
IDENTIFYING FACTORS THAT HINDER FEMALE STUDENTS PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF GEOGRAPHY SECOND YEAR STUDENTS, GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT, ASSOSA UNIVERSITY, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

Education is a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills. The overall objective of this research is to identify the main challenges that hinder female students' participation in learning and teaching process in Assosa University. Specifically, the study aimed to examine the conditions that affect female student's participation in the classroom and to describe the importance of female students participating in learning and teaching process in the classroom. In conducting this research, a mixed research approach, that is, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and descriptive design would be used. Purposively, second year female students were sampled out the three level of students since they are the median of both first- and third-year students. Concerning the source of data, relevant primary data would be collected from instructors and students. In order to alleviate the problem, the researcher would be proposed the following strategies. First, discuss with sampled students (female students) about the problems that hindered their academic participation in progress. Secondly, In order to enhance their skill short train would be given by instructors from department of English and foreign language. Both qualitative and quantitative methods would be employed to analyze the data. They did not effectively hear their teachers, difficult to interpret to their mother language and they could not use effectively in class as medium instruction due to poor language skill. The limitation of self-esteem and self-confidence which result limitation of self-reliance. As a result, they always need to rely to male students.

Keywords: Action Research; Self-Esteem; Education.

Introduction

Background of the study

Education is a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills. These are primary education, secondary education, further (higher) post-secondary education, adult education, a college/university education, formal and informal education (Wehmier, 2004 cited in Oxford University, 2005).

According to UNDP (2004), "development is to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community." Unlike growth which is determined only with the growing economic or wealth activity, national development is about the overall improvement of on the lives of the citizens in the specific boundary.

With all the issues of development and growth, the role of women is significantly important because women share the half number of the population in most of our world. That is why teaching or developing women is the backbone of every development. A woman is a human with sexual characteristics of female or girl and the word women used to refer adults when it is adolescents, the name will be girl.

Education is the major important measure that can be taken to ensure a full integration of women or girls in development. Education raises the social status and self-image of women, increases their ability to question status-quo, enables them to make decision for themselves and increases their contribution to the well-being of society and the country at large. Though girls' education is seen as one of the prerequisites for promoting national development plans, girls and boys have not yet achieved equal opportunities to have access to education.

Thus, discrimination in girls' education has a serious impact on national development. Decades of research findings provide substantial evidence of the lesion between education and economic development.

In most Sub Saharan African countries, including Ethiopia, women contribute a large portion of labour force such that restricting education to boys has a direct and measureable impact on productivity. Although some success in improving the level of education of women and girls in some developing countries has been registered, most Sub Saharan countries (like Ethiopia) still lag behind the rest of the world. The latest progress report towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the UN indicates that there was little or no progress was seen the period 1998-2002 in Sub Saharan Africa. Regarding gender gap in education, girls are not provided or encouraged to participate in education (UN, 2006 cited in Yirga, 2004).

Ethiopia is among those countries which are the most educationally disadvantaged ones. Though it introduced modern education as early as 1908, the majority of the rural population (especially women and girls) have not equally got benefited from it.

Therefore, there is a serious gender disparity in educational participation, completion of their respective schooling and academic achievement at different levels in the Ethiopian educational system in general and Assosa University in particular.

Although there are some sporadic studies on gender and education in general and socioeconomic and cultural factors affecting female students' academic participation using educational perspectives in particular, there might be limited empirical studies on those factors using social work perspective in Ethiopia. Thus, study aimed at assessing and identifying factors affecting academic participation of female students and the implication of all the above-stated situations leads to special measures or actions which eliminate discrimination, eradicate illiteracy, create gender sensitive educational systems, increase enrolment ratio and retention rate of girls and improving quality education to facilitate lifelong learning, as well as development of skills of females students at all levels of the system in the country. Therefore, it becomes imperative to study factors that affecting female student academic participation in Assosa University in BenshangulGumuz regional state.

Statement of the Problem

In the Ethiopian society, women are viewed as procreators of the coming generations, as well as producers of goods and services. However, in many Ethiopian local communities, traditional perceptions of women as inferior to men continue to prevail as many people invoke preservation of African cultures to justify the subordination of women.

Hence, men usually dominate women in the political, religious, economic, academic and domestic spheres. Women's academic achievements and roles in society are hardly acknowledged or recognized. This situation has necessitated the call for the empowerment of women by according them their due status, rights and responsibilities and enabling them to participate actively in decision making activities. Issues related to women have taken new dimensions and received varied treatments by the United Nations and its specialized agencies over the decades. The principle of equality of men and women was first recognized in 1945 in the United Nations Charter and, subsequently, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Even though the international declarations, of which Ethiopia is a signatory, affirming the legal rights and equality of men and women; available literature shows that girls' participation still constitutes a disproportionate percentage of those participating in academic system at different levels of the education system in the country. Many global conferences have been organized and held on various issues on women and have made global progress in improving the status of women; gender disparities still exist, especially in regard to participation in different levels of education system. The low participation of women in the higher institution affects the progress in improving, and promoting gender equality.

The rationale for promoting women's participation in academic participation is based on equity, quality and development given the nominally equal status of men and women in laws of most countries, it is only right that both sexes participate in decision making over matters affecting them. Several obstacles that prevent women from participating in schools have been identified. Bello (1992) considers socio-cultural beliefs as the major barriers in this regard.

So far, the available empirical studies on such issues like Joyce Rhoda Akuaku (2015) on girls low participation in science, Lilian manwa (2014) determinants of academic performance of female students and LeliftuMekonnin (2014) females participation in educational leadership are conducted, they are not focused on the factors affecting female participation in higher institution, so that this action research will conduct to improve the academic participation of female students in Geography and environmental studies department the case of 2nd year female students in Assosa university, Ethiopia .

Objective of the study

General objective

The general objectives of this research are to identify the main challenges that hinder female students' participation in learning and teaching process in Assosa University

Specific objectives

- > To examine the conditions that affect female student's participation in the classroom.
- > To describe the importance of female students participating in learning and teaching process in the classroom
- > To identify the main problem that hinders the participation of female students in the classroom
- > To provide suggestions to improve female student's participation in academic achievements

Significance of research

Since I am lecturer in Assosa University, the problem is observed in Assosa University that female students not participated actively in learning and teaching processes but the concerned body do not take an attention to tackle the problem. Accordingly, this action research will have the following significance for the concerned bodies, which includes

- ❖ It may help female students to identify the main challenges to their participation in classroom during asking and answering questions
- ❖ It may provide some feedback information to schools for improvement programs
- ❖ It may create awareness about the importance of female participations in their academic achievements of the higher institutions
- ❖ It may pave the way for further investigations in the future for interested researchers on similar problems

Research Design

The main concern of this research is to investigate the factors that affect female student's participation in Geography and Environmental studies of second year students. In conducting this research, a mixed research approach, that is, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and descriptive design would be used. The researcher mainly employed questionnaire for data gathering instruments because it is easy to address many people and save time and money to collect data. The questionnaire is designed so as to be completed by second year students and Geography instructors.

Sampling Techniques and Sampling Size

Purposively, second year female students were sampled out of the three levels of students since they are the median of both first- and third-year students. It means the first-year students are new for the campus and third year are already have been finishing their tasks while these target group is a median and more appropriate. Since they are the same sex and manageable size by judgment sampling all female students included in our study. Besides, all Geography instructors which have MA are also included in sample by taking into account their experience.

Number	Population	Total population			Sampled		
		M	F	T	M	F	T
1	Second year students	50	57	107	-	57	57
2	Instructors	9	-	9	9	-	9
Total sampled		59	57	116	9	57	66

Data Sources of the Study

Concerning the source of data, relevant primary data would be collected from instructors and students. Moreover, class-room observation would also be made which would enable to draw valid inferences. In addition, secondary data sources were also reviewed from written documents like journals, articles and other referees about female student's participation in teaching and learning process.

Action strategy

In order to alleviate the problem, the researcher would be proposed the following strategies. First, discuss with sampled students (female students) about the problems that hindered their academic participation in progress. In view of that, identify the factors which influence their participation and by prioritizing the factors and the action would be taken.

Secondly, one of the problems in academic participation may be constraint of language skill. It is obvious; English is our medium of instruction. In order to enhance their skill short train would be given by instructors from department of English and foreign language.

Thirdly, the other may be lack of self-confidence and Self-esteem which exposed them for lack of self-reliance. To mitigate these problems the following measures would be taken:

- ❖ Discuss with them to identify their family background.
- ❖ Treating them as they are equal with male students except their biological difference with other male students.

Procedures of Data Analysis

The data collected through different tools would be analyzed in line with the basic questions raised in chapter one. Both qualitative and quantitative methods would be employed to analyze the data. Data obtained through open ended items of the questionnaires would be analyzed qualitatively using descriptive statements and explanations. Whereas, data obtained through close ended items of the questionnaires would be analyzed and interpreted quantitatively using mainly percentages. The percentages would be calculated and conclusions would be made from the findings of the study that enabled the researcher to recommend some basic solutions to the major problems.

Result and Discussion

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data, gathered by different instruments, mainly questionnaire, observation and document analysis. The summary of quantitative data has been presented by the use of tables. Similarly, the qualitative data was organized to the themes, analyzed and used to strengthen or elaborate more that of the quantitative one. Thus, the qualitative data is used to support the result obtained from the interpretation of the quantitative data.

Demographic and family background of the respondents

The overall of the matter under investigation as well as respondent's personal background information are presented brilliantly here under.

Table 4.1: Demographic and family background of the respondents

	Background of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age		
	16-20	18	31.57
	21-24	34	59.64
	25-29	5	8.77
	Above 30	0	0
		57	100
2	Parent occupation		
	Farmer	32	56.14
	Trader	7	12.28
	Government workers	10	17.54
	Other	8	14.03
		57	100
3	Parent residential area		
	Rural	48	84.21
	Urban	9	15.78
		57	100

As depicted on above table 4.1 the majority age of respondents 34(59.64%) were lied between 21 and 24, 18(31.57%) were between 16 to 20 years and the else 5(8.77%) were 25 to 29 years old. But all were below 29 years old. The most occupation of respondents family occupation, 32(56.14%) were farmers, 10(17.54%) had been working in government office,7(12.28 %) had been sustained their daily livelihoods depend on trade activities and the remain 8(14.03 %) were engaged in different activities. Regarding family residential background the above table show that 48(84.21%) respondents' families were lived in rural and the others 9(15.78) were lived in urban. The result of the table be evidenced for that the age of predominate respondents were 21 to 24 years old, the occupation of the majority respondents family were farmers and mainly there were lived in rural area.

Respondent's achievements

The proceeding table was described that female students cumulative achievement which reviewed from department document

Table 4.2 Respondents achievements

	Achievement(Cumulative)							
	2-2.40	2.41-2.80	2.81-3.00	3.01-3.20	3.21-3.40	3.41-3.60	3.61-3.80	>3.80
Frequency	28	24	3	1	0	0	1	0
Percentage	49.12	42.10	5.26	1.75	0	0	1.75	0

Source: Department document analysis, 2018

From above table 4.2, almost around half of respondents, 28(49.12%) were scored grade between 2 and 2.40, nearly, 24(42.10%) were scored 2.41 to 2.28, 3(5.26%) of respondents were scored between 2.81 and 3.00, one respondent was scored between 3.01 and 3.20. and the else one talented were scored between 3.61 and 3.80. This result implied that as range of grade score increased the total number of respondents score were decrease.

Investigating factors affecting female students participation

The factors that affect female participation could be varying from one institution to other as well as from one region to others. But, these students come from different family background, social background, ethnic background economic background and etc. Their participation problem might be emanated from these cumulative or one the factors.

Table 4.3.Examining factors of female students’ participation

Questions	Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage
What about your participation in classroom activities in lower grade?	A. Low	29	50.87
	B. Medium	22	38.59
	C. High	6	10.52
Did your family follow you as you effectively participate in class?	A. Yes	28	49.12
	B. No	29	50.87
Did your teacher follow up you as you effectively participate in class?	C. Yes	23	40.35
	D. No	34	59.64

As table 4.3 show that most respondents 29(50.87%) replied as their participation were low, 22(38.59%) of them answered as their participation were medium and the remains 6(20.52%) were responded as their participation were high. On this line most students confirm that relative to male students their participation was not as such in the activities like group assignment presentation, class work, homework etc. Eventually, it had negative impact on scored grade.

On similar table second item, larger numbers of students 29(50.87%) were replied that their family were not follow up where as the else 28(49.12%) were confirm as they follow up. Regarding this, natively greater numbers were justified that while they were attended lower grade their family did follow up their activities. Therefore, they were not ready to attentively participate in class. Lastly, on table 4.3 most students 34(59.64%) were responded that the teachers were not follow up where as the else 23(40.35%) said that the teachers were follow up. Besides, larger numbers of students were confirm that most teachers taught equally with other students, but did not took any other consideration. Just like students the teachers were treated us equally.

The teachers and female student’s relation to participation

Table 4.4 Female students’ participation in classroom activities

N ^o	Questions	High		Medium		Low	
		F	p	F	p	F	p
A.	Teaching method						
	Participation in group discussion	0	0	1	11	8	89
	Participation in Presentation	0	0	0	0	9	100
	Participation asking and answering questions	0	0	2	22	7	88
	The females students participation group assignment	0	0	3	33	6	77
	The females students participation homework and class work	0	0	2	22	7	88
	Follow up female students participation	0	0	1	11	8	89
	Give female tutorial	1	11	7	78	1	11
	Female performance and achievement	0	0	0	0	9	100

Finding and Conclusion

As examined in previous chapter there were various factors and challenges led the female students to become low in class room participation in turn which led to them low achiever. The result of the study shows that:

- ❖ Lack of cumulative experience and techniques of study, How to study, How long time spent to study? Where do they study? When did they study? They unable to answered these question
- ❖ Poor language skill. They did not effectively heard their teachers, difficult to interpret to their mother language and they could not use effectively in class as medium instruction.
- ❖ The limitation of self-esteem and self-confidence which result limitation of self-reliance. As a result, they always need to relay to male students.

Evaluation of action strategies

In the discussion with sampled students (female students) about the problems that hindered their academic participation in progress female student and teachers, identify the factors which influence their participation. And by prioritizing the factors and the action would be taken, we tried to provide Tutorial, training for female, encouraging them to participate in variety of clubs.

Secondly, one of the problem academic participation may be constraint of language skill. It is obvious, English our medium instruction. In order to enhance their skill we also tried to give training and encouraged them to participate in ELIC (English language improvement center) of the university. We also tried to break down backward and traditional bondage which affect them not participate in the class room and out of class through creating awareness for them.

Thirdly, the other may be lack of self-confidence and Self-esteem which exposed them for lack of self-reliance. As we have investigated most of students including their counterpart are from countryside which had its negative effect on their overall activity including class room participation.

To mitigate these problems the following measures would be taken:

- ❖ Discuss with them to identify their family background.
- ❖ Treating them as they are equal with male students except their biological difference with other male students. These biological differences mathematically, $1=1$, this means male students have one unique sex organ and also female students have one unique sex organ. Therefore, their participation would be enhanced.

Furthermore, the problem was minimized, but it doesn't absolutely solved. It needs to further investigation.

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