

INNOVATIONS

Assessing Grade 9 Female students' Participation in Mixed and Single Sex Groups in ELT Classes with Reference to Beriso Dukale Secondary School

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Abstract

This study was principally aimed to assess grade nine female students' participation in mixed and single sex groups in ELT classes. The study utilized descriptive research design to elucidate credible data from the subjects. Mixed methods were employed to conduct the study. In the selection of sample population, availability and random sampling techniques were used. Seventy eight students with eight teachers were involved in the study. The instruments of data collection were questionnaire, interview and observation. Questionnaire was used to verify whether English teachers really treat female students in single and mixed sex groups to participate confidently in group discussion. Classroom observation was used to obtain direct information about the participation of female students and the actual practice of teachers in single and mixed sex group. Interview was used to supplement the questionnaire and observation data. Questionnaire data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data from observation and interview were analyzed qualitatively. Findings of the questionnaire data indicated the great majority of the respondents claimed that the teachers did not treat and encourage female students in single and mixed sex groups equally to participate in group discussions. Besides, here there is no enough follow up to enhance the participation of female students in mixed sex as compared to single sex groups. Interview finding indicate that there are some factors that affect female students' participation such as dominance of male students, self-confidence and background (cultural and social views). The findings call for all ELT teachers and stake holders participation to solve this problem.

Key Words: 1. Assessing 2. Female Students 3. Participation 4. Mixed 5. Single 6. Sex 7. Groups

Introduction

Gender inequality and female discrimination seem to begin at home in the family and extend its dimension towards school institutions and put educational objective and the acquiring of knowledge in to great obstacle (USAID, 1990). Women are conventionally believed to be subordinate and supportive in mixed sex groups; while male are considered to be relatively dominant and competitive. In the school context, gender identity is hugely noticeable. There has been traditional assumption that competitive tendencies are much rewarded in the school context and that female and male students' classroom participation is not equal, especially male students are more likely to dominate (Coates, 2004:196).

A number of studies indicate that Ethiopian females lag behind male counterparts academically for several genders related reasons (Tsige, 1994). One of major area this female academic under achievement becomes apparent is the classroom. While they are not intellectually inferior female students do not, they seem to assert themselves through positive in initiating behaviors of the assigned class discussion (Maccaboy, 1993). Sunderland(1994) states that teachers like assertive boys most and assertive girls least. Some teachers also hold negative attitudes about the academic potential of female students and minor the society's gender biases into the classroom participation (World Bank, 1996).

According to Bailey (1993), girls have higher confidence in their single sex groups than in mixed sex groups. They also consider confidence as a major factor affecting girls' level of participation in ELT classes. Girls' confidence which may be conveyed through acts of assertiveness is not usually perceived positively as it is contrary to cultural expectation which not receiving freedom to them. Some teachers in some single sex and mixed groups give less attention to group participation. Moreover, depending on ensuring and providing equal opportunity for female students in group participation without any discrimination by their sex and potential were not realized in both groups, therefore, this study has been designed to assess female students participation in mixed and single sex groups at Beriso Dukale Secondary School.

Statement of the problem

School is used as source of future generation for a given country. The issue of gender particularly in the education sector has become a major concern. Participation in group discussion is one of the main areas that need due attention of equal participation of both male and female students. The participation of female student is under several problems like lack of full confidence, girls are interacting less and being silenced by boys, leading to girls' lesser, verbal involvement in group discussion activities in mixed sex group that resulted unequal participation between single sex groups.

Moreover, in group discussion, lesson does not seem to consider female students' participation particularly in Beriso Dukale Secondary School. In high school, most teachers heard and observed while they order their students simply to open the book and discuss in groups for 10-20 minutes. The teachers did not realize the use of participation and were not encouraging female students in mixed sex to discuss in groups equally with that of single sex groups.

In line with this, few related international and local studies were conducted so far. Barton (2002) conducted research on an investigation of single sex in EFL classroom and its learning performance. Finding of the study shows that only top female students feel free to learn and participate actively in group.

In Ethiopian context, Markos (2005) conducted a study with the objective to assess factors affecting female students' participation in mixed sex groups in EFL classroom and the result of the study indicates that all female students have the same problem in participation. And a research conducted by Fitsum (2008) to assess female students' participation in mixed sex group in EFL classroom and finding of the study indicates that teachers only focus on the general participation of students. However, all of the above studies were not conducted on the assessment of female students' participation in mixed and single sex group and some of the factors have not been assessed yet. Thus,

the researcher of this study tries to assess the participation of female students' in mixed and single sex groups in ELT classes.

Objectives of the study

This study was aimed to assess grade 9 female students' participation in mixed and single sex groups in ELT classes. Under this broad objective, the study was designed to:

- Identify the level of participation female students exhibits in single and mixed sex groups
- Assess ways in which female students' participation can be treated in single and mixed sex groups
- Distinguish factors affecting female students' participation in single and mixed sex groups

Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the study had the following research questions.

- What level of participation do female students exhibit in single and mixed sex groups?
- How can female students participation be treated in single and mixed sex groups?
- What factors affect female students participation in single and mixed sex groups?

Research Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of the study was to assess female students participation in single and mixed sex groups in ELT classes. Thus, a descriptive survey research design was used. This is because descriptive survey is an appropriate method to find out what was happening currently in classroom and to gather necessary information that encountered in participation of group discussion activities (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989).

Subject of the study

Subject of the study was grade nine female students and ELT teachers at Beriso Dukale Secondary school 78 students from total number of 750 students and 8 ELT teachers who were teaching in the school. The researcher selected 78 students randomly since collecting data from all students were tiring and time consuming.

Sample size and sampling techniques

In order to achieve the intended objectives, grade 9 female students and ELT teachers at Beriso Dukale secondary school were focused on. As the real classroom situation in this school, it was focusing on the preference of students sitting arrangements. Some female students liked to sit together in classroom and they engaged in the same group (in single sex group). on the other hand, a few of them enjoyed to sit with male students and make their groups with them (mixed sex group). Depending on this situation, the researcher tried to find the gap between those groups. By considering this, the researcher selected a desired sample of 39 female students and 39 male students through simple random sampling technique. In this sampling technique, the lottery method was applied and 8 ELT teachers (7 male and 1 female) were selected purposively. Since the number of teachers were small in number, the study included all ELT teachers and together 86 people were incorporated in the study.

Data Gathering Instruments

In this study, the researcher used three data gathering instruments: questionnaire, classroom observation and interview.

Data Gathering Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed to 78 students with the presence of the researcher at the normal class time. Students who needed explanation about the questions or the way they should make their responses were given clarifications. All the students' questionnaire was returned. As far as interview was concerned, interview for three ELT teachers was carried out after class by assigning 10-20 minutes for every participant and during every interview the researcher took notes. Finally, the researcher used observation checklist and observed 5 lessons by using the pre-designed observation checklist.

Data Analysis Procedure

In data analysis procedure, the questionnaire data was analyzed before the analysis of observation data. Because it was found that this step could create convenient condition to compare the result of questionnaire data with the result of actual lesson observation data. After observation, data was analyzed and compared with questionnaire data, interviews were held to clarify points which were observed. Finally, all data were analyzed and interpreted to reach conclusions and recommendations.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Students' Response whether the Teachers Treat Female with Male Equally

Item	Does your teacher treat female students equally with boys in mixed sex groups?	Number of respondents	Percent
Variable	Yes	26	33.3%
	No	52	66.6%
Total		78	100%

The result in table 1 above shows majority of the respondents, 52(66.6%) replied that their teacher did not treat female students equally with boys in mixed sex groups. Whereas, 26(33.3%) of them responded that their teacher treated equally with boys in the mixed sex groups. The observation data supported this response. All the observed teachers did not treat female students equally with boys in the mixed sex groups. Most of the respondents claimed that lack of equal treatment between male and female students caused effective participatory not take place in the groups. Consequently, lack of background experience to treat female students in mixed sex group equally with boys was on of the root cause for their being inactive and inefficient participants in their groups. In addition to this, the reason why teachers did not treat female students equally with boy is that some teachers think female students were intellectually inferior to male students. From this result, one can conclude that the great majority of the students lack equal treatment from their teacher with boys in mixed sex groups.

Table 2: Students' Response whether Female Students Participate more in Mixed Sex groups

Item	Who participate more in mixed sex group?	Number of respondents	percent
Variable	Boys	39	50%
	Girls	25	32.05%
	Both	14	17.94%
Total		78	100%

Table 2 above reveals that half of the respondents, 39(50%) replied that boys participate more in mixed sex groups. On the other hand, 25(32.05%) of the respondents responded that girls participate more in the mixed group. Whereas, 14(17.94%) of the respondents replied that both boys and girls participate equally in mixed sex groups. Interview data was confirmed this point. Moreover, the teachers responded that female students are dominated by male students in mixed sex groups. Aries (1989) states that majority of female students in mixed sex groups choose males as their representatives showing their confidence in males. This implies that in mixed sex group female students' participation is not as of male students. It is possible to conclude from this data that female students direct their turns mostly to males and males produce and receive more turns than female students.

Table 3: Students' Response whether Female Students Participate more in Single sex groups

Item	Do you think that female students participate more in single sex groups?	Number of respondent	Percent
Variables	Yes	59	75.64%
	No	19	24.255
Total		78	100%

As shown in table 3 above, almost two third, 59(75.64%) of the respondents replied that female students participate more in single sex groups. Whereas, 19(24.35%) of them responded that they participate more in single sex groups. In interview data, one interview replied that: *“When female students are set in single sex groups, they are free and less frightened to participate on the lesson although they make mistake, they are more confident. Because, they are not dominated by male students”*

With regard to this, observation data confirmed that female students in single sex groups participated more and encouraged each other without fear. They were provided equal chance to participate freely by taking turns without any interference in their groups. Olli and Meldrum (2009) argues that single sex groups commonly allow girls to better participate and perform without being exposed to boys domination and frequent indifferent of girls capacity and talent issue.

Table 4: Students' Response with regard to how often the Teacher direct them to participate in single and mixed sex groups

Item	How often does your teacher direct you to participate actively?	Single sex groups		Mixed sex groups	
		frequency	percent	frequency	percent
Variable	Always	27	34.6%	17	21.79%
	Often	40	51.22%	26	33.33%
	Sometimes	11	14.10%	35	44.78%
	Never	-	-	-	-
Total		78	100%	78	100%

From the table above, more than half 40(51.22%) of the respondents replied that their teacher directs them to participate actively in single sex groups often. Whereas, 27(34.6%) of them responded that their teacher directs them to participate actively in single sex group always. 11(14.10%) of the respondents replied that their teacher directs them to participate actively in single sex groups sometimes and none of them replied never at all. While 35(44.78%) of the respondents replied that their teacher directs them to participate actively in mixed sex groups sometimes; and 26(33.33%) of them responded that their teacher directs them to participate actively in mixed sex groups often. Whereas, 17(21.79%) of the respondents replied that their teacher directs them to participate actively in mixed sex groups always. And none of the respondents gave their response on never at all.

From the result obtained, one can conclude that the teacher directs female students to participate actively in single sex groups more than mixed sex groups. The researcher recognized during class observation that the teacher directed female students to participate actively more in single sex groups than mixed sex groups. This was due to the dominance of male students in groups, lack of self-confidence, feeling fear and shy to participate freely in groups as well as no better treatment and direction from their teachers to participate in the groups. In contrast to this, female students in single sex groups participated freely and confidently due to the absence of opposite sex that dominate them. Coates (2004) states boys are allowed to call out the answer, while girls are not treated in the same way. Even on condition that calling out is not encouraged and teacher select male students who raised hand first, the boys still dominate by getting the look from the teacher when the teacher directs a question, or put up hands earlier than girls to ensure their greater participation.

Table 5: Students' response on how they rate their teachers' encouragement of female students

Item	How do you rate your teacher's encouragement of female students to participate in classroom activity?	Single sex group		Mixed sex group	
		f	%	f	%
Variables	Very high	5	6.41%	6	7.79%

	High	20	25.64%	15	21.79%
	Moderate	42	53.84%	18	23.07%
	Low	11	14.10%	40	51.28%
Total		78	100%	78	100%

As indicated in table 5 above, 42(53.84%) of the respondents replied that the rate of teacher's encouragement of female students in single sex groups is moderate, and 20(25.64%) of them responded high. On the other hand, 11(14.10%) of the respondents replied low in rating their teachers encouragement of female students in single sex groups. 5(6.41%) of the respondents rate that their teacher's encouragement of female students in single sex groups is very high. While 40(51.28%) of the respondents replied that the rate of teacher's encouragement of female students in mixed sex groups is low and 18(23.07%) of them replied moderate. Whereas, 15(21.79%) of the respondents reacted as high in mixed sex groups and 6(7.69%) of them replied that the rate of teacher's encouragement of female students in mixed sex groups is very high.

This result shows that the rate of teacher's encouragement of female students in single sex groups is better than in mixed sex groups. This implies there is better encouragement and follow up of female students to participate in mixed sex groups.

Table 6: Students' response on how often their teacher female students to participate confidently in mixed sex groups

Item	How often does your teacher engage female students to participate confidently in mixed sex groups?	Frequency	Percent
Variables	Always	-	-
	Sometimes	25	32.05%
	Rarely	46	58.97%
	Not at all	7	8.97%
Total		78	100%

As shown in table 6 above, the highest number of respondents 46(58.97%) of the replied that their teacher engage female students to participate confidently in mixed sex groups rarely. whereas, 7(8.97%) of them responded that their teacher does not engage female students to participate confidently in mixed sex groups. On the other hand, a slightly less than a third, 25(32.05%) of the respondents replied that their teacher engage female students to participate confidently in mixed sex groups sometimes. In fact, open ended questions data shows the students blamed that they have simply been ordered to open their book and participate with their groups without support, guidance and encouragement from their teacher.

From this data, one can conclude that teachers do not engage female students to participate confidently in mixed sex groups. Observation data was also confirmed the issue. This may lead female students' lack of interest in participation in mixed sex groups.

Factors Affecting Female Students Participation in Single and Mixed Sex Groups

Household Chores

The burden of household chores was one main factor that affects female students in most of the houses in the study area. Having returned from school, they are expected to help their mothers or undertake activities like fetching water and firewood, cooking, taking care of younger children, washing clothes, cleaning the house etc. This workload makes them tired, and unable to concentrate to complete school assignments. Moreover, they don't get time for it, even if they wish to do so. Going to school without doing homework or assignments makes them inferior in the eyes of teachers, demoralized, and ultimately become poor in performance (Geiger, 2002). The general belief in the country, that a girl is supposed to do all household activities when she gets married and thus the training for that in childhood is more important than school learning, might be the reason for this compulsion, even if her labor is not essential in some houses.

The fact that domestic work takes most of the time available for female students should be analyzed from cultural perspectives. In the study area domestic work is believed to be the role of the female students brought up to accept these roles. In order to cross check the above information, views from female students less participation were also analyzed with work load defined to include cleaning rooms, cooking meals, fetching water, washing cloths and care of siblings etc. Overall results for the study area suggest that work load is the one of the most important activities that dominates their time throughout the whole week.

Self Esteem of Female Students

Self-esteem of female students is an internal motivation of the students to attain their ambition to achieve the goal through performing better in education (Welch, 1993). Female students' own perception about their education and need for good academic performance was another influencing factor. If they do not realize the importance of education and career prospects or better life chances, and limit the aspiration to be wives and mothers, naturally, it will adversely affect the desire to perform well in schools. This type of lower perception about the importance of education is more observed in female students, since they have less opportunity to realize career prospects and do not have female role models for motivation to learn and perform well.

Parents Related Factors

Parents may not always have the understanding and background to support their children's education throughout their schooling. Parents' level of education and awareness about the importance of education has a complex impact on female education (Sunderland, 1994). Moreover, the status of parents' income and the type of help provided at home are also important to send and support their daughter education. Parental attitude towards girls' education is a significantly influencing factor for academic performance of the female students. If parents do not recognize the need for education of their daughters, they would not encourage the girls to attend schools and learn well.

School Related Factor

Besides the provision of guidance and counseling, tutorial classes and different training, 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 participate actively in lesson they are provide. Provision of guidance and counseling service for

students in the school is very crucial for their success in their academic and non-academic endeavors as school female students face a number of problems such as economic, social, academic and personal. School plays 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).

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. In open ended questions, most of the respondents claimed that lack of co-curricular training and females' participation in different clubs has an effect on their academic performance. In this regard, interview result also asserted that if female students participate in different training, they can develop their self-confidence and well aware how to manage themselves in the activities they are engaged in.

School environments are one of the factors which highly determined the success of the female education program. It can be influenced the effectiveness of teaching and learning process. The learning environment, distance to school, model female teachers and sexual harassment are school related factors which affect female students academic performance to some extent.

Furthermore, direct and indirect school costs include the expenditure on stationery, school uniform, school fee, transportation and cost of accommodation which consists of house rent, food and other utilities due to long distance traveling and staying in urban center students. The parents of female students have to meet the expected expenditures when they join in the High School which contributed to sustain their education. In this regard, female students complained that the school cost highly affect their academic performance.

Socio-Economic Factors

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.

Conclusions

Based on findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn.

- Finding of the study indicates that teachers do not treat female students in mixed sex groups adequately and encourage them to participate actively in their groups.
- Female students in mixed sex groups are less confident to participate and boys tend to dominate the groups participation. Besides to this, teachers were not seen in enhancing the level of female students participation equally with boys in mixed sex groups.
- Finding of the study indicates that female students in single sex groups participate freely and perform better without any fear since they are not dominated by male students.
- Finding of the study reveals that female students in single and mixed sex groups are influenced by different factors such as:
 - ✓ Lack of full interest and confidence
 - ✓ Lack of continuous treatment and guidance from their teachers that enrich their self-confidence
 - ✓ Being destructed by male students and inferiority among themselves

- ✓ Lack of opportunity to participate
- Moreover, finding of the study revealed that most teachers were not seen in participating female students in mixed sex groups mostly on rough treating and there was no frequent follow up.

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