

## Major Barriers Influencing Female Students' Participation in the Classroom and their Empowerment: Implication for Selected Secondary Schools, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Messeret Assefa\*

### Abstract

Education is a basic requirement for female students' transformation and advancement and is the prime ingredient of human resource and socio-economic development. Thus, the present study aims to look into major barriers influencing female students' participation in the classroom and their empowerment. The researcher deployed a descriptive survey research design. The study also engaged quantitative and qualitative approaches. For this purpose, out of ten sub-cities, five sub-cities were selected randomly. The sample of this study consisted of five principals for an interview, selected by purposive sampling method, 100 secondary schools' teachers, and 300 students selected by using a simple random sampling method. A closed-ended and an open-ended questionnaire were adopted to collect quantitative and qualitative data from teachers and students. There were five focus group discussions from five sample secondary schools, each group encompassing five members. The time taken was one hour for each FGD at a different time span. The study was carried out from October 1 to November 3, 2021. The findings show that the insufficiency of female students' self-confidence does not contribute much to their success in classroom participation. Further, female students are not getting adequate benefits from socio-cultural empowerment. In short, the internal and the external challenges affect in many respects' female students' classroom participation.

**Keywords:** Female students, secondary school, participation and empowerment

Challenges of women's participation in all sectors, array from individual up till community level. Individual issues were associated with character traits such as work-family balance concern and being deficient enough in self-confidence. For example, at the school levels, hard relationships whether classmates and their academic performance were found to be a problem, whereas, at their local area, social constructs towards females were observed as core challenges to the participation of females in any public performance (Mohajeri & Mousavi, 2017). Students feel active enough if learning is practical and related to their life. And they are actively engaging and participating in any classroom activities. Furthermore, Tatar, S., [2005], good classroom participation contributes essentially for the enhancement of performance of academic education and students' individual progress in their future life. Empowerment can be described as many-sided shared practices that help communities manage their own existence. It is a development that promotes influence in people, to exercise in their own subsistence, in particular to their group of people. by considering their own concern that they regard as significant Page & Czuba, (1999); Bayeh, (2016). Further, a number of researchers highlight the connection between education and affirmative association with female empowerment and plummeting the gender gap. Awareness is necessary for females to partake in overhaul and to understand and surmount the challenge adjoining them Stromquist, (2015) in connection to these, World Bank (2003a) indicated that encouraging gender parity is an important part of economic and human being progress strategy; "These days, there is a common knowledge within the advancement of society that enlargement policies and

measures that fall short to take gender disparity into account and not succeeding to address the difference between males and females will have inadequate usefulness and grave cost inference." Further, World Bank (2003a) denotes that, arithmetical experiential evidence set up the affiliation between education and female empowerment. Furthermore, (Hur 2006, p. 524) in his study stresses that empowerment is an end rather than a process that can be anticipated, evaluated, and developed. As per Kessey (2005), empowerment is a means of change by which people or institutions, having little or no control, get hold of the potential to make an appropriate resolution that benefits their survival. The study is a complementary contribution to knowledge about the female students' activity and empowerment in secondary school classroom participation.

### Statements of the problem

Empowerment is the means that connects individual capability to redefine their prospect and preference and to be able to carry out those Eyben et al (2008:5). In spite of such significance, the preponderance of female students are accountable to be fewer participants in the classroom than their male counterparts.

Education has the power of enhancing the chances of employability, allows women to improve their self-image, self-support, decision-making sureness and helps them cognizant of their rights Khan & Awan, (2011). In addition to this, abundant research has recognized the role of education in female empowerment. Though, those researches did not cover up the impact of diverse barriers that influence female students' classroom participation and empowerment. However, this paper proposes to fulfill the gap and to consider the major barriers influencing

female students' participation in the classroom and their empowerment.

### **Research questions**

The study is an effort to look into the major barriers influencing female students' participation in the classroom and their empowerment: Implication for selected secondary schools, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in so doing, the following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the major barriers that influence female students' classroom participation?
2. What are the means that empower female students' classroom participation?

### **Research Objectives**

In order to achieve the above stated basic questions, the following objectives were raised in the study

1. Identify the major barriers influencing female students' classroom participation.
2. Indicate the strategy that empowers female student's classroom participation

### **Significance of the study**

The result of this investigation is expected to be vital for different stakeholders such as program coordinators, secondary school curriculum developers, secondary schools' teachers, and students, and policymakers. Hence, the following salient contribution will be upheld from the research:

1. It may provide vital information for better policy planning and implementation in regards to secondary school female students.
2. It may give an opportunity to the prospective curriculum developer to be need-based, participatory and gender-based during the course of curriculum planning and development.
3. Furtherance study will serve as an input for future researchers on the same issues.

### **Delimitation of the study**

This study was confined to major barriers influencing female students' participation in the classroom and their empowerment in selected secondary schools of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. From this the five schools were selected randomly from ten sub-cities for this study: These were Belay Zelek, Bethlehem, Abyotkires, Addis Ketema, and AkakiKality secondary schools.

### **The design of the study**

The study deployed a descriptive survey research design. This aided the investigator to gather existing information in order to reply to the basic research questions. The design was found suitable and permissible for the assessment of succeeding associations between updating variables and explanation of the theme. It also enables one to have the overall assumption of the problem by studying the current position, nature of the present settings, and trends through pertinent and detailed information.

The study used quantitative and qualitative approaches. The approaches are deployed to engender inclusive data using different strategies from diverse bases. The data collection also involves gathering

numeric information (quantitative) as well as text information (qualitative), interviews, and FGD. Thus, the final result signifies both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study.

### **C. Sources of Data**

The data for the current study was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. In order to get actual evidence, primary data was composed of principals, teachers, and students by using questionnaires, interviews, and FGD. Secondary sources of data were also collected from accessible pertinent documents (books, journals, secondary schools, strategy documents, and web pages) were denoted and other resource documents applicable to the study were used to care for the data.

### **D. Pilot Study**

The questionnaires were authenticated to attain validity and to assess the aptness before they were managed. To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was inspected by the investigator. The reliability test was administered in one none sampled secondary school, encompassing 12 teachers and 25 students. The objectives of the reliability and validity test were to triangulate whether the investigator and the respondents were properly interacting through the tool. In regards to, qualitative procedures analysis encompasses triangulating information collected through interviews and FGD

It further enhances the content validity of the survey's questions in regards to the feedback attained. Besides, reliability evaluation for the entire closed-ended items was considered using SPSS version 23, in order to recognize the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Thus, the reliability estimates for the total items using Cronbach alpha were found to be 0.831 for teachers and 0.845 for students closed-ended items.

After getting all the five amended items, the questionnaires were disseminated and shadowed up for data collection as per the time given.

### **The sample size and sampling techniques**

Simple random sampling technique was used to choose five sub-cities from ten sub-cities and five secondary schools were also chosen from five sub-cities in Addis Ababa city administration. The entire grade 9 and 10 students from the five secondary schools are considered to be the population of the study. i.e., Belay Zelek, Bethlehem, Abyotkires, Addis Ketema, and AkakiKality. In Addis Ababa city administration the whole secondary schools in all ten sub-cities contribute to a more or less similar attribute in their operation of the substructure system and facilities.

In the light of quantitative care, the necessary sample size was determined using a single population formula assuming that one in four respondents are dissatisfied based on the investigator's quick evaluation with 0.05 level of significance and margin of error of 5.0% which yielded nearly 100 and divided the estimated SS equally across the schools.

Twenty teachers from each school were consulted and chosen for their input. After getting the map of the selected schools from the city government of Addis Ababa education bureau the five schools were approached.

Thus, in regards to the students' community 300 of them were drawn from grades 9 and 10 who were participating in 2021/2022 from the five sample schools to partake in the questionnaire. While for the qualitative assessment, five principals of the sample schools were selected by using the purposive sampling method, twenty teachers (five from each school) and students were selected randomly from the five sample schools for FGD.

#### **Instrument and procedure of Data Collection**

The investigator obtains a visit certificate of permeation from Addis Ababa University department of curriculum and instruction and subsequently enquired for a letter of permission to visit the sample schools the regional education bureau. Once the permission was allowed, the investigator retained schedules with the respective school principals to visit and manage the questionnaire. The investigator visited the schools and conducted the questionnaire. The subjects were secured of their confidentiality afterward they were given a short time to fill in the questionnaire, after which the investigator collected the filled questionnaire.

In regards to the qualitative part, interview and FGD appointment dates were scheduled and approved at an appropriate time. The qualitative data were gathered using five research questions composed of close-ended question items i.e. school issues, family issues, personal issues, and empowerment of female students within the major barriers influencing female students' participation in the classroom and their empowerment. While, for the qualitative interviewee and focus group discussions five semi-structured questions were prepared. It encompasses policy and management questions to include the context of the city government of Addis Ababa education bureau secondary schools.

The question in the tools ranged from school issues to the empowerment of female students. The subjects were asked to reply to each item on a five point-scale i.e.-Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The investigator himself administered the questionnaire and to enrich the quality of the reply the return time was made short through tenacious follow-up. The investigator made the determination of the study simple and vivid to all subjects about the questionnaires in order to evade misunderstanding. In addition to these, clarifications were made to the participants, and data collection was carried out as per to the agenda agreed upon

#### **Interpretation and data analysis**

In this study, quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis were deployed. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample subjects in order to respond to the research basic questions asked. A

four-point Likert rating scale was used to gather data descriptive statistics such as mean and SD was deployed to infer the data in order to respond to the basic research questions. Replies were associated to find out those mirrored similar views. Lastly, using descriptive statistical analysis i.e. using mean and SD, the prearranged data were interpreted and analyzed quantitatively and supported by qualitative data. That is, the qualitative data is composed by means of interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). By realizing the transcripts of the interview and the focus group remarks seized during the course of collection recurrently, the investigator alienated the transcribed texts into different categories.

This empowered the investigator to lump the data into different groups and consider them with a code. Subsequently, the investigator convened all similar classes and branded them with a code Leech, NL. & Onwuegbuzie, AJ. (2009). In conclusion, the predominant theme was established by bringing different groups of codes into a single unit in line with the basic research questions asked. The representative of each informant code was recorded on the interview sheet for principals', interviewees a, b, c, d, e, whereas for FGDs teachers f, g, h, I, j for female students FGDs, k, l categorized progressively to support the qualitative data. Hence, the data obtained through the close-ended questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively whereas; those reached through open-ended questionnaire, interview, and FGD categories were scrutinized and abridged qualitatively.

#### **Ethical consideration**

The purpose of the study was explained to all of them in their local language the participants' consent and confidentiality during the course of data collection and after the study was finalized, was censored by informing all participants in advance that participation in this study was voluntary and that they could pull out at any time. The code of anonymity was applied which fundamentally means that the participants endured anonymity throughout the study. The descriptive statistics in table 1 for item 1 the role of the teacher in supporting female students are low, the mean score for teachers shows that 4.0237 and SD 1.20491 whereas, students mean 4.1149 and SD 1.113532 respectively. From this, one can realize that teachers and students agreed that the roles of the teacher in supporting female students are low. In this regard, principal interviewee<sub>1</sub> appealed that "There are many factors that teachers' support low response answers for female students. Because one of these factors was the inadequate teacher's salary, most of them were not around the school compound to help the needy students rather they go hunting for a part-time job in private secondary and primary schools, just to meet both ends. this then deterred their support to female students".

In support of principals' standpoint Teachers, FGD<sub>1</sub> contends that "During the course of learning

teaching hours we are trying to support both female and male students in the classroom but, it is difficult

running to finish the content without making the lesson clear for the students. Hence it is equally

**Table 1 Participants’ Response on Rating of the School and Family issues**

N	Item	n students	Mean	SD	n Teachers	Mean	SD
<b>School issues</b>							
1	The role of the teacher in supporting female students are low	253	4.0237	1.20491	87	4.1149	1.13532
2	Checking female learners understanding is less in a large class	253	3.5455	.96512	87	3.6322	.94149
<b>Family issues</b>							
3	Extent of workload and female students classroom participation	253	3.6008	3.20136	87	3.5747	.81601

in a large classroom to support female students separately because apart from our teaching task during the week class we are very busy for meeting our own daily subsistence food, accommodation, etc. to support our self as we are not able to survive with our meager salary alone.” However, schools must oversee a tutorial program with a token incentive for teachers and strengthen the relationship between teachers and parents, and consider parents as an important mentor of students learning at home to have a positive relationship with parents to influence students’ active engagement in their learning

Table 1 item 2 depicts the respondents’, checking female learners' understanding is less in a large class. The mean scores of both teachers and students show that mean 3.5455 and SD .96512 and 3.6322 and SD .94149 respectively. This shows that in a large classroom where there are 75 students in an overcrowded classroom, checking female learners' understanding in each period is not practical.

Principal interview<sub>6</sub> in this vein, “Suggested that in general terms we are not blaming teachers only. The curriculum itself doesn’t allow them to do flexibly. It appears that an integrated curriculum would be more helpful for facilitating active learning than a content-packed, (subject-based curriculum). On the other hand, an integrated curriculum underlines more on the inquest and problem-solving approaches where students get the prospect to be keenly engaged in critical views to search and resolve problems.

This is therefore unless otherwise the curriculum is geared towards an integrated approach it is difficult for the teachers to support students in general and particularly female students as suggested. In this regard, Auster and Wylie (2006:4) indicated that teachers’ willingness and engagements in classroom preparation are seriously a vital magnitude in the formation of success in the classroom endeavor. On the other hand, a lesson plan is useful for a teacher to prepare ahead of the actual class teaching, which helps him to cover the content on time rather than

important for the learning teaching strategies to be covered in a particular classroom, to bring the expected outcomes.

In this regard, Finn, et.al (2003:346) denotes that in the light of the dispersal of accountability and social loafing. They indicated that the vital principle after the dispersal of accountability is that, as the group size expands, the responsibility of performance will reduce. Social loafing happens because an individual will set in fewer attempts and she/he is less recognized when functioning in groups where the accountability is mutual.

It is clear that small class sizes and large class sizes can play a significant task in helping female students learn. It can also be summed up that in large classes’ individuals show less effort and the teacher might not be able to reach female students or the entire class as she/he is running to finish her/his daily class and move to the next class. Even if the teacher is willing to help female students after class hours sometimes, she/he may not be able to get them because before it gets late students are trying to get transportation to reach their home as early as possible.

In regards to the heavy workload of female students at home Janice and Janice (2002:1) indicated that parents are an influential tutor at home in helping children learn more and enhance their academic achievement. This implies that children can be actively involved in the classroom learning activity if they are well prepared at home by doing reading assignments and other activities related to topics taught in the classroom. Further, Pena (2000:42) denotes that the primary factor for the child’s academic achievements and learning progress is the result of parent interest and support. Hence, the strong teachers' and parents’ smooth relationship will enrich female students’ classroom participation.

Both teachers and students respondents in table 1 item 3, were enquired to give responses as to the extent of workload and female students' classroom participation, students mean 3.6008 and SD 3.20136,

while that of teachers mean 3.5747 and SD .81601 respectively. A factual interpretation of this result would indicate that female students who had experienced too much work after school work at home will develop a negative parental influence. Principal interviews and FGDg were generally consistent with the quantitative results. Mostly it appears that, many of the participants in FGDg highlight that the existence of overload at home for female students was one of the contributing factors for their less participation in the classroom. Further, in most of these variables, both the quantitative and qualitative findings agreed with each other and also with the existing literature. Moreover, FGD<sub>h</sub> discussants contend that we are not blaming parents for giving tasks at home. "Because, if female students are not supporting their poor parents at home it is difficult for parents to fulfill both ends. Mainly parents or guardians were engaged in some activities to engender income for their family. Something like petty trading at the local market and making a local drink like "Tela and Areki". Unless otherwise, they were not able to cover their daily subsistence and able to go to school. In this case, schooling is secondary to them".

Nonetheless, the aforementioned result signifies that workload at home was considered as one of the issues that deter whether female students from being active participants or not in a classroom.

be quiet even though they have many things in their mind or better than their male partners' '. In association with these, for instance, Kamp (1996) asserted that as compared to their male counterparts, females with inferior self-confidence tend to be fewer participants. Of course, social constructs or cultural barriers play a decisive part on female classroom participation but, today different measures have been taken such as affirmative action, female assertive training, and female students participating in club associations. Such measures assist them to some extent to be assertive compared to their male counterparts.

As it is observed in table 1 item number 2 participants' both teachers and students rated the Socio-cultural empowerment issues. Accordingly, the general pattern indicates similar distribution. The mean scores of the two sample groups show students mean 2.7791 and SD 2.06359 Whereas, that of the teachers mean 3.3103 and SD 1.01512, respectively. This result indicates that the support provided are less for female students' social empowerment. Besides, an opportunity provided by the secondary schools to empower and develop female students' classroom participation and cultural barriers positions did not frequently exist. Similarly, the school environment is not enabling opportunities to meet teacher requirements. The result of this study also revealed that female students have not been given more

**Table 2 Mean s and Standard Deviations**

N	Items	N Students	Mean	SD	N Teachers	Mean	SD
	<b>Personal issues</b>						
1	The extent of self-confidence	253	3.5020	.74335	87	3.5632	.80263
	<b>Empowerment of female students</b>						
2	Socio-cultural empowerment	253	2.7791	2.06359	87	3.3103	1.01512

The response in table 2 item number 1 revealed that the extent of self-confidence and female students' classroom participation students mean to be 3.5020 and SD .74335 whereas teachers mean 3.5632 and SD .80263 respectively. Among the other aspect which may be well-thought-out to influence female students' classroom participation, one was their self-confidence. Both the mean of the students and that of the teachers show that participation rate and self-confidence were positively related.

Nonetheless, the qualitative aspects of the Principal<sub>a</sub> noted that, "In my viewpoint, one likely reason for female students' low participation was that females recognized that they have no capability to cope up with their male counterparts instead of being gender based inequality". FGD<sub>h</sub> in support of the principal's views they claim that, "Female students due to cultural barriers should not speak in a classroom discussion. Because, if they speak bravely, they will be considered as a chatty or talkative female, different from the norm, for this reason, they prefer to

chances to be in a more challenging forum as compared to male counterparts.

Further, the finding of this study revealed that the extent of support provided to the female students in empowering them was inadequate. Hence, the support and encouragement obtained from school leaders and the extent of support received from the school community in general and classroom teachers, in particular, were not sufficient.

The school was not in a position to sufficiently provide an opportunity to empower and develop female students to participate in classroom activities. Besides, the school environment was moderate as an enabling environment that provides female students an opportunity to meet the empowerment criteria to the classroom active participation. Moreover, the result of this study also revealed that female students have not been given more opportunities to be in a more challenging position that was previously given as a social construct to boys' supremacy and it was

not simple to change the position in a patriarchal society like Ethiopia.

The interview result indicates that the female students are eager to progress in their academic achievement since they are accountable for their own learning and take different measures that may improve and advance their learning.

“Despite the challenges of socio-cultural aspects, I think female students are keen enough to participate in a classroom discussion and advance their academic achievements. This is because they are prone to progress themselves with education”. (Principal Interviewee<sub>E</sub>).

Teacher FGD<sub>I</sub> “We sense that females aspire to progress in their academic career, but it may not be varied from the male counterpart’s objective level. They are making different decisions in order to overcome challenges faced during the course of their schooling”.

Female students FGD<sub>K</sub> “Dedication and endurance are our first motto to overcome the challenges we faced in progressing our academic achievements. What's more, despite our socio-cultural problems the ball keeps rolling that we have taken steps such as doing our assignments, discussing with fellow classmates and asking things which are not clear from our respective teachers.”

As stated in the above qualitative responses, female students are conquering the barrier they faced in diverse ways by including developing their classroom active participation by doing their assignment in consulting their counterparts and their respective teachers.

### Conclusion

Female students rated their capability in an area of participation, females as moderate, which is not highly contributing to the success of female students’ classroom participation. Likewise, the insufficiency of female students’ self-confidence also does not contribute much to their success. Moreover, the females are not getting adequate benefits from socio-cultural empowerment in general by the school community and in particular from their respective teachers and parents or guardians as expected. Surprisingly, there are gender offices that exist in higher education which helps to form a network.

Hence, female students have a moderately adequate network for sharing experiences. They are also getting moderate support from the staff members and colleagues. But this is not the case for high school students. Female students are facing several challenges at the school and home in coping up with social and cultural aspects and the main are challenges from family accountability and society's social constructs or attitudes.

Nonetheless, female students believed that they are better than their male counterparts in many aspects if they got continuous encouragement, recognition, and forum to participate. In short, it can be deduced that the female students in the secondary schools have an

interest in their academic undertaking if they got support from the school community and parents or guardians.

### Recommendations

1. Regarding female students’ empowerment, female students are not sufficiently getting support from the school as well as from their parents and or guardians that helps them participate in a classroom discussion. Hence, rules and regulations shall be set to support their empowerment in all respects, so that the school community should be abiding as per the rules and regulations.
2. Affirmative actions were also being considered seriously in supporting female students’ participation at school or at home. To actualize these, during school parents’ days or any occasions the school management should arrange and give an awareness lesson to all the concerned stakeholders about the importance of female students’ participation in their future daily life endeavors.
3. Schools must consider a tutorial program with incentives for teachers and strengthen the relationship between teachers and parents. And consider parents' efforts in promoting their children's progress as an important mentor of students learning at home.

### References

- Auster, ER.& Wylie, KK (2006). Creating active learning in the classroom: A systematic approach. *Journal of Management Education*, 30 (2):333-353
- Eyben, R., Kabeer, N., & Cornwall, A. (2008). Conceptualizing Empowerment and the Implications for Pro-Poor Growth: A Paper for the DAC Poverty Network, Institute of Finn, JD., Pannozzo, GM.& Achilles, CM 2003. The Why of class size, Student behavior in small classes. *Review of Educational Research*, 73 (3):321-368
- Hur, M. H. (2006). Empowerment in Terms of Theoretical Perspectives: Exploring a Typology of the Process and Components across Disciplines. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34(5), 523–540.
- Jancie, N. & Janice (2002) twenty practical parental involvement tips: Issues in education. *Journal of Early Education and Family*, 10 (2): 13-17
- Kamp, V.M. (1996). *Antecedent factors of women in Adult education*, London: Pergamum Press
- Khan, S. U., & Awan, R. (2011). Contextual assessment of women empowerment & its determinants: Evidence from Pakistan (30820). Germany: University Library of Munich.
- Kessey, C. (2005). Empowering Muslim Women through Microcredit Scheme: The Case of the SuyaniGonja Muslim Women's Group WOPAG, Working Papers, Ghana: Historical and Contemporary Studies.
- Leech, NL. & Onwuegbuzie, AJ. (2009). A typology of mixed methods research designs. Quality

&Quantity: *International Journal of Methodology*, 43:265-275.

Mohajeri B. & Mousavi F. Challenges to Women's Participation in Senior Administrative Positions in Iranian Higher Education. *International Education Studies*; 10(8); 2017

Page, Nanette, Czuba, Cheryl E., 1999. Empowerment: what is it? *J. Ext.* 37 (5). Morita, Sachiko

Pena, DC. (200). Parent involvement: Influencing factors and implication. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94 (1):42-61.

Stromquist, N. P. (2015). Women's Empowerment and Education: Linking Knowledge to Transformative Action. *European Journal of Education*, 50(3), 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12137>

Tatar, S. (2005). Why keep silent? The Classroom Participation Experiences of Non -native English -speaking Students. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 5, 284-293

United Nations. (2010). Women'S Empowerment Principles Equality Means Business, <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/65>

World Bank (2003a). Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals, York: Basic Books.

Received on 03-03-2022

Revised on 01-04-2022

Accepted on 13-04-2022