

Factors Affecting Gender Equality in Private Higher Education of Ethiopia : The Case of North Gondar

Kassahun Tegegne
Gondar University P. O. Box Gondar
E-mail kassteg@yahoo.com

Abstract

In most developing countries like Ethiopia girls and women are worse off than boys and men with regard to access to and participation in schooling. The various factors, which affect gender equality in education, can be grouped into demand and supply sides. On the demand side, socio-economic and cultural factors will affect the behavior and the choices of parents and students to join a certain department. On the supply side, political and institutional factors linked to the schools will affect gender equality in education.

To examine these problems, the study will draw the following objectives. (1) To assess how socio-economic and political factors affect gender equality in private higher institutions of North Gondar, (2) To examine the cultural and institutional factors that affect female students' participation in private higher institutions of North Gondar. To achieve the above stated objectives, the study will use cross-sectional survey on the basis of simple random sampling technique. The study will also use both secondary and primary data. Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected using open-ended and close-ended questionnaires, In-depth interview and focus group discussion. The sample population will consist of 406 female students of private higher institutions. To identify the major factors that affect gender equality in private higher education of female students, therefore, the study will dig out the various socio-economic, political and cultural factors. On the bases of the findings, policy recommendations will be forwarded in order to narrow the gap in gender disparities in higher education.

Introduction

Gender inequalities in educational provision reflect deep-rooted traditions and values within the ideological, political, economic and socio-cultural fabric of societies (Kasente, 1995). According to Amuge (1987) in rural societies girls are made to perform household and agricultural chores. This is one of the many factors that limit girl's education. Cleaning the house, preparing the food, looking after their siblings, the elderly and the sick, grazing the cattle and collecting firewood are some of the key tasks they have to perform.

Parents are, therefore, reluctant to spare them for schooling. Physical safety of the girls especially when they have to travel a long distance to school and fear of sexual harassment are other reasons that impede girl's education (Gregory, 1995)

In most developing countries, women and girls are disadvantaged, compared to men and boys as regards access to education and services as well as influence and control over decision making processes and social /political institutions that determine quality of life (Eshiwani, 1993). Girls tend to start school late or not at all for they are more engaged in household chores and income generating activities than boys or because parents are more concerned for their safety and security away from home: or because households prefer to send boys to school rather than girls. Girls are also more likely to drop out of schools than boys because the physical and physiological problems they face (Kasente, 1995)

According to EFA Global monitoring report (2000), “ Full gender equality in education would imply that girls and boys are offered the same chances to go to school and that they enjoy teaching methods and curricula free of stereotype, and academic orientation and counseling unaffected by gender bias. Most fundamentally, it implies equality of outcomes in terms of length of schooling, learning achievement and academic qualifications, and more broadly, equal job opportunities and earnings for similar qualifications and experiences” .

Focusing on girls' educational achievements and career aspirations allows society to ensure women economic security, a better quality of life and more career choices. Thus, targeting more equitable educational techniques will not only improve the lives of individual women, but will also advance the community as a whole (Fennema, 1990).

There is clear evidence that the economic and social rates of return to schooling are quite high, and on the whole, higher for women than for men yet in most developing countries, women are relatively less educated than men. Girls do not receive the same quality and level of education, as do boys (Kaino, 1996)

The "gender gap" is highest in Africa, the inequality in enrollment is worse at secondary and tertiary level than at the primary levels (Kasente, 1995). In many African countries, women's enrolment rates in higher education remain relatively low in comparison with those for primary education. According to Whyte (2000) overall, statistics on women's education in Africa indicate that although girls' enrolment at secondary school level is increasing favorable in many developing counties, the picture for women's enrolment of tertiary institutions is not encouraging. This is because, access to tertiary education, and women's access in particular, is determined by a cost of factors that are mutually reinforcing, these include favorable admissions policies, physical access to institutions, availability of financial resources, prior access to secondary school and quality of institutional culture and the like (Gregory, 1995).

Ethiopian private higher education is indeed expanding rapidly. A few years ago there were less than six accredited or pre-accredited private colleges and university colleges today. The number is more than seventy for diploma and 34 for degree programme. The private higher education institutions now enroll more than 21% of all tertiary students. Despite these achievements, the participation of female students relatively low the issue of gender inequalities in education is acute in Ethiopia because of low level of female participation in higher education as well as other deep-rooted forms of gender bias and discrimination in society. Ethiopian women and girls are disadvantaged, compared to men and boys as regards access to higher education as well as influence and control over decision-making processes.

2. Objectives of the study

The major objective of this study is to assess factors that affect gender equality in education in private higher education institution of North Gondar. It also tries to

1. identify the institutional factors that affect girls' and men's education in private higher Institution of North Gondar,
2. determine the economic factors that affect girls' education in private higher Institution of North Gondar, and
3. identify the various factor that affect women's and men's education in private higher Institution of North Gondar.

3. Methodology

Both secondary and primary data were also used in the study. The component of secondary data includes a review of relevant literature and recorded information about students, for example number of students by sex and dropout numbers in each college were collected. Quantitative and qualitative data were also used to substantiate the study. To elicit quantitative data structured and semi structured questionnaires were prepared. To complement the quantitative data, qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews.

The study employed a cross-sectional survey on the basis of simple random sampling technique. The study was conducted in Gondar town, North Gondar Administrative Zone. In Gonder there are three accredited and pre-accredited private colleges. Out of the three colleges, two of them were taken as sample for the study. These are Blue Nile College and Gothonial Teacher Education and Medical College. The study is based on data collected from teacher education departments of the two colleges on the basis of simple random sampling technique. The total numbers of trainees for first cycle primary school teachers from both colleges were 1090 female trainees and 776 male trainees. Out of the total study population, 140 female trainees and 60 male trainees were taken randomly proportional to the size of each college population

The data was analyzed using univariate technique that is percentage to describe the various factors that affect gender equality in education

4. Review of Related Literature

Studies on gender disparities have been done in both developed and developing countries.

In some countries women in institution of higher learning tend to concentrate in certain fields of study such as education, humanities, home economics and arts (Abbott et al, 1997)

Gender disparities in education in developing countries can be characterized by some influences form cultural and traditional practices. In Sub-Sahara Africa, education has been influenced for example by indigenous cultures and religion. Although many developing countries made efforts in education, female and males in these countries were not equally educated. The inequality in education is reflected in lower enrolment rates, higher dropouts and lower performance among girls in schools (Nakanyika and Balihuta, 2002)

Some studies have indicated that the nature of schooling from the earliest years could shape the capacities and strengths of the growing female. This implies that if we have to look at the study of females at higher education e.g. at university levels, we have to look into schooling before entering university (Miller and Volke, 1998).

According to Gregory (1995) though many studies did not investigate factors, which affected girl's performance in class, factors such as family influence, traditional and school characteristics had a role to play in influencing girl's performance. For example, girls had less time to study as they were burdened with tasks at home (than boys) and this was likely to lower their achievement.

A combination of cultural, social and economic factors underlies girls' educational inequalities and gender disparities in educational access and outcomes between rural and urban areas often interact with gender.

This means that while girls in urban areas are often more likely to be in school than rural boys, rural girls are especially disadvantaged (Fennema, 1990).

In most agrarian societies, women tend to be assigned the most time and energy-consuming tasks, such as caring for children, food preparation, and collecting water and fuel (Amuge 1987). A research in Eastern Africa shows that by the age of ten, girls are spending up to ten hours per day on production activities raising the opportunity costs of girls' education for poor households. These opportunity costs are especially high where girls must travel a long distance to school or where the daily and yearly program of the school does not fit with peak periods of economic activities (Kasente, 1995).

According to Kaino(1996), in rural area of Africa, sometimes, the withdrawal of girls for marriage is connected to parental fears that their daughter may become pregnant at, or on the way to school. This reflects a problem of classroom security, and discrimination encountered by girls inside the school. Teachers' negative attitudes towards girls' abilities and roles, often reinforced by curriculum materials, is one dimension of the problem (Eshiwani, 1993).

According to UNESCO (1997) the various factors, which affect gender equality in education, can be grouped into four main categories, these are socio- economic, cultural, political/institutional and school related factors are the main ones.

Socio-economic factors

- Poverty
- Direct cost (tuition fee, transportation)
- High opportunity costs / lower rate return
- Girls needed for household/ agricultural tasks
- Distance of residence
- Limited employment opportunities for graduates

Cultural Factors

- Parents' low level of education
- Lower priority for girls' education
- Girls' education perceived as incompatible with traditional belief or religions principles
- Early marriages and pregnancies
- Role of the girls/women as wife and mother
- Skeptical attitude towards the benefits and outcomes from educated girls

Political

- Insufficient public support for the poor
- Inconsistent educational policies
- Poor quality of education programs
- Limited employment prospects
- Inadequate elements for progress assessment and policy formulation

Factors Linked to the Institution

- Limited school/classroom space
- High school fees
- Low proportion of female teachers
- Teachers untrained / non sensitized to gender issues
- Stereotypes as school (curriculum, Text books)
- School curricula in conflict with traditional culture
- Orientation of girls/ women to non-scientific fields
- Sexual harassment and insecurity
- Distance from school
- Lack of school canteens
- Poor quality of hygiene facilities
- Lack of accommodations for or exclusion or pregnant.

5. Data Presentations and Discussions

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Sex	Number	Percent
Male	60	30
Female	140	70
Total	200	100

The data from table 1 indicates that 70 percent of the respondents are females while the remaining 30 percent are males. This shows that the majority of students in sample colleges are females. This is due to the fact that, the education policy encourages females' participation in the region especially at teachers' training institution by providing 60 percent of the enrolment cotta for female students. In addition to this, students who have lower result and who are unable to join the university and public colleges are joining to the private colleges. Because of these two reasons the numbers of female students is greater than that of male students.

Table 2: Place of Origin of Respondents

Place of origin	Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Rural	Female	89	71
	Male	36	29
	Total	125	100
Urban (Gondar Town)	Female	51	68
	Male	24	32
	Total	75	100

If you come from rural area what is the distance of the place to your college

Average distance in Kms	Female		Male	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Below 50 KMs	20	17	8	22
50 – 60 KM s	22	19	10	28
61 – 70 KMs	31	26	16	44
71 and above KMs	10	8	2	6
Total	83	100	36	100

Table 2 shows that 71 percent of female respondents and 29 percent of male respondents came from rural areas, while 68 percent of female respondent and 32 percent of male respondents are from Gondar town. This shows that majority of students came from rural areas.

On the same table, respondents requested to estimate the distance between their residence and college, majority of respondents (44 percent of male and 26 percent of female respondents) replied about 61-70 kms. However, 28 percent of male and 19 percent of female respondents stated that it is estimated to be 50-60kms.

Respondents further asked to state the effect of distance their college education. Majority of female respondents in the open-ended question explained that they face/encounter different problems: as a result of the distance for example, transportation problem, sexual harassment, rape and sometimes get threatened by young boys in between when they travel to college or to their home.

Table 3: These have been forcing female students to go to their college and come back home with a company of their relatives.

_Item	Female		Male	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	86	61	22	37
No	54	39	38	63
Total	140	100	60	100

If your answer is “yes” for question item one, what is its effect?

Items	Female		Male	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
It is difficult to get transportation Service	—	—	2	3
Since it is located in the center of the town so it is noisy	20	14	20	33
It is difficult to use the library at night	49	35	1	2
The area around, every thing is costly so that it is difficult to afford basic necessities	71	51	37	62
Total	140	100	60	100

One can understand from table 3, majority of respondents (51 percent of females and 62 percent of males) stated that because of the location of the college i.e. in the center of the town, most students cannot afford to pay for basic services, like water supply, electricity, and dormitory. The problem is more serious for females, because the price of renting a room is costly for females than for male students. House renters assume that girls consume more water and electricity power and they also assume that females share kitchen. As a result, even some landlords are not willing to rent their rooms to girls. In addition to this, 35 percent of female students, reported that during night time reading in the library and come back to their house is a risk.

Table 4. Number of Dropout

Year	Female		Male	
2006	12		5	
Causes of drop out				
Reason for Drop out	Female		Male	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of money for tuition free	5	42	2	40
Pregnancy/marriage	4	33	-	-
Failed exam	-	-	-	-
Illness/Deaty	1	8	2	40
Other	2	16	1	20
total	12	100	5	100

Table 4 shows that 12 female students and 5 male students dropped out because of various reasons. Among the major reasons that forced female students to dropout are pregnancy and lack of money for tuition fees. Many girls perceive marriage as an escape route from family poverty. Girls sometimes withdraw themselves from school, especially if their needs for supplies like shoes and dresses are not met by their parents. In other cases, parents encourage girls to drop out or fail to pay their tuition and arrange marriages for them or encourage them to get married. Illness and death are the third major reasons that forced both female and male to drop out from their education.

Table 5. Education Related Factors that Affect Students Academic Performance

Factors	Female		Male	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of continuous assignment	-	-	-	-
Lack of guidance and counseling	47	34	14	23
Lack of trained teaches	20	14	12	20
Lack of tutorial program	40	28	3	6
Lack of Instructions technology	3	2	8	13
Lack of text books and reference materials	30	22	23	38
Total	140	100	60	100

Source: survey data

As one can see from the table, majority of respondents (47percent of females) and 23 percent of male respondents explain that lack of guidance and counseling services in their college affects their academic performance. 28 percent of female students reported that lack of tutorial programs in their college is another problem that affect their academic performance. On the other hand, 38 percent of male respondents reported that lack of textbooks and reference materials are the major problem that affects their educational performance. In addition to this, lack of trained and qualified teachers reported as a problem by 20 percent of respondents. The researcher recommends that from this especially for female and academically low achiever student’s tutorial programs are important in order to improve their academic achievement.

Table 6: Different Physical Facilities of the college.

Items	Female		Male	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of classroom	5	4	4	7
Lack of class seats	5	4	5	8
Lack of library	20	14	25	42
Lack of student lounge	40	28	20	33
Lack of hygiene facilities/toilet	50	36	4	7
Water supply problem	20	14	2	3
Total	140	100	60	100

Source: survey data

The above table shows that the major problems that students face in their college are lack of separate male and female hygiene/toilet facilities which is indicated by 50 percent of female students, followed by lack of student lounge which is indicated by 40 percent of female students while 42 percent of male students expressed lack of library services followed by lack of student lounge as a serious problems which affect their academic performance.

Education factors such as lack of resources, low teacher quality and moral and lack of basic educational services in the institution and gender bias in teaching materials affect the participation of female students

Table 6: Gender Related Factors that Affect Gils’ Education

Items	Female respondents	
	Number	Percent
Sexual harassment	60	43
Gender discrimination	50	36
Verbal abuse	30	21
Total	140	100

Source: survey data

As the data from table shows that majority of female students (43 percent) reported that threatening for sexual harassment is one of the major problems that creates insecurity in their day-to-day life to participate actively in their education. On the other hand, 36 percent of female respondents explained that gender bias in the community and in the academic institutions is another problem that affects their academic achievement. Gender discrimination is a lifelong problem that affects girls’ self-esteem and capabilities. Gender discrimination prevents girls’ aspirations and restricts their opportunities. It denies them the experience that will build competence and self- direction, and equal competition with men. Sexual harassment limits opportunities for women to participate in their education actively. Sexual abuse took in the form of aggressive sexual behavior, intimidation and physical assault by older boys; sexual advances by male teachers. Girls were also subject to sexual advances in proximity of the institution, in particular from the so-called sugar daddies (older men who seek to lure girls into sexual relationship with money or gift).

Table 7: Students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)

Item	Female respondent		Male respondent	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
3.6 and above	6	4	8	13
3.2-3.59	45	30	26	43
3.0-3.19	56	40	21	35
2.7-2.99	26	19	4	7
2.5-2.79	7	5	1	2
Below 2.5	---	-	-	-
Total	140	100	60	100

Source: survey data

Table 7 shows that majority (40 percent) of female students' cumulative grade point average lies between 3.0-3.19 while the majority (43 percent of male students' cumulative grade point average lies between 3.2 –3.59. Female students whose cumulative grade point average are 3.6 and above accounts only 4 percent while that of male students constitute 13 percent. This shows that male students cumulative grade point average relatively better than that of female students' score

Summary and Recommendations

In general, the feedback from the survey showed that female participation rate in the private institutions is higher than that of males. This is an encouraging aspect of the education policy, as it provides more access for female students to join higher institutions. Another encouraging aspect is that the expansion of private institutions in the region providing access for those who unable to join to the public college and universities. Despite these encouraging factors, there are still persistent challenges that affect equal access of women's education to men. The challenges are:

- Sexual abusive behavior of males towards girl students were widespread phenomena in many institutions and the area around the institution. Among the perpetrators are older male students, male teachers and sugar daddies. These groups often use money and gift to attract the girls. Sexual harassment limits opportunities for women to participate actively in their education.

- Girls were also exposed to abuse behaviors by male strangers on their way to and from colleges in the form of threatening or verbal assault.
- Educational services like guidance and counseling and tutorial programs have been ineffective due to lack of trained guidance and counselor on the field. As a result, girls do not get advices about their personal and educational problems in order to mitigate the day to day challenges they face.
- The geographical location of the colleges also adversely affects girls than boys both in terms of security and access to basic needs like housing, water, and electric city.

To develop a gender –sensitive environment for teaching and learning in private institutions in collaboration with the government and the community, it is important to address the following points:

- Valuing boys and girls equally in all aspects of educational experience, but recognizing that many girls will at least initially require more support and resource.
- Eliminating gender bias the behaviors and attitudes of teachers and male students in their relationship with girls.
- Addressing existing barriers to girls full participation in private higher institutions' environment, from sexual harassment, sexual abuse and violence by both students and teachers.
- Ensuring that the curriculum materials like text books and reference materials should be accessible to female students, and its contents, languages and methodologies should meet the educational needs and entitlements of girls and recognize women's contributions to the society.
- Moreover, gender inequality in education is contribution to and a reflection of gender inequality in the larger society. Interventions promoting gender equality outside the institution are obviously indispensable. Since gender relationship is also a relationship about power, such interventions must support of decision – making and the community in all walks of social life.

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