Higher Education Expansion and the Gender Question in Ethiopia: A Case Study of Women in a Public University

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Abstract: The need to be part of the globalized knowledge economy on the one hand and ensure social justice on the other necessitated the change from elitist to massified higher education system. Following this new development, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Ethiopia embarked on ambitious expansion by increasing the national enrolment capacity and the number of universities. This study assesses the effects of government policies in terms of mainstreaming gender issues in higher education based on a case study at Debub University. Data were collected from two sources. One is the primary data obtained based on an open ended interview with 20 female students admitted on affirmative action program. The second is the university registrar office. The results show that of the total of 27,209 enrolled between 2000/01 and 2004/05 academic years at undergraduate degree programs, only 19.2% were women. Similarly, the average proportion of women graduates over the same period was 11.7%. Women attrition (due to academic reasons) was found to be about 35.1% in the 2003/04 academic year. The qualitative results indicated that women equity is affected by factors related to socio-psychological, academic and guidance and counseling support, health and financial problems. Implications of the findings to policy and practical implementation at lower level in higher education institutions are discussed.

Introduction

Western-style higher education in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. According to existing studies, it started with the inauguration of the University College of Addis Ababa in 1950 (Wanna, 2004; Habtamu, 2003). Though so recent, it can be said that the HE sector in Ethiopia has shown a modest expansion until the 1980s - a period which some scholars characterize as 'a lost decade' for African Higher Education (Mama, 2003). A closer look at the detailed account indicate, in early

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1950s, the enrolment capacity of the University College of Addis Ababa was below 1,000 with less than 50 faculty members, a majority of whom were, expatriates (Habtamu, 2003). In the 1960s, however, higher education continued to spread out with the opening of several junior colleges in the provinces. These mainly included the inauguration of the College of Agriculture and Mechanization at Alemaya, Ambo, and Jimma; the College of Public Health at Gonder and Polytechnic Institute at Bahirdar. Added to that, the Institute of Building Technology, the College of Engineering, Kotebe College of Teacher Education, and Theology College of Holy Trinity were subsequently opened in the capital (Habtamu, 2003). If anything that happened in the 1980s deserves a mention, it was the upgrading of the College of Agriculture at Alemaya to a status of a university. The graduate program was launched by Addis Ababa University in 1978 with-overall enrollment reaching 246 in 1982/83, out of which, only 15 were women. Since then, graduate courses were continued to be offered in several areas, including engineering, natural science, agriculture, the social sciences, and medicine (*US Library of Congress,* 1991). The unfolding situation this time required Addis Ababa Unive rsity to expand its scope and principally focus on graduate and postgraduate training as a result of the increasing demand for instructors for the newly inaugurated universities (World Bank, 2004).

Overall, though higher education in Ethiopia managed to register considerable success until the latter part of the 20th Century (World Bank, 2003), it did not escape the criticism for being elitist. Specifically, it raised a serious doubt as to its survival in the 21st century due to its inability to ensure access, quality, relevance, efficiency, and responsiveness to societal demands at the face of the increasingly globalized knowledge era. Thus, like other African higher institutions, it was felt that there was a need for higher education reform in Ethiopia.

At the moment, Ethiopia is introducing a reform to its higher education to be part of the global knowledge economy. Hence, following the

adoption of the Education and Training Policy (TGE 1994), the Ministry of Education has recently produced a document entitled: *Higher Education System Overhaul* (HESO) that outlines a reform for its tertiary education. Similar to the situation in other African countries, the reform's objectives are to ensure equity, access, accountability, relevance and responsiveness to the demands of the Ethiopian people (Ashcroft, 2004). Particularly, the reform process keeps the perspective of poverty reduction and bringing about sustainable development.

Relevant to this has been to bring about gender equality and bridging the development gap between the various regional states, nationalities, and other social groups via increasing access to HE (Habtamu, 2004). The need for bolstering participation and access and ensure equity demanded expansion and upgrading of existing colleges to a status of a university and opening up new ones in various parts of the country. Today, there are nine public universities each with an enrolment capacity ranging from eight to ten thousand in their regular programs, and thirteen more universities are expected to be established in the near future. Moreover, in agreement with the Neo-Liberal agenda, public universities have already introduced cost-sharing allowing repayment through a graduate-tax scheme after HE graduates got employment once they finish their education (Wanna, 2004).

In addition, private higher education institutions have proliferated and claime to cover about 24% HE enrolment (MoE-EMIS, 2003) mainly at diploma level and to a limited extent in their degree programs.

Taken together, it can be argued that though the current massification campaign is so commendable, it has failed to ensure proportional representation of the sexes. Furthermore, this study contends that the emphasis on increasing female enrolment, but not doing enough to retain them to get through their studies is tantamount to denying women access to HE.

On the bases of these presumptions, the present study highlights government policy frameworks addressing gender equality in higher education to give a backdrop to its subsequent arguments. Then, it analyzes women *access* (as measured by enrolment rates), *attrition* (as measured by academic dismissal rates), and *success* (as measured by the proportion of women graduates) relative to their men counterparts at Debub University.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are to:

- describe the state of women participation in higher education in Ethiopia,
- analyze government policies addressing the gender question,
- examine patterns of female access, success, and attrition over the last five years,
- bring the issue to the attention of policy makers to revisit the implementation of affirmative action in higher education institutions at national level in general and institutional level in particular, and
- forward suggestions towards ensuring gender equity.

In the section that follows, government policies shall be briefly reviewed to be followed by the analysis of gender mainstreaming in education in general and higher education in particular, i.e. the existing situation at Debub University in terms of women access, attrition and success.

Policies on Mainstreaming Gender Issues in Education

After the fall of the military regime in Ethiopia, government policies began to consider the need to address gender inequality in socio-economic and political arena. Thus, addressing gender issues has received considerable attention by understanding its crucial role in

poverty reduction, ensuring good governance and democracy. As a result, all major policy documents clearly articulate the gender question. For instance, the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia (FDRE, 1995), Article 35. No.3. states that:

> The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social, and economic life as well as in public and private institutions (p. 93).

Within the constitutional framework, the New Education and Training Policy further articulated the need to address the longstanding inequity and discrimination suffered by Ethiopian women.

> Special attention will be given to women and to those students who did not get educational opportunities in the preparation, distribution, and use of educational support input (TGE, 1994; Article 3.7.7.)

Similarly, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2004) also further articulated the need to implement affirmative action for women, students with disabilities and native students of disadvantaged regions:

> Entry assessment or admission procedures designed for any female, disabled student, a student who completed high school education in a developing region and who is native of the nationality of such region or student from nationality whose participation in higher education is low shall be different from others. They shall, during their stay in the institution, get special support; particulars of such support shall be determined by the “Ministry” (Article 6: 3).

Thus, it is now apparent that the policy frameworks addressing the issue of gender equity as well as fostering female retention and success in higher education seem to be in place. The major interest of this paper is not only to describe women access based on enrolment at the point of entry, but also examine the extent to which government policies are implemented with respect to increasing women success during their university studies.

Methodology

The present study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected based on an interview with 20 female students drawn from three randomly selected colleges and faculties of Debub University. Secondary data were obtained from the University Registrar's Office. The paragraphs that follow describe the study participants and instruments used to collect primary data.

Participants and Interview Themes

Participants of the interview were 20 female undergraduate students with a mean age of 21.2 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.21 years drawn from three major fields of study. Tabulated across areas of study, 6 (30%) from the College of Agriculture, 8 (40%) from the College of Teacher Education, and 6 (30%) from the Faculty of Social Science. Of the total, 12 (60%) were drawn from second-year and 8 (40%) from the third-year group. First-year and final year students were not included on the ground that the former are very new and the latter are about to graduate and most left their respective campuses.

The semi-structured interview was based on the question that solicits participants to identify the sources of difficulties that female students encounter in their university studies. Based on the responses, the author identified three major themes whereby their responses are aggregated. These included: (1) Socio-psychological factors that relate with interpersonal relationship in the university environment including relationship with female classmates and dorm-mates,

opposite sex students, instructors, and other psychological factors that affect their motivation to succeed in college, (2) Academic support and guidance and counseling, and (3) Socio-economic and health-related problems which include financial and health problems and unwanted pregnancy.

The interview was conducted on face-to-face basis with the principal investigator being the interviewer with the help of an assistant who takes notes of the responses of the participants. The respondents were assured beforehand that their responses will be confidential and would not be in anyway used for another purpose.

Data analyses were made separately. For quantitative data, simple percentages, and Microsoft Excel generated graphs were used. Interview results were presented by aggregating the responses under three major themes as indicated above.

Results

This part presents the descriptive and qualitative interview results. First, the descriptive results on women access, attrition, and success in higher education will be given. Following that, the aggregated interview results along the three themes will be presented.

Access

Women access to higher education over the last five years, since the establishment of the university is shown in Table 1. As can be discerned, women enrolment in the year 2000/01 before the issue of higher education was not yet the agenda was 16%. After five years of expansion of the higher education sector by the government, the participation rate has shown a marginal increment of about 4.8% (i.e. female enrolment has increased from 439 to 1781). Even though the absolute size appears substantial, it is far from ensuring equity to women in higher education as a social category.

Table 1: Enrolment in the Undergraduate Degree and Diploma Programs

Academic Year	Female	Male	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)
2000/01	439	2313	2752	84.1	15.9
2001/02	707	3101	3808	81.4	18.6
2002/03	848	4210	5058	83.2	16.8
2003/04	1461	5565	7026	79.2	20.8
2004/05	1781	6784	8565	79.2	20.8
Overall	5236	21973	27209	80.8	19.2

Source*:* Debub University Registrar's Office, June 2005.

The close inspection of the graph in Figure 1 depicts a steady increase in absolute size of men enrolments than women, which in turn permits the argument that the expansion of the higher education sector is rather widening the already existing social inequity between the sexes.

Overall, of the total 27,209 students enrolled between 2000/01 and 2004/05 at Debub University, only 5,236 (19.2%) were women. This indicates the far-reaching impacts on continued marginalization of women in the professions and gainful employment.

Access versus Attrition Trends

As indicated earlier, there has been some increment in the participation of women as students at undergraduate level. To give the complete picture, there must be some data that substantiate the extent to which the marginal increment in participation is accompanied by survival in the system. The data, however, depict a rather disappointing picture. Accordingly, as shown in *Figure 2,* women's share is accounted for the larger proportion of the dismissals than enrolment. A closer look at Table 2 tabulated by college/faculty reveal, for instance, that the college of agriculture enrolled 273 (23.6%) female students in 2003/04 academic year, of which 84 (30.7%) were dismissed at the end of the first semester. The total

number of dismissed female students of the college of agriculture exceeded a third (34.4%) of the overall enrolment at the end of the same academic year (see: Table 2). Overall, women dismissal rate was found to be 51.7% (209 dismissed women out of a total enrolment of 405) relative to the share of their men counterparts which accounts for only 6.2% (196 male students) in the indicated areas of study.

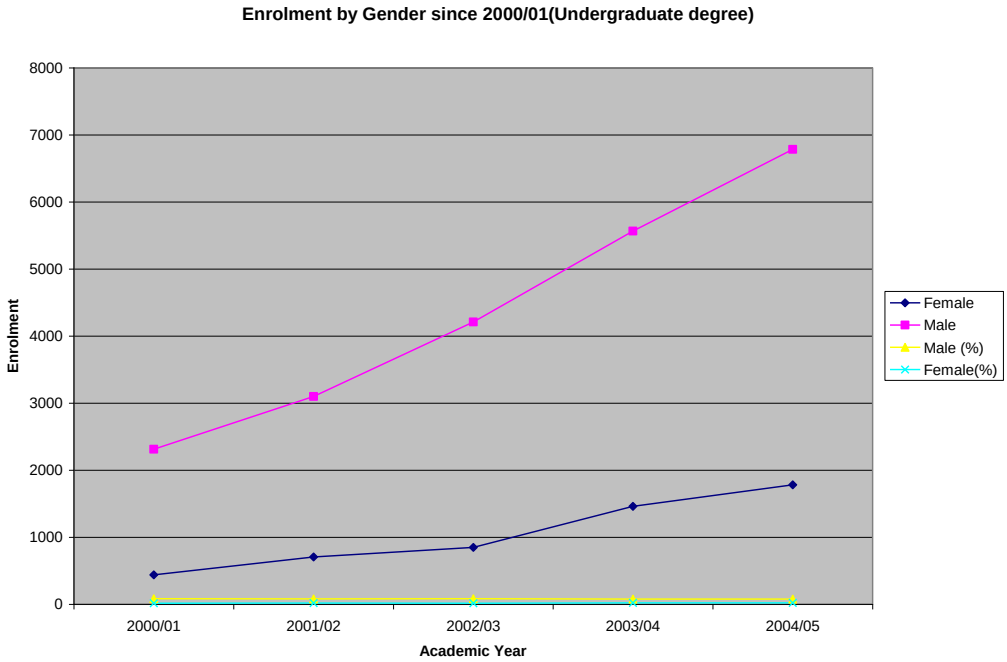

Figure 1. Enrolment pattern in undergraduate degree programs (2000/01- 2004/05 academic year)

Table 2: Enrolment and Dismissal Rates of Regular Degree Students in 2003/04 Academic Year

College/Faculty	Enrollment			Dismissal Rate			
	Male	Female	% Female	Male	%	Female	%
Agriculture	889	274	23.6	92	10.3	84	30.7
Engineering	418	98	19	9	2.2	19	19.4
Natural Sciences	692	136	16.4	45	6.5	51	37.5
Social Sciences	803	320	28.5	46	5.7	47	14.7
Health Sciences	332	114	25.6	4	1.2	8	7.0
Total	3134	942	23.5	196	6.3	209	22.3

Source: Computed based on data obtained from Debub University Registrar, June 2005

As depicted in Figures 2 and 3, in 2003/04 and 2003/04 academic years, women in the faculty of natural sciences, engineering faculty, college of agriculture, college of teacher education, and faculty of social sciences were found to take the lions share of the overall dismissals. Taken together, Debub University on average enrolled a total of 1,723 female students in its regular undergraduate programs, of which it has lost about 35.1% (465) of them at the end of the 2003/04 academic year (see: Table 5). In other words, at least two women were dismissed for every ten women enrolled in the regular program.

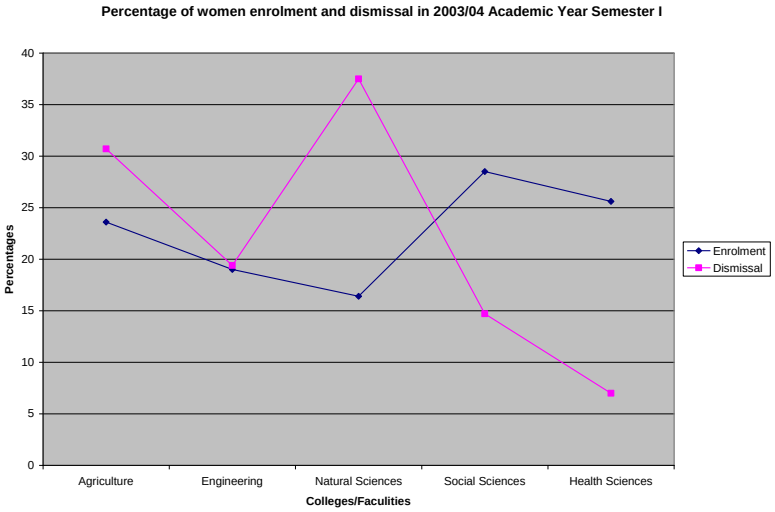

Figure. 2. Women Enrolment and Dismissal Rate by Faculty/College (2003/04 Academic Year Semester I)

As can be discerned from Table 3, some streams seem to be less welcoming to women than others. For instance, the fields of engineering and teacher education (secondary level) lost over half of their female students. While on the other hand, female dismissal rates in the social science (17.6%) and health science (15.2%) streams appears better.

Table 3: Women Enrolment and Dismissal in 2004/05

College/Faculty	Enrolled	%	Dismissed	%
Agriculture	276	23.6	95	34.4
Engineering	95	19	54	56.8
Forestry	54	16	22	40.7
Health Sciences	125	25	19	15.2
Natural Sciences	133	16	44	37.5
Social Sciences	312	27	55	17.6
Teacher Education	328	17	176	53.7
Total	1323	18.22	465	35.1

Source: Debub University Registrar's Office, June 2005

In general, in 2004/05 academic year, of the total 1,323 women enrolled at undergraduate level, 465 (35.1%) were dismissed for academic reasons alone. However, the figure does not take into account those who terminated their studies due to economic, health and family-related problems.

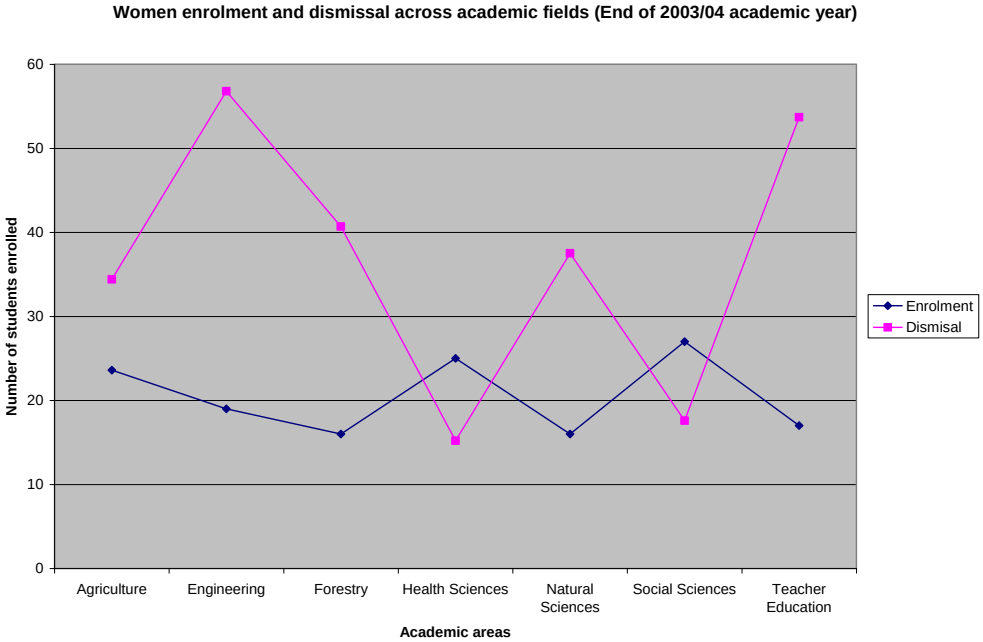

Figure. 3. Women enrolment and dismissal across academic fields in 2004/05 academic year.

Success

Similar to access, women success (as measured based on the percentage of women graduates) over the last five years did not show any meaningful change in terms of proportions. In fact, the figure has increased from 41 (12%) in 2000/01 to 157 (13.2%) in 2004/05. In between, the pattern showed fluctuation particularly in 2001/02 and 2002/03 academic years.

Table 4: Number of Men and Women Graduates over Five Years (2000/01 – 2004/05) period

Academic Year	Female	Male	Total	% Female
2000/01	41	295	336	12.2
2001/02	43	420	463	9.3
2002/03	54	564	618	8.7
2003/04	108	729	837	12.9
2004/05	157	1028	1185	13.2
Overall	403	3036	3439	11.72

Source*:* Debub University Registrar's Office, June 2005

In 2004/05 academic year, when new departments and faculties had their graduates for the first time, the proportion of women remained unchanged. Their distribution across the various faculties (see: Table 5) further depicts marginal representation across professions.

Table 5: Percentage of Women Graduates in 2004/05 Academic Years

College/Faculty	Total	Female	Male	Female (%)
Agriculture	183	32	151	17.5
Engineering	46	8	38	17.4
Forestry	76	8	68	10.5
Health Science	46	10	36	21.7
Natural Sciences	252	35	217	13.9
Social Sciences	295	48	247	16.3
Teacher Education	335	26	309	10.7
Overall	1185	157	1028	13.2

Source*:* Debub University Registrar's Office, June 2005.

Interview Results

A semi-structured interview schedule consisting of three major themes was developed to find out the outstanding reasons behind high female academic dismissal rates compared to their male

counterparts. These themes were broadly classified as: (1) socio-psychological factors related to their interpersonal relationships and motivational variables, (2) financial and health issues, and (3) academic and guidance and counseling support. The responses are summarized as follows along the above categories:

The Socio-psychological factors. Under this category the following issues were frequently raised almost by all respondents who participated in the interview:

- Bullying, sexual harassment, and sometimes physical assault by male students
- Request by male students and others to do them sexual favor in return to some kind of support accorded
- Fear to approach their instructors to ask for academic support, adevice, and guidance
- Difficulty of some female students with non-urban backgrounds to get along with same sex dorm-mates coming from urban areas
- Falling in love with someone who does not encourage them to make effort to succeed in their studies
- A widespread belief that those female students who are admitted to the degree programs with affirmative action are unlikely to succeed in their studies.

In particular, it is worth mentioning some of the responses that participants gave in this connection:

> We know that we joined the university with low GPAs; as a result, we [girls] feel that we cannot compete. [FT02] (My translation)

It appears that the 0.2 GPA point reductions at admission seemed to have far-reaching negative implications of paying a price in terms of lowering their self-esteem in general and academic self-concept in particular. This further enhances the levels of anxiety and frustration

experienced in academic situation and particularly if they are in competitive situations such as examinations whereby social comparison is the rule rather than the exception. With regard to this, there is empirical support for the relationship between academic self-concept and achievement in college (Demewez, Mehadi, and Tesfaye, 2005).

The other factor identified as an important variable for female underachievement in the university concerns *interpersonal relationship.* Particularly, opposite-sex relationships on campus seem to have a setback on female academic success because it is based on *traditional sex-roles* that divided the place of men and women in Ethiopian society. A third-year female student in the college of agriculture said the following while explaining the impact of first-year females having boy friends in college.

> Girls having boy friends are at a disadvantage because they cannot plan their dating together…it is mostly boys who arrange the time and place – thus boys plan and come to our dormitories to call their girl friends often after finishing their work – girls may not resist the offer not to jeopardize the relationship even though they just started studying, or to take a nap to study for the rest of the evening [ACAC-05] (My translation).

The above response, among other things, indicates the existing power-relationship between men and women in our society: Boys make decisions about the time and place of meeting their lovers. Most girls among those interviewed (75%) also feel that it is the right way to do even though it is unfavorably affecting them academically. To a large extent, the tendency of women to disregard their comfort and safety for the sake of others is due to their developmental differences which favour boys in on interpersonal relations at the expense of their own (Gilligian, 1982). On the other hand, traditional gender roles that encourage male domination further discourage female college students, especially those with traditional mothers (Tesfaye, 1997) to claim participation in making decisions even about their outings.

Academic and Guidance and Counseling Support. This is also cited as a reason behind high female attrition. These are some of the outstanding reasons:

- Lack of adequate learning materials (such as handouts, reference books, and texts) and inability to get them a copy on individual bases.
- The previous academic experience in secondary schools is not enough to prepare them to university and it is not uniform across schools throughout the country.
- Inability to get continuous and need-driven remedial academic support in the form of tutorials which meets their demands in terms of the courses they are currently taking.
- Absence of guidance and counseling service in the university.
- Beliefs that instructors are not taking them seriously (their problems) and do not attempt to extend sympathy and support.
- Views that the 'Gender Office' with its current organizational capacity can do little to avert the problems that has been experienced by female students.
- Teachers' qualification varies from school to school and there are unqualified teachers in the fields of physics, mathematics, civics and history.

Particularly, commenting on the quality of instruction/learning in secondary schools [of preparatory programs], a first year student who came from rural West *Gojjam* and was dismissed last year and joined on readmission said:

> We had no qualified teachers like students coming from Addis Ababa and other major cities of the country; as a result, we lack the necessary preparation to compete at equal footing. [FSS-03] (My translation)

This is linked directly with the apparent problem of assuring quality standards in secondary schools and particularly those at preparatory levels in the whole country. Boys and girls joining HEIs in Ethiopia come from different academic backgrounds due to individual differences. But individual differences that arise due to environmental variations should at least be minimized. Especially girls coming from disadvantaged regions and rural areas are at the forefront of those victimized.

Financial and health obstacles are also cited as factors that facilitated females lack of success in their studies. These among others are:

- inability to buy learning materials, books, and pay for photocopying
- some female students reported to have terminated or failed to continue their education due to pregnancy and sickness which discouraged them to concentrate on their studies

In short, the interview with female students revealed that a wide-range of variables which are categorized under three categories related to socio-psychological factors, academic support and guidance and counseling, and financial and health related obstacles have been identified to have undermined women academic performance and thereby their representation in higher education in general and at institutional level in particular.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that despite gender-sensitive policy frameworks, female access to higher education (based on data from Debub University) did not show a proportional increment over the last five years (i.e. between 2000/01 and 2003/04). Moreover, attrition rate (as measured by the number of female students' dismissal for academic reasons) was generally found to be high. The highest female academic dismissal rate was registered in the 2003/04 academic year which accounted for little more than 35%.

Furthermore, even though the overall proportion of female graduates has shown a slight improvement in 2004/05 compared to the previous years, the increment was not that impressive.

In short, since the introduction of the new Education and Training Policy in 1994 and the subsequent HE expansion efforts, visible improvement in female proportional representation in higher education has not been achieved. Consistently, the recently published Annual Education Statistics by the Ministry of Education (MoE-EMIS, 2003) indicates that the share of female students in higher education institutions is showing a declining trend contrary to expectation. On the other hand, Habtamu (2003) further argued that the share of female graduates until the year 2000 at national level was more than 14%`and nevertheless, female attrition was very low. Due to this, Ethiopia was cited along with Egypt (a country with high female HE participation on the continent) as portraying good examples of female low attrition rates in comparison with other African countries (Mama, 2003). Thus, it is imperative at this juncture to pose the question: 'Why has female attrition become so high as soon as the massification began?" Though the reasons behind high attrition should come under close scrutiny, one can safely conclude that polices adopted to bolster women participation via affirmative action in higher education do not seem to come into full force due to the multi-dimensional nature of the problem. The present study manages to reveal only the 'tip of the iceberg'. Some of the core issues identified include: The socio-psychological factors and problems related to interpersonal relationship conditioned by the university environment, lack of academic and guidance and counseling support and financial and health problems. However, it is difficult to claim that the problems could be addressed with these fragmented pieces of information. Thus, there must be an in-depth research into to these set of issues identified in the interview with female students in the present paper.

According to the results of the above analyses and observation of the situation at Debub University, the following suggestions could be forwarded in order to implement affirmative action and thereby bridge

the existing gender imbalance in access and success in higher education.

The Psychological Consequences of Affirmative Action and Faculty's Response

The MoE has been implementing positive discrimination favoring female students by admitting girls to higher education with a cut-off point lower than 2.0 GPA points compared to admission requirements for male students. It remains to be empirically scrutinized, the extent to which this admission requirement played out in terms of influencing girls' academic self-concept compared to those female students who actually scored high in the entrance examination. On the other hand, female students who were admitted to Debub University on affirmative action reported that they feel they may not be able to succeed by competing with those who joined through the regular admission criteria. They openly expressed that they underwent frustration and anxiety particularly when they had to sit for final or mid-term exams.

Even though female students admitted on affirmative action were awarded only 2.0 GPA point advantage, the amount is so small compared to the experiences in other African countries such as Uganda (Mama 2003); ours are considered and labeled as much inferior (Habtamu, 2004). On top of the consistent interview results, Habtamu's argument received a partial empirical support from a subsequent study of motivational variables in academic context. For instance, a study of academic self-concept conducted among 134 first-year students of the Debub University revealed that female students reported low academic self-concept than do their male counterparts with high statistical significance (Tesfaye, 2005). As a result, the labeling of these students as low ability group coupled with less favorable environment would have facilitated their academic underperformance which was as high as 35.1%. On the other hand, academic self-concept has a robust correlation with academic performance (Marsh, 1990), which in turn, explains the observed low academic performance at the university. Thus, the absence of

student guidance and counseling service played a very negative role in terms of escalating the psychological prices girls had to pay.

On the other side of the spectrum, the belief among some academic staff including deans and instructors (Abebayehu, 1998; Anteneh, 2000) that: 'Admitting a student with a lower GPA is compromising the quality of education' seems to have further worsened the already precarious situation. Previous studies on affirmative action at Addis Ababa University revealed that the tutorial services and various support mechanisms being provided for girls are inadequate and the overall academic environment is not generally conducive (Abebayehu, 1998; Anteneh 2000). For the most part, this also is the case at Debub University where support and tutorial programs to female students have not been regularly organized and are not financially backed except the limited efforts made in providing reading materials and photocopy services (DU-Gender Office 2005).

The Social Environment of Higher Education Institutions

The social environment in which young women find themselves as they join higher education institutions is totally different from what they seem to be familiar as they were under parental care and control. What is waiting them, to a large extent, appears to be frequent and widespread sexual harassment and discrimination – in some instances, students are forced or trapped to have sex with their male college classmates, employees and even by some ill-disciplined instructors. As such, there is no clear-cut and elaborate university-wide regulation that effectively protects women from such threats and danger. As a result, girls do not feel safe to stay at night in libraries, laboratories and even classrooms to study or to prepare reports; dormitories are overcrowded and not at all conducive for silent individual study. In fact, there is a so-called "Gender Office" established in all campuses of the university. Given its organizational strength, however, this office could not attend to all plights of female students beyond hearing complaints. The office's ability to

meaningfully address their academic needs by instituting efficient professional support appears very limited at least as we see it today.

Equally important is the influence of the continued differential socialization of the sexes. Apparently, HEIs are not at all immune from traditional and cultural stereotypes operating against women that authorize male superiority. For those college women who have been victims of sex-role stereotyping in all walks of life, the pervading attitude itself is frustrating, as even academically competent female have been challenged by the unfriendly environment, let alone those who need some remedial academic, social and psychological support to succeed in higher education institutions. If affirmative action to female in higher education is to bear fruit, it should begin with challenging these outdated stereotypical attitudes and impediments in university campuses. Male who make-up the 'majority' in universities should be part of the solution, as they are part of the problem. Therefore, apart from adopting an elaborate rules and regulations by the university regarding harassment and violence that targeted female students, attention should be given to their social and academic problems.

Furthermore, if the "Gender Office" is to remain relevant in the struggle to ensure gender equality, it should provide a functional academic support and should have a guidance and counseling service with the necessary financial backing in budget terms to effectively run its activities. Furthermore, the effort should go beyond endorsing policies that only focus on increasing admissions while relegating the need to address the multifaceted challenges that women face after enrolling in the universities. Women who got the chance to be admitted also deserve to succeed in their studies and this requires more commitment in budget terms since they need extra academic support, special guidance and counseling, and learning materials.

The Missing Women Role Models

The university and its academic staff should come forward as frontline partners in confronting the challenges by bridging the gap between men and women, first by changing the out-dated attitude related to male superiority. There is abundant theoretical and empirical support regarding the positive effect of women role models on young female students to follow in their foot steps in all spheres including succeeding in tertiary institutions. Thus, there is a consensus at all levels that more women should be employed in higher education institutions. But the reality on the ground tells a different story. For instance, in 2002/03 academic year the proportion of women faculty in Ethiopian universities stands at 7% (MoE-EMIS, 2003; Habtamu, 2003). Debub University is no exception in this regard. A close scrutiny of faculty gender composition in the university reveals that women constitute about 10% (Academic Program Office, 2004/05), most of whom in fact are in typical 'feminine' fields such as: Home-Science and Technology, Nursing, Language, and Humanities. This picture has to change and more women should be encouraged to join higher education as faculty members. This is not simply to bring about equality, but also due to its significant exemplary role to same-sex students that success in higher education is not contrary to women's role in society.

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