentage gap was found in students thinking their favorite or least favorite professor was entertaining (84% of participants found their favorite professors to be entertaining, 22% of participants found their least favorite professor to be entertaining. The percentage gap in this category is 62%).

These conclusions are also supported by some of the qualitative data collected in this survey. At the end of the survey, participants were told to finish the sentence, "I wish my university professor would…" Out of the 226 participants, 129 responded. Of those who gave a response, 30% (68)of participants mentioned "fun," "funny," "humor," "interesting," or "entertaining" in their responses. A representative answer is that of a 27-year-old male biology student, who stated, "I wish my university professor would be funny, knowledgeable and focus on the details of our class." A 24-year-old male medical student, made the following statement: "I wish my university professor would be an expert in his or her field and organize the class very well. I want him to make the course clear and easy to understand and be good at using examples for our comprehension. He should also be interesting." From the prompt, it became clear that students wanted their professors to be kind, good communicators, entertaining, competent, knowledgeable, and social. They wanted to have a connection with their professors beyond the classroom and hear about their professor's experience.

Perceptions of Teachers and Their Effect on Students

In response to the primary research question—"What are Chinese students' perceptions of their teachers and how do these perceptions affect those same students?"—the study showed that Chinese university students view their favorite professors primarily as entertaining, experts in their field, caring, good communicators, and good at helping students to learn more. Chinese university students view their least favorite professors as unentertaining, boring, arrogant, and poor at communicating and helping students to learn more.

Many of those surveyed also commented on how they wanted their professors to give them good grades and help them in their research. This is in accordance with the

works of Pratt et al. (2009) and Rugutt and Chemosit (2009), who reported that many students are motivated extrinsically through grades. These studies also support the notion that extrinsic student motivation comes from instructors' praise. Helpful feedback was a significant trait of favorite professors and one of the least significant traits of least favorite professors in this study.

The data also reiterated the importance of student–faculty interaction. Encouraging students, providing positive feedback, developing personal connections with students, and cultivating a positive environment in the classroom all strongly affect student motivation (Hardre 2012; Hardre et al., 2009; Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009; Tam et al., 2009). This can be shown in what participants think of their favorite professors and in their answers regarding favorite professor characteristics. Many students want their professors to care about them, show an interest in them, and give feedback that can positively influence their learning. When professors make their classes interesting, or even entertaining, it positively affects students' intrinsic motivation. Students also desire what previous studies have shown to be the characteristics of great teachers. As mentioned above, Miller's (1987) study demonstrated that great teachers have contagious enthusiasm, time for student questions and comments, control of the classroom pace, and competency in their chosen field. They are humorous, encouraging, patient, caring, creative, and challenging (Miller, 1987). Students identified similar characteristics as desirable in their professors. Enthusiasm, time, humor, encouragement, care, and creativity were all repeatedly listed by the participants as qualities of favorite professors.

Chinese university students viewed their least favorite professors in a different light. From many of the responses, it is likely that many Chinese university students find their least favorite professors to be boring. This is in accordance with the results of Foote et al. (2000), who found that poor teachers make students dislike the subject matter and make it seem boring or irrelevant. Chinese university students also perceived that the least favorite professors have a lower chance of affecting their learning. The correlation between least favorite professor effects and behaviors and how students viewed their least favorite professors in light of their professional characteristics was lower than the correlations with favorite professors. The least favorite professor characteristic that had the strongest correlation with student affects and behaviors was entertaining ($r=0.53$, $p<.05$). The least favorite professor characteristic with the weakest correlation was expertise ($r=0.30$, $p<.05$). The favorite professor characteristic that had the strongest correlation with student effects and behaviors was caring ($r=0.59$, $p<.05$). The favorite professor characteristic with the lowest average correlation was high expectations ($r=0.45$, $p<.05$). Outside of the high expectations characteristic, all favorite professor characteristics had a higher correlation on average with student effects than the strongest correlation of least favorite professor characteristics. The weakest correlations were 15 percentage points away from each other.

The correlation data revealed the effect of certain teacher qualities have on student outcomes. Students will likely feel smarter with favorite professors whom they find to be experts, caring and good lecturers. Moreover, students will likely think that they learn more with favorite professors who are good lecturers, caring, and experts. Students will likely feel respected by favorite professors who are caring, experts, and entertaining. In addition, students will likely think that they receive helpful feedback

from favorite professors who are caring, good lecturers, and experts. Finally, students will likely try harder for favorite professors who are good lecturers, caring, and experts. In terms of least favorite professors, students will likely feel smarter with those who are entertaining. Students will likely think they learn more with least favorite professors who are entertaining and caring. Furthermore, students will likely feel respected by least favorite professors who are caring and entertaining. They will likely think they receive helpful feedback from least favorite professors who are entertaining and caring. Finally, students will likely try harder for least favorite professors who are good lecturers and entertaining.

If universities are looking for smarter students who learn more and receive helpful feedback, then they must also recruit caring professors who are good lecturers and are considered experts in their field. If they are looking for students who try harder, again, they must seek out caring professors who are experts in the field and are good lecturers. If they want students to feel respected, they must hire expert professors who are caring and entertaining. It is important for students' professors to be good lecturers, experts, entertaining, and caring. Students will likely learn more, feel smarter, receive helpful feedback, and try harder.

Concerns Regarding Data Collection

There were some concerns that arose during the collection, interpretation, and data analysis phases of this study. Perhaps the greatest issue regarding the reliability of the survey had to do with the interpretation of the information. Seven of the questions in the survey were coded qualitatively which created room for potential error. Such qualitative analysis involves the potential for misinterpretation of what the participant wants say, faulty coding, and other task-related errors. Translation may be another issue. Students took the survey in English, which was not their first language, resulting in a risk that participants might not understand a question or might use vocabulary incorrectly. In fact, some of the students surveyed wrote their answers in Chinese. I had a Chinese friend interpret the answers for me and added the translated responses to my codebook, which could be a cause of concern. Another potential issue I would like to address has to do with the sampling procedure. Because I am a unilingual English speaker, I was unable to sample a greater variety of majors and types of students, since many Chinese follow courses that are conducted only in Chinese and do not have a working knowledge of English. My survey was given only to those who were able to complete it in English, thereby overlooking the large population of Chinese students who may not be proficient enough in English to participate. Finally, in trying to use as much of the data as possible, some incomplete forms were used for certain parts of the data. This did not skew any of the numbers, but instead added to the total number of participants for various parts of the survey.

Another concern is that this study did not address the relationship between entertainment and student learning. Some research has found that student evaluation fuels lighter workloads and easier grading from professors, who depend on good feedback to keep their jobs (Greenwald, 1997; Williams &Ceci, 1997; Wilson, 1998). These studies have shown that students rate professors on their appearance, hygiene, and entertainment value more than their ability to guide them in learning. However, the data from this study indicated that although students want entertaining professors, they do not want them to simplify their learning. The students surveyed wanted their professors to be entertaining in a social way; moreover, they wanted their professors

to befriend them so that they could learn more comprehensively and holistically. This is supported by statements such as the following: “I wish my university professor would care for students, be professional and entertaining and help me in my future career.” Although there were students who made comments such as “I wish my university professor would give me good grades,” or “I wish my university professor would give me little homework and make me pass the class,” these statements about class ease only appeared 13 times out of the responses of 129 participants who completed this portion of the survey. Statements about professor appearance appeared four times.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study could be expanded on and carried out in other cultural contexts with different age groups. Moreover, future research could address questions such as the following: Are there universal qualities for favorite teachers/great teachers? Do students in different age groups prefer other qualities in their teachers? What qualities are the same or different in secondary school teachers and postsecondary teachers? It would also be interesting to see how subject matter plays a role in student preference. What affects student learning more, the professor or subject? Further questions could be developed as this research progresses.

Based on this research and previous studies, one suggestion is for universities to greatly consider personal qualities and characteristics when hiring professors. University students are motivated by good relationships with their professor and being engaged with the class. Expertise, although important, is not necessarily what students are after. Expertise must be accompanied by a desire to teach and grow in the profession, as well as wanting the best for and out of one’s students. Another suggestion is for universities in China to adopt a more comprehensive approach to learning. Chinese students want their professors to be able to aid them in learning through personal communication and fun. It is also important for professors to make an effort to get to know their students, respect them, and care for them. Chinese students want a professor to be more of a mentor and friend than a general or leader. This relationship and communication must be partnered with expertise in order to provide Chinese university students with the education they need and desire.

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Appendix

Favorite Professor Correlation Charts

Figure 8.1. Out of the factors tested, in relation to favorite professor expertise, the likelihood of feeling respected was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.6298). Other factors that co-varied were learning more (p=<.05, r=.5913) and receiving helpful feedback (p=<.05, r=.5811).

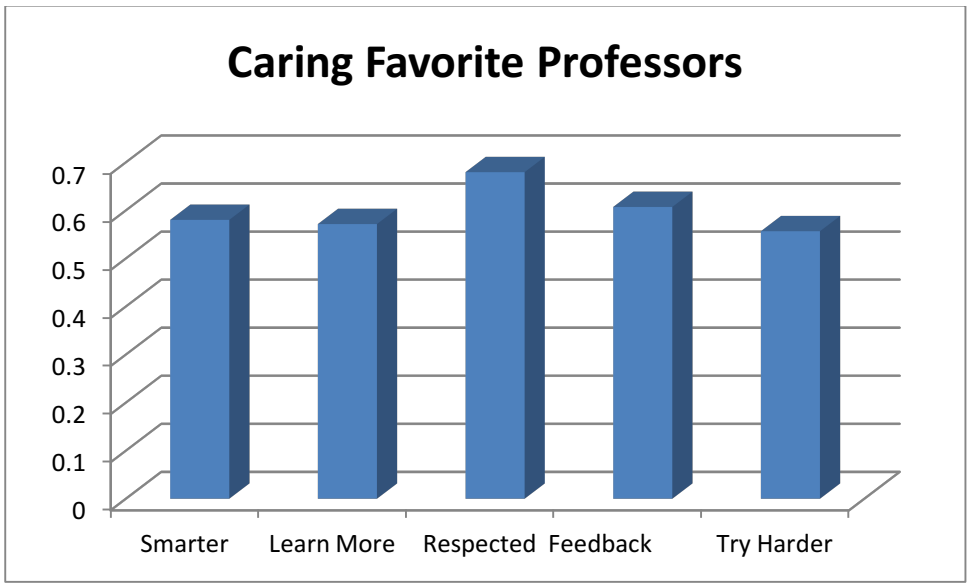

Figure 8.2. Out of the factors tested, in relation to favorite professors who care, the likelihood of feeling respected was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.6795). All the other factors co-varied were well with trying harder being the lowest (p=<.05, r=.5566).

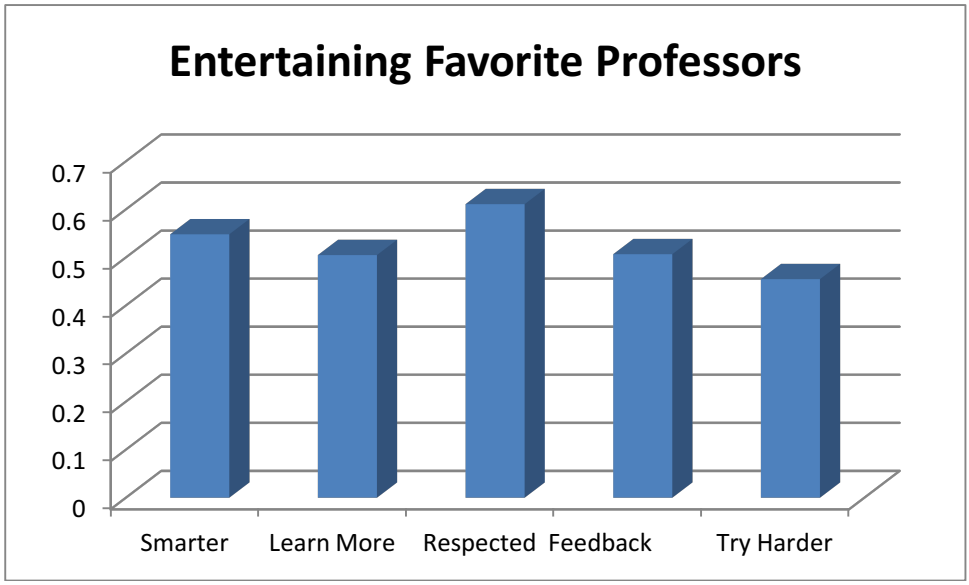

Figure 8.3. Out of the factors tested, in relation to favorite professors who are entertaining, the likelihood of feeling respected was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.6108). The other factor that co-varied was feeling smarter (p=<.05, r=.5481).

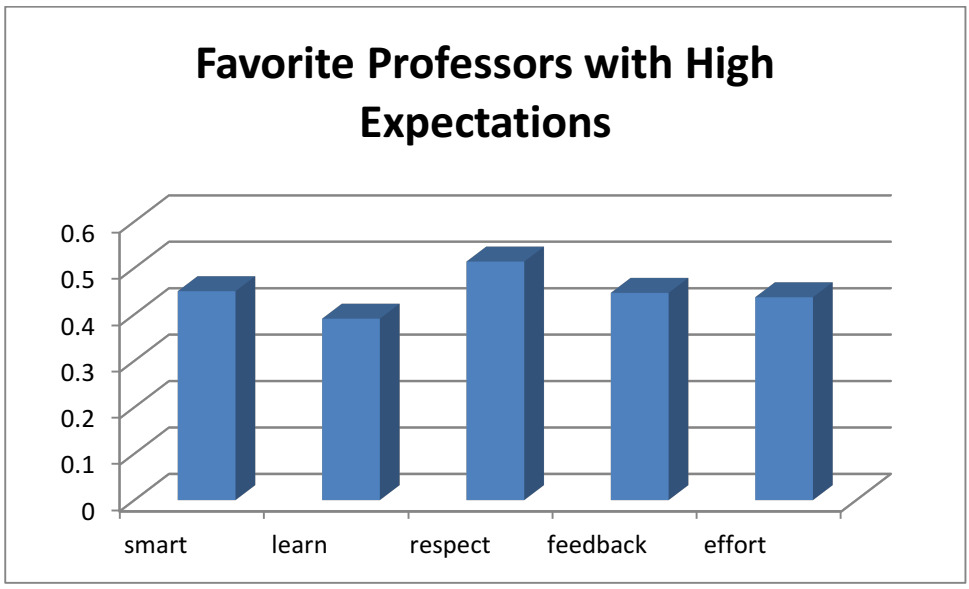

Figure 8.4. Out of the factors tested, in relation to favorite professors with high expectations, the likelihood of feeling respected was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.5137).

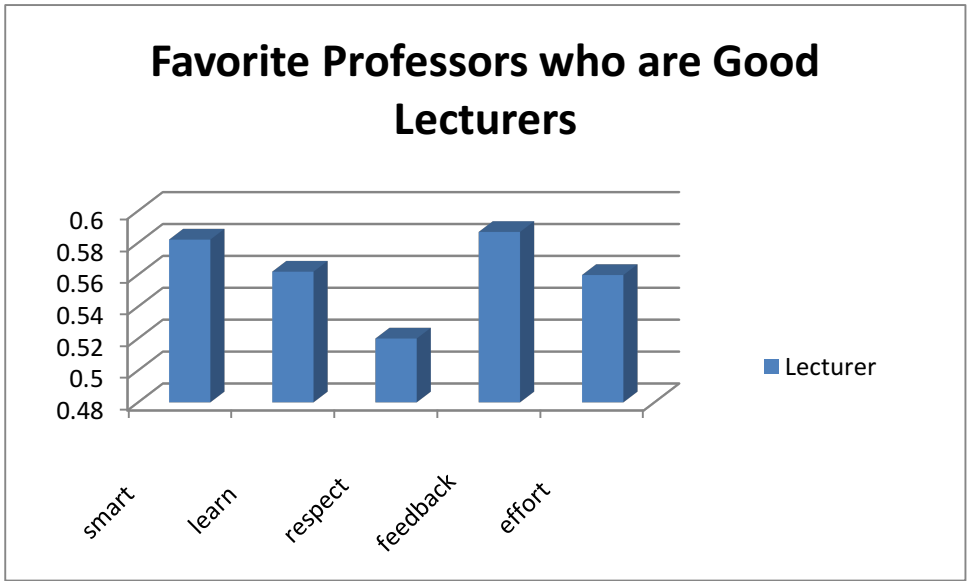

Figure 8.5. Out of the factors tested, in relation to favorite professors who are good lecturers, the likelihood of receiving helpful feedback was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.5868). The likelihood of feeling respected was the lowest correlation (p=<.05, r=.52).

Least Favorite Professor Correlation Data

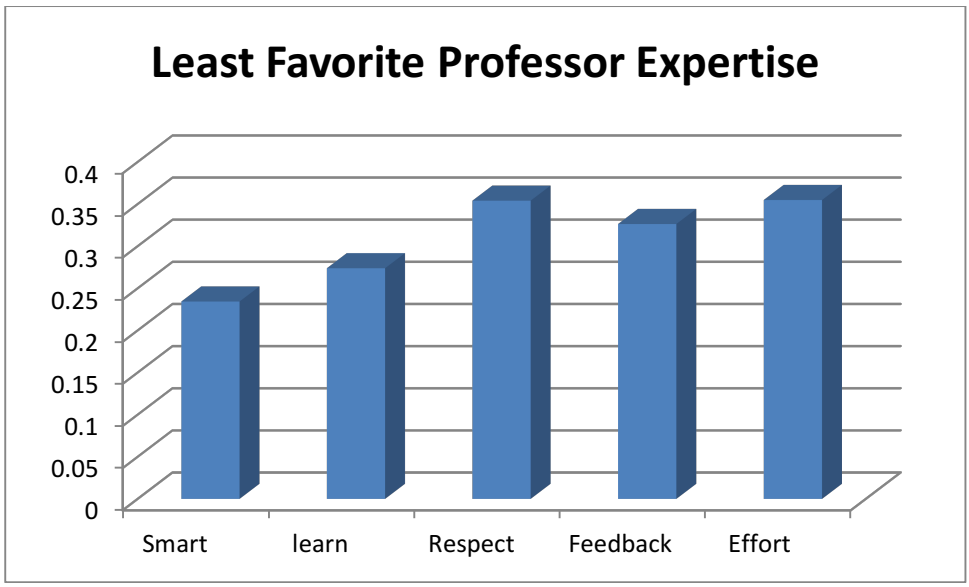

Figure 9.1. Out of the factors tested, in relation to leastfavorite professor expertise, the likelihood of feeling respected was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.3548).

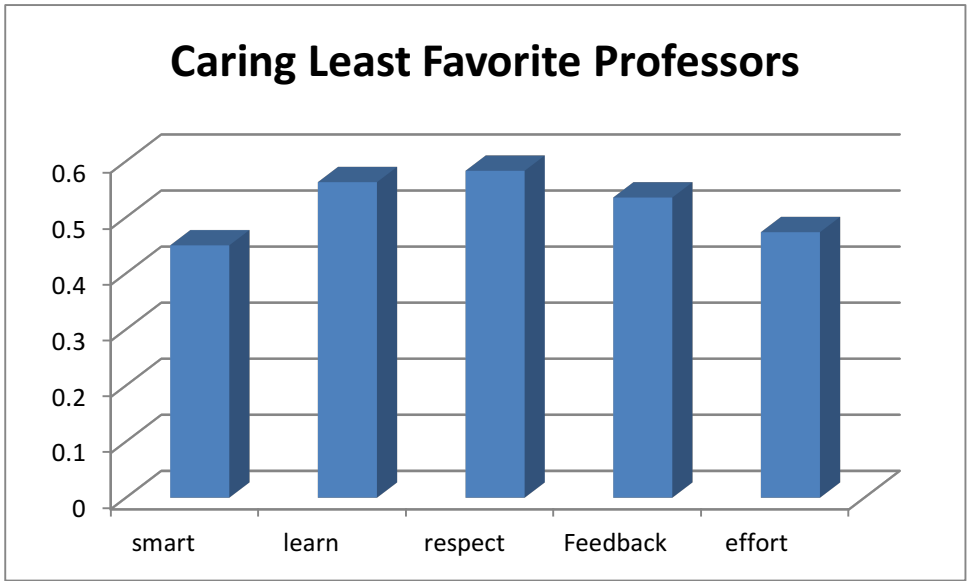

Figure 9.2. Out of the factors tested, in relation to leastfavorite professors who care, the likelihood of feeling respected was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.5831). Other factors that co-varied were learning more (p=<.05, r=.5628) and receiving helpful feedback (p=<.05, r=.5354).

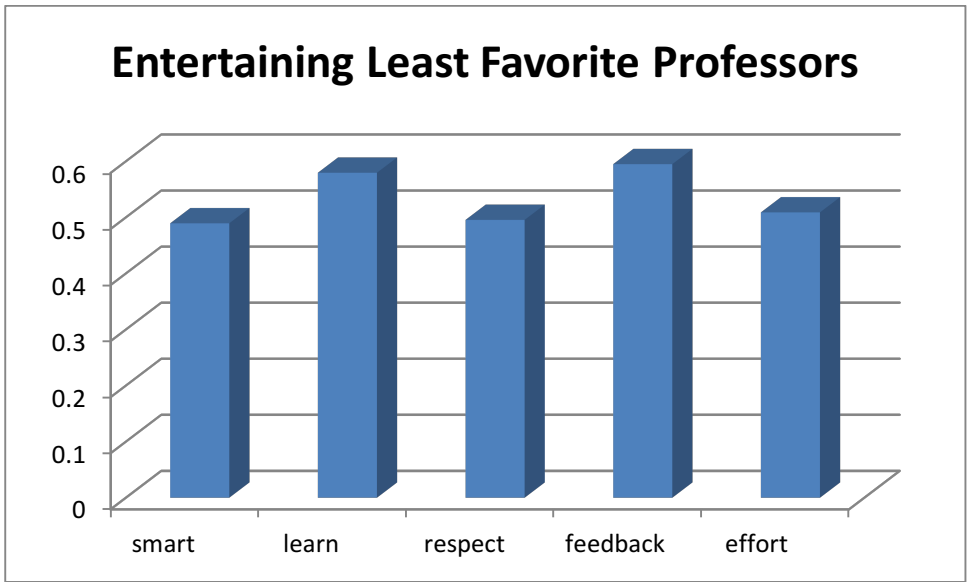

Figure 9.3. Out of the factors tested, in relation to least favorite professors who are entertaining, the likelihood of receiving helpful feedback was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.5949). The other factor that co-varied was learning more (p=<.05, r=.5796).

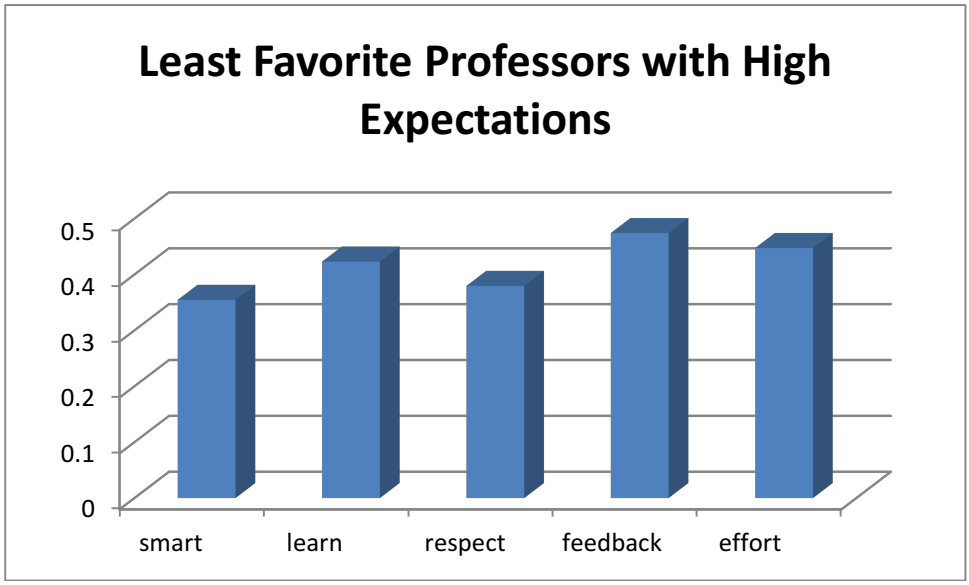

Figure 9.4. Out of the factors tested, in relation to least favorite professors with high expectations, the likelihood of receiving helpful feedback was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.4742).

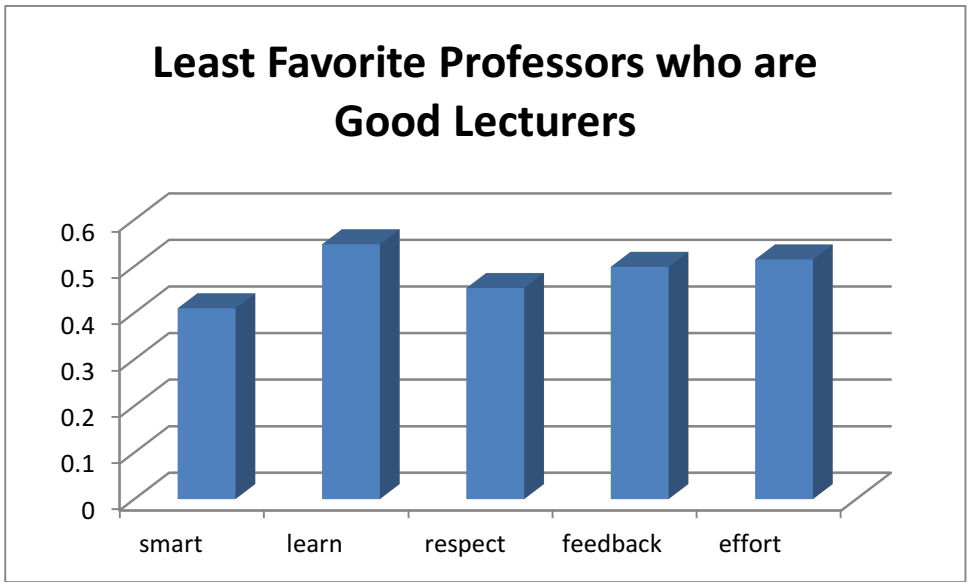

Figure 9.5. Out of the factors tested, in relation to least favorite professors who are good lecturers, the likelihood of learning more was the highest correlation (p=<.05, r=.5469). The other factor that co-varied was trying harder (p=<.05, r=.5143)