



An Analysis of Florida State Student Preferences and Biases when Selecting Tutors at the ACE Learning studio

Thamengie Richard, Dr. Samantha Tackett
Department of Psychology, Florida State University, Tallahassee FL



Introduction

Many universities offer their undergraduate student's free aid to help them succeed. At Florida State University, this aid comes in the form of tutoring at the Academic Center for Excellence as well as other services on campus. Receiving tutoring for courses is a great determining factor for success in the classroom. Although tutoring is a beneficial resource for many students and can be a great equalizer for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, administrators may be unaware of how students of different backgrounds are choosing their tutors. This study is being conducted to determine whether there are preferences in how students select their tutors. Selection bias could be students choosing tutors they believe are better at certain subjects based on stereotypes or it could be students choosing tutors that they can relate more to socially or culturally. A study by Bahr et al., found that teachers who viewed students as difficult were more likely to have issues with that student and give them referrals. This practice resulted in giving Black students more referrals. The researchers decided to investigate if similar biases (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) are present in other teaching relationships (i.e., tutoring). In this study, we explored tutors' perceptions of students' biases for language, race, gender, and ethnicity. Understanding whether there are biases present can help administrators work to dispel stereotypes and/or increase diversity among their tutors for students. The primary hypothesis is that tutors will suggest that race, gender, ethnicity, primary language, and age play an above-average role in how students select their tutors. The secondary hypothesis is that availability will be considered the most prioritized factor by students.

Method

To understand student preferences and biases towards tutor selection, the researchers recruited tutors and collected interview data for the study. Experienced tutors were interviewed about their experiences with students. These interviews lasted 30-45 minutes in duration and were conducted via zoom to accommodate tutors' schedules. Firstly, tutors completed a short form which gathered demographic and tutoring experience data. Secondly, the interviewer asked the tutor questions about how they felt students prioritize various factors when selecting a tutor. Tutors were able to share their personal thoughts and experiences. An example question for tutors is, "What factors make a student and tutor compatible?" Lastly, tutors were instructed to place a list of tutor characteristics in rank order based on their perceptions of students' priorities (highest to lowest priority). Once the interview was conclude, the audio was exported, deidentified, and submitted for transcription. Open code qualitative analysis of interview data is on-going. In total, 4 tutor interviews were completed. All tutors were upperclassman with 3+ semesters of experience tutoring college-level curricula.

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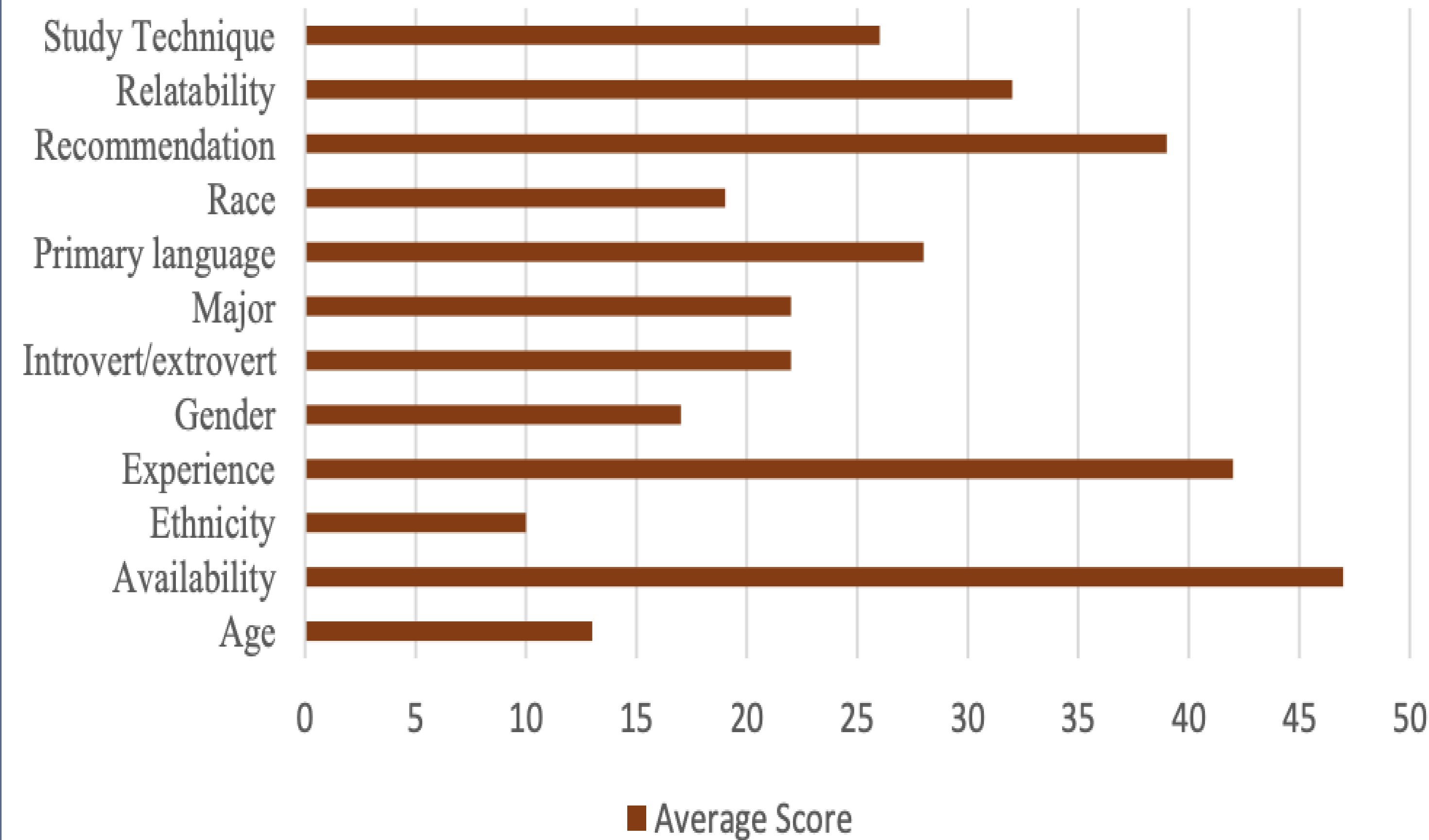
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Factor Importance Averages



Graph 1: Average rating of factors prioritized by students

	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	First Language	Major and Minor	Courses Tutored
Tutor 1	22	White	Eastern European	Male	Polish and Russian	Computer Science and Statistics Minor: Mathematics	Physics, Calculus, Discrete Math, Programming (general programming, object orientation, assembly, data structures), Statistics
Tutor 2	21	Black	Haitian American	Female	Haitian Creole	Social Work	English, Mathematics for liberal arts 1 & 2
Tutor 3	20	White	Polish	Female	English	Behavioral Neuroscience Minor: Chemistry	Chemistry 1 and Biology for Non-majors
Tutor 4	21	Black	Hispanic	Female	English	Public Health Minor: Child development	Study Skills

Table 1: Tutor Demographic information

Quote 1: Response related to ethnicity bias and language bias

Interviewer: "Do you think students work better with tutors they relate to?"

Tutor 1: "I had one student who I think came from a country in Eastern Europe, and so they came here, and they were trying to get a computer science degree here, and briefly I mentioned that my dad did the same thing. He's a programmer from Ukraine and speaks to Ukrainian companies... When I brought it up, there was some bonding, and that definitely increased the conversation, increased how comfortable we were with each other, and that definitely improved how we interacted."

Results

The results show that Tutors believe students select a tutor based on availability and peer recommendation as the top two priorities for selecting and returning to a specific tutor. Additional priorities were identified from the tutors' rank ordered lists of their perceptions of *students' priorities* (highest to lowest priority) of tutor characteristics. When tutors placed tutor characteristics in rank order based on what they believed was most important to their students, ethnicity was on average the lowest rated factor. Availability and recommendation received 47 and 42 points respectively, while ethnicity received 10 points. When tutors placed tutor characteristics in rank order based on what they believed was most important to their students, race, gender, age, and primary language were not scored as highly prioritized factors, but rather moderately prioritized factors.

Although Graph 1 shows that other factors are far less important than availability when students are choosing tutors, the interview responses show that experienced, college-level tutors do believe race, age, gender, and other societal stereotypes play a role in how students feel about their tutors. This is supported by interview data (e.g., *I would say definitely gender*). See Quote 1 and 2.

Discussion

The results can be an indication that negative stereotypes and biases are not explicitly prevalent among college students when selecting tutors. The researchers identified the online tool for tutor appointments to be a confounding variable. When analyzing a student's selection process, the researchers discovered that the appointment tool allows students to reserve a tutor session based on the alignment of a tutor's availability and the student's schedule options. Students have to click on separate tabs to access more information about tutors (e.g., names). Pictures are not included in the reservation tool.

Secondly, preferring a tutor that is of a certain race, primary language, personality, or gender is not always negative. Tutors stated that they believe students work better with tutors they relate to and that can give their students relevant examples. Students may learn more if the tutor can speak their language whether that is Spanish, Russian, or AAVE. Additionally, students might choose a tutor based on physical attributes if that tutor inspires them. A few examples are: a fellow woman in STEM career breaking the glass ceiling, a fellow introvert flourishing in a communications profession, and a fellow Black student succeeding pre-med classes to decrease medical research racism.

Overall, some tutors expressed that they may not be selected to be a tutor or might not have repeat clients because of uncontrollable factors. Increasing education on institutional racism, sexism, and ageism, communicating scientific information to counter stereotypes, and promoting positive, diverse role models are a few ways to address discrimination. Limitations of this study include sample size and the use of approximation with tutors' perceptions of students' priorities. Future research could include photos with tutor selection.

Quote 2: Response related to gender bias and race bias

Interviewer: "In your experiences, what preferences have the biggest impact on who students select as their tutor?"

Tutor 2: "I would say definitely gender and I want to say race too, but I don't think race is as big. Yeah, I think [gender] that's mainly it in my experience. So yeah, I would definitely say that."