

## **GENDER DIFFERENCE IN STUDY BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ETHIOPIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Studies indicate that there is relationship between students' study behaviour and their academic attainment. That is, if students differ in study behaviour, their academic achievements possibly vary. The present study aimed to examine gender difference in study behaviour. Quantitative survey research method was used to conduct the study. On the study, 1340 (53.28% male and 46.72% female) students were participated. Study Behaviour Inventory (SBI) was employed to collect data. Mean and Standard Deviation were calculated and difference in study behaviour was tested by independent t-test at .05 significance level. The result of the study revealed that students had appropriate study behaviour. There were significant gender differences in management of time for routine, recurring tasks and in overall study behaviour among university students in favour of males. A functional counselling service is suggested to be installed in universities in Ethiopia in order to provide study skill training for female as well as for male students.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Behaviour, Study, Gender Difference

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term study behaviour in this investigation is used as a guiding concept including study habits, or study approach. Since the 1970s many researchers have examined how college students study and have explored factors that correlate to effective study approaches. It is generally believed by teachers and students alike that the appropriate study behaviour relates to higher grades (Wolfenden & Pumfrey, 1985). In relation to this idea, Otto (1978) noted that appropriate use of study behaviours related to better academic outcomes in various areas. In addition, Wolfenden and Pumfrey (1985, p. 91) emphasized study behaviour stating as Success or failure in academic work depends, in part, on personal characteristics not necessarily related to ability. Irrespective of their level of ability, a student may engage in study behaviours that may enhance or detract from the student's academic performance.

Bliss and Mueller (1987) defined study behaviour as "what students actually do". On the other hand, they defined study skills as tasks students "capable of doing". They then

generalized these definitions to mean study skills as the potentials for action, whereas study behaviours as the observed actions. Thus, students are not likely to exhibit appropriate study behaviour if they do not possess the necessary skills and attitudes.

By using Study Behaviour Inventory (SBI), Bliss and Mueller (1993) and Bliss and Sandiford (2004), consistently found that there were three factors underlying study behaviours. These were the feelings of academic self-efficacy, management of time for routine, recurring tasks, and management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks.

Feeling of academic self-efficacy refers to the learners' beliefs concerning their capabilities to accomplish academic tasks and activities (Bandura, 1977). Students with high academic self-efficacy are more likely to choose challenging tasks, work harder, persist longer, persevere when facing difficulties, and are more likely to succeed (Schraw, Crippen, & Hartley, 2006). Research results show that academic self-efficacy is highly correlated with and predictive of learning outcomes in a broad range of settings (Kitsantas, 2002; Schraw et al., 2006).

Time management refers to how well individuals are able to utilize and allocate time appropriately, which in turn, affects the accomplishment of their personal goals (Pintrich, 2004; Ogonor & Nwadiani, 2006). Effective time management generally is positively related to students' performance; that is, students who are better at planning and managing their time are more likely to have higher achievement than students who manage their time not (Bliss & Mueller, 1993; Ogonor & Nwadiani, 2006).

Research results suggest that unproductive study behaviours can lead to low performance to academic withdrawal (Goldfinch & Hughes, 2007). Specifically, students with low academic self-efficacy are likely to avoid difficult tasks, lack persistence and easily give up when facing obstacles while studying (Pajares, 2008). Those who manage time poorly are unable to allocate their time reasonably, not pace their study appropriately, and often cram for classes until the last minute. Poor time management tends to yield unsatisfactory academic performance (Balduf, 2009). For that matter, study behaviour plays a key role in students' academic outcomes. Hence, examining the study behaviour of students, especially the new universities in Ethiopia, helps to lay foundation for appropriate study behaviour of students that may contribute to the academic success of students.

## **Differences in Study Behaviour**

Gender differences in study behaviour have been considered in many studies. For instance, Speth and Brown (1990) reported gender difference in that female students were found to be adopting a deep approach and organized study methods than male students. On the other hand, Bliss, Vinary, and Koeninger (1996) indicated similar study behaviour of male and female students in their work of validation of the Spanish translation of Study Behaviour Inventory (SBI) in which 495 (48% men and 52% female) students were participated.

Robinson, David, and Saarnio (1994) reported that females had more utilized effective study habits than males. They further indicated that masculine traits were no better a predictor of effective study habits than were feminine traits. Bashir and Mattoo (2012) portrayed that high significant relationship between the school environment (private and government) and marks for female students and no for male students. However they reported no significant

difference between male and female students of secondary school in study habits. Similarly, Nuthana and Yenagi (2009) depicted similar study habits of male and female students.

The analysis of the relationship between the epistemological beliefs of secondary level students and their attitudes towards studying was conducted by Onen (2011). The result indicated that there was significant relationship between students' gender and grade levels in terms of their epistemological beliefs and attitudes towards studying. It was reported that the increase of epistemological beliefs corresponded with the improved attitudes towards studying.

The literature review so far presented in this part of the study showed that there were differences in study behaviour of the students as a function of their background. Thus the present investigation intends to examine the study behaviour of Wollega University students with regard to their gender.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The investigation aimed to examine difference in study behaviour in relation to students' gender in higher education. More specifically the study intends

1. To examine study behaviour of students
2. To examine gender difference in study behaviour

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

1. There is appropriate study behaviour among university students
2. There is gender significant difference in study behaviour among university students

## METHOD

Quantitative survey method was employed for the study. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) was calculated to report mean scores. Independent t-test was conducted to examine the significant differences. The analysis of data was supported by SPSS 16. The significances of variables were tested at the 0.05 alpha levels.

## SAMPLE

The population of this study were students of Wollega University. As the data obtained from the Registrar Office of the university indicates, there were 9200 (male = 7009, female = 2181) students in the academic year 2011/12. Then, lists of all students with respect to their gender were prepared. By employing simple random sampling technique 15% of male and 35% female students were selected. Of the total sample selected, 514 (male = 377 & female =137) of them were eliminated from analysis because the respondents did not completely fill in the questionnaire. Thus, the study comprised of 1340 (male= 714 & female=626) sample of students.

## INSTRUMENT

To collect data, Study Behaviour Inventory (SBI) that was developed and validated by Bliss and Mueller (1986) was employed. The inventory has a total of 46 items with response choices of 4-point Likert scale: (1) Rarely or never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Often or usually, or (4) Always or almost always. On validation of the inventory, the developers categorized the

inventory into three factors of feeling of academic self-efficacy (FASE), management of time for routine, recurring academic tasks (MLRR), and management of long-term specific, nonrecurring academic activities (MLSN).

The three factors have an internal consistency reliability of .86, .82 and .70 for the feeling of academic self-efficacy, management of time for routine, recurring tasks and management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks respectively. These measures show high levels of internal consistency reliability for the complete instrument and the three factors. The reliability coefficient for the entire SBI was found to be .88 after using the test-retest method with a time interval of 3 weeks. Additional evidence of the construct validity of the instrument is that the correlation between the total of SBI score and the grade point average was 0.79. The correlations with Factors I, II and III were 0.74, 0.70, and 0.67 respectively (Bliss & Mueller, 1993). Hence, according to these authors, the Study Behaviour Inventory is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing study behaviour of college and university students.

Bliss and Mueller (1986) reported that eight items were not loaded on any of three factors identified (feeling of academic self-efficacy, management of time for routine, recurring tasks and management of long-term, specific, nonrecurring tasks). Hence, from 46 items of the SBI, 38 items that were found to have a factor loading on one of the three factors were employed in the present study by translating it in to Afan Oromo.

Before using the inventory to collect data the items were administered to 55 students in Wollega University. The reliability estimation for SBI resulted in 0.84 for the total scale, 0.81 for management of time for routine, recurring tasks, 0.74 for feeling of academic self-efficacy, and 0.67 for management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks. The inventory on average takes 15 minutes to complete.

## PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Being with teachers (those had class with students for that period), the selected students were contacted in classroom. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. They were informed that the research has no risk and it is completely confidential. They were also informed if they didn't want they have full right not to respond to the questionnaire, though they were encouraged to provide responses by informing them the importance of the study. In doing this, no student was found to be unwilling. Then, the questionnaire distributed to the students.

Finally, before recoding responses it was checked for completeness. Incomplete questionnaires were discarded from the data pool. Data from the completed documents were entered into SPSS version 16 for computation, analysis, and report preparation.

## RESULTS

In the present investigation, 38 items of the study behaviour inventory of four Likert responses were used for data collection. The inventory has three factors. The responses of negatively stated items were reversely recorded. As a result, a low mean score indicates inappropriate and a high mean score portrays appropriate study behaviour. In present study, the feeling of academic self-efficacy was measured by 14 items. For this factor, the expected minimum score was 14, and the maximum was 56. A mean score less than 28 is considered

as negative, between 28 and 42 is taken as weak positive and greater than 42 is judged as positive of the feeling of academic self-efficacy. The typical items in this factor included, “I have to reread material several times; passages do not have much meaning the first time I go over them”; “I get nervous and confused when taking an examination and fail to answer questions to the best of my ability”; and “During an examination, I forget names, dates, formulas, and other details I really do know.”

Similarly, the management of time for routine, recurring tasks was measured by 16 items. The expected minimum mean score was 16, and the maximum was 64. For this factor, a mean score less than 32 is taken as inappropriate, 32-48 is considered as weak appropriate, and greater than 48 is judged as appropriate management of time for routine, recurring tasks. The items in this group include: “I keep my assignments up to date by doing my work regularly from day to day”; “After a class lecture, I go back and recite to myself the material in my notes, rechecking any points I find doubtful”; and “Before attending class, I prepare by reading or studying the assignment.”

In addition, the management of long-term specific, nonrecurring task factor included 8 items. The expected minimum mean score is 8 and the maximum is 32. Therefore mean score less than 16 is regarded as negative, 16-24 is deemed as weak positive, and greater than 24 is considered as appropriate management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks. Items of this factor included, “I find it hard to finish work by a certain time; work is unfinished, inferior, or not on time” and “When preparing for an examination, I learn facts in some logical order of importance, order of presentation in class or textbook, order of time in history, etc.”

Likewise, for the overall inventory, the possible minimum and maximum mean scores would be 38 and 152. A mean score less than 76 is taken as inappropriate, between 76 and 114 is deemed as weak, and greater than 114 is considered as appropriate study behaviour.

Before the data obtained by the inventory treated, it was checked for appropriateness of normality. Visual examination of the histogram the mean scores of the total inventory revealed that the curve was almost normal. A skewness coefficient (skewness divided by the standard error of skewness) was calculated as  $.119/0.067=1.67$ , which was less than 2, that sufficiently fulfils the assumptions of normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Then, the analysis of the data is presented as follows.

**Table 1.** Means Scores and Standard deviations (SD) of Study Behaviour by Gender

Scale	Total Sample		Male		Females	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
FASE	42.12	5.61	41.29	5.46	40.93	5.78
MTRR	50.16	5.58	50.45	5.49	49.82	5.67
MLSN	24.94	3.06	25.09	2.97	24.77	3.15
Overall	116.22	11.79	116.83	11.35	115.52	12.25

**Note:** FASE= Feeling of Academic Self-efficacy, MTRR = Management of Time for Routine, Recurring tasks, and MLSN = Management of Long-term Specific, Nonrecurring tasks

In relations to the range of mean scores shown above, the total sample mean scores in Table 1 reveals that the respondent were found to have positive feeling of academic self-efficacy, appropriate management of time for routine, recurring tasks, appropriate management of long-term specific, nonrecurring academic tasks, and overall appropriate study behaviour. Hypothesis 1 states that there is appropriate study behaviour among university students.

Hence, the result confirms the hypothesis. As Table 1 further illustrates the mean scores of male students in the three factors and in the overall of the inventory were found to be higher than their female counterparts. The results also reveal differences in study behaviour of students in terms of their standard deviations across each factor (feeling of academic self-efficacy, management of time for routine, recurring tasks, and management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks) and the overall of the inventory, the highest being in case of female students and the lowest in the case male students. Significance difference in study behaviour between male and female students is examined by independent t-test and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Summary of t-test of Gender Difference in Study Behaviour between

Factors	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
FASE	1.168	1338	.243
MTRR	2.063	1338	.039
MLSN	1.910	1338	.056
Over All	2.029	1338	.043

**Note:** FASE= Feeling of Academic Self-efficacy, MTRR = Management of Time for Routine Recurring tasks and MLSN = Management of Long-term Specific, Nonrecurring tasks

Table 2 presents the analysis of gender difference in study behaviour. As observed in the table, there was no significant gender difference in feeling of academic self-efficacy,  $t(1338) = 1.67, p > .05$ . That is male and female participants of the study had similar positive feeling of academic self-efficacy. Hypothesis 2 states there is significant gender difference among university students. The result in part fails to support the hypothesis.

Similarly, there was no significant gender difference in appropriate way of management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks,  $t(1338) = 1.91, p > .05$ . The result shows that male and female students had comparable appropriate way of management of long-term academic activities like preparation for final examinations and writing papers. Similarly the result hypothesis 2 partially fails to support the hypothesis.

On the other hand, the mean score comparison shown in Table 2 reveals that male and female students were found to significantly different in management of time for routine, recurring tasks,  $t(1338) = 2.06, p < .05$ . This result indicates that male and female respondents were different in their management of time for routine day to day academic activities like revising class notes and home works. The result therefore moderately confirms hypothesis 2. Closer examination indicates that male students had significantly higher mean score than female students in management of day to day academic activities. This shows that male students were found appropriately utilize their time for executing routine academic activities than female students.

In addition, there was a significant gender difference in overall study behaviour among students,  $t(1338) = 2.03, p < .05$ . The result depicts that male and female students differ in their study behaviour. While the overall study behaviour of students is considered, the result consequently confirms the hypothesis 2. Closer examination also shows that male students were found to have higher mean score in overall study behaviour than female students. This indicates that male students were found to exercise appropriate study behaviour than female students.

## DISCUSSIONS

With regard to the study behaviour of students, the finding of the present investigation indicates that the respondents were found to have positive views and beliefs concerning their feeling of academic self-efficacy. Bliss and Mueller (1986) indicated that the feeling of academic self-efficacy helps students to connect the phenomenon between what they are capable of doing and what they are actually doing in an academic situation. Correspondingly, according to the social cognitive theory, high efficacious students tend to persist in the face of difficulty, seek moderately challenging learning situations, and view failures as learning opportunities (Bandura, 1986). Hence, students with positive feelings about their academic abilities are more likely to use the study skills they possess and exhibit positive study behaviours, while students with negative perceptions are less likely to exhibit positive behaviours even though they may possess the requisite skills.

Similarly, the result revealed that students perceived their management of time for routine, recurring tasks and long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks as appropriate. As a result, the students' study behaviours were found to be appropriate. According to the theory of self-efficacy of Bandura (1977), the participants of this study were found to have confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve or approach a task. The students were found to be appropriately balanced their time and effort for academic and non-academic activities. Further, Pintrich (2004) suggested that managing and regulating time usage requires students to adjust time and effort to tasks based on their goals.

The results of this study indicated significant gender difference in management of time for routine, recurring tasks in favour of male students. This suggests that male participants of the present study were found to be higher in appropriate way of managing their time for day to day routine activities. On the other hand, there were no significant gender differences in feeling of academic self-efficacy and management of long-term specific, nonrecurring tasks. The results indicate that both male and female participants were found to be similar in their feelings of academic self-efficacy (that was positive) and comparable degree of management of long-term activities (that was appropriate).

However, taking into consideration the composite mean score of study behaviour, there was significant gender difference in favour of male students. This means male students were found to be higher in experiencing appropriate study behaviour. A quite number of research investigation compared male and female differences in study behaviour. Lammers, Onwuegbuzie, and Slate (2001) found that females spent significantly more time studying than males and females had higher study scores than males. Speth and Brown (1990) reported gender difference related to studying in that female students were more likely to adopt a deep approach and organized study methods than male students.

Nevertheless, it is not surprising in the present study to find that male students experienced appropriate study behaviour higher than females. In Ethiopia, females in general and female students in particular have many roles than males. For example, the Ethiopian Society of Population Studies (2008) indicated that household workload for both married women and young girls are a deterrent for schooling. That is, before and after school female students help their mothers to prepare food, care for children and participate in home routine activities while relatively males check their homework, play with mates or watch movies. Thus, female students probably are left with not sufficient time to revise their homework with concentration and applying study skills.

The present findings revealed that the female participants had a comparable academic self-efficacy and long-term study behaviour such as preparations for examinations to that of male participants. It means, female participants appeared to maintain their confidence level regarding study skills such as efficient methods of learning and preparations for examinations. However, unable to get sufficient time for routine, recurring tasks and activities may significantly influence the females overall academic performance, as execution of the day to day activities influences the amount of total work to be done.

## CONCLUSIONS

As the result of present investigations shows, it is interesting to find students experience appropriate study behaviour in a new university. Hence, in order to increase the learning of students, it is very important to continuously revise methods of teaching, methods of assessment and motivate students to enable them study appropriately.

Contrary to many study results, male students were found to have more appropriate study behaviour than females. The result has relation to the social experiences of the country of Ethiopia where female students have many roles at home than boys. After school while girls pass their time by helping their mothers and performing routine activities, relatively boys have time to revise their notes and perform homework for the next class. This low experience of study behaviour may negatively affect the academic achievements of female students. As a result females might feel inferior in their achievement compared to male students. This may further affect the social status of females in general. Hence, it is crucial to install functional counselling service in universities especially in Ethiopia to provide special support in study skills for females as well as for males.

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