

# Factors affecting female students' academic performance at higher education: The case of Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia

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Accepted 19 December, 2014

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## ABSTRACT

In Ethiopia, female students' participation at all levels of education is increasing at an alarming rate. On the other hand, the numbers of female students who graduate from higher learning institutions are still less as compared with their male counter parts due to different factors. This study was conducted with the objective of assessing major factors affecting the academic performance of female students' in Bahir Dar University. This case study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and the data were collected from students, teachers, management bodies, student's dean and council, and gender office. The result of this study indicated that university related factors such as university academic and administrative rules and regulations, peer pressure, lack of female role model teachers, department choice of students and providing different supportive trainings and tutorial classes by the university impacts female students' academic performance. In addition, socio-cultural factors such as female students' background area, educational status of parents, the perception towards their academic performance influencing factor and how these affect the academic achievement of female students. Furthermore, socio-economic factors such as economic status of parents, the expansion of khat (*Catha edulis*, a green stimulant plant leaf) shops, tourist centers and night clubs around the university affect female students' academic performance. Therefore, the government, ministry of education and the university should give due attention to promote female students academic achievement. The university should start working with regional government, city administration and community to promote female students academic achievement.

**Keywords:** Academic performance, factors, female students, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is the harmonious development of the physical, mental, moral (spiritual), and social faculties of individuals, for a life of dedicated service (Eshetu, 2002). It is a tool that enables citizens to make all rounded participation in the development process. The participation of females in socio-economic development programs also depends on their educational backgrounds. Educating girls and women is critical not merely to achieve personal benefits but also for the improvement in the areas of human resource development of the society (Egenti and Omoruyi, 2011).

The natural environment does not distinguish males and females. However, whenever the exposure of human

beings to the natural environment occurred, both sexes started to differ in the nature and depth of their experiences. Later, the gender disparity that began in a small way, get widened by political, economic, cultural and other factors (<http://info.moe.gov.et/gendocs.pdf>). Education is one of the social factors where by gender disparity is reflected. In the field of education, the number of educated females is very low. As the grade level in school increases, the number of female students starts to decline because of lots of factors (Mersha et al., 2009).

Consequently, higher education remains an area of learning from which women are less represented. The very few women that are fortunate enough to join higher

institutions are characterized by lower academic performance and higher forced withdrawal. As a result, such inequity in higher education representation has a serious lifelong impact on their opportunities to participate in the country's political power sharing, economic privileges as well as social representations. This is because, currently, joining higher education has become a path to upward social mobility status, political power, economic privilege and social prestige (Mersha et al., 2009).

The problem for women's education is not obtaining the advantages that education can offer. Currently, female enrollments are significantly improving from time to time. But gender disparities still exist in education participation and performance in each year of higher education. Factors that are hindering female participation and performance in higher education appear to exist (Juma et al., 2012). Some girls clearly do enter tertiary institutions despite numerous obstacles, but for most girls, the battles to overcome gender impediments and obtain qualifications once they are enrolled continue unabated (Wudu and Getahun, 2009). They often encounter an institutional culture that has not been transformed and that remains hostile to their gender needs. Within this culture, they either negotiate their specific needs as discretely and unobtrusively as possible, or dropout when the environment makes trend and causes of female students' dropout. Their requirements may vary from the need for child care from parents, the need for women's residences, for safe and accessible transport to and from educational institutions at all hours, to an institutional culture which values women's intellectual capacities and skills. In order to ensure that every girl enjoys her fundamental right to education, different strategies and intervention programs were developed and implemented by the government of Ethiopia (Wudu and Getahun, 2009).

The ministry of education of Ethiopia is taking many measures to improve girls' enrolment in the higher education. As a result, the number of female students enrolled in higher learning institutions is relatively increasing. Despite this fact, experiences of the researcher show that the dropout rate of female students in higher learning institutions is so high as compared with their male counter parts. Here, it seems clear that though the ministry of education has tried to increase the enrollment of girls in higher learning institutions in each year and in every semester the problem of female students' dropout at tertiary level seems worth stressing. Hence, the present study was undertaken to investigate the causes or factors affecting female students' academic performance at higher education level.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was applied in this study so as to clearly describe factors that affect female students' academic performance. Qualitative approach was used for the purpose of using non-numeric explanation to describe and compare the respondents' opinions or reviews for the open ended questionnaire

with relative to the research topic and personal interview.

Quantitative approach was also used for the purpose of using numeric explanation to describe respondents' response (female and male students' response on the questionnaires). Simple random sampling was employed to select samples from faculties and departments. In addition, purposive (non-probability) sampling was adopted to select samples from students at a class, staff members, management bodies, student councils, proctors, student dean, and gender office and dropout female students for interview purpose. One hundred fifty students completed the questioner and 13 (management bodies, students dean and council, gender office, proctor and dropout female students) were included in the interview. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and qualitative data were analyzed by narration and summarization.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic data

From 164 questionnaires distributed, 150 were completed. The completed questionnaires were from 120 female and 30 male students.

Analysis of data showed that there are different factors affecting the academic performance of female students at higher education. This are categorized by three major categories such as, University related, socio economic and socio cultural factors.

### University related factors

Respondents were asked to give their over all agreement about university related factors such as university administrative and academic rules and regulations, university climate, peer and student to teacher relationship, different supportive trainings, guidance and counseling services and tutorial classes provided by the university to female students, lack of female role model teachers and department choice of students. Majority of respondents agree about the effect of these factors on female students' academic performance (Table 1).

### Socio economic factors

As respondents' response socio economic factors such as, economic status of parents, female students living outside University and being non café, limited employment opportunities and the presence and influx of tourists, expanding khat (*Catha edulis*) shops around the university gates and nearby, and night clubs/bars, widespread hotel beds around the university affect female students academic performance at higher education level (Table 2).

### Socio cultural factors

Respondents also give their overall agreement about

**Table 1.** The effect of university related factors on female students' academic performance.

Factors	Respondents	Rating scale				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
University academic rules and regulations	Frequency	32	91	11	11	5
	Percentage	21.3	60.7	7.3	7.3	3.3
University administrative rules and regulations	Frequency	43	79	7	17	4
	Percentage	28.7	52.7	4.7	11.3	2.7
Effect of peer pressure and relationship on female academic performance	Frequency	68	64	6	6	6
	Percentage	45.3	42.7	4.0	4.0	4.0
Effect of university climate on female academic performance	Frequency	44	75	9	13	9
	Percentage	29.3	50.0	6.0	8.7	6.0
Effect of student to teacher relationship on female academic performance	Frequency	49	78	8	12	3
	Percentage	32.7	52.0	5.3	8.0	2.0
Different trainings support female academic performance	Frequency	77	62	5	3	3
	Percentage	51.3	41.3	3.3	2.0	2.0
Tutorial classes provided by the university helps female academic success	Frequency	80	54	7	6	3
	Percentage	53.3	36.	4.7	4.0	2.0
Students participation on different clubs (sport, HIV/AIDS etc) helps females academic success	Frequency	55	70	7	11	7
	Percentage	36.7	46.7	4.7	7.3	4.7
Lack of guidance and counseling services	Frequency	75	60	2	8	5
	Percentage	50.0	40.0	1.3	5.3	3.3
Department choice of students	Frequency	76	55	4	8	7
	Percentage	50.7	36.7	2.7	5.3	4.7
Lack of female role model teachers	Frequency	48	97	1	4	0
	Percentage	32.0	64.7	.7	2.7	0

socio cultural factors affecting female students' academic performance. Such as, female students' background area and self esteem/perception and level of parental education have an effect on female students' academic achievement (Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

The major problems of female students at higher education level are identified and analyzed. Respondents explained that university climate affects female students' academic performance. University play an important role in raising the academic attitude of a student by providing a stimulating, motivating and encouraging environment which indirectly results into good and higher academic

achievement (MOE, 2004).

Besides the provision of guidance and counseling, tutorial classes and different trainings, student to teacher relationships also plays significant roles in female students' academic performance. Teachers play significant role in students learning. Particularly if teachers have positive attitudes towards female students and are gender sensitive in the classroom, female students will be encouraged to learn. Provision of guidance and counseling service for students in the university is very crucial for their success in their academic and non-academic endeavors as university female students are new for the environment, free from family control and they face a number of problems such as economical, social, academic and personal.

University and department placement of students' play

**Table 2.** The effect of Socio economic factors on female students' academic performance.

Factors	Respondents	Rating scale				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Limited employment opportunities affect female academic performance	Frequency	58	78	4	8	2
	Percentage	38.7	52.0	2.7	5.3	1.3
Economic status of parents affect female academic performance	Frequency	65	70	5	7	3
	Percentage	43.3	46.7	3.3	4.7	2.0
Female students living outside the university	Frequency	55	77	5	8	3
	Percentage	36.7	51.3	3.3	5.3	2.0
Female students becomes non cafe	Frequency	37	91	7	12	2
	Percentage	24.75	60.7	4.7	8.0	2.0
Presence of tourist centers around the university affects academic performance of females	Frequency	42	94	5	8	0
	Percentage	28.0	62.7	3.3	5.3	0.0
Presence of chat shops around the university negatively affect females academic performance	Frequency	57	70	6	8	8
	Percentage	38.0	46.7	4.0	5.3	5.3
Presence of night clubs/ bars/ around the university affects academic performance of females	Frequency	87	51	3	5	3
	Percentage	58.0	34.0	2.0	3.3	2.0

**Table 3.** The effect of socio cultural factors on female students' academic performance.

Factors	Respondents	Rating scale				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Females who live in urban areas perform better than girls who live in rural areas	Frequency	47	81	6	8	8
	Percentage	31.0	54.0	4.0	5.3	5.3
Female students self stem/perception	Frequency	46	93	4	5	2
	Percentage	30.7	62.0	2.7	3.3	1.3
Level of parental education	Frequency	66	65	8	6	3
	Percentage	44.0	43.3	5.3	4.0	2.0

a key role in their future life adjustment and their success in a given field of study. In most cases, if students are placed based on their interest in the university and department, they can be successful in academic endeavors in particular and in their future life in general, and vice versa. The majority of respondents (89%) and (87.4%) agreed university and department placement of students based on their interest, respectively, has a positive effect on female students' academic performance and vice versa. Students placed without their choice faces problems such as lack of interest in the University's environment and this makes them reluctant to attend their lesson and since they are placed too far from their parents they are suffering from home seeking of their

families (particularly when they were freshman students).

Assertive training, which is a behavioral technique, helps students to develop the necessary social skills to manage interpersonal and academic situations more effectively, and to feel better about themselves. Moreover, female students participate in different clubs help them to share their experiences, to help each other etc. The majority of respondents 92.6 and 83.4% agreed to the effect of co-curricular trainings and females participation in different clubs on their academic performance, respectively. In this regard, interview result also asserted that if female students participate in different trainings, they can develop their self-confidence and well aware how to manage themselves with new

environment.

The other problem faced by female students was found to be economic constraint. Economic constraints seriously affect female students' academic performance, which spans from the very limitation of purchasing the necessary educational materials to those affecting their health. Students from poor families failed to fulfill necessities such as education materials, cosmetics, recreation, etc. As a result, to get away from such trap they may be engaged in different immoral, and risky engagements such as sexual affairs and expose themselves to irreversible problems including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy and consequently they dropped out of the university and have extended consequences in their future life. The report from interviewed teachers confirmed that some students (mostly of rural origin) are exposed to such risky situations. On the contrary, females' who are from poor economic background parents have low self esteem as well as feel inferiority.

Most of University students are in the age group of 21 to 25 years which implies that they are young, they want to know everything even that is not good for them, free from family control and enjoy with different group of people and new to the university environment. As a result, they want to try new things like chewing khat, going to night club and get entertained in the tourist places. Moreover, some unethical and immoral men who have better economic income such as older men in Amharic "*Shuger Dady*" for *transactional and transgenerational sexual malpractices* outside the university is becoming the major negative factor that impacts the performance of female and young students. This is also a major factor for wasting or killing female students' reading and study time and using them as temporary sex mate. Sadly, University gates are becoming destinations of such stupid activities. On the other hand, students who are economically better but were under close family control before joining the university, want to enjoy with different bodies by going to various unnecessary places which are mentioned above and also consider doing this kind of activities as a symbol for modernization.

Girls' expectations of their school performance and career prospects play significant roles in their persistence at school. Female students' self perception on their academic performance is lower and they perceive themselves they are academically weak and they believe that "we can't". Due to this they cannot use their effort as well as develop dependency on others. As demonstrated from the table above, the majority of respondents, which accounts 92.7%, agreed on the effect of female students self perception on their academic performance.

Educated parents would perceive the need of females' education in a better way than those who are not educated. Educated parents might also facilitate the girls' learning at home, encourage, continuous follow up and motivate them to score better academically. The analysis

of data here in this study further confirmed this as seen in the table above. The lion share of respondents (87.3% were agree) indicated that the level of parental education highly affect the academic performance of female students. Ager (2002) suggested that females' education is more strongly and adversely affected by parents who are illiterates than literates.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to asses factors affecting the academic performance of female students at higher education and to suggest possible solutions that may help to promote female students academic performance.

The research has tried to identify and analyze university related, socio cultural and socio economic factors that affect female students academic performance. University related factors such as university climate, university academic and administrative rules and regulations, student to teacher relationship, peer pressure, participation of female students on different clubs (sport, HIV/AIDS, etc), tutorial classes provided by the university, different supportive/co-curricular/ trainings provided by the university to female students (assertiveness, life skill, gender issues, HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health), department choice of students, provision of guidance and counseling services and lack of female role model teachers affect female students academic performance.

Socio-cultural factors which affect female students' academic performance include, female students self esteem/perception of their academic performance, and family background of female students. Furthermore, socio-economic factors such as the presence of night clubs/bar, khat shops, and tourist centers around the university, economic status of parents, limited employment opportunities, and female students living outside the university and becoming non café are affecting female students' academic performance.

The attrition rate of Bahir Dar University female students was high in a decreasing rate in the last five years due to different cause of failure. Such as, sexual harassment, their were no supportive trainings provided by the university, fear of failure, female students self perception on their academic performance, lack of self confidence, and community attitude towards female students performance. Even if the trend of female students' attrition rate in BDU is decreasing from time to time, still female students attrition rate is present in the university and needs to do more in this area.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on results and conclusions drawn, the following suggestions are proposed to promote female students

academic performance:

1. The university should control (by effectively executing its workplace policies and collaborative work practices) the opening of khat shops and night/bar/ clubs around the university by collaborating with regional government.
2. The university should give recognition and rewards for well performer female students to motivate other female students.
3. The orientation and counseling for female students' should be given by course instructors and relevant teaching staff at the beginning of the course.
4. The university's concerned bodies should develop a system (policy or strategy) whereby female students can get support from senior students, friends and teachers.
5. The university should create means of paying special attention to students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities (HIV/AIDS) and joined the university from rural areas.
6. The government should give financial/economical support for economically disadvantaged female students through evidence based income generating schemes and working in collaboration with relevant partners including the Higher Education partnership forum, donors and media.
7. The government should sanction and impose appropriate punishments on teachers who violate female students' right.

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**Citation:** Tiruneh, W. A., and Petros, P. (2014). Factors affecting female students' academic performance at higher education: The case of Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia. *African Educational Research Journal, 2(4): 161-166.*

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