RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EFFECT OF BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS IN REDUCING ANXIETY, IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM AND PREVENTING INTENTION TO ACADEMIC DROPOUT AMONG ENGINEERING GIRL STUDENTS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Higher educational institutions are among those areas where gender inequality is widely observed in terms of departmental preference, number and academic achievement. Various factors are accountable for lower academic performance and higher attrition rates of female students. In addition to subordinate historical place of women, the general institutional environment, the overall interaction and practice the students make with school personnel, institutional rules and regulations, sanctions, and the organizational structure are also undeniable. Student's personality, motivation, mental health and training also affect academic performance of female students. The main objective of the study is to examine the efficacy of behavioral interventions in reducing anxiety, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic dropout among female pre-engineering students of Wolaita Sodo University. The study employed experimental study where measurement was undertaken before and after the behavioral intervention. Beck Anxiety scale, Rosenberg Self-esteem (RSE) scales and Likert scale were the major data collection tools. On top of this in-depth interview with six students was undertakes to collect qualitative data on how students background and life experiences affect their level of self-esteem, anxiety and drop out intention. Descriptive, correlation and t-test were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that the effect of behavioral intervention in reducing anxiety, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic dropout is found to be statistically significant. Hence the researcher recommends the university to extend the provision of counseling sessions to all female students of all departments in a regular basis to maintain their psychological wellbeing. Specifically, it will unfold their self- esteem and reduce the level of anxiety and intention to dropout.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the social factors whereby gender disparity is reflected. The number and proportion of educated females is very low. As the grade level of education increases, the number of female students starts to decline. Consequently, higher education remains the level of learning where females are less represented both as students and staff. The very few women that are fortunate enough to join higher learning institutions can be characterized by lower academic performance and higher forced withdrawal. Consequently, such inequity in higher education representation has a serious life-long impact on their opportunities to participate in the country's political power sharing, economic privileges as

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well as social representations (Yeshimebrat *et al.*, 2013). From the literature, various factors have been stated to be the causes for lower academic performance and higher attrition rates of female students. For instance, the general institutional environment, the overall interaction and practice the students make with school personnel, institutional rules and regulations, sanctions, and the organizational structure. It is long noted that the relationship between students and their universities is one significant predictor of social and academic development that the structure of the university unfairly treats students based on their background (Apple, 1980). Student's personality, education, motivation, mental health and training also affect academic performance. College life can be called a significant transition period, where students experience many things first time, in, for example new lifestyle, exposure to new cultures, friends, roommates, different ways of thinking and also deal with a unique amount of stress (Khurshid *et al.*, 2015).

The most common psychological problems of adolescence are depression and anxiety. From the bulk of research, it can be inferred that depression and anxiety may be experienced at the same time. It has been declared that depression and anxiety are accompanied with 12 to 75% of the surveys conducted (Farhan & Khan, 2015 as cited in Al-Qaisy, 2011). A huge amount of research has attempted to identify important factors to student success by assessing the relations among many psychological and academic variables. Few studies have used different methods to propose and test models that can be used to understand the relations among factors that influence student academic success (Momanyi, Ogoma, Misigo, 2010)

Statement of the problem: The first year in college can be a time filled by novel and stimulating incidents. It can also be a demanding experience to the majority of college students. Some studies have revealed that the better accustomed students are to their college setting, the better will be their academic achievement (Lent *et al*., 2009). The transition stage from high school to college can be challenging for students particularly following departure through the dependent phase at home or in school where they have to stand by the regulations laid down by parents and the school. From their view, college is a moment when these controls are not there and the students become autonomous just like adults. Earlier studies have revealed that the transition time from secondary to tertiary schooling is a critical phase (Hutardo and Carter, 1997).

Various literatures reveal that numerous variables influence academic performance of students. A study by Lent *et al*. (2009) shows that the better students adjust to their academic environment, the better will be their university experience. Once students adapt to the requirements and roles of the recent environment, their academic and psychosocial experience is likely to be satisfying (Charles & Stewart, 2016). Female students exhibit higher level of anxiety (Ozen *et al*., 2010), depression and stress (Shkullaku, 2013) than males (Baldassin *et al*., 2008 as cited in Gendron, *et al*., 2011). Gemeay *et al*., (2013) observed gender differences in psychosocial adjustment. They revealed that female students experienced more stress than their male counterparts. Other studies observed that female students had higher emotional, physiological and behavioral reactions to stressors (Misra, 2000) and that they were also more likely to feel homesick and loneliness than male students (Luigi *et al*.,2007). Zahra (2010) found no relation between gender and students' depression and anxiety (Gendron *et al*., 2011).

Teachers, administrators and parents are normally anxious about student's self-esteem. Its significance is often overstated to the extent that low self-esteem is observed as the cause of all evil and high self-esteem as the cause of all good (Manning, Bear & Minke, 2006). Self-esteem is related with depression, anxiety, motivation and general satisfaction with one's life (Harter, 1986; Rosenberg, 1995). Given these relations, children and adolescents who lack self-esteem may be more dependent on their parents and have lower academic and vocational goals (Joshi & Srivastava, 2009). Just like other universities of Ethiopia, Guidance and counseling services are usually provided in Wolaita Sodo University. These services are meant to promote the student's wellbeing within a learning set up. The primary purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of behavioral interventions in reducing anxiety, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic drop out among engineering girls' students. Due to the limited number of studies in the country in general and in the study area in particular; that examine the effects and need for counseling services on the issue, this research was important and timely. This research was expected to fill the knowledge gap in this respect and also to motivate future researches. Moreover, it is an essential part of the researcher's learning process as it's primarily aim is for academic purpose.

The objective of the study: To assess the level of anxiety, self-esteem and intention to academic dropout among engineering girls' students. To find out the differences in the levels of anxiety, self-esteem and intention to academic drop out among engineering girls' students after counseling session.

Hypothesis of the study: Due to the limited number of studies that examine the effects and need for counseling service to engineering girls' students, this research is important and timely and the following null- hypothesis was proposed.

Ho: There will be no significant difference in level of anxiety, self-esteem and intention to academic drop-out among - engineering girls' students after counselling.

Review of related literature: The general institutional climate is the overall interaction and practice the students make with college personnel, institutional rules and regulations, sanctions and the organizational structure which in turn affect students practice in the college and their perception towards the college. It is one salient non-academic factor that influences students' social and academic experience. It is long noted that the relationship between students and their universities is one significant predictor of social and academic development. To put it in yet another way, the managerial and organizational structure of the university unfairly treats students based on their background (Apple, 1980).

This shows that unfavorable college climate adversely affects students' daily academic performance by reducing their willingness to persist at academic tasks and interfering with the cognitive process involved in learning. Furthermore, learning is a high-risk taking initiative that works better when students are made to feel secured and centered in who they are and what they are already talented of doing before they are asked to take on new ventures. Psychological security and a positive feeling of self-worth are pre-requisites for the more abstract need to know and learn. Unfavorable college climate may college school failure more than intellectual ability for some culturally different students. Thus, maximizing college success requires creating conducive college climate (Craft, 1996).

College life has its own demands and challenges and failure in meeting those demands and challenges causes academic, psychological and social problems to a college student who is likely to be the person most affected by those problems (Abu Baker, 1997). Researchers have also shown that progress from high school to college can result in negative/ positive experiences for students, especially at the beginning months. Most students successfully cope with university life,

yet, some become overwhelmed. A number of college students have their education and personal lives disrupted by psychosocial problems. When psychosocial difficulties go untreated, the results can be serious and include academic failures and even total withdrawal from the university. This is also case in Ethiopian higher institutions. Yusuf (2004) states "Students in Ethiopian institutions of higher learning face all kinds of problems related to academic, personal, social, health, medical, financial, family and a host of other personal problems". Moreover, Bell (1996) states that students have to learn about their environment, and about themselves, and they have to manage their relationships with the institution and its demands. If they are unable to do this, they fail in their task of being a student. Such psychosocial adjustment problem issues may be the same for all students in higher education institutions regardless of their differences in background (Bell, 1996). To explain this even further, Bell states that students need to leave behind what has gone before and to look forward to what is to come. They need to become attached to the institution and to their subject to make friends and to form a working relationship with those who will teach them. Scholars used to categorize students' psychosocial problems into a number of categories. Throughout the transition periods to campus life, mostly first year students face many intellectual challenges such as academic and overall campus situation as well as social difficulties like moving far away from home (Eom & Choi, 2010).

Al-Amayra (1988), conducted a study on 582 male and female students at Yarmouk University. In the study, the prevalent psychosocial problems among university students were found to be in the academic, social, and psychological and health in descending order. Similarly, in a study by Cornell (1994) several participants of new entry college students indicated academic pressures, interpersonal problems and emotional stress as common problems. However, many other studies found low confidence, sense of loss, anxiety, confusion, and sense of isolation and alienation among college students (Lindley & Borgen, 2002). Some studies focusing on the nature of students transition to college offer important insights in to the internal as well as external contexts and factors that can influence students' academic adjustment. For example, an exploratory study by Terenzini *et al.* (1994) dealt with students' perspectives about college transition, including how they become involved in college, and the experiences that influence the process both positively and negatively. They used group discussion in four distinct types of institutions in terms of student demographics and institutional characteristics (i.e. urban community colleges, residential liberal arts colleges, urban community state universities and residential research universities) and concluded that the process by which students become involved was poorly mapped.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Wolaita Sodo University which is found in Wolaita Zone of Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State. Wolaita Sodo University is selected for this study on the basis of the researcher's knowledge about the low academic performance as well as high academic drop-out rate of female students and various problems they have been facing in educational environment. Therefore, the study targets only undergraduate regular

engineering female students of Wolaita Sodo University. This mixed methods study utilized experimental design, using pre and post-tests to measure the level of anxiety of students, self-esteem and intention to academic drop-out at the beginning of receiving personal counseling services and again after five sessions. Hence, the variables of interest included counseling services as the independent variable and level of anxiety, self- esteem and student intention to academic drop-out as the dependent variable. This design allows comparison of pre and post test results. The design is therefore found appropriate for this particular study because it will enable the researcher to make comparisons between the pre and post results regarding the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services based on reducing level of anxiety, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic drop-out among female students.

The scale to measure intention to drop-out was developed by the present investigator by reviewing the literature related to it (Martinez and Munday 1998; Chyung, Winiecki, & Fenner, 1999; Lee & Burkam, 1992). Questions were designed to assess student's intention to drop-out from their education. The scale consisting of 10 items with a 4-point Likert scale. Participants indicate the extent to which they believe in statements with a response options; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree and they were given scores 1, 2, 3 and 4. The scores of the scale range from ten to forty and the higher the number indicates the higher level of intention to drop-out. In the process of identifying students who have high intention to drop-out, the researcher consider score thirty and above as a cut-off point. Quantitative data was collected using the Rosenberg Self-esteem (RSE) scale (Rosenberg, 1986). The RSE scale is a ten-question four-point Likert Scale with range of: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The purpose of the RSE scale is to measure global self-esteem, or the overall mental wellbeing of an individual (Rosenberg *et al*, 1986). The scale was originally created to assess the self-esteem of high school students, which is directly relevant for this study, although it has been used with a variety of ages and populations since its creation (Rosenberg, 1995).

The RSE scale has shown exceptional internal consistency and stability, based on a Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility of .92 and test retest reliability correlations of .85 and .88 when tested over a two-week period (Rosenberg, 1995). Furthermore, the RSE scale demonstrates concurrent, predictive, and construct validity correlating with the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and with predictive measures of both depression and anxiety (Rosenberg, 1995). Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) (Hamilton, 1959) was one of the first rating scales developed to measure the severity of anxiety symptoms, and is still widely used today in both clinical and research settings. The scale consists of 14 items, each defined by a series of symptoms, and measures both psychic anxiety (mental agitation and psychological distress) and somatic anxiety (physical complaints related to anxiety). Each item is scored on a scale of 0 (not present) to 4 (severe), with a total score range of 0-56, where 17 indicates mild severity, 18-24 mild to moderate severity and 25-30 moderate to severe. The author quoted high reliability and validity on his instrument. Before the actual behavioral intervention was started, the intention to drop-out scale was distributed to all pre-engineering female students

Distribution of respondents by Socio demographic profile

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18 years	12	15.4
	19 years	40	51.3
	20 years	19	24.4
	21 years	4	5.1
	22 years	3	3.8
	Total	78	100.0
Religion	Orthodox	46	59.0
	Protestant	27	34.6
	Muslim	5	6.4
	Total	78	100.0
Place of birth	Urban	35	44.9
	Rural	43	55.1
	Total	78	100.0

Comparison of pre and post test result of intention to drop out Paired Samples Statistics

			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Intention for dropout	(Pre)	31.8462	78	1.61227	.18255
	Intention for dropout (Post)		21.1538	78	3.79020	.42916

Comparison of Pre and Post test result of Self-esteem level Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Self esteem level (Pre)	20.6667	78	5.53071	.62623
	Self esteem level (Post)	29.9359	78	3.05933	.34640

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation			
Pair 1	Self esteem level (Pre) - Self esteem level (Post)	-9.26923	6.09806	-13.425	77	.000

Comparison of Intention to Drop-out, Anxiety and Self-esteem Correlations

		Intention for dropout	Self esteem level	Level of anxiety
Intention for dropout	Pearson Correlation	1	-.428	.229*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033	.044
	N	78	78	78
Self esteem level	Pearson Correlation	-.428	1	-.800**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033		.000
	N	78	78	78
Level of anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.229*	-.800**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.000	
	N	78	78	78

*· Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**·· Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(263 students) and was requested to fill the questionnaire. Based on the intention for drop-out result, students whose score was above 30 were considered to have high intention to drop-out and they were included for counseling sessions. Hence, a total 78 students were found to be appropriate in the inclusion for the experiment out of the 263 students. In the main study, all the instruments meant to measure their level of anxiety and self-esteem was distributed to 78 respondents to be filled individually in half an hour. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents (during their regular class time) by the researcher in classrooms. The collected data was analyzed to find out whether there exist significant differences in effectiveness of counseling in reducing anxiety level, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic drop-out among female engineering students. Comparisons was also done on effectiveness of guidance and counseling services based on pre-test and post-test measurements. The t- test statistical technique was used for analysis. The t-test was appropriate in finding out whether significant differences exist between two groups in the study. The significance level was set at 0.05.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following describes the background information of respondents and later the test results. As indicated in the above table, all respondents are found within the age range of 18-22. Specifically speaking, around 91% of the total students participated in the study are below the age of 20. This is an indicator of a simple fact that almost all of them are enrolled to education during the normal school entry age. Regarding the religious affiliation of respondents, the above table also revealed that, about 46 (59 %) of them are

followers of orthodox Christianity, 27 (34 %) of them are protestants and only the remaining 5 respondents are Muslims. Regarding place of origin (birth place), there were two options provided for respondents: Urban and Rural. Hence 35 (nearly 45 %) of them came from urban areas and 43 (around 55 %) of them reported their place of origin from rural areas. Hence, more than half of the total respondents have rural background in their place of origin. Five group counseling sessions was provided for the engineering girls students who have had intention to dropout. Hence the following tests are meant to prove whether the behavioral intervention brought a statistically significant change in reducing level of anxiety, unfolding self- esteem and reduce their intention to drop out. In the above table, the t-value 24.955 indicated that there is a statistically mean difference between the two mean scores of the intention to drop-out among female pre-engineering students observed before and after receiving treatment (P < 0.001). The mean intention for drop-out (Pre) and Intention to drop-out (Post) score among female pre-engineering students were 31.8462 and 21.1538 respectively. The mean difference in intention to drop-out (Pre) and Intention for drop- out (Post) score was statistically significant and it is believed by the researcher that it have been effective due to the treatment effect. In the above table, the t-value 13.425 indicated that there is a statistically mean difference between the two mean scores of self-esteems among female pre-engineering students observed before and after receiving treatment (P < 0.001). The mean self-esteem (Pre) and self-esteem (Post) score among female pre-engineering students were 20.6667 and 29.9359 respectively. The mean difference in self-esteem (Pre) and self-esteem (Post) score was statistically significant and it is believed by the researcher that it has been effective due to the treatment effect. In the above table, the t-value 14.032 indicated that there is a statistically mean difference between the two mean scores of the anxiety among female pre-engineering students observed before and after receiving treatment (P < 0.001).

The mean anxiety (Pre) and anxiety (Post) score among female pre-engineering students were 47.7821 and 30.2821 respectively. The mean difference in anxiety (Pre) and anxiety (Post) score was statistically significant and it is believed by the researcher that it has been effective due to the treatment effect. The above table shows that there is a high negative correlation (-.428) between intention to drop- out and self-esteem of the female pre-engineering students and it is statistically significant (P < 0.033). It reveals that intention to drop-out students have low self-esteem. The correlation also further reveals that there is positive relation between intention to academic drop-out and anxiety of the female pre-engineering students and it is statistically significant (P < 0.044). It is also in the table that there is high negative correlation (-.800) between self-esteem and Anxiety score and it is statistically significant (P < 0.001).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this section is to see whether the current research hypothesis is has approved or not. The major concern of this study was to examine the effectiveness of behavioral interventions reducing anxiety, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic drop-out among female engineering students. In this research 78 female pre-engineering students whose intention to academic drop-out was more than thirty in a ten to forty range four

scale measurement were selected in the experiment. The selected students were given different behavioral intervention sessions to see its impact their level of self -esteem, anxiety and intention to academic drop-out. Hence students may able to learn to recognize the negative thoughts and replace them by positive and constructive one. Following all the counseling sessions, students were expected to be able to reconstruct their belief system through cognitive and rational thinking processes and this should make individuals to face their future problems more successfully. The overall result of this study revealed that the level of self-esteem enhanced after the counselling sessions. The level of anxiety and intention to academic drop-out show a statistically significant decline following the counseling sessions.

Study participant's level of intention to academic drop-out result was higher before the intervention. The t-value 24.955 indicated that there is a statistically mean difference between the two mean scores of the intention for drop-out among female pre-engineering students observed before and after receiving treatment (P < 0.001). The mean intention for drop-out (Pre) and Intention for drop-out (Post) score among female pre-engineering students were 31.84 and respectively. The mean difference in intention for drop-out (Pre) and Intention for drop-out (Post) score was statistically significant and it is believed by the researcher that it have been effective due to the treatment effect. The findings of the present study are found to be consistent with many other researchers. For instance, a research review by Harris and Coy (2003) on 21 studies with CBT concluded that after students have learned the intervention programs, they were more effective in reducing their irrationality (88%) and Anxiety (88%) increasing their control emotion (71%) and over 50% of the subject were reported to have decrease the level of depression and were more confident in facing their problems. On the other hand, the mean result of the participants in control group remained unchanged. On the pre-test their mean were 25.68 (SD: 3.07) and the post-test result was 25.77 (SD: 3.11) which is not statistically significant. Therefore, based on the findings of the present research the researcher accepted the alternative hypothesis that there is significant difference in level of anxiety, self-esteem and intention to academic drop-out among female pre-engineering students after counselling which resulted from the counselling session and reject the null hypothesis.

In conclusion, oftentimes in higher education, it is assumed that students know how to behave, how to study, how to prioritize, and how to plan. However, given what it is known about rates of college persistence, this is an assumption that should be called into question. The study investigated the efficacy of behavioral interventions in reducing anxiety, unfolding self-esteem and prevention of intention to academic drop-out among engineering. Seventy-eight pre-engineering female students were included in the experimental study. The data were obtained using self-administered instruments: Beck Anxiety scale, Rosenberg Self-esteem (RSE) scales and Intention to Academic dropout scale. The two measuring instruments were adapted from previous related studies whereas the Intention to Academic drop-out scale was developed by the researcher for the sake of this particular study. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and t-test. The results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference before and after the provision of counseling sessions on

female student's level of anxiety, intention to drop-out and self-esteem level. From the findings, it can be concluded that pre-engineering female students are capable enough to reduce their intention to drop-out and level of anxiety through behavioral interventions. On top of this their level of self-esteem is also found to be positively related to behavioral interventions. Based on the research findings, the researcher firmly believed that, pre- engineering female students are more likely to seek counseling services in order to deal with their psychological problems and to assist them change their attitudes, behavior and sense of accomplishment in the higher educational environment.

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