

Perceptions of Parents towards the Academic Performance of Female Students: The Case of Kutto Sorfella Primary School, Sodo Zuria Woreda, Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

The objectives of the study were to assess the current status of the academic performance of females in grade seven and eight and to study how perception of parents affect the academic performance of female students in Kutto Sorfella Primary School, Sodo Zuria Woreda, SNNPR, Ethiopia. To achieve the objectives of this research both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during the survey from primary as well as secondary sources. For this study 23 household heads were selected by simple random techniques and interviewed for the purpose of the study. Instruments of data collection included structured survey questionnaire, guided interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. To analysis data qualitative techniques such as summarization, and categorization were used but concerning to quantitative data, the computer software; SPSS-16 version was used. The other specific methods of data analysis such as tabulation and cross-tabulation were also used. Computation of descriptive statistic such as frequency, percentage and mean and were also carried out. From the result the researchers found out perception, attitudes, and opinion of parents towards female education, affected the academic performance of female students negatively so that the academic achievement of female students is very low in the study area. Therefore, in order to overcome these problems some strong commitment and reformation should be done in the study area by parents, students, local leaders, policy makers, GOs and NGOs.

Keywords: Perception, self-esteem, aspiration of Parents, academic performance

Introduction

The declining level of the educational achievements of students in developing countries has been a matter of increasing concern to their governments in general and policy makers in particular. Especially the country like Ethiopia, with less educated man power, very few educational institutions and limited number of graduates at their tertiary level (degree and diploma), the educational achievement of students admitted to higher educational institutions is of great concern (Bedassa and kidist, 1999). Illiteracy affects women in many ways e.g. women's access to agricultural extension and their ability to understand and use technical information are also compromised by this lack of basic education (Jamison and Lau, 1982). The impact of education on production efficiency is particularly strongly positive when extension agents are conveying modern agricultural techniques. In long terms, increasing school enrollment for girls will boost the productivity of female farmers (Emebet, 2001). Female students in rural Ethiopia invariably encounter different problems in attending school. Several studies in Ethiopia that poverty or economic constraints were the stumbling blocks for female's education. The factors that cause gender imbalances in Ethiopia may be inability to buy school materials and home-based factors, which include family size, household income, parent's education, cultural and traditional belief all contributes substantially to poor female performance in school. Females are less illiterate and have smaller performance rates at every level of education in Ethiopia. Thus, this study is mainly specific to how perceptions of parents influence the academic performance of female and male students in primary education and provides empirical data for policy makers.

Research Methodology

Description of the Study Area: The Study Site Kutto Sorfella primary school is currently found in Western Wolaita Zone of Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples Regional State in Ethiopia. The Woreda is located approximately between 6 50'N-7 53'N and 37 36'E-37 53'E. Most of the land area of the woreda is found in the altitude range 1400 meter above sea level to 2950 meters above sea level. The climatic condition of the woreda is similar to most of southern parts of the country. Maximum rainfall ranges between 1200mm-1300mm per annum. Maximum temperature also ranges between 20 C-25 C with average minimum 10 C-15 C. Sodo Zuria covers an area of 481.25 square kilometer. The total population is about 200866. From the total population 99,979 and 100,887 are males and females respectively. The economy of the people of Sodo Zuria Woreda is mainly based on agriculture.

Source of Data: To achieve the objectives of this research both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during the survey from primary as well as secondary sources. The source of data would be both primary and

secondary sources for the study. Primary data was gathered from the sampled respondents (the head of households, male and female students from each households) where as secondary data was gathered from literature review such as journals, books, and school administrative documents, NGOs report and others to explain the general issues related with the female students academic performance.

Sample Size: Where the school is found at Kutto Sorfella kebele, all girls (45) and boys (51) that learn grade seven and eight were interviewed. 23 household heads were also randomly selected and interviewed for the purpose of the study.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments: Primary data was collected from sampled respondents using structured interview schedule. To collect the data structured and semi-structured questionnaires was prepared and pre-tested before the actual survey was commenced to check the compatibility of the questionnaires with the realities.

Participatory Qualitative Data Collection Methods: These methods of data collection were employed by the researchers, which include key informant interview, focus group discussion, etc.

Research Findings

Perception of parents towards the performance of female students

In rural areas most of the time mothers give low attention about the education of their daughters. This is because they expect their daughters to be drop out, marriage at early age, and have no hope for the completion of their daughter. In another way, parents particularly their mothers insist their daughters' time to contribute to household chores rather attending to school. Similarly, the results in (Table 1) also indicate that out of 23 household heads, 52.2% of them prefer their son's first for education whereas 8.7% of them prefer to send their daughters first. Moreover, 39.1% of household heads prefer to send both sons and daughters to school equally. As the report of sampled household heads, the daughters who are left at home due to economic problem they have marriage opportunity even if they face this problem but for sons their probability to be left with their parents for long duration is very high. As this time son is expecting everything from his parents and he also depends on them so that parents want to send him first for school enjoyment in order to overcome this future burden.

During survey parents were also asked about their perceptions regarding to *which one is more to be guarantee for their family at their old age*. As discussed earlier, for how long daughters are living with their parents, it is not expected them to be left with their parents and they start to live with their husbands but sons want to stay with their parents unless they face exceptional issues. In many societies because of cultural reasons, parents think that they are likely to benefit more from their sons than their daughters (Rose *et al.*, 1997, as cited in Yenenesh Tadesse 2007). Further, even if the son succeeds his education and gets some opportunities he wishes to live with his parents at his home but for daughters it is very difficult to do so.

Table 1: Response of parents towards children's academic performance

Opinion of the parents towards students academic performance	Male	Female	Both
If you get serious economical or social problems, whom do you choose to send to school first?	12(52.2)	2(8.7)	9(39.1)
Whom do you expect more to be guarantee for their family at their old age?	19(82.6)	1(4.3)	3(13.0)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Perception of Parents towards the perception, aspiration and self-esteem of students

In rural areas most of the time girls are unable to get the time for studying due to the household chores and childcare after school hours. Girls expected to contribute to childcare or household chores rather than go to school (Amanuel and Mulugeta, 1999, as cited in Yenenesh Tadesse 2007). This predicament happens because of parents' perception towards the household work burden and education so that they are giving the first priority for their household chores than education. The results in (Table 2) more shows that out of the total number of sampled parents, 87% of them said that girls must not continue their education even if they are married or get pregnant before they completed schooling but 13% of them said that girls can continue their education. So, in order to be successful for their education girls shouldn't be getting the chance of marriage being they are on education.

The respondents were also asked their perception about female education in causing shortage of labour at home. 73.9% of the female children who are out of school belong to the parents who have a perception of female education causes a shortage of labour at home but 26.1% of them they don't have the problem of shortage of labor at home in place of females because of their education. Cultural divisions of labour make the women to engage in tedious and time taking activities. Most of the time females are engaging in different activities at household level after their school hours in rural societies so that parents may face shortage of labour at home and

they don't want to send their female students to school rather tying them at household work activities. Therefore, this negative perception of parents towards female is one obstacle that hinders girls' opportunity to enjoy their education and lead them to home activity takers and later early marriage.

The opinion of students critically influences everything, from their performance at school, their relationships and their role as students, to their accomplishment in life. This indicates that self esteem is a major component in determining success or failure. High self esteem leads to a happy, gratifying and purposeful life and also it improves performance and increase risk-taking. The results in (Table 2) reveal that out of 23 household heads, 69.6% of them they believe that self esteem of the students have a positive influence on their academic performance especially for those parents who have clever students. These respondents coated that *what they saw today they will harvest it tomorrow*. However, the remaining parents (30.4%) they don't have any confidence on children's self esteem so that they don't want to teach them in proper manner.

Aspiration is the major factor that influences the performance of one person. It sometimes says that hopeless is the outcome of lack of aspiration. This reflects female students are desperate for their education due to external pressures like home burden, lack of support, the negative attitude of families towards studying time, long distance to schooling, and inadequate materials for education and so on. However, parents think positive attitude towards students' aspiration for their outcome of their performance but they didn't analyze the time of studying, fulfilling their psychological needs that motivates them to succeed their education and because of their background they don't know what is good or bad for their academic performance so that students couldn't be seen their final achievement. The results in (Table 2) clearly indicate that out of 23 household heads, 82.6% of them they know as the aspiration has a positive influence on student's academic performance where as 17.4% of them they didn't know it.

Table 2: Response of parents towards the perception, aspiration and self-esteem of students

The opinion of parents	Yes	No
Do you believe that, girls must continue their education even if they are married or get pregnant before they completed schooling?	3(13.0)	20(87.0)
Does girls' schooling have caused shortage of labor at home?	17(73.9)	6(26.1)
Do you think that the aspiration level of the student will have a positive influence on their academic performance?	19(82.6)	4(17.4)
Do you think that self esteem of the students will have a positive influence on their academic performance?	16(69.6)	7(30.4)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Perception of parents towards task performed by female and male students

During discussion with head of households most of the families were reported about the type of tasks students perform after school hours. Based on their responses, both male and female engage on different activities in the study area. Most of the time female students are held with home activities where as males are spending their time outside of home activates. The results in (Table 3) show that fetching water, cooking meals, carrying of siblings, washing clothes, and cleaning house were almost the responsibility of females beside the task they work on other activities in some extent. However, most of the male students were involved mostly on the activities like collecting fuel wood, cattle herding, farming activities and marketing. Therefore, families of the students know that the academic performance of female students is highly influenced by home responsibilities so that they are spending their time on household work activities rather than doing their home work after school hours.

Table 3: Response of parents on task performed by their children

List of Activities	Sex of the household head		
	Female	Male	Both
Fetching water	15(65.2)	6(26.1)	2(8.7)
Collecting firewood	2(8.7)	6(26.1)	15(65.2)
Cooking meal	18(78.3)	1(4.3)	4(17.4)
Caring sibling	15(65.2)	7(30.4)	1(4.3)
Cleaning house	20(87)	1(4.3)	2(8.7)
Cattle herding	5(21.7)	17(73.9)	1(4.3)
Farming	3(13.0)	19(82.6)	1(4.3)
Washing clothes	18(78.3)	1(4.3)	4(17.4)
Marketing	10(43.5)	3(13)	10(43.5)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Perception of parents towards the resources and time their children have

It is sometimes viewed as boys are stronger than girls physically. However, referring to their academic issues both boys and girls have the same mind assets though they have different problems that obstacles them for their

final achievements. Consequently, people considered girls as they have mind failure to perform their education in proper manner. The sampled parents were asked about the performance of female as compared with male students concerning to their academic performance and achievements. The results in the following (Table 4) shows that out of total sampled parents 39.1% of them agree with the statement 'Girls can perform or achieve as equal as boys in their education' whereas 52.2% of them are disagree and the remaining were undecided. This negative opinion towards the performance of female students retards their ability to compute with boys so that they are poor performers and achievers.

In rural areas female students are busy with home responsibility burdens so that they weren't getting enough time for reading and doing their home work after school hours. Not only them but also male students were busy with farm activities even though they are not like females. The results in (Table 4) reveal that 34.8% of them agreed but 65.2% of them were disagree with the statement 'Girls have enough time as boys for studying and doing their assignment after their school time'. So, according to the report of respondents there was a big difference between male and female students regarding to their time allocation for studying, doing assignments and helping their parents for all sexes generally and female students particularly. If students don't study hard, it is an inevitable for them to get low performance so that they will never be arrived at their goal.

In developing countries like Ethiopia, the attitude of people towards female academic performance is wrongly perceived in the society especially in rural areas. For example, some parents perceived that educating female is wastage of resources, because they belong to her husband and they could be dropout from school when they reach the age of marriage and they will leave their parents and start to live with their husbands. Some of the parents reported that even if female students are failed in exam they don't bather about it because they have marriage opportunity. The results in (Table 4) reflects the reality that from the total of the sampled respondents 60.9% of them agree where as 21.7% of them are disagree but the remaining are undecided with the statement 'Girls' schooling is wastage of resource.'

Majority of the sampled parents also reported that they don't provide equal resources for both male and female students because they are hopeless for female education so that they want to fulfill all educational materials first for males. Lack of encouragement and educational information from the parents to the students could likely cause certain deficiencies in their learning activities (Sewnet, 1995). Therefore, the level of parental education is an important prediction of students' performance.

During survey most of parents reported that majority of students in the study area are coming from rural areas and they are also illiterate so that parents knew themselves very well as their educational status influences children's academic performance. Some of them also said that they couldn't identify what kind of educational material is quit important for education or not, what kind of advise is essential for their children, and the time of working their homework. In beside of that the results in (Table 4) further indicates that out of the total of sampled parents 78.3% of them they knew how the educational background of the family affects students' academic performance but few of them disagree.

Contrary to that some of male household heads said that 'students' academic performance isn't because of our illiteracy but because of the rudeness and carelessness of our children even if we fulfill all of their educational materials, giving advice, and doing everything for them they don't accept our idea and they want to go their own program but their way of journey leads them to the wrong road from their education'.

Table 4: Response of parents towards students' resource

Perception of parents	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Girls can perform or achieve as equal as boys in their education	9(39.1)	12(52.2)	2(8.7)
Girls have enough time as boys for studying and doing their assignment after their school	8 (34.8)	15 (65.2)	-
Girls' schooling is a wastage of resources	14(60.9)	5(21.7)	4(17.4)
Girls have to be given as much resources as boys for their education	9(39.1)	12(52.2)	2(39.1)
Educational background of the family can affect student's academic performance	18(78.3)	4(17.4)	1(4.3)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Perception of parents towards the presence of female role model in the community

Availability of role model in one society is another factor that influences the academic performance of female students especially in developing countries because females had never been viewed in a place of first position and status in the society for many years back so that women were considered as valueless. This is due to the problem of culture, perception and attitudes of people towards gender even though there is biological difference between boys and girls. During survey majority of the sampled household heads were asked that few of female were giving service as a role model in our society so that female students couldn't be shaping their future hope.

One of male headed household said that *in my residence we have one woman, she has been teaching primary school for many years but her life standard is not beyond of our life even we are sometimes helping her and even her income is also very low. We also think that education changes the mind of the people but it doesn't change the life of the people, the outcome of education without money is meaningless. So, we have the question why we teach our children if their life is not changed.*

This indicates that people are running with money but they don't care for the additional knowledge, skills and attitudes and changing their perception. The results in (Table 5) reveal that out of the total respondents 26.1% of them said that there are females which are standing in the society as a role model but 73.9% of them don't have female role model. This clearly identifies that those families which know such role models in their society they are interested in teaching their females very well but those families which don't have they are hopeless to teach their female students rather tying them with household responsibility and finally preparing them for marriage. Further, its result points out that out the total respondents 65.2% know how much the role model of female encourages girls' academic performance but the remained 34.8% were disagree to the importance of role model for females' academic performance in the society.

Table 5: Response of parents towards the role model of female

Presence of role model	Yes	No
Is there any female who can be as a role model in your area for female students?	6(26.1)	17(73.9)
Do you think that the availability of female as a role model will encourage girl student's academic performance?	15(65.2)	8(34.8)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Perception of parents towards sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is one factor that discourages female students from their education. Hallam (1994) indicates that there is a pandemic of sexual violence and harassment in educational institutions in Africa, and it is a real concern for students, parents and school authorities. Most of the female students are coming from rural areas by coming across long distance. During long journey they face such illegal practices. Sexual harassment has been an issue of special concern since the mass rape of 75 schoolgirls in Kenya (Teshome Nekatibeb, 2002). Male students are mostly identified as offenders and their acts include verbal abuses, cartooning, harassing, beating and raping. Anderson-Levott *et al.*; (1994) reported that in Guinea boys are very aggressive towards girls and that they used physical force, threatened and teased girls to silence them in the class. Teachers also prey on their female students, threatening to fail them, or publicly humiliate them, to prod them into sexual liaisons. Teachers are also reported to reward female students who 'co-operate', with grades and tuition waivers. Similarly, the results in (Table 6) also reflect that there was practice of sexual harassment in the study area.

Table 6: Response of parents on the effect of sexual harassment on female students

Sexual harassment	Yes	No
Is there any sexual harassment expected to be happened on female?	14(60.9)	9(39.1)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

The perception of parents towards distance of school

Distance from school has been another deterrent for girls' education in many countries in Africa (Teshome Nekatibeb, 2002). A large number of studies in the region where it has been reported that the long distances girls (particularly rural girls) travel to school has two major problems: one relates to the length of time and energy children have to expend to cover the distance, often on an empty stomach, the other relates to the concern and apprehension parents have for the sexual safety of their daughters (Odaga and Heneveld, 1995). The problem of distance from school also has implications for the motivation of girls to stay in school. In Guinea, studies show that close proximity of schools had a positive motivating impact on girls' participation in schools while in Mali, most girls stated that living far away from school and having to walk discourages them. During survey majority of sampled parents reported that majority of female students were traveling long distance to schooling where as few of them were near to school. So, poor performance is sometimes perceived as the result of travelling long distance in rural areas. In addition to this, many of the respondents also said that travelling long distance is sometimes not safe so that females face many problems on the road and even there might be the time of missing their life. The results in (Table 7) also reveal as travelling long distance is not safe for female students.

Table 7: Response of parents on the influence of distance on female students

Statements	Yes	No
Is there any one of your daughters travel long distance to school?	18(78.3)	5(21.7)
Do you think that travelling long distance is safe for female students?	6(26.1)	17(73.9)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Summary of the Results

The results in the (Table 8) indicate that the influence of different factors on female academic performance as rated by parents. Many scholars and sociologists for instance (Engin-Demir, 2009) argue that learning is not only a product of formal schooling but also of communities, families and peers. A wide-ranging factors such as socio-economic, socio-cultural and schools environment can influence learning as well as girls' academic performance. Enormous researches on the determinants of academic performance has centered on the relative effects of these factors. For example educational background of the family, their income and attitude; girls domestic work, their aspiration and self-esteems, are some important determinant of academic achievement, while school environments have minimal effects. During survey parents were asked to rate the extent to which a list of *cultural, family characteristics, student characteristics and school characteristics related determinants* hinder female students academic performance in their local areas by means of questionnaires and the results were summarized in (Table 8). From the total of rated determinants, majority of the respondents were reported to have higher effects on the academic performance of female students.

Among the high rated factors, parental level of education, household work responsibility and the absence of role model were found to be the most significant source of disparities in female students' academic performance with 82.6%, 78.3% and 78.3% respectively, as rated by the families where as the basic sanitation and schooling costs were rated to be the least significant factors to affect their academic performance. This result was consistently agreed with that of Engin-Demir (2009) and Robinson (1993). The existence of high number of children in the family lead to less favourable child outcome, girls students from the larger families considered to have less favourable home environments in the first case, secondly the boys may get precedence in investing the meager resources of the family to education than girls consequently these will results in low academic performance of the girls.

Table 8: Summary of how Perception of parents affects females' academic performance

The factors affect girls academic performance	Low	Medium	High
Educational background of the family	3(13.0)	1(4.3)	19(82.6)
Household work responsibility	3(13.0)	2(8.7)	18(78.3)
Family resources	4(17.4)	3(13.0)	16(69.6)
Number of the children in the household	3(13.0)	8(34.8)	12(52.2)
Perception of parents about girls education	2(8.7)	4(17.4)	17(73.9)
Schooling costs	17(73.9)	2(8.7)	4(17.4)
Aspiration level of the student	2(8.7)	5(21.7)	16(69.6)
Self-esteem of the student	4(17.4)	2(8.7)	17(73.9)
Sexual harassment	4(17.4)	3(13.0)	16(69.6)
Absence of role model	1(4.3)	4(17.4)	18(78.3)

Source: Field survey data, 20012

Conclusion and Recommendation

Education is considered to be an important means of social mobility at individual level and the driving force for economic, social and cultural development at national level in general and at local level in particular. This study was carried out at Kutto Sorfella primary school. The main purpose of this study was to assess the current status of females' academic performance and to examine how perception of parents affects the academic performance of female students in grade seven and eight in the study area. To achieve the objectives of this research both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during the survey from primary as well as secondary sources. Instruments of data collection included structured survey questionnaire, guided interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The sample population included male and female students and household heads at the local level.

In order to analysis data qualitative techniques such as summarization, categorization, re-stating and triangulation were used but concerning to quantitative data, the computer software SPSS-16 (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used. The other specific methods of data analysis such as tabulation and cross-tabulation and computation of descriptive statistic such as frequency, percentage and mean were also used.

Regarding to the sampled respondents; 23 household heads were randomly selected for the purpose of interview in the study area. The researcher has also clearly found out that the time of students spend their time on studying and helping their parents was assessed. A researcher postulated that students who spent the most time studying would achieve the highest marks in examinations, whereas those that did the least studying would achieve lower marks. Statistically it was observed that most of the male students use more of their time on studying than female students after their school time. This is because of female students have high home responsibility than male students in their house so that the academic performance of female students is less than that of male students. As the result of this, both male and female students in the rural areas face time constraints for doing their homework so that their academic performance is highly influenced by household work activities.

Finally, from all of the results the factors such as housework responsibility, absence of role model in the community, educational background of the family, economic status of the family; perception, attitudes, and opinion of parents and children towards female education, tasks performed by females after the school hours, distance of the school, and indirect costs of schooling, sexual harassment, that affected females' academic performance so that the academic performance of female students is very low in the study area. Therefore, in order to overcome these problems some strong commitment and reformation should be done in the study area by parents, students, teachers, local leaders, researchers, policy makers, GOs and NGOs.

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