

Practices, Challenges and Opportunities of Intragroup Synergy Creation among Female Students in Ethiopian Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract: The study explicated the extent of practices, challenges and opportunities in intragroup synergy-creation among female students in selected higher educational institutions of Ethiopia by considering the role of different student-related units in building synergy and self-reliance among female students. In order to realize the objectives of the study, specific reference was made to student-support units in Arsi, Ambo, Bule-Hora, Addis Ababa, Haramaya, and Madda-Walabu universities. Descriptive survey design of research was used to give shape to the illumination and description of issues. Complementary model of triangulating data was also used as per the types of data in view. Data were collected in the form of experiential self-report from officers in gender offices of three purposively selected universities among the six, and 223 students from six sample universities. Sources of data were 6 officers and 223 students. Instruments of data collection included semi-structured interviews and questionnaire. As procedures of data collection and analysis, first office-based data were collected regarding what was planned and implemented, and then student-based data were worked on. The collected data were systematically arranged and analyzed statistically in the form of percentage values and thematic explication. Concurrent mixed model was used in the presentation and analysis of data. The findings indicated that female students practiced synergy creation more on social than academic. Major expository practices dealt with generic orientation and breakthrough which were provided for students who were in need. Female students lacked chains of adjoining their academic and social commitments. Challenges in synergy creation were identified as highly routine-based provision of training and induction which were reactive rather than proactive, and students' tendency to be attracted to social synergy rather than socio-academic. So, the challenges were both institutional and individual. The opportunity is both institutions and underlying directorate offices should work to design a scheme for intragroup synergy creation among female students so that they can start gender-equity from within and then move to between groups exchange.

Key terms: *practices; challenges; opportunities; intragroup; synergy*

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Background

Education is the process of ensuring equitable development among students in physical, mental and psychological realms (Griffin, 2009). With its indispensable role in the economic, social, cultural, and political development of individuals and societies, promoting gender equality in education ensures that, the opportunities and benefits that come with education are available to both boys and girls in developing countries (Baric and Bouchie, 2011). An education program should seek to ensure that gender concerns are identified and addressed at the highest level of decision making through the development and implementation of gender-equitable policies which can lead to workable development (King, 2006).

Such a development cannot be realized without allowing conditions which entertain some diversities such as those related to gender role, cultural dimensions and other forms of treatment in society. In that, diversity among students are hard to stop but possible to adapt to the working situation for the best benefit of learners (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, 2006).

One of the areas in education where student diversity is largely observed is higher education, which provides for students of different ethnic, gender, academic, economic and cultural backgrounds (Brigham and Nix, 2010). While the existence of diversity is considered as a beauty for creative and multifaceted minds, the way diversity among students is treated may have a lasting impact on their very success and adjustment in work and life (Curtis, 2011). By virtue of being human, students come to belong to one or the other social, economic or gender category where some are males and other are females; some belong to one ethnic group while others belong others; some come from middle income family backgrounds while others come from well-to-do families (UNESCO, 1993). Such a question of being is treated in higher education in the form of supports given by pertinent units and offices arranged for

treating diversity among students which may, at occasions, lead to disparity which may leave a scar on the students' lives and achievement.

Higher education institutions react to diversity among students through such offices as gender, student affairs, youth reproductive guides, and counselling. Such offices, though having their own target roles, focus on curbing conditions which stand as challenges on students' learning and achievement. One among diversity areas in education to which vast attention is given nowadays is gender issue, binding parity between males and females at large.

In response to the escalating gap in quantity and quality in learning between boys and girls in education, gender offices arrange for breakthroughs through training and orientation, supplies and other related supports, in order to minimize the gap. However, the effect of such supportive action in creating synergy among students of the same gender category does not seem to have been given wider attention. To that effect, researches are rare regarding the issue of intra-group synergy building.

So, this research investigates the extent of creating intragroup synergy among female students in higher education with specific reference to practices in selected Ethiopian universities. This research is timely and justifiable on the ground that investigating the progresses of supports in terms of bimodal reference to within group roles for self-reliance in education would put emphasis on insightful minimization of gaps observed in learning among females and males, and extends the chain of treating gender-based disparity from within groups as well as between.

Statement of the Problem

In educational settings in general and higher education in particular, group-involvement is believed to support holistic purpose of attaining success. The holistic purpose of synergy among students is underlined

in the study held by Gillies (2016) who underlines that team-based cooperation promotes socialization besides attesting benefits students derive when cooperating with others.

Brame and Biel (2015) also stress many instructors from disciplines across the university use group work to enhance their students' learning. Whether the goal is to increase students' understanding of content, to build particular transferable skills, or some combination of the two, instructors often turn to small group work to capitalize on the benefits of peer-to-peer instruction. Yet, the extent to which academic and social skills are synthesized in higher education is an issue seeking scrutiny. Moreover, the issue of gender-parity more specifically in the case of intragroup synergy seeks a special attention for three main reasons. The first reason goes to the concern for the role a person shares in terms of what s/he deserves as a human being. The second reason is related to the belief how gender role is treated marks how each student in that gender group can behave in the immediate and mediate life situation which also influences the person's desire and endeavor for self-improvement (Slavin, 2006). The third reason pertains to the reality embracing the style of gender role treatment manifest in the concerned institutions forecasts what they get as a backwash effect (Mehta and Kulshrestha, 2014); the better and productive the treatment the better is the change backed up, and the more sustainable the institution as a center of big concern. Coming to education, how gender roles are actuated in schools heralds not only the amount of success but also the reaped long-range effect of schooling (Hofbauer and Wroblewski, 2015).

This, in turn, quests for the nature of treatment given by the concerned institutions and the effect found as a pathfinder for further change. Regarding this, Baric and Bouchie (2011) underline some of the roles of gender-responsive education to be addressing gender-based barriers to both boys and girls so that both men and women can learn the impact; respecting differences and acknowledging gender; sensitive to all the needy groups, not only females, part of a wider strategy to advance

gender equality in the society, and to be continuously evolving to close gaps on gender-disparity and discriminate gender-based discrimination.

Regardless of the presence of vast theoretical and research findings on the necessity of gender and gender-based concerns to ensure education quality through equality, the creation and development of intragroup synergy among students remains an area of big concern. This is due to the fact that, without considering within group exchange and developing synergetic roles among females, sheer reference to them as the most disadvantaged, as so far seen both domestic and international research, would lead to by-passing internal roles of females to support one another thereby subjecting them to dependence on external supports.

So, this study deals with the following grand and elaborate questions:

Basic Question: To what extent is intragroup synergy creation practiced among female students in higher education?

Specific Questions

- How far do female students in higher education support one another in terms of academic and social matters?
- What workable roles do different student support units (gender, HIV and student affairs) play in helping students build synergy among themselves?
- What policies and directives do university units officially design and put to practices to enable female students to be self-supportive and synergetic?
- What factors stand as challenges to intragroup synergy creation?

Objectives of the Research

The aim of this research is to clarify the practices and challenges of intragroup synergy among female students in Ethiopian institutions of higher education. In other words, the general objective of the study was

to ascertain the extent to which intragroup synergy was practiced and the challenges of institutional supports in ensuring it among female students in higher education.

Specifically, the research intends to:

- identify extent of practices in synergy creation among female students in terms of academic and social matters;
- identify workable roles gender directorates and student support unit play in helping students build synergy among themselves;
- find out policies and directives university units officially put to practices to enable female students to be self-supportive and synergetic;
- clarify factors which stand as challenges in creating and enriching synergy among female students; and
- identify opportunities which can be ascertained about the prospective co-working of female students on the basis of the interplay between observed practices and challenges.

Review of Related Literature

There are diverse works related to gender in education, more specifically, gender parity in higher education. This part of the research deals with survey and interpretative presentation plus review of both theoretical and empirical reviews on gender parity, and then clearly demarcates the landscape of the current study. So, this review looks into practices of synergy creation among female students in higher education from gender-in-education perspective.

Basic Concepts

Synergetic practices, herein, refer to the socio-academic interrelationships and strength students have in supporting one another overall (Ma and Runyon, 2004). It is termed socio-academic for the

reason that human beings, to which students are no exception, are social in the first place, and assume social roles given them by the entire community of members. Their academic roles are antecedent to the former, though enriching and, at times, dominant. Synergy is stressed as one inevitably involving energy synchronized with synthesis or integration (Wharton, 2009).

Academic synergy is presented in this work as the system of having integration and integrity to share experiences and feel homely while working towards achieving common goals and educational standards. Adjunct to the academic synergy is social synergy which marks the tendency to be collaborative, supportive and models for one another in the realm of academic interchange (Johnson, Johnson, and Douglas, 2010).

Essence of Intragroup Synergy

Besides defining common terms, it also becomes essential to earmark the essence of researching and denoting the place of females' synergetic support to one another. One of the green areas to which attention must be paid is that, currently, more attention is being given to gender-based analysis of females' roles in education and workplace. Different sources underline that, even though females/ women hold the most striking responsibility in the society, their roles are overshadowed by patriarchal traditions (African Gender Equality Index, 2015). The document forwards three areas of concern for the development of women: Economic, social development and law. Here, social development is taken as a human development aspect where education and social skills are presented as entwined parcels.

Besides the gestalt need to boost women's development through education, researches regarding intervention strategies to encourage women's success in education, especially higher education, is witnessed to have only short stance it touches a limited horizon. This is witnessed by Onsango (2009), who studied affirmative actions to support women's

success in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and came up with the findings that, actions taken to support students in the form of lower entry-scores, remedial training and financial backup were not sufficient to realize success. The researcher recommended in-depth intervention mechanisms to be used by the government and the universities to ensure access and success on the part of female students but did not trace the strategies as roadmap. By far, the research touched upon intervention mechanisms as held on out-in bases.

The other essence to consider synergetic roles of females comes from the fact that, even in higher education institutions, the rate of women's participation in research and administration is very low, though there are considerations in terms of equal pays for men and women in the form of salaries (Bichsel and McChesney, 2017). With the manifestation of disparity in research and administration positions in higher education, expectations of female models of the future may be perplexing. Hence, it becomes essential to study the within group case in order to treat the external. Though the study underlines the gap in payment and position across research and administration, it does not touch practices of synergy females/ women to guide and achieve equitably. So, the issue of female-female synergy remains open for research.

The other point of concern comes from the question whether cooperation in academic areas, as is advocated in many aspects of education, can lead to students' achievement. Bryson (2007) held a quasi-experimental study which was intended to check if students tended to achieve differently as a result of placement in a cooperative vs. individual working group, and came up with the finding that there was no significant difference in achievement. However, the researcher did not consider the type of synergy existing among the students, pre-hand.

Miriam, Ball, Jackie and Diane (2003) studied parental involvement in university choice for their children, and came up with the finding that girls were more open to discuss about university choices with their parents, especially with their mothers, than boys. The study also underlined boys

did not tilt to discuss issues of university choice with their parents since they felt to be more independent. Though the study sparks the likely choice of maternal guidance to females, it does not thoroughly touch what follows afterwards, and how that experience should be enriched by synergy within group.

Forms of Intra-Group Synergy

Vast sources of literature stress existence of different forms of synergy creation. In this review, academic and social synergy will be surveyed in relation to learning in higher education and synergetic threads to be formed among students.

Academic Synergy

Academic synergy, as presented in Rocca, Margottinni and Capibianco (2014) is reinforced in terms of collaborative learning and peer tutoring in the university environment which can positively influence students to maintain a constant motivation and affection towards their study; they also help to reduce the drop-out and encourage greater regularity in the academic career.

Johnson, Johnson and Anderson (2010) investigated the place of cooperative school climate in boosting social interdependence and attitudes towards relationships with peers and teachers. The study revealed that, cooperativeness and frequently participating in cooperative learning situations were positively related to perceptions of support, help, and friendship from teachers and peers. But how cooperative self-reliance could be effective among students of the same gender has not been indicated in the study since it was generally held.

Social Synergy

Social synergy in academic settings, with specific reference to student self-reliance is the process of working together to achieve the maximum.

According to Khamcharoen (2000), it provides for students to help promote academic and social integration in students so that it can retain students. In addition, when that comes, not only can it retain students but also the growth of university will be highlighted. Sparks (2013) states that educational institutions can improve the benefit of every student only when there are strong teams that create synergy in problem solving, provide emotional and practical support, distribute leadership to better tap the talents of members of the school community, and promote the interpersonal accountability that is necessary for continuous improvement. It is evident from the cited idea above that, student benefit both socially and academically when there is positive emotional attachment among them.

Practices of Synergy Creation in Higher Education

The praxis of synergy creation among students in higher education is a part of the overall paradigm shift in methodology which underlines the reality that students should learn by creating knowledge not solely by copying down what teachers give them but by acting on what they are given and developing their own repertoires. Active learning instructional strategies can be created and used to engage students in thinking critically or creatively, speaking with a partner, in a small group, or with the entire class, expressing ideas through writing, exploring personal attitudes and values, giving and receiving feedback, and reflecting upon the learning process (Eison, 2010).

Active learning is generally earmarked as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process which also requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing (Prince, 2004). The assertions given by Eison (2010) and Prince (2004) above denote that students must be organized in learning to be actively engaging and thinking critically and creatively. Hence, how they think largely depends on how they are organized.

Methodology of the Research

This research focused on explicating extent of practices, challenges and opportunities in creating synergy among female students in higher education. The major variables of concern were activities of the offices as set in planned strategies and formalized in practice and practices of synergy as observed on the part of female students as customers.

Research Design

This research took a descriptive survey design which was used to disclose the status of practices and challenges of creating synergy among female students in higher education on the basis of triangular analysis of data. For the triangulation of data, the complementary model was used on the conviction that such a model would provide a framework in which one form of data enhances or complements the other (Creswell, 2012 and Walliman, 2011: 13).

Data Types and Sources

Data for the research were obtained in the form of factual performances and experiential self-report. Factual data referred to office plans and performance strategies set by gender directorates of the respective universities whereas experiential reflections referred to practices so far made to make intragroup synergy creation a reality. Qualitative data were collected from 6 officers in Gender Affairs Directorates of Addis Ababa, Arsi and Ambo universities which were purposely selected from among the six, on the bases of their being proximate and resourceful to collect data at ease and to a required degree. Experiential accounts of students were also referred to in which 300 randomly selected female students were data providers.

Sample Population and Sampling Techniques

In selecting samples, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to identify faculties and underlying departments. Accordingly, two faculties were identified. From each faculty, two departments were identified to be possible centers of data from which 50 female students were selected at random. Simple random sampling technique was preferred since the focus of the research was to describe extent of practice in intragroup synergy creation among female students but not to compare intercollegiate practices.

In general, the research sample enclosed 50 female students selected from each one of the six universities ($n=300$), and 2 officers in gender directorates from each of the three purposively selected universities ($n=6$). Whereas the sample population from among the students was 300, the relevant population realized upon the possible return of the questionnaire was 223. The research target being human, among the sampled population, seven didn't give relevant information for unknown reason. So, the relevant data was collected from 223 students.

Instruments and Procedures of Data Collection

Instruments of Data Collection

Instruments of data collection were binary mode questionnaire, and semi-structured interview. In the proposal, it was aimed to employ focus-group discussion guides and documentary checklist but for ethical and technical reasons, the latter two were not successful. Binary mode questionnaire (combining both open-ended and closed-ended questions) (Krosnick and Presser, 2009) was used in order for respondents to add some views, experiences and factors which they believed to be valid, in addition to those set by the researcher. Semi-structured interview items were also preferred to help participants to have wider options to give in-depth reflections.

Procedures of Data Collection

First the questionnaire items and interview guides were developed in English and reviewed for validity by three professionals in Arsi University, Jimma University, Addis Ababa University, and a researcher in Education Strategy Center, Addis Ababa. The questionnaire items were also pilot-tested for viability in Wellega University, which was not among the target universities. Results of the pilot-study ($r=0.74$) were used to enrich and logically set the questions by adding missing points, shaping bulkier ones and arranging them in logical order. Reflective suggestions from peer review were also used for enrichment purpose. Then the questionnaires were produced in English and distributed to respondents. Questionnaire data were collected in one-phase which lapsed from February to Mid of May, 2017. Then enrichment of questionnaire data and collection of qualitative data followed. In general, 300 questionnaires were distributed and 264 were returned. In addition to questionnaire-base data, interview data were also collected through face-to-face approach in which officers in Gender Office Directorates were participants. Each interview event was scheduled to an hour. Records of each event were audio-set but audio-visual setting of participants' accounts were not discerned for ethical reasons. As per the consent reached with the interviewees, the anonymity was totally guarded.

Procedures and Techniques of Data Collection and Analysis

The procedures of data collection and analysis were such that, first questionnaire data were collected from the students. This was followed by the interview data. The collected questionnaire data were designed to get the students' reflections as target beneficiaries from intra-group synergy creation, and then come to the official practices. The collected data were systematically organized and analyzed statistically and thematically in the same procedures.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Analysis the research data followed reflection on the tabulated accounts and cumulative points displayed through statistical means as per the questions set. Accordingly, the first question dealt with academic synergy. In the realm of learning, students who schedule their works in teams are said to be more successful than those who work alone. In this regard, it became necessary to view the students' synergy-creation in terms of co-scheduling study-time, and the subsequent responses are given in the table below:

Regarding Academic Synergy Creation

Table 1: Extent of Co-Scheduling Study-Time

<i>Q1. How often do you schedule your reading time with other female students?</i>				
Response Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
very often	67	29.6	30.0	30.0
sometimes	102	45.1	45.7	75.8
Less often	33	14.6	14.8	90.6
Not at all	21	9.3	9.4	100.0
Total	223	98.7	100.0	

The response in Table 1 above denotes that the majority of the female students referred to in this research had common schedules for their studies sometimes (45.7%). Co-scheduling was indicated to be very often as indicated by considerable number of responses as well (30%). About 70 percent of the responses tilt to the negative when seen from the cumulative percentage adding up the responses excepting *very often*.

Regarding this, the interview response to the question *How often do you guide students to schedule their events together?* From one of the target centers runs as follows:

We don't go to the specifics of teaching-learning issues. Our focus on the general matters of boosting female copes up in their learning. We do so through their representatives selected from both males and females. They contact us when they need training or inductions. Actually, we provide induction and orientations sessions for new entrants [fresh] students (Ambo, May19, 2017).

An account from the other respondent appears as follows:

When students join the university, we provide them due orientation about campus life and how they should manage encounters in and out. This is due both sex groups, regardless of their backgrounds since they are students overall. They need to be adjusted to the university life invariably. At times, we collaborate with professionals from different colleges especially health and psychology/education. At times, invite charities working youth health to provide awareness-raising inductions on matters of mate-selection and STD's. On what you term "Co-scheduling" I don't have any hint. [Addis Ababa, May 15, 2017].

From both the questionnaire responses in Table 4 and interview accounts above, it is clear that, schematic synergy creation among students in the target universities was not a common practice or strong. Thematically, terms like to the specifics, when they need training [special occasions], and orientation about campus life denote the treatment of intra-group synergy to be far from being practical since the actual practice is too general.

The other point of concern was based on underlying how the students themselves considered team-work which could be the base for co-scheduling. References to team-work highly stress the necessity that when students of similar background work in workable teams their

support to one another in their respective groups and their gross achievement will be very high rather than when they work with a dissimilar group [females working with males].

So, in this research, emphasis was given to checking how female students viewed team-work in their respective faculties among the same group, and the respective responses are provided in the following table:

Female Students' View of their Team Tendency

Table 2: Female Students' View of Their Team-Work

Q2. How do you consider team approach in your batch?

Response Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Strong	76	33.6	34.2	34.2
Somewhat Strong	85	37.6	38.3	72.5
Weak	61	27.0	27.5	100.0
Total	222	98.2	100.0	

From data in Table 2 above it could be understood that female students considered their team-role as somewhat strong in majority (38.3%). Perhaps, there were also others who underlined their having very strong team-work (34.2%), the inclination, overall, being to the negative when the second and third options are seen together. The rate of response for strength, see from cumulative percentage almost 73 percent. Somehow, having somewhat strong team-tendency implies the shrinking nature of intra-group synergy among students when seen against the works of Michelson and Sweet (2008) who stress three essential aspects of team-based learning. First, with team-based learning, group work is central to exposing students to and improving their ability to apply course content. Second, with team-based learning, the vast majority of class time is used for group work. Third, courses taught with team-based learning typically involve multiple group assignments that are designed to improve learning and promote the development of self-managed learning team. The next point of concern was the identification of factors that challenge

team-based synergy creation. The reflections of the students are given below:

Factors Challenging Team-Tendency

Table 3: Factors Challenging Team-Work

Q.3 What factors do you consider challenging to team-work among female students in the university?

Response Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Tendency to be individualistic	68	30.1	33.0	33.0
Tendency to work with opposite sex	73	32.3	35.4	68.4
Tendency to work with those from the same linguistic background	48	21.2	23.3	91.7
Other	17	7.5	7.8	99.5
		.4	.5	100.0
Total			206	

As indicated in Table 3 above, the maximum rate of responses pointed to tendency to work with opposite sex groups (35 %). Almost equal rate of responses was also given to individualistic tendency (33%), and linguistic attraction became the third prominent challenge (23.3%). To illustrate, tendency to work with members of the opposite sex group (males) can keep them passive and lower in confidence while giving them opportunities to gain new insights. Working individually may help those who want to work thoroughly enough on their lessons but practices in a university, be it theoretical or practical, require students to work and achieve cooperatively, thereby forming group synergy. In support of the individualistic tendency, a student gave the following account: "Most students like to work alone, even though the principle urges cooperative learning. This is specifically true with female students. They are not easily convinced and drawn to working in groups and supporting each other." [PS2, Ambo, May 16, 2017].

From this, it could be deduced that, intragroup synergy creation was not clearly manifest as a part of academic guidance and skill-nurturing technique.

<i>Unit</i>	<i>First n (%)</i>	<i>Second n (%)</i>	<i>Third n (%)</i>	<i>Fourth n (%)</i>	<i>Fifth n (%)</i>	<i>Total</i>
Student council	30 (14.2)	25 (11.8)	55 (26.1)	54 (25.6)	47 (22.3)	211
Teachers	21 (10.1)	19(9.2)	39 (18.8)	65 (31.4)	63 (30.4)	207
Dept Heads	26 (12.6)	27 (13.0)	44 (21.3)	48 (23.2)	62 (30.0)	207
Gender Office	33 (15.4)	34 (16.4)	35 (16.9)	47 (22.7)	58 (28.0)	207
Counselors	30 (14.8)	29 (14.3)	62 (30.5)	45 (22.2)	37 (18.2)	203
Student Affairs	30 (14.6)	34 (16.6)	53 (25.9)	40 (19.5)	48 (23.4)	205

Students' Reactions to Synergetic Supports due Them

Table 4: Students' Reflection on Synergetic Supports they gained

In Table 4, it is indicated that the gender office takes the first rank in providing synergetic guides (15.4%) for female students. Counselors (14.8%), student affairs (14.6%), and student council (14.2%). From the rank, it could be ascertained that Gender-Directorates of the target universities had dominant roles, yet with very limited scope in their involvement. Though the questionnaire data denoted existence to the highest standard of supports on the part of gender directorate offices in each university, participants on interview displayed lack/shortage of direct intervention in terms of synergy-creation. Below is given a transcribed reflection:

We do give students general gender-based guides but we don't have special provisions for female students. Even there is no standard-based delivery of support. The provision, at large, is of a single-reference implying gender as related to the youth in general, and females' parity issues in particular [Interviewee 1, ArU, May 10, 2017].

Additional documents prepared for general orientation enclosed basics of active learning, awareness-raising guides for the prevention of HIV/AIDS infection and prevention of harassment triggering conditions. Even those brochures were not set by respective directorates for local

consumption but set for holistic purpose of boosting preventive and protective skills. Though students rated counselors to be providers of guidelines for synergy creation, two conditions appear to make the provision of counseling services. One of these is in the fact that not all faculties have had counselors. The other point was that, counseling services given to students were focused on reactive intervention when problems came about rather than guide students to support one another on pro-active bases. So, the role of counselors, as asserted by students, is very much minimal when it comes to intra-group synergy creation.

Student Self-Attribution on Social Roles

Table 5: Self-Attributive Roles among Female Students

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Weak (%)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Below average n (%)</i>	<i>Average n (%)</i>	<i>Above Average n (%)</i>	<i>Superior n (%)</i>
I usually participate in group discussions with female mates.	30 (13.6)		21 (9.5)	52 (23.6)	52 (23.6)	65 (29.5)
I help the group keep on task as we work together by initiating female members	23 (10.5)		39 (17.3)	60 (27.3)	62 (28.2)	36 (16.4)
I contribute useful and positive ideas on progresses reached in group.	23 (10.6)		29 (13.4)	51 (23.5)	58 (26.7)	56 (25.8)
I express the quality of group work justifiably.	25 (11.6)		32 (14.9)	56 (26.0)	54 (25.1)	48 (22.3)
I consistently and actively work toward group goals	22 (10.3)		34 (16.0)	48 (22.5)	66 (31.0)	43 (20.2)
I value the knowledge, opinion, and skills of all group members	26 (11.9)		28 (12.8)	55 (25.1)	60 (27.4)	50 (22.8)
I actively contribute for my group without reminding	31 (14.6)		31 (14.6)	54 (25.4)	49 (23.0)	48 (22.5)
I help the group identify the necessary changes by encouraging group action for change	19 (8.7)		33 (15.1)	56 (25.7)	58 (26.6)	52 (23.9)
I am punctual and contributive in attending group meetings and discussions	25 (11.5)		29 (13.3)	51 (23.4)	49 (22.5)	64 (29.4)
I make alternative arrangements where initially schemed plans fail to work (be it academic or social)	29 (13.4)		32 (14.7)	55 (25.3)	65 (30.0)	36 (16.6)

Students' reflections in Table 5 above denote they have superior tendencies in participating discussion with female mates (29.5%), and that they had above average tendency to keep group tasks going (28.2%). In valuing the knowledge, opinion and skills of all group members, the target respondents denoted having higher tendency (31%). Respondents also indicated that they had higher inclinations towards active contribution (23%) and making alternative arrangements failed (30%). Participation in group with female mates (29.5%) and being punctual and contributive to group meetings and discussions (29.4) were rated as top pivots of concern. Contributing positively to group progresses (26.7%), giving rational suggestions about the quality of group work (25.1%) and encouraging group change (25.7%) were rated as higher but not superior as well. Overall, the responses indicated that female students in the target study had both higher and superior tendencies in their general attributes in the group role-assumption but there were no witnessed means of activating females' intra-group synergy.

Experiential Reflection on Social Synergy

Table 6: Female Students' Reflections on Social Affairs

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Different</i>
Sharing females' dormitory with students of diverse backgrounds	152 (75.2)	40 (19.8)	10 (5.0)
Participating on social affairs such as cultural ceremonies	108 (47.8)	61 (27.0)	32 (14.2)
Dining with female students from different settings or geographic locations	103 (45.6)	60 (25.5)	34 (15.0)
Sharing materials with female students of different religions backgrounds	135 (59.7)	44 (19.5)	21 (9.3)
Supporting female students with different linguistic backgrounds	107 (47.3)	68 (30.1)	26 (11.5)
Working with female students from different economic status	131 (58.0)	40 (17.7)	25 (11.1)
Sharing materials with females with physical impairment	101 (44.7)	65 (28.8)	33 (14.6)
Supporting female mates in time of frustration or in their worries	116 (51.3)	49 (21.7)	25 (11.1)
Sharing experiences female mates on how to select partnering mates constructively	106 (46.9)	51 (22.6)	40 (17.7)
Expressing your feelings without fear or hesitation among female mates	120 (53.1)	44 (19.5)	32 (14.2)

From the data in Table 6 above, it could be clear that, female students in the target universities strong social interchanges. When compared with their academic interchanges, the social aspect had progressive feature, as seen from the presented data and subsequent assertion.

A related qualitative assertion presents a different and knocking aspect especially with regard to nature and preference of interdependence, as set below:

In and around dorms, there are some days when we play and chat as get-together. We also have special TV room to entertain. In our dorms, however, we share things with those from similar linguistic, religious and areal backgrounds. For instance, I am from City A, and love to be those from my area, with whom I can pray and sit to read. (SP, ArU, June 16, 2007).

*PS-Participant Student

Further evidence can be added to the quantitative data that, though students instinctively gave way to synergetic reaction by living, dining, sharing rituals, and supporting the needy ones, they did so with little planned undertaking, and their action was restricted to familiarity in backgrounds whereby students of similar backgrounds came together.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Major Findings

This research investigated practices, challenges and opportunities of creating intragroup synergy among students in higher education with the objective to identify extent of practices, roles of different support-rendering units in strengthening unity and interdependence among

female students in higher education in both academic and social aspects.

With regard to depth in synergetic practices, responses and experiential reflections provided by students and respective support givers denoted provision of temporarily generic supports which were ceremonial and non-consistent with the practical needs of students in the teaching-learning climate. The work of supporting students with advises was also found to have been left to Gender Directorates which highly focused on general orientation, encouraging model students and inculcating students to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS infection, harassment and commitment to unwarranted sexual partnership. But there were no means of integrating the students' efforts to support and benefit from one another on intragroup bases.

Regarding provision of guidelines, there were no guides for female students to work synergistically. Rather, temporary supports were given to students who had shortage of materials, both males and females. Reflection given from some members of Gender Directorates also displayed lack of focus to date on female-female parity at large. In that, solutions and immediate breakthroughs were not devised on an intragroup basis.

It was found out also that, there were challenges on the students' part in being individualistic and tilting to work with male counter-parts. Moreover, lack of attention on the part of support-renderers in not considering within-group synergy was the other striking challenge, though there was a temporal attempt to pick model figures to exemplify good practices. By and large, university-based Gender Directorates did not have self-contained guidelines to show pathway for intragroup synergy-creation. Most of the guiding resources, to that effect, did not have clear indicators of purpose and standards to which they were to be used.

Even, where team pliability was to be said in place, conditions were bound to local conditions which stuck to group-uniformity in language, areal boundary, religion and ethnicity which invariably tangled the female students' interdependence and synergy-creation.

Conclusions

In line with the summary above, intragroup synergy creation on the part of the students tilted more to social synergy than academic. In that, female students practiced synergy as related to geographic, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Institutional guidelines and training sessions focused on general awareness-raising on social and academic skills for all students with little regard to intragroup support among females.

To that effect, female students did not have strong knowhow of synergy-creation. In spite of the escalating attention to empower them through education, and regardless of the wide-scale necessity to develop skills and experiences of self-efficacy among female students, within group strength to accept, respect and transform such synergy is not developed well.

Challenges to intragroup synergy were students' inclinations to work with geographic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Preferences to work with male counterparts and religious stratification had secondary challenge in that respect. Lack of in-depth care and attention on the part of gender office and student advisory councils was also the other challenge. To the grand, intragroup synergy among female students magnified male-female disparity as the most prevalent concern of the day. The opportunity here is that, both institutions and underlying directorate offices must work to design a scheme for intragroup synergy creation among female students so that they can start gender-equity from within and then move to between groups exchange.

Recommendations and Implications for further Research

This research dealt with investigating extent in the practices of intragroup synergy creation among female students in the context of Ethiopian Higher Education. On the bases of the findings revealing lack of strong awareness on intragroup synergy among female students, taken the evidence that, females tended to be more cooperative on social issues than academic, and that cooperation was based on stratifications in terms of locality of birth, linguistic and religion-based divisions, and cognizant of the reality that, the guidelines provided to prove parity were not context-responsive and near, the following recommendations were given:

- Concerned support providers such as Gender and HIV/AIDS directorates need to assess techniques of empowering females to support each and one another at their closets than expect remedial all from beyond.
- Gender and HIV/AIDS Prevention Directorates need to develop means of creating, boosting and transforming intragroup synergy so that females could be models for one another and think beyond their local practices to work and achieve in collaboration. That could be in the form of girls' club, study-teams, peer-related counseling and dialogues.
- When training/ induction programs are held, emphasis on the part of student affairs and respective councils should be given to conditions which deter students' collaboration. This should, peculiarly, be noted by training developers and providers in and through the universities.
- Further research needs to be done on issues concerning overall synergy-creation among students in higher educational institutions of Ethiopia.

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