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English language proficiency, academic confidence, and academic success: A case study of first-year female students at an Ethiopian university

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE,
AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR FEMALE
STUDENTS AT AN ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITY

by

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A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
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The Peace Corps' Mission

To promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals:

To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women

To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served

To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This purpose of this research is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of first-year female university students in natural science fields at an Ethiopian university. Participants in this study were voluntarily participating in an intervention program offered by the gender office where I served as the English language mentor. The intervention was a part of a three-year pilot program aimed at reducing the attrition rate of first-year female students. English is the medium of instruction at the university level, but many Ethiopian students struggle with English as a foreign language (EFL), so an English mentoring program was established to improve the English language skills of interested female students. In this context, I conducted research to gain insights into how this group of female EFL mentoring program participants perceived their own English language experiences, academic confidence, and personal experiences as first-year university students.

In the past twenty years, the total number of higher education institutions in Ethiopia has expanded rapidly, a process referred to as massification (Mohamedbhai, 2014). Simultaneously, the implementation of gender equity policies established by Ethiopia’s Ministry of Education (MoE) has decreased the gender gap between male and female students who are admitted to Ethiopian universities (Mersha, Bishaw, Asrat &
Nigussie, 2009; Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). Massification, combined with greater gender equity policies, has resulted in a dramatic increase in the total number of female students who enter public universities (Mersha et al., 2009).

However, inequality for female students in the context of higher education remains a serious problem, despite two decades of preferential admission policies designed to increase access for historically and socially marginalized groups, including females (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). While access to education has improved for previously marginalized groups, societal discrimination remains a challenge faced by many intelligent young women who aspire to complete a university degree (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). Scholarly reports can be useful in providing a systematic framework to discuss the challenges some female students have faced in university systems. For example, a report from Jimma University lists the top problems identified by individual female student survey respondents as follows: harassment and violence (38%), raping (26%), early marriage (11%), and lack of security in dorms (11%) (Demise, Shinebaum, & Melesse, 2002). Focus groups from the same report identified shortage of facilities (including water and toilets in the dormitory) as the top concern of females, with safety as the second most frequent concern of female students, and harassment as the third (Demise et al., 2002).

While many female Ethiopian university students are thankful for the chance they have to attend university, many struggle academically and personally as they adapt to face new challenges that are a part of university life. Ultimately, some will succeed and others will fail. In the opinion of the intervention program staff where I worked, if our support program could prevent one young woman academic dismissal, then our collaborative
efforts were a success. This opinion may sound overly simplistic, but it does address a concern that academic dismissal of female students might create a ripple effect of adversity for students who had aspired to complete a university degree.

Recent reports have established a trend of female attrition in Ethiopian universities through large-scale research studies that consider admission and completion rates, with comparisons of statistics from different universities and across different academic disciplines (Semela, 2010; Tilahun, 2003). When addressing the problem of gender inequality in Ethiopia, government policy relies heavily on enrollment and attrition statistics; a critical analysis of policies that rely on qualitative data alone has been presented by Molla (2013) and Molla and Cuthbert (2014). Molla (2013) calls for studies that can move the conversation about female attrition beyond surface-level statistics (enrollment and attrition rates) towards deeper investigations into identifying factors that correlate with academic success or failure.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of first-year female students in natural science faculties and to describe characteristics and differences found in three different groups that represent three different levels of academic success (promoted, warning status, and dismissed). These groups were formed using first-semester grade point averages (GPA) provided by the university. All of the study participants voluntarily attended English mentoring sessions that were part of a larger intervention program designed to support female students and reduce the rate of attrition.
The Problem of Female Attrition in Ethiopian Higher Education

Data on attrition from institutions of higher education in Africa are scarce and the lack of reliable data at the national and institutional levels in African countries has been a cause for concern for educational policy makers (Mohamedbhai, 2014). In the year 2000, access to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa was four percent, with 339 students per 100,000 persons; in contrast, tertiary-level gross enrollment in Ethiopia was only 0.8 percent, with a ratio of 62 tertiary students per 100,000 inhabitants (Saint, 2004).

However, recent actions in Ethiopia since the turn of the century demonstrate the country’s commitment to an ambitious plan aimed at higher education expansion and reform, including decentralization of public institutions and policies designed to increase access and improve equity for women and other historically marginalized groups (Saint, 2004).

According to educational policy in Ethiopia, efforts to increase equity for female students should encompass equal access, equal participation, and equal success across gender within the context of higher education and training programs (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). Unfortunately, providing access to higher education may not be an effective solution to the gender equity problem in Ethiopia because access alone can quickly be rendered meaningless for those students who do not experience full participation and academic success within in the massified university system (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Tessema, 2009).
Information on gender equity and higher education made available by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education indicates that the representation of women in public universities has increased steadily in the past two decades, reaching the level of 28 percent for female students and 9.5% for female staff in the school year 2012-2013 (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). The overall number and percentage of female students as well as the attrition rate of female students varies among universities and between faculties of study within any given institution. While government policies have narrowed both the gender inequity (access, participation, and success) and gender inequality gap (ratio of women and men) in Ethiopian universities, the problem of underrepresentation of female students and faculty in higher education persists. In 2012, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Donald Booth stated that the United States had decided to form partnerships with organizations in Ethiopia because collaboration was necessary to identify successful strategies that might help prevent young women from dropping out of Ethiopia’s universities (Embassy of the United States of America, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 2012). Accordingly, partnerships were formed to develop new approaches that support young women facing the demands of university life to help promote their successful completion of university degrees.

The implementation of gender-sensitive policies that begins at the university admission stage can become problematic when the system as a whole is not conducive to female student success; when supportive programs are absent, female students in Ethiopia have a higher chance of attrition from university (Amazan, 2009; Semela, 2007). The aim of this study is not to discuss gender equity policies in Ethiopia, nor is it to comment on
the efficacy of intervention programs for female students. Rather, this is an exploratory case study that uses a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data to describe the English language proficiency, academic confidence, and academic success of the study participants. The next section will explain the genesis of this study.

Background of Researcher

From 2011 to 2014, I served as a United States Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Ethiopia. For two years, I worked in the education sector as an English language teacher trainer. I extended my Peace Corps service in Ethiopia for an additional third year because I had the opportunity to participate in a unique pilot program that provided academic support, life-skills training, and English mentoring to first-year female university students at several Ethiopian universities. The supportive intervention program I worked with as a PCV had four main pillars: life skills training, peer mentoring, provision of material support in the form of hygiene kits and academic supplies, and English language mentoring. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I was able to work as an English language mentor with the participants for one academic year. I was granted permission from the partnering organization to conduct research exploring the topics of English proficiency, academic confidence, and academic success. This explains my professional background and how this opportunity for research in Ethiopia evolved.

Role of Researcher

This case study used an exploratory approach to investigate the experiences of natural science EFL students at an Ethiopian university who participated in a pilot intervention program that included English mentoring. From the start, I viewed my role
as multi-faceted: an English mentoring program designer, an English language mentor, a Peace Corps Volunteer, a female role model, and an academic researcher. As an English language mentor, I designed and implemented a program with the intertwined goals of fostering the academic confidence of first-year female students and improving their English language development through targeted practice of writing, speaking, listening, and reading. The purpose of the intervention program was to lower the attrition rate of young Ethiopian students, a mission that is shared by a wide range of people and organizations including the Ministry of Education, university gender officers, administrators, and faculty members. Reducing the attrition rate of female university students is vitally important for the female students themselves, their family members, and their home communities.

Research Question

The study is guided by the following question: What differences are found amongst first-year female students at an Ethiopian University when grouped according to academic status (dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) with respect to English language proficiency, academic confidence, and perceptions of their own experiences with English, academic confidence, and university life?

By approaching this research as an exploration of three groups of participants with varying degrees of academic success (based on GPA), this study aims to provide new insights into experiences and perceptions of aspiring young female scholars in the natural science faculties in an Ethiopian university. The descriptions of the whole group (all of the study participants) and each of the three sub-groups (dismissed, warning, and
promoted) are drawn from a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. This mixed-methods approach uses three types of quantitative data: GPA, English language proficiency as measured by British Council Ethiopia’s International Language Assessment (ILA) placement exam (British Council’s ILA, 2015), and academic confidence data from the Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) scale (Sander & Sanders, 2006). Additionally, this case study utilizes qualitative data in the form of student writing samples.

My hope as a researcher is that this exploratory case study might provide insights for those who are interested in understanding the experiences of first-year female students and reducing attrition rates of this demographic in the Ethiopian university context. By focusing on students who were academically unsuccessful (dismissed group), as well as those who struggled academically (warning group), and those who succeeded (promoted group), this study attempts to reveal differences across a broad spectrum of experiences to possibly provide a deeper understanding of issues related to female attrition than quantitative data alone. A more complete picture of the individual and collective experiences of the participants could possibly lead to new and improved strategies for supporting female students who will join Ethiopian universities in the future.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my research exploring the characteristics of first-year female EFL students who voluntarily participated in an intervention pilot program designed to decrease attrition rates. My role as the English language mentor in an intervention program was explained, as was my role as a researcher interested in gaining insights into the experiences and perceptions of the study’s participants. The purpose of
this research was stated as a response to the call for qualitative research (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014) exploring the phenomenon of high attrition rates amongst female students assigned to Ethiopia’s public universities. Also, a rationale was provided for my focus on two features of study participants: English language skills and academic confidence. It was my opinion that gathering quantitative data measuring English language proficiency (ELP) and academic confidence within the context of an intervention program was important as a baseline to understand the needs of the beneficiaries. The guiding question for this research study was given and the goal of this research study was explained. In the next section, I will provide an overview of the subsequent chapters in this research study.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter Two, Literature Review, includes research on Ethiopia’s higher education system in order to provide pertinent background information and illustrate the complex relationship between university expansion, gender equity policies, and factors contributing to attrition of female students. After that, the topics of ELP and academic confidence are connected to the situation of female EFL students in the Ethiopian higher education system, and the gap in research is noted. Next, Chapter Three, Methodology, outlines and explains the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and tools for analysis that were used in this research project. Chapter Four, Research Findings, first presents the data of three cases of students who are grouped according to their academic standing at the end of the first semester. The Findings chapter concludes with an analysis of the data in response to the research question. Finally, Chapter Five offers a reflection on the
research findings, identifies new questions that emerged from this case study, and makes suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides a synthesis of research relevant to this study. Since the main focus of this research is the issue of female attrition from Ethiopia’s public universities, the first section provides background information on the current conditions of Ethiopia’s public higher education system. The second section looks at the topic of English in the context of Ethiopian education. The third section of the literature review synthesizes research on English language proficiency (ELP) and academic success. Finally, the fourth section synthesizes research on academic confidence (AC) and academic success.

The themes of ELP and AC were emphasized in the English mentoring pilot program, which focused primarily on improving the English language proficiency of the beneficiaries while simultaneously working to improve, in part through self-reflection, their academic confidence in the university context. To my knowledge, studies on ELP and AC looking at female university students in Ethiopia have not been conducted. These four sections provide the foundation and identify the gap for this case study investigating the experiences and perceptions of female EFL students in an Ethiopian university while highlighting the relationship between ELP, AC, and academic success.
The research question guiding this study is as follows: What differences are found amongst first-year female students at an Ethiopian University when grouped according to academic status (dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) with respect to English language proficiency, academic confidence, and perceptions of their own experiences with English, academic confidence, and university life?

In the following section, research will be presented to create a contextualized picture of the contemporary problem of female attrition in the context of university systems in Ethiopia. The discussion starts with a section on the problem of female attrition in Ethiopian higher education and then each subsequent section covers the related topics as follows: university expansion (massification), gender equity policies, rates of female attrition, factors contributing to female attrition, and some suggested solutions to this problem.

The Problem of Female Attrition from Ethiopian Universities

Contemporary universities in Ethiopia are making a concentrated effort to provide new opportunities for the growing number of ambitious students who are graduating in record numbers from the secondary education system. As the country continues to develop and more women graduate from university, the traditional images that continue to frame stereotypes of Ethiopian gender roles may begin to fade into history. Some of these stereotypical images of a traditional Ethiopian female include images of women carrying water, bending over smoky fires in rudimentary kitchens, and sitting in a market selling goods while caring for small children (Amazan, 2009). Women in Ethiopia, as in other countries, have suffered for a long time due to the economic and socio-cultural
hardship and discrimination they face. The different roles that women have in Ethiopian life, including their economic contributions, have little value and are not fully recognized. Despite their essential role in Ethiopian life, their contributions are often measured by their gender specific roles as mothers and wives rather than by their active participation in the economic development of the country (Amazan, 2009).

Most acknowledge that full economic growth in Ethiopia is not possible without the active involvement and valuable contributions of females and males alike (Gelana & Cheru, 2014). Young female scholars are graduating from secondary school and being assigned to universities in increasing numbers, yet despite efforts that have been taken to mitigate the problems of gender inequity and inequality in Ethiopia, some of the problems females encounter persist (Amazan, 2009), which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. In the next section, research on the rapid expansion of Ethiopia’s higher education system is presented and some of the consequences of rapid growth and development in this public sector are highlighted.

Higher Education Expansion in Ethiopia

The higher education system began in Ethiopia in the year 1950 with the founding of Addis Ababa University (AAU) and for the next half a century, AAU was the only university-level institute of higher learning in the country (Mulugeta, 2007; Tessema, 2008). When AAU first opened, there were fifty teachers and about one thousand students. Forty years later, in 1991, the number of students at AAU had increased to 14,994 students (Mulugeta, 2007). Prior to 1991, only 0.2% of Ethiopian citizens were enrolled in higher education; this figure increased four-fold to 0.8% by the year 2008.
(Tessema, 2008). The number of public universities in Ethiopia expanded from only two in 1999 to a total of 22 institutions just one decade later in 2009, and this number was expected to expand by an additional ten universities over the next five years (Molla, 2013).

This rapid process of university development and higher education expansion is called massification, a term that refers to achieving the maximum possible number of students enrolled in public universities (Tessema, 2009). Massification in Ethiopia is reflected by the rate of university enrollment, which increased approximately 950 percent between 1999 and 2010 (Tessema, 2009). This process has created new opportunities for female students, who have been entering universities in increasing numbers. However, some researchers observe that increased access to higher education in Ethiopia does not always result in increased success for many students, males and females alike (Areaya, 2010; Tessema, 2009). Massification, as a development strategy, has been combined with affirmative action policies and the result is an increased number of females attending Ethiopian universities. The next section of this chapter will review literature examining gender equity policies and possible factors that might be contributing to female attrition from Ethiopian universities.

Gender Equity and Ethiopian Universities

The situation of girls and women in Ethiopia is a reflection of the culture, where unequal gender relationships prevail in most aspects of Ethiopian society and life (Mulugeta, 2007). Data from the Ministry of Education show that females are underrepresented at all levels in education, especially in secondary and tertiary institutions (Mulugeta, 2007), even though females make up approximately half of the
overall population in Ethiopia. For example, in 2002, female enrollment in higher education was only eleven percent of the total student population. In 2005, female students enrolled in four-year programs at the undergraduate university level constituted only 22.3% of the student body and less than 10% of graduate students were female (Mulugeta, 2007). By the year 2009, the overall (undergraduate and graduate) level of female student enrollment in Ethiopian universities had increased to twenty-five percent, which showed a marked improvement from 2002.

At Addis Ababa University (AAU), the gender disparity can be seen in all levels of the educational system, from administration to faculty to students (Mulugeta, 2007). Female faculty in 2007 were only eleven percent of the total teaching staff and women were under-represented in AAU’s decision making roles, such as directors, deans, and president. For example, males held all fifteen of the central administration positions at AAU. This underrepresentation of females was also visible in the student population, where females constituted less than 28% of students in regular undergraduate programs and only 10.1% of postgraduate students (Mulugeta, 2007).

Factors Contributing to Female Attrition

As mentioned earlier, gender-sensitive affirmative action policies implemented by Ethiopian universities were designed to increase the number of female students in academia and to improve their overall graduation rate (Mulugeta, 2007). However, research studies indicate an overall pattern of high female attrition rates from Ethiopian universities, particularly when compared to their male counterparts (Mulugeta, 2007; Semela, 2006). There have been several reports that identify factors that seem to affect

In a study of first-year students at Debub University, Semela (2006) found that 1,723 female students were enrolled in regular undergraduate programs, but in the first year of university life, 465 female students were dismissed. At this university, the overall dismissal rate due to low grade point average (GPA) for first-year female students was found to be thirty-five percent. In contrast, the rate of dismissal for males due to low GPA during this same time period was only six percent. The findings of Semela’s (2006) Debub University study also indicate that some departments were more challenging for females than others, with the natural science department losing almost forty percent of female students in the first year and the engineering and secondary teacher education departments losing more than fifty-percent of first-year female students. The high rate of attrition noted by the Debub University study implies that the first year of university life for many female students can be extremely problematic.

Another study by Mersha et al. (2009) looked at female attrition rates at eight universities in Ethiopia. Examining longitudinal data gathered from registrars’ offices, they focused on five faculties of study at each university. Interestingly, it did not include first year students and looked instead at students in their second, third, and fourth years of university study. Generalizing the findings from all eight universities, Mersha et al. (2009) found a pattern of high attrition for females in three faculties: Engineering, Education (secondary teacher preparation), and Business and Economics. Researchers
asked the student participants to identify problems females face at universities and rank possible factors that contribute to high female attrition rates. According to the results of the survey, the top three problems faced by female students were the following: fear of failure, economic problems, and being assigned to a faculty in which they were not interested. A similar study at Bahir Dar University identified four factors as the most significant causes of female student attrition at that university: lack of self-confidence, lack of adequate effort, carelessness, and lack of ability to be competent (Mersha et al., 2013).

However, when considering a topic such complex as attrition, it is important not to generalize and assume that female students always have higher attrition rates than their male counterparts in Ethiopian universities. As one example, consider a study by Tilahun (2003), which looked at figures from Addis Ababa University (AAU). His study examined attrition and promotion rates in the Faculty of Business and Economics and found that there was no statistical difference between the academic attrition rates of female and male students during the years of his research study. In contrast to the research of Mersha et al. (2009), Tilahun’s (2003) research shows that female students attending AAU achieved greater equity with male students as measured by academic promotion in the Faculty of Business and Economics during the time period of his study.

Molla (2013) asserts that the attrition rate of female students in higher education in Ethiopia can be attributed to four main factors: lack of active participation in the learning process; lower position of academic women in the higher education system; gendered streaming of academic fields; and insecurity of female students related to sexual
harassment. The study’s findings provide insights into the types of deeply embedded challenges female students encounter, explaining that the current superficial presentation of the problem of gender inequality in Ethiopian universities is inadequate because it reduces the framing of the problem to a disparity in enrollment numbers (Molla, 2013).

It has been argued that one reason gender equity policies in educational contexts fail to achieve their goals is because they cannot challenge the male cultural norms against which women are being assessed and in which women are constructed as the problem (Molla, 2013). Gender equity policies do not challenge patriarchal norms and practices, but instead tend to attribute gender inequality to lack of confidence and ill-preparedness of female students (Molla, 2013). The policies do not consider the deeper institutional realities found in higher education that place women in an unequal position. Repressive gender norms, including prejudice against women and sexual harassment, are described as structural barriers that Ethiopian women encounter in higher education; the system as a whole must be addressed rather than simply identifying the problems that women face, as if women themselves are the root of the problem (Molla, 2013).

The disproportionally small number of females at the student, faculty, and administrative level combined with the Ethiopian patriarchal culture combine at Addis Ababa University to create an unwelcoming and unfriendly academic environment (Mulugeta, 2007). Specifically, Mulugeta (2007) asserts that females face harassment, violence, stigma regarding affirmative action, and lack of a gender policy; thus, female voices are suppressed and their academic, social and personal lives are hampered. The experiences of female students include fear of movement on campus in evenings,
harassment when studying in the library, derogatory graffiti on campus targeting women, and being viewed in a negative light when they perform well academically or converse frequently with professors (Mulugeta, 2007).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ethiopia has been implementing a policy of affirmative action in favor of female students; however, a study (Semela, 2006) from Dabub University in southern Ethiopia, raises some questions about the negative psychological impact that affirmative action programs may have on some female students. This study found that some female students in the study reported that they experienced high anxiety when they sat for mid-term and final exams and they also felt they might not be able to succeed because they had to compete with students who had met the standard admission criteria that they did not have to meet themselves (Semela, 2006). Female students in the study also held low levels of academic self-confidence when compared to their male counterparts (Semela, 2006).

Policies aimed at lowering the gender equity gap in Ethiopia have also been critiqued by Molla (2013), who is concerned that female students in Ethiopia’s public university system are essentially being set up for failure by the current implementation of affirmative action and gender-equity policies that admit female students to universities without providing necessary support programs to foster their academic success (Amazan, 2009; Semela, 2007; Yizengaw, 2007). Clearly, the massification process and gender policies of universities have benefited some female students but they have created significant problems for those who are unable to succeed academically and are dismissed from universities.
Suggested Solutions to Support Female Students

During the academic year when I served as the English language mentor, the program had trained ten Ethiopian female faculty members to offer year-long life skills and academic mentoring to all of the beneficiaries. The main purpose of the intervention pilot program was to provide targeted support for female students and by doing so, to attempt to reduce the attrition rate of first-year female students at the participating universities. The intervention program participants were recruited from the faculties of Engineering and Natural Sciences, two departments which were known to have a higher rate of female attrition than other fields of study. This type of intervention is supported by researchers such as Semela (2007), who asserts that the lack of academic support female students receive while attending Ethiopian universities directly inhibits their success.

Amazan (2009) observes that a lack of female role models at the university level can create additional challenges for female students. Interventions that offer targeted mentoring and support for female students, such as this study’s English mentoring program, are considered essential by the Ministry of Education (as cited by Molla, 2013), as seen in the Strategic Framework for gender equality in Higher Education, which calls for institutions to provide tutorial services to enhance academic performance and reduce the attrition rate.

On the other hand, such intervention strategies (including tutorial services and mentoring programs) aimed at supporting female students might not be necessary if the cultural and institutional environment were conducive for young female scholars in the
first place, promoting a normal and healthy learning process and reinforcing female students’ innate ability to succeed academically (Ministry of Education, as cited by Molla, 2013). In summary, one suggested solution calls upon institutions to consider the problem of gender inequity from a totally different perspective: offering tutorials and assertiveness trainings to women should be counterbalanced with gender awareness trainings for men and through protective legislation.

In this section covering the problem of female attrition from universities in Ethiopia, contextual information was synthesized on massification of universities, gender equity policy, factors influencing attrition of female university students, and proposed solutions to this problem. The literature reviewed in this chapter was not comprehensive, but was selected to provide some background information to understand the actual experiences of females in this case study. It underscores the need for future studies addressing the demographic of female EFL students in Ethiopian universities to better understand why some students are not promoted, why some are successful, and why some drop out for non-academic reasons. The factors contributing to the problem of female attrition, as well as proposed solutions, should consider various aspects of this complex issue, including the overall university context, government policies, and the actual experiences of individual female students. Deconstructing the complex relationships between Ethiopia’s young female scholars and their academic environment, formed in part by institutional massification and gender affirmative action policies, is not a simple process, but understanding the nature of these relationships is crucial if the society as a
whole aims to decrease the gender gap and improve the experiences of female students attending Ethiopian universities.

The English Language in Ethiopian Education

Beyond the factors described above, the role of the English language in the Ethiopian educational system must be considered. Ethiopia has one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse populations in the modern world. According to various sources (Eshetie, 2010; Ethnologue, 2015), Ethiopia currently lists the number of ethnicities and corresponding distinct languages at a minimum of eighty-five. Of those, the Oromos, Amharas, Somalis, and Tigrayans are the largest ethnic groups, in that order (Eshetie, 2010). Amharic is the federal working language of Ethiopia. The English language has a paradoxical role in Ethiopia, where it plays a central part in the education system of the county, yet remains a foreign language; researchers have observed that the English language is foreign to most Ethiopians and is used today only amongst a small minority of the educated, economic, and political elite (Bogale, 2009; Jha, 2013).

Nationwide, English is taught as a subject starting in grade one in primary schools; English then becomes the medium of instruction starting in grade nine and continuing through preparatory, college and university levels (Bachore, 2014; Eshetie, 2010). All universities in the country are supposed to use English as the working language, which means they should use English to produce documents, hold meetings, and write minutes and reports (Eshetie, 2010). Universities in Ethiopia are currently using English as the medium of instruction because faculty and students alike see English as the medium for achieving international recognition and academic status (Bachore, 2014).
The use and teaching of English creates a number of challenges for the Ethiopian educational system. Generally, the teaching of English as a subject in Ethiopia and its use as a medium of instruction at the primary school levels are under-resourced (Bachore, 2014); Students often struggle to follow their studies in English because their knowledge of English is poor and the teachers struggle to help students learn English since the teachers themselves often lack adequate English language skills.

In recent years, teachers in Ethiopian schools have been complaining about the low level of English language competence of students; employers have the same complaint about low English skills for graduates (Eshetie, 2010). Ethiopian students’ English language performance is a recognized area in need of improvement because most students struggle to communicate in English both orally and in writing (Bachore, 2014). At the university level, teachers perceive students as struggling to comprehend reading material and lectures due to their low English language proficiency (Eshetie, 2010). Furthermore, many Ethiopian college and university students lack the ability to express themselves clearly in English and that even graduates emerge incapable of writing basic documents related to job-seeking in English, while teachers at all levels lack the English skills needed to teach well (Eshetie, 2010).

In summary, English has a broad functional role in Ethiopia as the medium of instruction at both the secondary and tertiary level. English may also be used alongside Amharic in education, business and trade interactions and transactions, media, and communication (Eshetie, 2010). However, the quality of English in Ethiopia’s education system and in everyday use is not adequate (Eshetie, 2010). In recent years, various steps
have been taken to improve the English language capacity of students and teachers in Ethiopia. For example, Peace Corps Ethiopia’s Education Volunteers are currently working to support the government of Ethiopia’s strategy to improve the quality of education at various levels; two important goals of this international partnership are to improve English language teaching methods and to increase students' and teachers' English proficiency (Peace Corps Ethiopia, 2015). With sustained effort, the hope is that the quality of English in Ethiopia’s education sector should gradually improve by building the capacity of English language teachers and students.

Academic Confidence and Academic Success

Academic confidence is a construct that is narrowly focused on academic performance in a typical university context (Sander & Sanders, 2006). The Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) scale is a tool developed to measure academic confidence, and has students rate themselves on statements that describe factors related to academic success, including one’s ability to study independently, give presentations in front of a group of peers, achieve decent grades, ask a lecturer a question, and attend classes (Sander & Sanders, 2006). Academic confidence is a concept that combines a person’s view of their ability and their behavior. As such, measurements of academic confidence can be useful because they indicate how a student expects to be able to respond to the demands of studying at university; also, academic confidence measurements can show how students differ from one another (Sander & Sanders, 2006).

In order to measure academic confidence, the ABC scale can be divided into four factors (sub-scales) that provide an understanding of different behavioral aspects related
to one’s overall confidence in an academic context; according to Sander and Sanders (2009), these four factors (sub-scales) are studying, attendance, grades, and verbalizing. Studying and attendance are considered to be two factors related to academic confidence that can largely be controlled by the students (Sander & Sanders, 2009). In contrast, grades and verbalizing are factors related to the student-teacher dyad, which includes behaviors and processes that depend on the relationship that exists between student and teacher (Sander & Sanders, 2009).

Some studies have used the ABC to compare academic confidence across genders while others have looked at gender differences in academic self-concept as it relates to academic achievement (Sander, 2009). One study found female undergraduates have lower confidence than male counterparts in three categories (grades, verbalizing, and studying), but another study found females have higher confidence than males when it comes to studying (Sander, 2009). In contrast, a study in Ethiopia focused on grade ten students and found that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students in self-efficacy levels and academic achievement in the subject of biology; male students rated slightly higher in the self-efficacy category than female students and males scored much higher than females in the achievement category (Mohammed, Atagana, & Edawoke, 2014). The researchers concluded, in part, that self-efficacy and academic engagement could be linked to differences in academic performance for male and female students in biology (Mohammed et. al., 2014). A number of studies suggest that gender may have an effect on both self-efficacy and academic confidence, but other factors may account for differences as well (Sander, 2009), which suggests that gender may
be only one factor in a complex set of variables related to academic confidence and academic achievement.

Studies looking at academic success in relation to self-concept, self-confidence, and goal orientation compare groups of students using various factors such as participant characteristics (such as gender) and contextual characteristics (such as department of academic study). In one study exploring academic success at a public university in Malaysia, Matovu (2012) investigated students’ academic self-concept (their evaluation of their own knowledge and abilities in relation to academics); this study found that students with higher academic effort also had higher academic achievement, with females scoring relatively higher than males in both categories. Another study by Al-Hebaish (2012), whose participants were female undergraduate English majors in Saudi Arabia, found that students who had higher levels of general self-confidence scored higher on oral examinations in English, which implies that general self-confidence can be important for students as they strive to improve their second language oral proficiency. This study underscores the common assumption that foreign language learners perform better when they believe themselves to be capable learners, while those without high levels of self-efficacy will suffer negative consequences such as fear, insecurity, uncertainty, and social distance (Al-Hebaish, 2012).

Researchers Taye and Zhou (2009) examined how the goal orientation of university students in Ethiopia influenced coping strategies by examining their responses to scenarios of academic setbacks. The study found that males demonstrated a higher endorsement of performance approach goal orientation, a competitive mindset
concerned with demonstrating ability or surpassing others, when compared to their female counterparts; this finding suggests that cultural factors in Ethiopia likely encourage males students to choose effective coping strategies when faced with scenarios of academic failure more frequently than female students (Taye & Zhou, 2009). These studies imply that goal orientation, self-confidence, and academic self-concept are all possible factors in determining the academic success of university students (Al-Hebaish, 2012; Matovu, 2012; Taye & Zhou, 2009).

This present case study is concerned with an intervention pilot program at an Ethiopian university designed to support female students. In this type of program, monitoring and evaluation are essential, therefore indicators must be determined that can demonstrate the program’s efficacy. This is explained by Eldred, Ward, Dutton, and Snowdon, who stated:

Identifying learning gains and achievements are vital parts of the learning process. In non-accredited learning, the challenge is to clearly capture individual and group achievements, in order to demonstrate to learners, tutors and funders what has been gained. If gains in confidence are as significant as many learners and tutors appear to suggest, ways of evidencing them seem to be important (2004, p. 1).

Therefore, measuring the progress of individual participants and evaluating the achievements of the group as a whole are crucial for all stakeholders with an investment in an intervention and support program for students, from the grassroots level
(practitioners and beneficiaries) to the international aid agencies and nongovernmental organizations that provide guidance and funding (Eldred et al., 2004).

One consideration in evaluating the efficacy of an intervention program is to see if participation in such mentoring programs helps students achieve academic success (Jacobi, 1991). The idea of offering a supportive English language mentoring program to female university students in Ethiopia who are struggling with English seems obvious and justifiable, because low English language proficiency is one possible factor contributing to the high rate attrition. However, Jacobi (1991) cautions researchers and practitioners against turning to mentoring and intervention programs as a quick fix for problems that exist in higher education systems.

The impact of mentoring programs in fostering academic success is a complicated topic. Reports suggest that the importance of age, gender, and ethnicity of the mentor may play an important role, as well as educational background and language (Eldred et al., 2004; Jacobi, 1991). The design and implementation of the mentoring program, including such factors as the number of participants, contact hours, frequency of sessions, overall duration of the program, curriculum, and context) could have an impact on the ultimate success of beneficiaries.

Need for Research: The Gap

This case study is designed to address a gap in research examining the problem of female attrition from Ethiopian universities. To my knowledge, no prior case studies from Ethiopia have been conducted that focus on first-year female natural science students who are voluntarily participating in an intervention program that provided a blend of
communicative and academic English mentoring sessions. To my knowledge, prior studies have not used university students’ individual writing samples produced in the context of an English language mentoring program as a source for qualitative data. As suggested by Molla and Cuthbert (2014), this study addresses their call for research that includes qualitative data to explore possible factors contributing to female attrition in Ethiopian universities.

In addition, there is a gap in research from Ethiopia that includes quantitative data on English language proficiency levels of first-year university students as measured by the British Council’s International Language Assessment (ILA), which assessed reading, grammar and vocabulary skills (British Council’s ILA, 2015). Furthermore, the academic confidence of first-year female students in natural science fields in Ethiopia has not yet been measured using the Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) survey, which has the ability to measure four factors related to academic confidence: attendance, studying, verbalizing, and grades (Sander & Sanders, 2006).

Finally, there is a gap in research on first-year female attrition in Ethiopia that looks at differences between groups of students based on academic success or failure (based on first semester GPA).

Research Question

The gap in research as outlined in the previous section has led me to following research question: What differences are found amongst first-year female students at an Ethiopian University when grouped according to academic status (dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) with respect to English language proficiency,
academic confidence, and perceptions of their own experiences with English, academic confidence, and university life?

Summary

This chapter began with an overarching literature review examining previous studies on the larger theme of the current reality and challenges facing female students in Ethiopian institutes of higher education. Then, literature was reviewed on the topics of English language proficiency levels and academic confidence with an emphasis on understanding how ELP and ABC are related to academic success of female students at the tertiary level in the contemporary Ethiopian context. Finally, this chapter ended by identifying the gap in current research studies that this Capstone aims to fill, which is the need for both quantitative and qualitative data related to the academic experiences of first-year female university students in Ethiopia’s public universities, followed by a restatement of the research question. The next chapter outlines and explains the research methods used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the methodology used in this case study. First, the rationale is presented for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in this exploratory study. Next, the setting and participants are described. Then, the data collection protocols are presented and data collection procedures are explained. After that, the methods used to analyze the data are given, followed by comments about the reliability and verification of data. Finally, the ethical considerations taken for this study are stated.

The primary purpose of this research is to describe the experiences and perceptions of first-year Ethiopian female students who were assigned to natural science faculties at a public university in Ethiopia and who voluntarily participated in an intervention pilot program. The intervention included an English mentoring program designed to support female students using a student-centered, communicative approach to English language improvement with weekly mentoring sessions spanning two semesters. The research question guiding this study is: What differences are found amongst first-year female students at an Ethiopian University when grouped according to academic status (dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) with respect to English language...
proficiency, academic confidence, and perceptions of their own experiences with English, academic confidence, and university life?

Research Paradigm and Methodology: Description and Rationale

To investigate the research question guiding this case study research, an exploratory approach was used that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data. Johnstone (2000) states that a qualitative case study approach is justifiable when it can provide a direct contrast to an existing body of research that is predominantly large-scale and focused on quantitative data. Narrative case study research is becoming increasingly common in the second language acquisition field because a growing numbers of scholars are concerned with understanding how the language learners’ developmental experiences affect them as individuals within a specific context and how the environment impacts the learners’ second language acquisition experiences (Mackey & Gass, 2012). In addition, case studies have the potential for rich contextualization, which can illuminate the complexities of the second language learning process (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Molla and Cuthbert (2014) observed that since research already published on the topic of gender equity in Ethiopian higher education was primarily quantitative, taking a qualitative inquiry approach could serve as a purposeful counterpoint to the discussion that is framed by quantitative data on admission, progression, and completion rates. Following this suggestion, a mixed methods approach was taken in this case study with equal emphasis placed on the qualitative and quantitative data. This methodological approach aligns with the purpose of this study which is to investigate a specific contemporary phenomenon (the high attrition rate of female university students) within a
real life context (an English mentoring pilot program designed to support first-year female EFL students in the natural science faculties at an Ethiopian university), where the boundaries between the context and the phenomena are not obvious (Yin, 1994).

Quantitative data was used for this research in the form of university grade point averages of student participants, scores from a standardized English language placement exam called the International Language Assessment, and the Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) survey, an instrument used to measure academic confidence. The qualitative data consisted of writing samples gathered from participants that captured their perceptions on experiences with English language, academic confidence, and university life in general. This mixed methods approach was taken to illuminate the experiences of a small group of first-year female natural science students participating in an intervention program in an Ethiopian university. Furthermore, the data was analyzed according to the participants’ level of academic success, which may provide insights into the topic of female university attrition.

Data Collection

This mixed methods research study used both qualitative and quantitative data. In this section, the setting and participants are described. Then the data collection techniques are explained, first for the quantitative data and second for the qualitative data. Two partnering organizations collaborated with our intervention program to provide the following quantitative data for all research participants: GPA was provided by the university and English language proficiency was provided by British Council Ethiopia. Further quantitative data was gathered during the English mentoring sessions using a
survey to measure participants’ Academic Confidence levels. All qualitative data took the form of participants’ individual writing samples which were obtained during the English mentoring program sessions. These writing samples can be categorized into four types of writing: journal entries, session activities, homework assignments, and answers to a final questionnaire.

**Setting and Participants**

This study took place on the campus of a public university in Ethiopia. Participants were first-year female students who voluntarily participated in a supportive intervention pilot program facilitated by the university’s gender office. Since 2008, Ethiopian universities have established gender offices that work to facilitate the process of enhancing and supporting gender equality on their campuses. The intervention pilot program was facilitated by the gender office on the university campus and had four main pillars of support: life skills training, English mentoring, hygiene and academic kits, and peer mentoring. The intervention program participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 and were recruited by program staff in collaboration with volunteer student representatives from the gender department.

In addition, a promotional flier describing the English language mentoring pilot program was used to inform students about this extracurricular opportunity, which can be found in Appendix A: English mentoring pilot program informational flier. Following the recruiting process, a total of 750 participants were ultimately registered for this pilot program which took place at three universities in Ethiopia. The natural science students
who participated in this intervention program and English mentoring pilot program totaled 140 students at one university. These students came from different regions of Ethiopia and all of the students come from families where different first languages are spoken, including Amharic, Afan Oromo, Tigrinya and others. As the literature review explained, English is largely considered a foreign language throughout Ethiopia and the low level of English proficiency for many students can often be problematic even into the tertiary level of education (Eshetie, 2010). Thus, participants in this study can be described as both English language users and English language learners in the context of an Ethiopian university where English is the medium of instruction located in a country where English is a foreign language.

**Data Collection Technique 1: Grade Point Average (GPA)**

The grade point averages (GPA) of study participants and corresponding academic status were both provided to the intervention program by the university at the end of the first year at university. The GPA and academic status were from the first semester of university study, but they were not provided to the intervention program and gender office until the end of the second semester for various reasons. The university’s GPA scale was from zero to four points, and depending on GPA, a student was placed into one of three possible categories of academic status: dismissed, warning, and promoted. GPA ranges and corresponding academic status for students in this case study were as follows: dismissed status (0.71 - 1.40); warning status (1.58 - 1.99); promoted status (2.01 - 3.92).
Note that the university’s policy was to keep all students on campus for two semesters regardless of the first semester GPA, so students who were given a dismissed status were allowed to remain on campus and many continued to participate in the English mentoring program. However, as the English mentor and researcher, I was not given this information until after the English mentoring sessions were completely finished for the year. Also, I do not know when the students were informed of their academic status or their GPA by the university. For this reason, it is not possible to know if and how this type of information might have impacted their academic confidence or quantitative writing samples.

Data Collection Technique 2: International Language Assessment (ILA)

A standardized English language placement exam called the International Language Assessment (ILA) was used to as data measuring the English language proficiency (ELP) of all study participants (British Council’s ILA, 2015). The ILA is a British Council placement exam that was developed in 2009 to place students at the appropriate English proficiency level for their course of English language study; developing the ILA was one part of a joint project between CRELLA (University of Bedfordshire) and the Centre for Language Assessment Research, University of Roehampton (CLARe) (British Council, 2015). The English mentoring pilot program partnered the British Council Ethiopia, which offered ILA services to the program’s participants free of charge.

The ILA used in this study was a paper-based exam with fifty multiple choice questions that measured English language proficiency levels in three areas: grammar,
vocabulary and reading. British Council Ethiopia used the CEF scale to provide the results of the ILA exam. The CEF scale has six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2) with A1 being the lowest level and C1 being the highest as seen in Appendix B: Common European Framework (CEF) global scale with descriptors. A seventh CEF of A0 is used by some, including Weir (2013), to indicate no knowledge or skill with a language, but the A0 level is not used in this research study. The ILA test selected by the British Council Ethiopia and used in this study had limited range of possible results of only three of the CEF levels: A2 (basic user), B1 (independent user low) and B2 (independent user high).

Data Collection Technique 3: Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) Scale

The Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) survey is an instrument designed to measure the academic confidence of university students (Sanders, 2009). The ABC results can provide diagnostic insights that could help teachers and mentors understand the range of confidence levels within a particular group of students in a particular academic context (Sanders, 2009). Furthermore, the ABC instrument is used to measure overall academic confidence of a group according to the mean score as well as changes in academic confidence over time. In this case study, the ABC was used as a diagnostic tool in the English mentoring program to assess the confidence of students. The same ABC was given on the first and the last day of the program to measure changes in confidence levels over time.

The ABC consisted of twenty-four statements, and students were asked to rank their confidence using a numeric scale ranging from one (lowest confidence level) to five (highest confidence level). The ABC was created for use in the context of UK universities,
so some of the twenty-four statements had to be adapted slightly to apply to the Ethiopian context. Seven of the twenty-four statements were adapted based on suggestions from the Ethiopian intervention program staff and Peace Corps Ethiopia staff members; all changes were intended to provide clarity for students taking the ABC survey in the Ethiopian university context. The changes that were made from the original to the adapted statements on the ABC are listed in Appendix C.

The adapted version of the ABC survey that was used in this study is found in Appendix D; this was used as both the pre-program and post-program measurement of academic confidence. The Amharic translation of the ABC survey is found in Appendix E and the Afan Oromo translation is found in Appendix F.

Data Collection Technique 4: Journals

I collected qualitative data in my dual role as the English language mentor and researcher. The first type of qualitative written data was in the form of journal entries that were written by the program participants. Journal writing took place at the beginning of each mentoring session for approximately fifteen minutes. A list of journal prompts that were used can be found in Appendix G. The prompts were typically open ended and designed to elicit student reflection on personal experiences. I developed all of the journal prompts during the process of creating and implementing the English mentoring pilot program. The English mentoring program used the dialogue journal approach, which means that students wrote freely on the prompt or a topic of their own choice for several minutes. After each session, I took the time to read each journal and wrote a personal response to each student without making any corrections, as if we were having a
conversation. At the beginning of each English mentoring session, I explained the philosophy of free writing in journals and of using dialogue journals as a conversation between myself as the mentor and each individual student.

Mackey and Gass (2012) note that using journals to gather qualitative data is an approach that involves very little researcher control. Even when prompts are used to guide journal entries in the hopes of eliciting reflective writing about specific topics, the final content of journal entries is left entirely up to the research participants (Mackey & Gass, 2012). This is true for this case study because participants were encouraged to reject the journal prompts I provided if they preferred to write on a topic of their own choice.

**Data Collection Technique 5: English Mentoring Session Activities**

Writing activities that took place during the English mentoring sessions are found in Appendix H. The purpose of writing and related speaking activities was to practice English skills through discussion on topics related to the students’ own life experiences. Writing and speaking activities using stimulated recall of personal experiences were not designed to capture the participants’ thought processes, rather, they were designed to allow participants to share interpretations of their own actions or the actions of others within a given context that was familiar to them (Mackey & Gass, 2012).

**Data Collection Technique 6: English Mentoring Homework Assignments**

Participants were given optional homework assignments and examples are found in Appendix I. The homework assignments that I gave were always direct extensions of session activities. Homework prompts required students to expand in writing with detailed
accounts of personal experiences or expressing their personal opinions on a given topic. All writing samples used in this case study are personal, reflective works and as such are subjective; thus, the qualitative data should be considered one of many possible perspectives that could exist rather than as factual statements (Mackey & Gass, 2012). Because one aim of this study was to gain insights into participants’ views on personal experiences, the journals, activities, and homework were used as appropriate data.

Data Collection Technique 7: English Mentoring Questionnaire

The final form of qualitative writing used in this study was a questionnaire that was administered on the last day of English mentoring sessions. This questionnaire is found in Appendix J. According to Mackey and Gass (2012), open-ended questionnaires have several advantages including the fact that they are easy to administer, they give participants time to formulate responses in writing, and they provide the researcher with opinions on a specific topic from a large group of people. The questionnaire used was relevant to the research questions because it asked participants’ to share their views on their own English language skills, academic confidence, and ability to succeed.

Procedure

Participants

As mentioned earlier, intervention program participants were first-year university students in Ethiopia who were recruited from the natural science faculties. While there were 140 natural science students who volunteered to participate in the English
mentoring program, only sixty participants were included in this case study. The following criteria were used to determine the final group of sixty case study participants:

- Those with a first-semester GPA provided by university departments.
- Those who took the ILA exam at the beginning of the first semester.
- Those who completed both the pre-ABC survey and post-ABC survey.
- Those who produced qualitative writing samples in one or more of the four categories: journal entries, writing activities, homework assignments, or the final questionnaire.

From this group of sixty participants, three sub-groups were created based on their academic status: dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group. Groups were formed based on first-semester GPA data that was provided to the intervention program staff by the university. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of participants into three sub-groups (dismissed group, warning group and promoted group).

Table 1

*Case Study Participant Groups by Academic Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of Case Study Participants</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed Group</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning Group</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted Group</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recruiting process used to register participants from the natural science faculties and the criteria used to select the final group of participants means that the total number of participants in the whole group as well as each subgroup was not in the
control of the researcher. For example, there were 60 participants in this study and more than half were in the faculty of Biology, but since participants volunteered to participate in an extracurricular intervention program that figure is of no importance. In addition, nine of the fourteen dismissed students were in the Chemistry department, which may be an observation that is worthy of investigating but for the purposes of this study, it is used as one descriptive characteristic without further exploration. Information in Table 2 shows the participants’ faculties of study by whole group and subgroups.

Table 2

*Case Study Participant Groups by Faculty*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Geology</th>
<th>Earth Science</th>
<th>Computer Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This section explained the process used to create the whole group of participants as well as the three sub-groups. This framework provided the structure for investigating differences between sub-groups representing three levels of academic success.

**Materials**

British Council Ethiopia’s International Language Assessment (ILA). The British Council in Ethiopia evaluated the participants’ English language proficiency (ELP) at the
beginning of the first semester using a paper version of the International Language Assessment (ILA), a standardized British Council placement exam (British Council, 2015). The ILA exam was administered in a controlled testing room by trained invigilators from British Council Ethiopia. Students were given one hour to complete the exam, which measured English grammar, reading and vocabulary. The exam had fifty multiple choice questions, and students indicated responses on a standardized test answer sheet by filling in the bubbles. These answer sheets were taken by the ILA invigilators to the British Council Ethiopia office where final results were calculated by the British Council Ethiopia.

**Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) scale.** The Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) scale, Appendix C, is a diagnostic tool developed by Sander and Sanders (2006) with twenty-four statements about academic confidence. In order to measure changes in academic confidence, the ABC survey with optional translated reference sheets was given twice during this study; the pre-ABC survey was given on the first day of the English mentoring program and the post-ABC survey was given on the last day. Participants ranked each of the twenty-four statements on a scale from one to five with one being lowest confidence and five being the highest.

**Writing activities.** Writing activities took place during English mentoring sessions and as homework assignments. There were twenty English mentoring sessions planned for the year, ten per semester, and each session was planned for one hour and thirty minutes. During each mentoring session, students wrote in their journals for the first fifteen minutes. Then, communicative activities took place during the remaining seventy-five
minutes of each English mentoring session that combined English reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. In addition, students were given optional homework assignments every week. I collected all of the participants’ qualitative writing samples from journal prompts, session activities, and homework assignments after each English mentoring session either by photocopying or photographing the papers. Original writing samples were either returned to the students or given to the intervention program.

Though twenty English mentoring sessions were planned, only fifteen were held due to scheduling complications that arose during the second semester. Over the span of the English mentoring program, writing samples were compiled in portfolios for each participant and kept in a secure filing cabinet. Then on the final day of the English mentoring program, students were given the final questionnaire to complete. I photocopied or photographed all completed questionnaires and returned the originals to the intervention program staff and gender officers for their own monitoring and evaluation purposes. The following list shows the instruments used to collect qualitative data and the amount of data collected in this case study:

1. Journal prompts (Appendix G)
   - 15 journal entries were written by the dismissed group (14 people)
   - 23 journal entries were written by the warning group (11 people)
   - 94 journal entries were written by the promoted group (35 people);

2. Session writing activities (Appendix H)
   - 7 writing activities were produced by the dismissed group (14 people)
   - 5 writing activities were produced by the warning group (11 people)
• 13 writing activities were produced by the promoted group (35 people);

3. Homework assignments (Appendix I)
   • 2 homework assignments completed by the dismissed group (14 people)
   • 9 homework assignments completed by the warning group (11 people)
   • 30 homework assignments completed by the promoted group (35 people)

4. Questionnaire (Appendix J)
   • 11 questionnaires were completed by the dismissed group (14 people)
   • 9 questionnaires were completed by the warning group (11 people)
   • 24 questionnaires were completed by the promoted group (35 people)

Data Analysis

Grade Point Average Analysis

Analysis of first-semester GPA was done by the natural science faculties of study at the university. Each participant was placed into one of three academic categories according to her first semester GPA: dismissed, warning, or promoted. The researcher used these three groups as a basis for comparison for all subsequent data.

International Language Assessment (ILA) Analysis

The British Council Ethiopia provided the results of the ILA exam to the intervention program and results were given using the Common European Framework (CEF) global scale (Appendix B). As a reminder, the possible CEF levels from the ILA exam ranged from A2 to B2, with the lowest possible level A2 (basic), the middle level B1 (independent), and the highest level B2 (independent).
To analyze the CEF data, I counted the total number of participants who achieved each level for the whole group as well as for each group formed by academic status (dismissed, warning, and promoted). After that I assigned point values to each level on the CEF scale as follows: level A2=2, level B1=3, level B2=4. Using these numerical values in place of CEF levels, total point scores and mean scores were calculated for each group (dismissed, warning and promoted). This data analysis was done to allow comparison between groups on the basis of overall English language proficiency. Results were entered into a table for the purposes of description and comparison.

**Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) Analysis**

The ABC is an instrument that provides insights into a person’s approach to learning combined with her ability to self-regulate behavior in the university environment (Sander, 2009). To analyze the quantitative data from the two ABC self-assessments, a spreadsheet was created and data were entered to record each participant’s responses for twenty-four statements. Marks on a rating scale from one (lowest academic confidence) to five (highest academic confidence) were used to gauge the students’ level of confidence related to each statement. Numerical data were entered into the spreadsheet for the pre-program ABC and the post-program ABC, which were administered during the first day and the last day of the English mentoring sessions respectively.

The data were analyzed by using the results from both the pre-program and post-program ABC surveys for those participants selected for the case study. For each group (whole group, dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group), the results spreadsheet was used to calculate the mean rating for each statement on both surveys as
well as total scores (overall mean ratings on each survey) for each group. Next, the
difference in mean ratings for each statement between the first and second surveys was
calculated for each group to see any change in overall confidence for individual
statements. Differences in total score (overall mean ratings from the first and second
surveys) were then calculated for each group to reveal any overall changes in confidence
from the beginning to the end of the mentoring program. All of these calculations were
put into tables for comparison.

I sent the anonymous qualitative data with GPA, ELP and pre-program and post-
program ABC results to Paul Sander at his request. He performed a statistical analysis
using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to calculate the overall mean
scores. An additional SPSS analysis was performed by Sander to calculate mean scores for
each sub-group of participants (dismissed, warning, and promoted) looking at the four
ABC sub-scales (grades, verbalizing, studying, and attendance). Then, Sander conducted
further analysis using SPSS to describe differences between pre-program ABC and post-
program ABC ratings for each sub-scale by group. Finally, Sander conducted an Analysis
of Variance (ANOVA) to isolate the changes in confidence in the four sub-scales within
and between groups. The resulting data from all of Sander’s analysis were entered into
tables for descriptive purposes.

**Qualitative Analysis of Writing Samples**

I used grounded theory methodology to analyze the qualitative data. According to
Mackey and Gass (2012), this method provides a picture of the specific phenomenon
under investigation in light of the research question. For example, in this case study the
phenomenon under investigation was the participants’ perceptions of experiences which I placed into three overarching categories: their own English language experiences, their own academic confidence experiences, and their own experiences of university life in general. As recommended, this case study collected information from many different sources that explored the same phenomena (Yin, 1994) by using multiple forms of qualitative writing (journal entries, session activities, homework assignments, and a questionnaire).

I organized the writing samples from individual students into three groups that corresponded to the student’s academic status: dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group. For the dismissed group and the warning group, all written data were transcribed exactly as the student wrote in English, without corrections to spelling or grammar. However, due to the relatively large number of participants in the promoted group, only half of the participants’ data were selected and transcribed for analysis. In all, eighteen of the thirty-five participants were chosen from the promoted group and the qualitative data were transcribed for these eighteen students.

After transcribing the data, I read and analyzed each group’s written samples using grounded theory methodology. For one month, the process of reading and re-reading writing samples was repeated several times a week; each time I read the data I took a slightly different approach to analysis because I became increasingly familiar with the writing over time. Using this approach, several different schemes for coding the writing samples were explored over time. Grounded theory methodology as described by
Mackey & Gass (2012) is a process of coding samples that takes place over time in which the research must identify themes that are grounded in the data.

The final scheme I used to code the data and organize the results included placing themes into three predetermined categories related to the research question. Thus, the results of my coding process would respond to the research question about the differences found between groups of students based on academic status. Using my research question as a guide, the first predetermined category I used was the students’ perceptions of English language experiences. The second predetermined category I used to code writing samples was to identify examples where students shared their views about their own academic confidence. A third predetermined category that guided my coding process was more global and focused on student’s perceptions of their experiences at university. By starting with these three categories, I was able to read, analyze and code the data based on themes that emerged within each category. Themes that emerged did not always fit neatly into one of the three categories, but I did my best to objectively code the data and make decisions based on my professional judgement. The results of this qualitative analysis using grounded theory are presented in Chapter Four.

Reliability and Verification of Data

The qualitative nature of this case study means that there was no attempt to conform to the scientific standard of reliability defined as a research procedure that produces the same results each time it is used (Johnstone, 2000). However, this case study did address the reliability problem by making as the process as operational and
transparent as possible, following Yin’s (1994) suggestion to conduct the research as if another person were always looking at every action that was taken. As a result, this report describes procedures taken in detail so that another person could follow the same steps and obtain similar results (Yin, 1994). As the researcher of this case study, I made an effort to be transparent about key aspects including my role as researcher, the selection criteria of participants, the criteria used to group participants by academic status, a description of the cultural context, my rationale for using this research paradigm, and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Due to the unique nature of all case studies, the research findings are normally not generalizable (Yin, 1994). However, the qualitative data type and quality were operationalized to the extent possible, a suggestion made by Mackey and Gass (2012). First of all, the reflective writing prompts were varied, yet targeted the same overarching topics for student reflection. In addition, qualitative samples were derived from four different sources: individual journals, session activities, homework assignments, and a summative questionnaire. Triangulation of qualitative data were done through redundancy of writing prompts elicitation and by collecting different types of writing samples.

Qualitative data were gathered during every English mentoring session over the intervention pilot program’s two semesters and it was supplemented by quantitative data (GPA; ELP and ABC results) to explore the differences between the groups of participants (dismissed, warning, and promoted). The boundary of this case study was limited to one specific intervention pilot program; therefore it is important to note that the findings will
not be generalizable (Mackey & Gass, 2012). However, the study can help us understand more about the place of female students in Ethiopian universities.

In this study, external validity was not a primary concern. The following steps were taken to minimize threats to external validity: complete description of the research setting, description of participants, stratified selection used to create three groupings of students according to academic status, and purposeful sampling of data from participants that was both systematic and convenient (Mackey & Gass, 2012). Findings were presented by describing characteristics found amongst each of the three groups of students (dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) and data were analyzed using grounded theory. Research findings can also be generalized to theories that were presented in the literature review as suggested by Yin (1994) for case study researchers. In summary, research findings suggested in the literature review were connected to the results and findings of this case study to the extent that such connections were possible.

**Ethics**

Ethical considerations are important in qualitative research. I accepted the responsibility to respect and protect the rights, needs, values, desires, and identities of the study participants at all times. Professional codes and U.S. federal regulations were taken into consideration for the protection of participants from harm, the right to privacy, protection from deception, and informed consent. The following steps were taken to protect the rights of the research participants:

- A general description of research objectives and rationale were shared with participants;
• The researcher’s status was explained as both an English mentor engaged in research and as a Hamline University graduate student completing an MA ESL degree;
• A statement that the research would be published and where it would be available was included;
• Written permission was obtained from participants using the informed consent letter;
• Human subject approval was obtained from Hamline University and the participating program;
• Names and any other identifying factors were removed from the data and participants were given numbers to protect their identities;
• Ethical considerations with respect to language were made and translations were provided in Amharic and Afan Oromo when possible;
• The researcher and the program staff were the only people who had access to the data collected for this study; data was held by the program staff in a secure and locked location in the securely locked program office provided by the university gender department. Qualitative writing samples were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked training room where the mentoring sessions were held;
• All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the rationale and described the setting, participants, and methodology used for this research. The various processes used to collect and analyze data were outlined. Reliability, verification of data, and ethical considerations were also
discussed. Next, in Chapter Four, Results, the findings of this study will be presented. Preliminary observations about the differences between groups (whole group, dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) will be noted and discussed alongside the results of data analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

This case study took place in an English mentoring pilot program designed to support first-year female natural science students at an Ethiopian university. In this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative data are shared. Through the collection and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, I sought the answer to the following question: What differences are found amongst first-year female students at an Ethiopian University when grouped according to academic status (dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group) with respect to English language proficiency, academic confidence, and perceptions of their own experiences with English, academic confidence, and university life?

The descriptive results of the quantitative data are presented first, followed by qualitative results. The first description shows how participants were grouped according to their levels of academic success using first semester GPA. After that, the results of the British Council’s ILA placement test measuring English language proficiency are described by group (whole, dismissed, warning, and promoted). Then, the data measuring participants’ academic confidence are presented by group. This includes the following: first, the results on overall academic confidence from the Academic Behavioral
Confidence (ABC) scale; and second, the results of factor analysis using four ABC subscales (attendance, studying, verbalizing, and grades).

After presenting the results of quantitative data, the qualitative data are presented for each group (dismissed, warning, and promoted). For each group of students, themes are described and examples illustrating each theme are shared. Presentation of the qualitative results is based on the three predetermined categories which were described in Chapter Three: First, students’ perceptions of English language experiences; second, their perceptions of academic confidence; and third, participants’ perceptions of university life in general. For each of these categories, the results will be presented by group (dismissed, warning, and promoted) with brief comments from the researcher explaining my preliminary findings.

Quantitative Results

Academic Success

Grade Point Average (GPA) on a scale from zero (lowest) to four (highest) is the standard measure used for academic promotion or dismissal in Ethiopian universities. As described in Chapter Three, GPA was provided by the university’s natural science faculties to the intervention pilot program staff at the end of the first semester. Participants’ GPA data were used in this case study to group participants according to their level of academic success.

There were fourteen participants who were placed in the dismissed group, which had GPAs ranging from 0.71 to 1.40. The warning group had a total of eleven participants and the group’s GPAs ranged from a low GPA of 1.58 to a high of 1.99.
There were thirty-five participants in this case study who were promoted, and for this group the GPAs ranged from 2.01 to 3.92. The whole group of sixty participants selected for this case study included a range of individual GPAs from 0.71 at the low end to 3.92 at the high end.

Table three, below, shows the following data: number of participants in each group, the mean GPA for each group, and the standard deviation of GPA by group.

Table 3

First Semester Grade Point Averages by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean GPA</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed Group</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning Group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted Group</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, I used the GPA information given to our intervention program by the university natural science faculties and the corresponding academic status as the quantitative measure for determining academic success. The thirty-five students who were promoted represent the group of students who were academically successful during their first semester at an Ethiopian university. In contrast, there were fourteen students who were dismissed; they were not successful, yet were allowed to remain on campus. Eleven students in the warning group were all at risk of being dismissed; they were warned by the university to improve their GPA during the second semester to be academically promoted.
English Language Proficiency

The International Language Assessment (ILA) was used to determine English language proficiency (ELP) of all study participants. The ILA was administered by professional invigilators from British Council Ethiopia at the beginning of the first semester. Results were calculated by British Council Ethiopia and given to the mentoring pilot program in a spreadsheet using the Common European Framework (CEF) levels (Council of Europe, 2001), previously described in Chapter Three. When considering the six CEF levels, they can be considered similar to the common division into beginning level (A1 and A2), intermediate level (B1 and B2), and advanced level (C1 and C2) of language proficiency (CoE, 2001). The British Council Ethiopia used a version of the ILA with a limited range of results from A2 (lowest) to B2 (highest). The CEF results of the ILA are presented in Table 4, below, by group (whole, dismissed, warning, and promoted).

Table 4

*CEF Levels from the International Language Assessment by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These results show that only two participants in this case study achieved a level of B2 (Independent User, Vantage), which includes the ability to understand the main idea of complex text on concrete and abstract topics. Less than one-third of the total participants scored a B1 (Independent User, Threshold); the global description of the B1 CEF level includes the ability to understand the main points of clear, standard input on familiar topics that are routinely encountered in school, work, and leisure.

In contrast, the majority of the study’s sixty participants, exactly two-thirds, scored a CEF level of A2 (Basic User, Waystage) on the ILA. The global description of this A2 level includes the ability to understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to immediate relevance such as family and personal information, shopping transactions, and school or work routines.

Next, the mean scores of the ILA results were calculated by assigning point values to each CEF level on the scale as follows: A1=1; A2=2; B1=3; B2=4; C1=5; C2=6. Results showing the mean ELP by group are shown below, in Table 5.

Table 5

*Mean English Language Proficiency Scores by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean ELP Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The process of converting CEF results to a numeric scale made it possible to compare overall English language proficiency levels of each group based on the CEF results. The results show that the dismissed group and warning group have similar mean English language proficiency scores of 2.29 and 2.27 respectively. In comparison, the promoted group was found to have a higher mean ELP score of 2.43. The results indicate that the whole group had a mean level of 2.37, which falls somewhere in the lower half of the A2 range when the number is converted back to the CEF scale.

**Academic Confidence Results**

Two sets of Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) data were gathered in this case study: pre-program ABC results were from the first day of the English mentoring session (near the beginning of the first semester) and post-program ABC results were from the final day of the English mentoring program (near the end of the second semester). The overall scores from the ABC survey represent the mean confidence ratings for each group (whole, dismissed, warning and promoted) across all twenty-four statements on a scale of one (lowest) to five (highest). Changes were indicated using positive figures (for example, +0.32 for the warning group) to indicate an increase in academic confidence and negative figures (for example, -0.19) to indicate decreased confidence. Changes in mean scores from the pre-program ABC survey to the post-program ABC survey by group show that the overall academic confidence of the dismissed group decreased, while the overall academic confidence increased for all other groups (promoted, warning, and whole).
As the results in Table 6 show, changes in mean scores of overall academic confidence took place for all groups. A slight increase is seen for the whole group (+0.06) and the promoted group (+0.07), while the greatest increase in mean academic confidence scores (+0.32) is observed in the warning group. In contrast, there is a decrease (-0.19) in mean scores for the dismissed group. Further exploration would need to take place to understand the possible reasons for these observed changes in academic confidence scores by group.

Table 6

*Academic Behavioral Confidence Survey Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score: Pre-Program ABC Survey</th>
<th>Mean Score: Post-Program ABC Survey</th>
<th>Changes from Pre-Program to Post-Program ABC Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed Group</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning Group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>+0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted Group</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another observation found in this quantitative data is that the overall mean ratings on the post-program survey are similar for the promoted and warning groups, and these are noticeably higher than that of the dismissed group. These results merit further investigation, which was not possible within the constraints of this research study and pilot English mentoring program. While it would be possible to speculate why academic confidence ratings increased or decreased for any of the groups, no conclusions can be drawn from this data without further investigation.
The ABC survey is able to measure four sub-scales of academic confidence: grades, verbalizing, studying, and attendance (Sander and Sanders, 2009). The results of quantitative data analysis for each of these four sub-scales are shown in Table 7 by group.

Table 7

*Academic Behavioral Confidence Survey Sub-Scale Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Program ABC Survey</th>
<th>Post-Program ABC Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Verbalizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group N = 60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.55486</td>
<td>0.74863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed Group N = 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.39830</td>
<td>0.52064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning Group N = 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.70013</td>
<td>0.9006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted Group N = 35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.53227</td>
<td>0.77868</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Analysis of data in this table provided by Paul Sander (personal communication, June 30, 2015)*

The students’ ratings of their own academic confidence as seen in the sub-scale data in Table 7 use the same system as the overall scores, with a range from one (lowest) to five (highest). By comparing the mean ratings of the pre-program and post-program surveys, changes can be seen in each of the four sub-scale scores by group.
The quantitative data on the sub-scales show that the highest level of academic confidence across the four sub-scales (grades, verbalizing, studying, and attendance) was found in the area of attendance for the whole group and in each sub-group (dismissed, warning and promoted) in both pre-program and post-program surveys with one exception: the dismissed group’s post-program survey. This means that by the end of the program, the fourteen students in the dismissed group ranked their own confidence levels slightly lower in the sub-scale of attendance (4.0476) than their confidence in studying (4.0714). As a reminder, the ABC survey asked students to rate themselves taking a holistic view on university life, not with a narrow view of any particular course. Consequently, the fact that level of confidence in attendance decreased and was lower than the level of confidence in studying might be important to note, but further investigation would be required to better understand this change.

Attendance and studying are the two sub-scales factors related to academic confidence that are considered processes and behaviors that are largely within the control of the students themselves (Sander & Sanders, 2009). Looking at the data in Table 7, the numbers indicate that studying is the second highest area of confidence when comparisons are made across sub-scales (grades, verbalizing, studying, and attendance) for the whole group in both the pre-program and post-program ABC survey. Studying is rated consistently as the second highest area of confidence across the four sub-scales for each sub-group (dismissed, warning, and promoted) on the pre-program ABC survey.

Isolating changes in confidence in the sub-scale of studying, the findings show that confidence levels in studying increased slightly in the post-program survey for the whole
group (from 4.1444 to 4.1972), promoted group (from 4.1810 to 4.2619) and warning group (from 4.0909 to 4.1515). In contrast, confidence in studying decreased slightly for the dismissed group (from 4.0952 to 4.0714) from the pre-program to the post-program ABC survey.

Both grades and verbalizing are aspects of academic confidence that are considered to be a part of the student-teacher dyad, which includes behaviors and processes that depend on a relationship between the teacher and the students (Sander & Sanders, 2009). The promoted and warning groups rated their own confidence levels in studying lower than their confidence levels in grades on the post-program ABC survey. In contrast, the dismissed group rated their confidence in studying higher than the other three aspects (attendance, grades and verbalizing) on the post-program ABC survey.

Finally, Table 7 shows the increase in confidence for both grades and verbalizing for the warning group on the post-program ABC survey. The results found in Table 7 indicate that confidence levels in verbalizing are consistently rated lower than confidence in grades, studying, and attendance by all groups on both the pre-program and post-program ABC survey with one notable exception. The warning group’s post-program ABC survey rated confidence in verbalizing as the second highest aspect, after confidence in attendance which was rated the highest. This finding in the warning group’s data is worth noting because it goes against the otherwise consistent pattern found in the other three groups (whole group, promoted group and dismissed group) whose participants rate their confidence in verbalizing as the lowest area of academic confidence in comparison to the other three categories (grades, studying and attendance) for all of the other groups.
Table 8 shows the difference in confidence for all four sub-scales (grades, verbalizing, studying, and attendance) between pre-program to post-program ABC survey.

Table 8

*Change in Academic Confidence by Sub-scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Verbalizing</td>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>+0.1439</td>
<td>+0.1328</td>
<td>+0.0528</td>
<td>-0.0722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.74353</td>
<td>0.98833</td>
<td>0.81851</td>
<td>0.66622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>-0.2357</td>
<td>-0.4524</td>
<td>-0.0238</td>
<td>-0.5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.94267</td>
<td>1.05900</td>
<td>0.90075</td>
<td>0.87462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>+0.5394</td>
<td>+0.8788</td>
<td>+0.0606</td>
<td>+0.2879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.78511</td>
<td>1.10828</td>
<td>1.00905</td>
<td>0.79614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>+0.1714</td>
<td>+0.1324</td>
<td>+0.081</td>
<td>-0.0143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.57231</td>
<td>0.75632</td>
<td>0.74137</td>
<td>0.41297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Analysis of data in this table provided by Paul Sander (personal communication, June 30, 2015)*

Table 8 isolates the change in confidence in each sub-scale, allowing for comparisons to be made between groups (whole group, dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group. Of note is the overall pattern of increased confidence in most of the sub-scales, especially for the warning group’s eleven participants. However, the dismissed group shows a pattern of decreased confidence in all four sub-scales.
In summary, the quantitative results presented in this section shed some light on differences between groups when considering academic success, English language proficiency (ELP), and academic confidence. First of all, the dismissed group showed a pattern of decreased academic confidence ratings over time on the ABC survey, whereas both the promoted and warning groups showed an increase in academic confidence over time. Verbalizing was consistently rated as the area with the lowest confidence levels, with only one exception of the warning group’s post-program ABC survey. The warning group had the greatest increase in overall confidence and there were important increases in confidence for the warning group in the sub-scales of verbalizing and grades. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated by Paul Sander (personal communication, July 2015) for each sub-factor of the ABC scale between groups and within each group. This ANOVA data is located in Appendix K: Analysis of Variance by Sub-scale, and it has been included to show that the variance was not due to chance (Paul Sander, personal communication, July, 2015).

The differences and similarities found when comparing groups of students provide insights into the interrelationship of English language proficiency, academic confidence and academic success. One important result from the quantitative data was the similarity between the groups with respect to English proficiency levels, with forty out of the total of sixty participants scoring at the A2 level of the CEF scale. The two participants with a B2 level of English language proficiency were in the promoted group, but further investigation is required to know if higher ELP corresponds in any way to higher levels of
academic success amongst first-year female natural science students. The next section will present the qualitative results.

Qualitative Results: Participants’ Perceptions of their Experiences

As outlined in Chapter Three, I conducted an analysis of qualitative data through systematic coding of writing samples. Results are presented in this chapter according to three main categories: perceptions of English language experiences, perceptions of academic confidence, and perceptions of university experiences. Within each of these categories, a grounded theory approach was taken and new themes emerged that were grounded in the qualitative data. I aggregated statements within each of the categories by theme. The results that are presented in this chapter are direct quotations from student writing samples. I preserved the same syntax but corrected spelling errors for clarity, except where noted. Data from all three groups contained grammatical errors, but these mistakes were not corrected because the errors did not prevent comprehension of the writers’ main points.

The findings of my qualitative data analysis are presented in the remainder of this chapter. First, students’ perceptions of English experiences are presented by group (dismissed, warning, and promoted). Second, students’ views on their own academic confidence are presented by group. The third section shares results on the students perceptions of experiences at university by group. All of these qualitative results are presented along with some of my comments about differences observed between groups as well as any other relevant insights. The qualitative results help illuminate the different
perceptions and experiences that were found in participants’ writing samples that were analyzed by groups representing academic status (dismissed, warning, and promoted).

**Perceptions of English Language Experiences**

Writing samples in each group revealed several themes that illuminate the participants’ views of and experiences with English. Several themes from each group are presented in this section and differences between groups will be noted.

**Dismissed group.** The first theme in this group’s data was the perception that English is an important skill in the Ethiopian education system. As one participant wrote in her journal,

My confident on English can very good and the other one I can try to discuss by English language in our class. Therefore English language is very important for me so I can try to speak English very well. b/c [because] we can learn by international language that is English for eg [example] the student that can speak learned by Oromic, Amharic, or Tigrinya can learn by English in high grade.

As her example illustrates, English is very important for her personally. She also notes that English replaces Ethiopia’s regional languages (such as Afan Oromo, Amharic, and Tigrinya) in secondary school.

In response to the final questionnaire, another dismissed student expressed her view that English, confidence, self-esteem, success, and hard work are interrelated:

English language is very interesting it is preferable to us… If self-confidence is present it crucial to normal class. If you know the mang [meaning] of all English words they understanding then they success. Therefore they will present these. Self
confidence then we done. Self-esteem the succeed. If you did not these thing there is one proverb: Succeed and rest don’t go together.

Finally, when asked on the questionnaire about her confidence in English language skills, another dismissed student wrote the following response, “It is very nice confident in my life specially in this time and it is not afraid to presentation in my classroom. So it is very important to learn English language skills.” These examples illustrate the first theme, English is important, found in dismissed group’s writing samples.

The previous writer focused her attention on one specific skill: the importance of English speaking skills. This is the second theme that emerged from the dismissed group’s data and corresponds to the results of the ABC survey results, where students rated their confidence in verbalizing lower than the other three aspects (grades, studying, and attendance). Many participants in the dismissed group expressed their opinion on verbalizing in their qualitative writing samples and several gave specific examples that illustrate why they think English speaking skills and communicative English are important. One student wrote in her journal, “My new thing to speak English without afraid,” and another wrote the following response on the questionnaire, “It is very nice confident in my life specially in this time and it is not afraid to presentation in my classroom. So it is very important to learn English language skills.”

The third theme found in the dismissed group’s data was the view that the English mentoring program improved their confidence in communicative English. One student reflected in her writing as follows:
My English skills to speak English mostly changed from the 1st when I joins [this university] I am not confident to speak English b/c [because] I am very afraid. In the 1st time but when I enjoy this English club [mentoring program] my confident mostly increase. I am don’t grammar I am don’t think about my mistakes simply speak.

Her response provides evidence that the communicative approach used in the English mentoring program was beneficial for her because she didn’t think about grammar or making mistakes.

When asked if the English mentoring program made a difference in confidence, one student responded,

Yes, [the program] is important b/c we can learned more speak English and write well and also it is important for our life in [this university] and we can have an English program without teacher we can discuss with our friends or we can do these subject by happy b/c it is help me more. These are all the use of [this program] that can take for us.”

In a response on the final questionnaire, one student expressed her view of the English mentoring program by commenting, “It is good to me and it is make more confidence to speak English or to write by English some thing about my study or other idea about myself or other persons.” Finally, a student from the dismissed group explained that participating in the English mentoring program improved her self confidence and communication skills, “It is developed to self confidence, for example:
discussion to my friends specially in this university, presentation, debates, communicate to my friends and so on.”

Several students noted that the program was beneficial for female students in particular. For example, in a response on the final questionnaire, the following idea was shared:

[English mentoring program] it is very good and very interesting all students specially female students and It is very advantages to helpful female students and it is very important. It is continuous I am very happy and thanks so much.

In summary the most prevalent theme in the dismissed group’s writing samples was the view that participation in the English mentoring pilot program improved their confidence with their own communicative English skills.

The fourth and final theme to emerge from the dismissed group’s data was the perception that English is a difficult language. For example, "Very very hard speaking language in English," wrote one participant. Another expressed her view by writing, "My weakness is language. To help me language and grammar and other then I think.” A third student expressed the following: “Challenge is difficult ideas and language not learning," which seems to express the challenge of learning difficult ideas and the language that is used in Ethiopian universities where English is the medium of instruction.

As shown in this section, four themes illustrating students’ views of their English language experiences were found in the dismissed group’s writing samples. These themes were as follows: English is an important skill; communicative skills in English are important; the English mentoring program improved confidence in communicative skills
and was beneficial for female students; and English is difficult. The next section presents the findings from the warning group.

**Warning group.** When the writing samples from this group were analyzed, two themes were identified that illustrate warning group students’ views of their own English language experiences. The first theme, which was also found in the dismissed group, was the view that English is difficult and the second theme was the perception that their English skills were improving.

The first theme found in the warning group data was the perception that English is difficult. For example, one student wrote,

“They are university is learned by communicative skill and female student is come to in the program is very appreciate why do they speak English is very challenge language. English is very good but I not speaking English and Amharic language. As her statement shows, neither English nor Amharic were languages that she feels she is good at speaking. A possible sub-theme emerged here which was that for those whose first languages were neither English nor Amharic, both of these languages were difficult.

In response to the prompt asking about life at university, another student wrote,

“[This university] is very good but it is language is very hard. Life is good and country is very good the education female student.” Since the writer did not specify which language she thinks is very hard, it isn’t clear if she means English, Amharic, or both. The same is true in the following example, “life now this time life is very danger b/c the language is very hard and the life is sometimes simple but not the simple.”
Being an English language learner while also learning in English was a frustrating experience for one student, who reflected on this predicament on the questionnaire asking about her confidence with her own English language skills:

It is good and I want to learn more b/c many thing I missed this cause will be the lack of English language communicative. I understand the problem from my life experience when I learn in elementary school I am perfect the level of grade growth time to time my confidence decreasing again decreasing...at the end of high school I am confused by everything my result in ‘English’ was bad, I ask me why? Why my result was like this b/c I can’t modify myself or not understand my problem.

Learning a new language for most people can be a long, difficult and non-linear process, and the previous example illustrates that learning English in Ethiopia is no exception.

Finally, the theme that English is difficult can be summed up with an excerpt from a student journal entry. When asked to write about what was happening in her life, she wrote, “life is good but speaking English and writing essay is very difficult and always very hungry and very soon, other tension on the campus.” For many students in the warning group, English language learning was viewed as difficult process.

The second theme found amongst warning group students was the view that their own English language skills were improving. One student illustrated this perspective when she wrote, “I am very confidence today about my English language skills b/c I get more English language skill to help myself as well as my friends.” By becoming more skilled
with English, she can help herself and her friends. Another person wrote in her journal about her happiness about and her interest in learning the English language. She said,

   Personal life is good b/c I am in the places of learning English and my department is good. I am interested by learning English language. So I feel happy when I came to English sessions. This English class with [this program] is learning helps me to understand what the teacher says and I understand the topic. Thanks!

Her motivation to learn and improve her English was high. Also, she credited her participation in the English mentoring program with helping her understand her teachers and the topics covered in her university courses.

   Promoted group. Amongst promoted students, two themes were found related to perceptions of English experiences. The first theme was the students’ recognition of their limited English language skills combined with their desire to improve. The following journal entry from one promoted student provides some insights into this theme.

   In the previous or the last week I have given many difficult assignment as well as I have taken communicating English listening test. Specially listening test caused me very worried in last week because during test our instructor read passage twice only and also He was not voluntary to gave enough time to do test. By this reason I think that I wouldn’t get enough or good result from this listening test. At the end I want to ask you to give advice or if you can and if are voluntary to tell me any method of style to do listening test very well within short time. I wonder you if you are voluntary and tell me any method to do an English test very well.
As her journal entry shows, she feels that her listening skills were not adequate and was asking me (in my supportive role as her English language mentor) for help to improve her listening skills for her next listening test. However, this English mentoring pilot program was not directly related to any of the students’ academic coursework at the university.

Another student addresses her speaking confidence in a journal entry by writing, “I have half confidence to speak English. There is one thing. Please, Jennifer — How can I speak English correctly & perfectly???” Because the journals were used as an opportunity for a written dialogue to happen between the students and myself as their English mentor, it was common for students in the promoted group (and to a lesser extent, students in the warning group) to share their opinions of their own limited English language capacity and then ask me personally for support or advice that might help them improve their skills. Another example of this from the promoted group comes from the following journal entry:

I have interest to talk many language specially English language same times I ask my self. How talk English freely? When & why it is difficult for me? And give practice is one of the most important for everybody. Practice. Practice make a man perfect.

Another illustration of this theme in the promoted group is the following statement, “My Essay is like this. And when it is wrong place tell me my mistake. I am sure all paragraph is not correct.”

The second theme identified in the promoted group related to perceptions of English experiences was the importance of the English mentoring program in developing
English communication skills. The following excerpt from one of journal entry in the promoted group’s data illustrates this theme:

What are the biggest differences b/n [between] your life now and your life this time last year? There are many huge differences b/n my life now and my life at this time. I would like to not [note] some of the differences. In the my life during last year I did not have enough communication skill relative to the present life. b/c [because] last year there was no any institution like federation that helps women. But now even though it is not enough, I start to develop communication skill by attend in [this] teaching program and for the future time I believe that I develop enough communication skill if you continue [this] teaching program.

Finally, one last example from the questionnaire sums up this theme, “[This program’s] English sessions make much difference in my confidence. When I participate in [these] English sessions I develop my self esteem, speaking skill, and the other related things. So I am very interested in [the program’s] English sessions.” In this example, the student views her own speaking skills as interrelated with self-esteem and other things. To a large extent, students in the promoted group shared the opinion that participation in the English mentoring program supported development (improvement) of their English language skills.

In summary, using the grounded theory methodology I was able to identify four themes in the dismissed group, two themes in the warning group, and two themes in the promoted group. The themes that emerged from the data related to students’ views of their own English experiences are summarized here.
For the dismissed group, four themes were identified:

- English is an important skill in the context of the Ethiopian education system.
- English speaking skills and communicative skills are important.
- The English mentoring program improved participants’ confidence in communicative English.
- English is difficult.

For the warning group, two themes were identified:

- English is difficult.
- Their own English skills are improving.

For the promoted group, two themes were identified:

- A recognition that their own English language skills are not adequate combined with the desire to improve their own English language skills.
- The view that the English mentoring program is important for developing their English skills, particularly communicative English skills.

**Perceptions of Academic Confidence**

This section presents the themes related to perceptions of academic confidence that were identified in qualitative data. The themes will be discussed by group (dismissed, warning, and promoted) and differences between groups will be noted.

**Dismissed group.** Analysis of data from the fourteen dismissed participants resulted in three themes related to academic confidence. The first theme is that confidence can change but doesn’t always. The second theme was confidence in verbalizing, which
overlaps with results presented in the previous section on perceptions of English experiences. The third theme was the importance of participation.

Changes in confidence that had taken place were expressed by two dismissed participants. In response the first student wrote, “Today my confidence is in the university mostly changed and I have a good confident in the university level.” However, another student bluntly stated the opposite view, “Program it is not make difference in my confidence.” These perceptions related to confidence are very general and the writers did not provide further details to contextualize their views, leaving this theme as it stands without much supporting evidence.

Confidence in verbalizing was a theme identified clearly by one student in the dismissed group. When asked how confident she was about her English language skills, she explained, “It is good b/c [because] to learn and speak of lessen the teacher ask’s for the student then answer for that question he/she teacher then I do not know for that teacher I ask for that.” This statement is an example from the dismissed group that addresses verbalizing, which is part of the student-teacher dyad and is one of the four factors related to academic confidence, according to Sander and Sanders (2009). Only one example of this student-teacher dyad was found in data from the dismissed group, but I wanted to include this theme here because it appears again in the data from the other two groups (warning and promoted).

The third theme related to academic confidence that emerged from the data was the importance of participation in university programs. “My ability to succeed at [this university] is increased because of this program helps me in academically and
economically for this reason I am succeeded it,” was a view expressed by a student in the dismissed group. Another person in this group wrote, “The program is developed to self confidence, for example: discussion to my friends specially in [this university], presentation, debates, communicate to my friends and so on.” Finally, another example of this theme was found in this circular statement: “I will participate in a lot of participation.” These statements illustrate that some students view their own participation in university programs as important.

I decided to include this theme of participation in the category of academic confidence rather than the category of university life because the word participation suggests taking an active role, rather than a passive role, for these students. The importance of active participation for female students may be important for academic success, since gender equity initiatives have placed emphasis on three areas of inequality in Ethiopian education: access, participation, and success (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014).

Further investigation is needed to better understand what these students mean and why they view participation as important.

**Warning group.** Two themes related to academic confidence were found in the data from this group. The first theme identified was recognizing the connection between confidence and one’s ability to succeed. Three of the eleven students in this group were realistic with their confidence level, their ability, and their expectations of achieving academic success. To illustrate this theme, one student’s response on the questionnaire was as follows:
Not only am I confident by English language skills but also I am very confident about my ability to succeed at [this university] b/c [because] I have a medium ability my educational status to succeed in my university education programs. The student recognized her own “medium” ability in general, yet expressed confidence with her English skills and a high degree of confidence in her ability to succeed.

Another student in the promoted group recognized her own “medium” confidence and made connections between her confidence with English and her own abilities in other subjects. She wrote the following:

I am a medium in confident of English language. For example, I do not afraid for presentation in class. But some times I confused b/c [because] of shortage of English words knowledge I am also medium also because I am not good at mathematics but I try other subjects well except IT and little at physics.

Having realistic insights into one’s own ability and connecting ability to academic confidence was a theme found in data from the warning group that was not found in the dismissed group.

The second theme that emerged from the warning group’s data was the view that academic confidence and academic self-concept change over time. This is expressed clearly in the following example, three complete paragraphs that are an excerpt from a longer personal essay an ambitious student completed as a homework assignment:

In 1994 EC I get to school. Grade one in the first semester I get good grade 98% and my uncle would be happy but now working hard again and again for successful to get your target and to make happy in your life way. In the second
semester I get first from all of the students in my class then I am happy so I did everything strongly. My from grade one to eight I am the one of student in my school and all my teachers love me and I also loves them and all people. I get insight of my teacher and all my teacher she makes something b/c she was clever & understand perfectly you can did always do anything by confidence.

In high school level something obstacle me. I always did anything in the time, but I can’t. I lost something in my life. When the teacher learned, I listened perfectly & asked him. But when he/she asked some question, mostly about what he learned before some seconds, immediately I afraid. I lost what I was about to understand to learned it. When I think again and again, I can’t to memorize. If he asked me, I can’t to answer and make myself in tension. What I can do? I didn’t know. I want to understand and to know many things. What ever but I can’t do it b/c [because] when I was to study in anywhere, I was sleeping. Then I was begin to make study and listening my teacher.

I am confused at this time b/c I know what was my problem. But now I pass this thing. I am thinking about it many times, again and again. If I am stop to learn, what to do? I am learned in this condition. I can’t do successfully. If you can to advice me and help, please help me. I like your program everything doing for us. I didn’t mange my time. If I can make a plan, I didn’t do that. I need that. Work today is not the next day. I can do anything and change my mind in everything.
In my opinion, it was important that I present this excerpt from a student essay without editing because the student made a sincere effort to reflect on changes in her past levels of academic confidence and chronicled how her own academic self-concept evolved over time. She traced these changes from her childhood years through her experiences in high school and connected them to her present situation as a university student. As a reader, it is evident that her self-perception as a child in her educational context was positive, but in high school her academic confidence went down and her academic self-concept was challenged by tension in high school. It would take further investigation to better understand why these changes occurred, but it does provide some insights into one young woman’s experiences as a motivated young student striving for success and her perspective as she struggled with self-doubt, sleepiness, and tension.

The next section will present two themes related to academic confidence that were found the promoted group’s data.

**Promoted group.** The quantity of qualitative data in the promoted group was much higher than the other two groups, which made coding more difficult. Statements about academic confidence were coded on multiple occasions and with each attempt, I used a different approach trying out different variants. Ultimately, I decided to present three themes that were identified in the promoted group’s data. The first theme was connecting their own academic confidence to behaviors of attendance and studying. The second theme was the view that verbalizing and academic confidence are interrelated, which was also identified as a theme in the dismissed group. The third theme was the view that academic confidence changes over time. This last theme was identified in all three groups
in this case study, suggesting that this point of view, that confidence is not fixed and can change, is common among first-year female university students regardless of their academic status.

Students’ perceptions about their own confidence related to attendance and studying is the first theme that emerged from the promoted group’s data. Analysis found that students frequently mentioned these two factors (attendance and studying) together in their writing samples. As noted by Sander and Sanders (2009), attendance and studying are academic behaviors that are essentially under the control of the students themselves. Analysis of data found that students in the promoted group had two different views, one positive and the other negative, when they wrote about this theme. The following examples are from journal entries that were written early in the first semester at university when their confidence was high with respect to the factors of studying and attendance:

I am confident about my ability to succeed at University by the following way:

The 1st and the main way that I am confident is by attending class. Always attentively and also I study hard for my exam as I can.

A different student in the promoted group wrote in her journal, “I am very fine now a time my life good and I am read intentionally read for final exam and my health is in good way—by attending class, read a reference book.” Again, her example illustrates how students mention both attendance and studying (read intentionally, read for final exam, read a reference book) when they write in their journals. Finally, one student created a list that expresses her confidence at the beginning of the first semester in a journal entry:
I'm very confident I can succeed it in the following way:

- go by attending the class
- by following the lecture attentively
- Or arranging my time to attend the class, read/study, attend tutorial class, refreshing myself and the likes
- by using the time perfectly
- by doing any assignment with care are given by the lecture and etc.
- This all will be done by the help of God

All of these examples were from journal entries written during the first semester of university life. Later in the first year the students’ perspectives on their own confidence, including attendance and studying, became more complicated and less optimistic. One student’s journal from the second semester indicated that she was happy because of some recent academic success:

I wanna tell you about last week the week is very nice because of last week I have some exams I will be study hard then I do my exam very excellent because of this am so happy and I have some.

As time passed and final exams approached, writing samples from the promoted students expressed the impact of stress and tension on studying. One example from a student’s journal views the situation as follows:

There are many new things now like having an exam and others. After two weeks we are going to have the final exam. So the new thing now is having some tensions about the examination. Also happening spending more time on reading
at the library. Seeing the students tension going to library to study more than before and working work sheets and assignments more complicated now.

These examples illustrate the different perspectives found in the promoted group’s writing samples on both studying and attendance, two factors related to academic confidence.

The next theme found in the promoted group was the view that verbalizing and academic confidence are interrelated. Sander and Sanders (2006) note that confidence in verbalizing is a behavior and process related to academic confidence that is part of a student-teacher dyad or relationship; evidence of the importance of verbalizing and the student-teacher dyad was found in the following journal entry excerpt:

I heard today I will have a English class my feeling is very fine because it is very interesting and it have many advantage for me e.g [for example] I have a confident to speak English in front of my teacher and I can speak English perfectly in the future, and so on. Asking my instructor or professor which means the instructor of that difficult course.

In her example, she addressed the importance of verbalizing in two ways, having the confidence to speak in front of the teacher and also having the confidence to ask instructors or professors questions in difficult courses.

Academic confidence is different than general self confidence, which is noted by one student on the questionnaire where she reflects, “before I will attend this program I have no confidence, actually I can do something but I don’t have confidence. By this program I speak confidently I will ask a lecture questions and answer for another
questions ask for me.” She points out that she knew she had the ability (actually, I can do something) but what she lacked was confidence in the academic context of a classroom.

A final example of the second theme (the view that verbalizing and academic confidence are interrelated) is found in this writing sample:

English language skill is very useful. By motivate our self to speak English in everywhere
- tends to practice, practice gets good.
- it teaches more things in a short time that helps me to attend our class in a good way.
- it avoid our frustration when we speak English in a public.

This example shows that verbalizing and academic confidence go beyond the student-teacher dyad in the context of an Ethiopian university. Her writing expresses the perspective that English is the language that is used in public discourse in the university context. This is a new experience for many first-year students because English is a foreign language in Ethiopia and it is not typically spoken widely in most communities.

The third and final theme from the promoted group was that academic self-concept is something that changes over time. This theme was also found in the warning group and the dismissed group. One example from student writing can be used to illustrate this theme for the promoted group. In response to a prompt asking about the biggest differences between life today and life last year at this time, one student wrote in her journal,
To be honest there is a big difference in my life comparing to now from the
differences I used to think I was not good enough to make a difference in my
country and I wasn’t thinking of such things. But now I know that one person can
make a difference and can influence the whole world’s work. If he/she is a good
and forward struggler for what they want to do. Last year I had not have such
English mentoring classes opportunity whereas now I have this opportunity and
I’m so glad…This programme will change the future of many young women like
me. I’m also sure that this English writing helps a lot of women. Who knows the
advantage of it for instance, in the future I want to be a writer in English language
because it is the language of the world and it may help my book to be more
readable and known. Generally this opportunities and my thinking ability have
changed a lot comparing to this year.

This journal response illustrates how her own academic self-concept, which is related to
her ability and her confidence, has changed in the past year. There is a correlation
between the opportunities she has now and her new self-concept, and she broadens her
own view that educational opportunities that she has had could also help other women
reach their full potential.

To summarize, the themes related to academic confidence were varied by group
with some similarities and differences. Using grounded theory methodology, I was able to
identify the following themes related to perceptions of academic confidence.

For the dismissed group, three themes were identified:

• Confidence can change but doesn’t always.
Participants have confidence in verbalizing.

Participation is important.

For the warning group, two themes were identified:

- Recognition of the connection between confidence and one’s ability to succeed.
- Academic confidence and academic self-concept change over time.

For the promoted group, three themes were identified:

- Academic confidence is connected to behaviors of attendance and studying.
- Verbalizing and academic confidence are interrelated.
- Academic confidence changes over time.

**Perceptions of University Experiences**

In this section, the results of my qualitative analysis related to perceptions of university experiences are shared by group (dismissed, warning, and promoted).

**Dismissed group.** The writing samples from students in this group produced three themes that represent a range of experiences with university life. These three themes related to university life are as follows: that university life is overwhelmingly positive, that sharing experiences and living with others is important, and that overcoming past difficulties is a formative experience for a person’s self-concept.

The first theme in the dismissed group’s writing samples was the view that university life is overwhelmingly positive. Examples of this theme included statements such as, “Give to this chance at [this university] I am very happy,” from one participant. A similar view was expressed by another student who wrote, “I want [this university]
because it is the best university for all of other universities—By this my life is very fun and in this year I enjoyed [this university] still this time.” Finally, one student explained her view that university life is positive. With some humor added, she wrote:

According to his name university means you never sity — that means we can always read some materials to know other knowledge or to score good marks. Therefore we have the ability to learn in university to know our self more or to get more knowledge.

The second theme identified in the dismissed group was the view that sharing experiences and living with others is important. After arriving at university, most students are living with people from other parts of Ethiopia for the first time. To illustrate this point, one student wrote, “I like to live other nations and nationality by grouping others in my thinking every thing is good for me.” Another expressed the following view: “It is because every and decision for my friends in university. We can share our knowledge in with our friends.” Living on campus in the female dormitory was viewed as follows: “Dorm life is good. Also I can happy in my dorm and I can discuss about our life in our dorm,” and from another student, “My dorm life is also very good for me we can solve any problem that is not good for our life and also I can educate in my department students that live in other dorm.” However, there was one person who did not share this view and wrote, “My challenges are not study dorm and my choice are libraries,” indicating that the dormitory hindered her ability to study and she preferred the library.

The final theme identified in the dismissed group was the view that overcoming past difficulties is a formative experience for a person’s self-concept. For example, “I felt
very angry, my aunt is dead. In my life a different emotion or feeling,” was written in a journal entry. Two students from the dismissed group shared views on the challenges they faced to get an education prior to university. One student wrote:

I must be training walk by foot in long time. I enjoyed high school but that high school is far from my parents also then by this reason I walk a long distant and also my father is changed my life b/c [because] I walk a long distance by foot then in a long distance there is d/f [different] obstacle like that the boys are attack the female by this reason my father change my life but that day is pass.

Another shared her experiences as follows: “I enjoyed secondary school then the obstacle is mostly pass b/c my secondary school is very very far from my parent by this reason I live nearer to the secondary school then I am fine.”

Both of these statements indicate the reality that secondary schools in Ethiopia are often located great distances from the homes of students. To a certain extent, these views on past experiences can shape the self-perceptions of female university students who come from rural areas who have overcome various obstacles and have beaten the odds in pursuit of an education by making it to the university level.

**Warning group.** Two themes were identified in this group’s data. The first theme was experiencing problems and sickness. The second theme was the importance of the student-mentor relationship.

In contrast to the mostly positive statements about university life from the dismissed group, students in the warning group were more likely to express a mixture of both positive and negative views. For those who had a negative perspective of university
life, the themes of sickness and tension appeared frequently in their journals. For example, when asked to write about her last week, one student wrote, “In my week very danger from me b/c [because] in a week d/t [different] test and homework so by [enough] Homework and cause I am sick b/c that means gained tension.” She went on to say, “In this week there is no peace b/c I am sick in this week in a last week one day there is no water and I am very sick b/c I drink at the Genda water.” She ends her journal expressing her view that the stress is only temporary by writing, “so this a lot of case test in last week but all of them are enough in this week or coming week I know that peace & lovely week for all English program student & teacher.”

When asked to describe changes that have taken place in the past year, one warning group student wrote,

One day I am very happy of I pass the national exam and enter preparatory school then I entered into college then I join into [this university]. But now I am a student of natural science faculty. Then I am confused and sad when I am not understand what the teacher is saying. So I usually am stressed because of my sadness.

When asked about life at university, another student wrote, “The life is good but every one challenge the education and also very danger the life in this campus it does not good every one and another problem is tension the life in the campus.”

Another example from the journals of a student in the warning group shows how her perspective of university life started out fairly positive, but became progressively more negative. Sickness, tension, and sadness were all mentioned in her journal entries. Her
first journal entries start out fairly optimistic with only a hint of a problem she was having adapting to the food:

[This university] is very comfortable except the university food is not because the cafe food isn't good for me. I am sick when I eat cafe food so I don't eat the cafe food is injera (I eat bread) and sometimes I go to my parents house and I eat food.

Her sickness becomes worse in her next journal entry where she writes,

Last week is nice but there is an event I was very sickness (illness). I went to my parents and they give me traditional medicine by coffee then I use this after that I sleep. Then I wake up. Generally, last week was very nice but without my illness.”

One week later in her journal, she describes dealing with her sickness in greater detail:

Today this day is difficult for me b/c I am very sick, I have a problem. When I am sick today I Go to the clinic in our campus and I tell all the symptoms of my sickness/diseases/go to the doctor. Then the doctor tells me you go to the laboratory …and then I go to the laboratory… After that he give me my result and I go [back] to the doctor and he give me medicine.

As the previous example illustrates, a persistent illness created problematic experiences which she chronicled in her weekly journal entries.

The second theme from the warning group was the importance of the student-mentor dyad (relationship). In many writing samples, the students were positive about the relationship with their English mentor, which makes sense because they voluntarily participated in the program. If they didn’t find it beneficial or didn’t like the mentor, they would not be attending. However, a negative view of the student-mentor dyad was found
in the following journal entry, written after the student learned she did not get a certificate of participation for the English mentoring program. She wrote, “The new thing is problem are awards I to English program. I attend and they haven’t one day or period missed then every I came of certificate is doesn’t exist of why the problem?” This example is included here because it points to an important dynamic of any mentoring program, which is the importance of building trust. Students in Ethiopia are often motivated by certificates, and in this example the student perceived that she had attended all of the sessions and thus deserved a certificate. However, as the mentor I had to convey the message that she had not met the criteria established by the program for earning a certificate, which resulted in stress and negative feelings for the student.

The next section will present results from the promoted group on themes related to university life.

**Promoted group.** When exploring the students’ perspectives on university life, the most frequent views expressed were that university was a time of personal transformation, adaptation, and perseverance. These themes will be presented with selected writing samples from student journal entries, excerpts from homework assignments, and responses to the questionnaire.

The physical environment and social environment created impressions for many of the first-year students. One student expresses her view in the following journal entry:

*Life at [this university] is not good but a lots of problems like water bathroom and so on at this moment I am so happy because am a join the campus and I see so many challenges and I know how to leave this challenge. The life in the*
campus is very interesting and at this moment when I promise for me I can [do] every thing and in the next time I am a competent and influential person or student.

Similar sentiments about adapting to campus life were expressed by a different student who wrote in her journal,

The environmental conditions of [this university] are suitable for me. The teaching and learning process is suitable. The dorm of our bed is favourable. When we compare learning and teaching process of [this university] to another university too hard for the score or grade. The food at cafe is good. The latrine very bad…”

As the two previous examples express, the university facilities and education are viewed in a positive light for the most part, with the exception of the bathrooms. This problem with facilities (such as water and toilets in the dormitory) was mentioned in the literature review by Demise et al. (2002).

Another participant wrote about her experiences as a first-year (“fresh”) university student in her journal,

Life in the university is very difficult specially when you are fresh. but when you are learn the [unintelligible] to when you are produce new friend it is very good. First I mixi when [this university] life is not difficult for me the big problem for me is good the coffee food for first time it is very hard with out food every things are very good. but now a time a act like senior students I don’t afraid any thing & I know all things and also now I adapt with coffee food.
As these examples illustrate, the promoted group’s data was a rich source of information about first-year female students’ perspectives on their lives at an Ethiopian university. Their written reflections capture their first impressions and chronicle their personal transformations as they adapt to their new academic and social environment.

The following journal entry completes this section because the writer expresses her impressions of university life and the personal transformation that took place as she adapted to her new life. In response to the journal prompt, “Tell me about your life at university,” she wrote:

When I arrived in [this university] I was terrified at the things that are happening to me b/c [because] the place was new to me and also the people are very d/t [different] from my place for instance, the way of their wearing and acting. Conflict were there in my roommates, food problems & loneliness feeling were also there.

There are many challenges I face now such as accomplishments of assignments and exams...In my present challenges I tried to do my assignments on time and managing my time is a problem of my present life in [this university] and to make things better I try to collaborate with my friends and ask them for solution after asking them I get different ideas and make my own decisions like I have to do it and this is my own responsibility after that every thing is going better and better. While I join [this university] I felt so scary and afraid of the situation that is - going to happen to me like challenges of new things - the population
type, friends and their life style, the way they will be and such things were difficult to me to think of.

While I leave my town it was the most different things and being by my own self by it self is the other thing that makes me nervous…and coming here without them [her sister’s children whom she used to raise] were also my difficult time in my whole life this was the only reason which detach me from them and that is why I can’t forget this moment. After I came here I tried to forget them and talk to them by mobile and make my self to decide to live like a situation not like I want of like I have been dreaming.

I selected the student writing sample as a summarizing illustration to show that the first year of life at a university is a time of personal transformation for many students. This is not limited to females, nor to Ethiopia, but is a global human phenomenon of growth and change that happens when you move from your community of origin to a new community to pursue higher education.

In summary, I identified the following themes in the qualitative data related to first-year female students’ perceptions of university life.

For the dismissed group, three themes were identified:

- University life is positive.

- Sharing experiences and living with others is important.

- Overcoming past difficulties is a formative experience for a person’s self-concept.

For the warning group, two themes were identified:
• Participants experience problems and sickness.
• The student-mentor relationship is important.

For the promoted group, one theme was identified:

• University is a time of personal transformation, adaptation, and perseverance.

Conclusion

The results of quantitative data on academic success, ELP, and academic confidence were presented using descriptive tables that showed the differences between groups (whole group, dismissed group, warning group, and promoted group). The tables showed comparisons of mean GPA, frequency of CEF levels based on the ILA assessment, overall mean scores on the ABC, overall change in confidence between the first and second ABC surveys, and a corresponding table with analysis of variance within and between groups was included as a reference in Appendix K. Qualitative results were presented in narrative format. I found several themes related to students’ perceptions of their own English language experiences, academic confidence, and university life using grounded theory methodology. Themes that emerged from the data were presented by groups of participants. In this chapter, I presented the results of my data collection, commented on my observations about the findings, and explained some of the differences found between groups (dismissed, warning, and promoted). Next, in Chapter Five, I will discuss the major findings of this case study, their implications, and any suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this case study, I investigated the following question: What differences are found amongst groups of first-year female students when defined by their level of academic status (dismissed, warning, and promoted) with respect to their English language proficiency, academic confidence, and perceptions of their own English language experiences, academic confidence, and personal experiences at an Ethiopian university? This chapter will present the major findings of this mixed methods study, the limitations, some of the implications, and suggestions for further research.

Major Findings

The first major finding was the possibility that English proficiency levels and academic success were connected for all three groups (dismissed, warning, and promoted) in this study. When looking at the differences between these three groups of participants, I observed that the promoted group had the highest mean English language proficiency level in comparison to the warning and dismissed groups. Also, the promoted group contained the two students who scored a B2, which was the highest level possible on the British Council’s ILA placement exam measuring participants’ ELP in reading, grammar and vocabulary skills. These results suggest that having a higher ELP might be one factor contributing to academic success, but further investigation is needed to understand if and
how ELP levels and academic promotion are related for first-year students in the context of natural science faculties at an Ethiopian university.

The second important finding from this exploratory case study was also based on the quantitative factor of English language proficiency levels in relation to academic success. When looking for differences between the three groups, I noticed that there were more similarities with respect to ELP than differences. Amongst the whole group, quantitative results showed that two-thirds of the first-year female university students (40 out of 60) had ELP scores of A2, which was the lowest possible level on the ILA placement exam selected by British Council Ethiopia. The importance of this finding is that two-thirds of the participants scored at the Elementary/Waystage level on the ILA exam according to the Council of Europe (CoE, 2001). A person with an A2 language level in any language has the ability to communicate in routine tasks, can have conversations on simple and predictable topics, and can understand sentences and common expressions related to basic and familiar information (CoE, 2001).

One important academic confidence finding was identified in the ABC survey results from the dismissed group, which showed an overall pattern of decreased confidence in all four of the sub-scale measurements (grades, verbalizing, studying, and attendance). This overall pattern of change in confidence was the opposite in the ABC survey results for both the warning and promoted groups; their quantitative data showed an overall pattern of increased confidence from the pre-program to post-program ABC survey results. These changes in confidence by group could be the result of students’ awareness of their own grade point averages at the time of the post-program ABC survey.
For example, poor test scores and other unfavorable feedback from instructors might have caused this negative shift in self-confidence for the dismissed group. However, I do not know if the students were aware of their GPA when they completed the post-program ABC survey, so further research would be needed to gather this information.

When looking for differences between the three groups based on academic status, another finding related to academic confidence was that the overall mean ratings of confidence were 4.08 on the first survey and 4.14 on the second survey. As a reminder, the academic confidence scale was from one (lowest) to five (highest). These numbers indicate a fairly high level of confidence overall for the case study participants, which appears to contradict the whole group’s relatively low mean GPA of 2.15 (on a scale of one to four) and the whole group’s relatively low English language proficiency level of A2 (Basic User) on the CEF scale. These findings suggest that as a whole group, the case study participants were overly confident in relationship to their English language skills and their GPA, at least according to my outside observation.

The overall findings related to academic confidence in this case study raise the same question that Sander (2009) asked about the usefulness of the ABC scale at the university level, given the evidence that ABC results can be linked to an overconfidence bias amongst in students in higher education. As Sander (2009) observes, an overconfidence bias in higher education is common, but it might also be possible that the ABC tool as a measurement of academic confidence needs to be adapted to accurately measure confidence levels in the Ethiopian context. Furthermore, is not clear to me if the
ABC tool is entirely appropriate for English language learners in a context where English is the medium of instruction.

When considering differences between the three groups from the qualitative data, I decided to mention most of my important observations in the narrative results presented in Chapter Four. The qualitative data found that students in all three groups expressed their desire to improve their English speaking skills and they also expressed their view that participating in the English mentoring pilot program had a positive impact on their confidence and English language skills.

It is important to note that participants viewed connections between their own English language skills and their academic self confidence, which were also the two intertwined goals of the mentoring program. I routinely attempted to raise awareness of the importance of participation in the program. In all three groups, the case study participants also made clear connections between their ability to succeed in the context of an Ethiopian university and their own English language ability, with speaking skills being the most frequently cited example. This discovery was reinforced by the ABC survey results, which found that participants rated their own confidence in verbalizing lower than other aspects (grades, studying, and attendance), with only one exception: the post-program ABC ratings by participants in the warning group.

In summary, the most important finding comes when examining the quantitative and qualitative results as a whole. All three groups provided evidence in their ILA results and their reflective writing samples that English is difficult and that studying at an Ethiopian university where English is the medium of instruction while simultaneously
trying to improve their own English language skills is a challenging, complicated, and multifaceted process.

While conducting this case study, I found that struggling with the English language is a common theme expressed by first-year female students in the natural science fields at one Ethiopian university. I also discovered that the qualitative data from students’ writing samples provided a rich source of contextual information to explore; I was able to identify several new themes related to perceptions of English experiences and perceptions of academic confidence that help illuminate the experiences of female students who were voluntarily participating in an English mentoring pilot program. It is my hope that by sharing these qualitative findings in this report, others may gain insights into the perspectives of first-year female university students.

Limitations

During my time as a researcher and an English language mentor with this pilot intervention program, I encountered a multitude of challenges. One of the limitations of this case study was the fact that participation in English mentoring sessions was voluntary and the intervention program was offered as an extracurricular activity. University course schedules in Ethiopia are not fixed, which means that teachers are free to change the times and dates of classes when necessary. The initial scheduling plan for English mentoring sessions as well as the original design of this English mentoring pilot program was not realistic given the intensive and complex university schedule of first-year natural science students. Therefore, the qualitative written data gathered from participants lacked
consistency in the following ways: numbers of samples, types of samples, and overall quality of samples.

A second limitation is that the quality of written data was sometimes affected by the low level of English language proficiency of some of the case study participants. There were some writing samples in this study which were not comprehensible in English to me as a reader. Consequently, it is possible that some participants were not able to fully express their perceptions and ideas in written English. Perhaps the overall quality of qualitative data would have been richer and could have provided more insights if the English writing proficiency level of the participants had been higher. Conversely, the data may have been even better if the participants had written in their first language rather than English, but unfortunately since this was an English mentoring program, writing in first languages for journaling, activities and homework was not an option for participants.

A third limitation was that the Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) scale was designed as a tool for measuring the academic confidence of psychology students in the UK; Sander (2009) notes that one possible limitation of the ABC survey is that it may not be an appropriate tool for measuring academic confidence in other countries or across all faculties of study.

Implications

One implication of my research findings is that if an intervention program at an Ethiopian university is focused on English language improvement, then the program designers might want to consider using a quality, standardized baseline assessment of English language proficiency (ELP) that can accurately measure a broad spectrum of
proficiency levels across a range of English skills. For example, in this case study the ILA placement exam only measured a limited range of three CEF levels (A2, B1 and B2) and it also focused on measuring only English reading, grammar and vocabulary skills. The implication I would like to suggest is that a baseline measurement including the full spectrum of six CEF levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2) or another standardized measurement system would be preferable, as would an assessment of English skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

I understand that for the purposes of this pilot English mentoring program, the ILA placement exam was useful because it provided a high quality independent measurement of participants’ ELP levels. Also, the ILA exam was provided free of cost and the generosity of the British Council Ethiopia was greatly appreciated. In essence, this implication can be summarized by saying that strategic planning for future English intervention and mentoring programs might want to include a baseline assessment that measures participants’ ELP for future intervention programs, followed by a summative assessment to measure the changes in ELP levels at the end of the program.

Another implication from this case study is based on the finding that two-thirds of the participants had an A2 level of English proficiency. If the majority of students entering university are at the A2 level, it would be ideal if intervention and mentoring programs for improving English were designed to meet the needs of students at the A2 level. Ideally, the intervention program could be designed to move students from the A2 level to the B1 range over time, a process which takes about 250 hours according to the
British Council Ethiopia. For students with a B1 level, an intervention program could be designed that would target their needs and promote them to the B2 level over time.

Conversely, another possible implication based on the quantitative data of this case study is that English intervention or mentoring programs in Ethiopian universities are not needed. There were thirty-five promoted students in this case study and twenty-two of the promoted students scored an A2 level on the ILA placement exam. This data suggest that students who have an A2 level of English language proficiency are not at a disadvantage and that they can be promoted in the natural science faculties at an Ethiopian university. However, the qualitative data from the students in the promoted group contradicts this implication, which is something worth considering. The promoted students’ perceptions of their English language experiences included the recognition that their own English language skills were not adequate, that they wanted to improve their own English language skills, and that the English mentoring program was important for developing their English skills.

In my opinion, using a targeted instructional design in English would be the best approach to improving the participants’ English language proficiency levels, which would increase their academic confidence as well as their ability to participate more fully in their university courses. Based on the qualitative data from all of the groups (dismissed, warning, and promoted), first year female students view English as a difficult language and want to work to improve their English language skills. The majority of students in this study view English skills as important and they also say they would like to improve their English skills. Considering both the quantitative and qualitative findings, the results
of this case study suggest that first-year university students in Ethiopia could benefit from targeted interventions and mentoring programs that are designed to improve their English language proficiency towards the ultimate goal of academic success.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further research could be conducted to better understand the relationship between various factors that were touched upon in this study: English language proficiency, academic confidence, academic success, and the perceptions of first-year female students in Ethiopian universities. Future studies could explore these factors using a number of possible approaches, some of which I will suggest here.

To what extent does English language proficiency play an important role in academic confidence and academic success for female students in Ethiopia? I would suggest future studies measure first-year university students’ ELP in reading, speaking, listening and writing with standardized assessments. The information from these baseline ELP assessments could be useful in many ways, including to see if there is any significant correlation between ELP and academic promotion or attrition rates amongst female students.

During the course of this case study, I became aware that the two most important factors in increasing self-confidence are personal experiences and social messages received from others, which raised the following questions: How do the personal experiences of female university students in Ethiopia merge with the social messages they receive from others to change their academic confidence over time? How might these changes in academic confidence compare across gender, faculties of study, and first languages within
one university? Since Ethiopian universities are known to have a gender equity problem, I would like to see future research that explores how the academic confidence of female students is formed by personal experiences and social messages received from others.

In addition, it would be beneficial to conduct further research on the efficacy of different types of intervention programs that are designed to support female students in Ethiopia. How do different programs support female students and what factors are the most important when trying to achieve the goal of academic success?

This study asked first-year female students to rate themselves on their own academic confidence levels using a pre-program and post-program ABC survey. Future research could examine academic confidence levels of female students taking a number of different approaches. For example, comparisons could be made between groups across gender, faculty of study, educational level (first year, second year, graduate students), and other factors that might be of interest to researchers in Ethiopia.

Finally, as originally suggested by Molla and Cuthbert (2014), qualitative research should be conducted amongst different populations at different universities in Ethiopia to further illuminate the experiences and perceptions of female university students. Listening to the voices of these students and inviting them to participate in important conversations about gender equity, academic confidence, and English language proficiency, those working to improve the university system might begin to shift their own perceptions and find new ways to approach the problem of female student attrition. By changing the way the problem is framed, a new picture might emerge which could provide new insights. With new vision, new solutions might be proposed to remedy the current situation.
Conclusion

In this case study, I investigated the relationship between academic confidence, English proficiency levels, and academic success amongst first-year female students in an Ethiopian university who were voluntarily participating in my English mentoring program. As their English mentor, I designed and implemented a pilot program to improve English language skills through communicative practice and foster a positive academic self-concept amongst participants towards the ultimate goal of academic success.

Students who participated actively in the English mentoring program were able to share their own experiences with others, to varying degrees, which promoted a sense of community, trust, and respect. By sharing their experiences with you in this report, I hope that their voices will be heard and that their experiences will be respected.

It is unfortunate that not all of the students who participated in this research study were academically successful. The high rate of female attrition from Ethiopian universities is tragic if changes are not made in the future that can help remedy the problem. I am grateful for the students who generously participated in this intervention program. I hope that our collaborative efforts might yield positive results in their own lives and beyond. Over time and with additional voices in this conversation, the way we frame the problem of female attrition in Ethiopian universities will start to shift.
APPENDIX A

English mentoring pilot program informational flier
English Mentoring Pilot Program,

U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers in collaboration with participants in the mentoring program uniquely designed to build academic English skills and confidence of first-year female students.

Modules:
There will be four different modules in the English Mentoring program. Each module contains five sessions.

Energizers:
These are short, fun exercises that warm up and prepare everyone for language learning. Energizers are important because they put everyone at ease and help build team spirit.

Dialogue Journals:
Students will write in a “dialogue journal” at the beginning of every session. This is a personalized space for freely sharing thoughts and feelings with the English mentor. Mentors will read the journal entries and write responses to each student, creating an ongoing dialogue and system of support for every participant.

Self-Study: 60 hours
Researchers say that 120 hours of targeted English language study is required to move up from one proficiency level to the next. Thus, the PCV English Mentors will give all participants weekly opportunities for independent self-study. Motivated students who engage in 5 hours of self-study per week will be more likely to improve their scores on the final British Council ILA assessment.

Reflection:
Sessions will end with a time for some reflection. What went well? What could be improved? What activities were useful? Why?

English Mentoring Classroom Sessions: 30 hours
Classroom sessions will be 1.5 hours and will balance group activities with individual work. There will be 20 classroom sessions in this year’s pilot program for a total of 30 hours. Attendance is mandatory for all participants. A variety of “student centered” English activities will provide practice opportunities designed to build the confidence of participants. These activities focus on tasks related to academic success.

Homework: 30 hours
Mandatory homework of approximately 2 hours will be given for 15 of the 20 classroom sessions.
APPENDIX B

Common European Framework (CEF) reference levels
### Table 1. Common Reference Levels: global scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</td>
<td>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in higher field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</td>
<td>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</td>
<td>Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.</td>
<td>Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>User</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
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<tr>
<td>User</td>
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APPENDIX C

Adaptation of ABC statements
Statement #1 Original: Study effectively on your own in independent / private study.
Statement #1 Adapted: Study for your classes effectively on your own in a private study location.

Statement #3 Original: Respond to questions asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre.
Statement #3 Adapted: Respond to questions asked by a university professor or lecturer in front of a full classroom.

Statement #5 Original: Give a presentation to a small group of fellow students.
Statement #5 Adapted: Give a presentation in English to a small group of students.

Statement #6 Original: Attend most taught sessions.
Statement #6 Adapted: Attend most classes that are taught during the year.

Statement #7 Original: Attain good grades in your work.
Statement #7 Adapted: Attain high scores (earn good grades) for your work.

Statement #8 Original: Engage in profitable academic debate with your peers.
Statement #8 Adapted: Engage in beneficial academic debates with other students in your program.

Statement #22 Original: Remain adequately motivated throughout.
Statement #22 Adapted: Remain adequately motivated throughout the year.
APPENDIX D

Academic Behavioral Confidence (ABC) scale
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How confident are you that you will be able to:</th>
<th>Not anxious.</th>
<th>Somewhat anxious, but mostly confident.</th>
<th>Both anxious and confident. in the middle.</th>
<th>A little bit confident, but mostly anxious.</th>
<th>Very anxious! Not confident.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Study for your classes effectively on your own in private study location.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Produce your best work under examination conditions.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Respond to questions asked by a university professor or lecturer in front of a full classroom.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Manage your work load to meet course deadlines.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Give a presentation in English to a small group of students.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Attend most classes that are taught during the year.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Attain high scores (earn good grades) for your work.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Engage in beneficial academic debates with other students in your program.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ask a lecturer questions about the course material they are teaching in a one-to-one conversation.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ask a lecturer questions about the course material they are teaching during a lecture.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Understand the material outlined and discussed with you by your university lecturers.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Follow the themes and debates in lectures.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Prepare thoroughly for tutorials.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>
### How confident are you that you will be able to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Not anxious.</th>
<th>Somewhat anxious, but mostly confident.</th>
<th>Both anxious and confident, in the middle.</th>
<th>A little bit confident, but mostly anxious.</th>
<th>Very anxious!</th>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Read the recommended background material.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Produce coursework at the required standard.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Write a paper in the appropriate academic style.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ask for help if you don’t understand.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Be on time for class lectures</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Make the most of this opportunity to study for a degree at university.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pass assessments on the first attempt.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Plan appropriate revision schedules.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Remain adequately motivated throughout the year.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Produce your best work in coursework assignments.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Attend tutorials.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Academic Behavioral Confidence Survey, Sander and Sanders (2006), with adaptations to statements as outlined in Appendix C.
APPENDIX E

ABC scale translated into Amharic
ከዚህ በታች በሚገኙትን ሰይኖር ተሽሮ ባለ ያሳቸው ወይም ከላይ በራስ መተማሮን እለዎት ይህ እንደሚለት በሚለ ቅርብ እና በፍራቻ መሃል ይወስኝ ይችሉ፡፡

1. የእንግሊዘኛ በተገቢ ለጉወሌ በመተማሮን ከመካከል ከፋስ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

2. የለስራዎትን በተወሰነ በታች ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

3. የዘንቨርስቲ በተ לימודי ዥታ ይህ ዯሁን በማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

4. የለስራዎትን በተአነስተኛ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

5. የሳራዎትን በተጠቃሚ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

6. የለስራዎትን በተወስኝ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

7. የለስራዎትን በተክርክሮች ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

8. የለስራዎትን በተግራቀም ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

9. የ swal ለማስታወቂ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

10. የለስራዎትን በተደረጉ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

11. የሉስራዎትን በተጠቃሚ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

12. የልስራዎትን በተስራ ይህ ያለ ለማስታወቂ ይችሉ፡፡

13. የልስራዎትን በተጠቃሚ (tutorial) በተገቢ በታች ይችሉ፡፡
14. የተሰጡትን የማጣቀሻ መጽሃፍት ይነባሉ።
15. የሚሰጡትን ከክርስ ለመላከታቸው ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
16. የሚሰጡትን ለሚስረት ከሚለጥፋ ከአምስት ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
17. ከአምስት ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
18. ከአምስት ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
19. የሚሰጡትን የጽሃፍ (paper) ከሚለጥፋ ከአምስት ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
20. የሚሰጡትን የኮርስ ለመላከታቸው ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
21. ከአምስት ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
22. የሚሰጡትን የኮርስ ለመላከታቸው ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
23. የሚሰጡትን ከክርስ ለመላከታቸው ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።
24. የሚሰጡትን የኮርስ ለመላከታቸው ያስፈልጉ ይሆናል።

Source: Translated from the English Academic Behavioral Confidence Survey, Sander and Sanders (2006) with adaptations to statements as outlined in Appendix C.
APPENDIX F

ABC translated into Afan Oromo
Qabxillee armaan gaditti argaman irrati ofitti amanuu haangam qabduu?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>= Baayyee ofitti amanuu/ sodaa tokko malee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>= Ofitti amanuu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>= Oftti amanuu fi sodaa giddu galessaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>= Sodaa / ofitti amanuu aala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>= Sodaa baayyee/ ofitti amanuu tokko malee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Qo’anaa kee dhunfaadhaan iddoo qobaa ta’etti haalla gaariin qo’attaa.
2. Qoruumsa kee huumna qabduun hojjettaa.
4. Hojjiiwwan kee yeroo dhaan xumurtaa.
5. Gareef inglifaan dubbi dhihesitaa.
7. Hojjiiwwan kee irraa qabxii gaari argataa.
8. Falmiwwan barumsaa waliin qbatani irratti hiriyootta kee waliin ni hirmaataa.
11. Qabxiwwan barsisaan barsisuufi marriiwwan kuttaa keessa ni hubbattaa.
12. Dhiimmoota falmiiwwanni fi kuttaa kessaa ni hordooftaa.

15. Hojjiiwan keennamanu sadarkaa gaaridhaan ni qophesihaa

16. Barreffamootta (papers) kennamman sadarkaa barumsaa qabuun qophesihaa.

17. Dubbiwwan si hingalee ni gaafattaa.

18. Kuttaatti yerodhaan argamtaa.


20. Qorruumsootta yaalli jalqabaan di dabarfattaa.

21. Irra deebittee qoo’achuuf (revision) sagantaa ni baastaa.

22. Ka’uumsi barumssaaf qabduu waggaa guutuu ni turaa.

23. Hojjiiwwan si keennaman irratti huumna qabduun ni hojjettaa.

24. Kuttaalle dabalataa (tutorial) irratti ni hirmaataa.

Source: Translated from the English Academic Behavioral Confidence Survey, Sander and Sanders (2006) with adaptations to statements as outlined in Appendix C.
APPENDIX G

Journal writing prompts
• What’s new?
• How are you? Write about your life.
• Tell me about your life at university.
• What do you like the best about university life?
• What are the biggest differences b/n your life now and your life this time last year?
• What are some of the challenges you face at university?
• Tell me about your week. What happened that was good/bad?
• Write about your experiences with English.
• How are you?
• How are you feeling today?
• What do you hate the most? What do you like the most?
• How do you describe yourself?
• What have you learned at university?
• What happened last week?
• Did anything unexpected happen in the past week? Describe what happened and explain how you felt.
• Think of three emotions. Choose one. Write about a time when you felt __(emotion).
APPENDIX H

Writing activity prompts
• If you could change one thing about yourself, what would you change? Why?
• If you could travel in time anywhere, where would you go? Why?
• If you could change one thing about life on planet earth, what would you change? Why?
• How is your life different today than it was one year ago? How have you changed?
• Who is your best friend? Describe the qualities you value most in a good friendship.
• What challenges have you faced in the past? What choices did you make when faced with these past challenges?
• What are some challenges you face now? What choices do you make to cope with these challenges?
• Create a personal timeline and include most of your important life events. Talk to a small group and share these events with others. Ask questions.
• Select a photograph and write a descriptive paragraph about the image. What do you see? What is happening? How does the photo make you feel? Why?
APPENDIX I

Homework prompts
• Personal Essay: Write about the most important events from your personal timeline [session activity] that helped make who you are today. When writing about past events, remember to use the past tense form of verbs — please use the reference sheets on past tense verbs if you need them. You can use the five paragraph narrative essay template to help organize your essay.

• Write a personal narrative essay based on the mind-map [mentoring session activity]. Your essay should include an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The three body paragraphs should focus on people, places, and things/ideas which are important to you and your life. You can use the five paragraph personal essay template to help organize your essay.

• Write an essay to the donors of this intervention pilot program (English mentoring and lifeskills training) giving your opinion about the role of this program. State clearly your opinion and support your opinion with details. You can use the five paragraph opinion essay template to help organize your essay.

• Values Backstory: Write a paragraph or an essay telling the story behind the story (backstory). Choose a value from today’s values exploration activity [session activity]. You can use the examples provided in class for ideas or you can use the template on narrative paragraphs or narrative essays to help organize your writing.
APPENDIX J

Final program questionnaire
QUESTIONNAIRE:

1) How confident are you today about your English language skills? Explain.

2) How confident are you today about your ability to succeed at university? Explain.

3) Did the English mentoring sessions make a difference in your confidence? Explain.

4) What suggestions do you have for next year’s English mentoring program?

5) Anything else you would like to say about English mentoring program?
APPENDIX K

Analysis of Variance ANOVA by ABC Survey Sub-Scale
## Analysis of Variance by ABC Survey Sub-Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Grades</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td>Studying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>0.080</td>
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$p < 0.05$

*Note. Analysis of data in this table provided by Paul Sander (personal communication, June 30, 2015)*
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