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Yilugnta and other Predictors of Class Participation and Achievement in Selected Courses at Addis Ababa University

Darge Wole[1]

Abstract

The study investigated the effect of *yilugnta* (synonymous with public self-consciousness, or PSC) and other selected factors on class participation and course grade in Math for Finance and Communicative English at Addis Ababa University. Other factors considered as potential predictors included sex, self-esteem and English proficiency. Path analysis using Amos was used to examine model fit and direct as well as indirect effects. *Yilugnta* was found to have a direct negative and significant effect on class participation and a similar indirect effect on course grade. The factors which reliably predicted class participation were yilugnta and English proficiency. The results underscore the importance of *yilugnta* in determining class participation and achievement. The concept of *yilugnta* and the findings pertaining to it also point to the importance of examining the PSC construct and its impact on student academic engagement and achievement from the cultural perspective.

Keywords: *Yilugnta*, public-self consciousness, class participation, achievement

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Introduction

Research (e.g. Howard & Baird, 2000; Howard & Henny, 1998) portrays a distressfully low level of student participation in university classes with a host of intertwined factors at play. The epithet 'consolidation of responsibility' (Karp & Yoels,1976, cited in Howard, 2002), which encapsulates a condition whereby only a few students play a dominant role in classroom interaction, embodies neither solace nor solution; the authors of the designation actually conceived it to signify a troublesome academic rift. Evidently, the situation in local (Ethiopian) universities suffers from this same aberration (Filaba, 2009; Yosef, 2016). Thus investigation of the factors that impede student class participation from different angles continues to be an important though involved task. One such factor from the cultural perspective concerns *yilugnta*.

Yilugnta, a term which in Amharic (a widely used local language), literally means "How would others judge my behavior" is very similar to public self-consciousness (PSC). It refers to an inordinate concern about evaluation of one's behavior by others. It takes two main forms: Refraining from doing something that is beneficial to oneself for fear of criticism, or going out of one's way to do something that is socially commendable simply to avoid reproach (without personal conviction about the appropriateness of the action). Thus *yilugnta* impels someone towards unfavorable outcome for himself (e.g. refraining from expressing one's lack of knowledge on a subject for being considered ignorant, or it may inspire an individual towards a socially positive outcome (such as helping others in need). If one were to focus on its negative aspect in academia, an undergraduate may refrain from asking a question in class for fear of making a mistake and exposing himself to ridicule or disparagement. Another student may obligingly nod his head in total agreement with an instructor who says "That is clear, isn't it?" although he is at a complete loss about the point the instructor was trying to make. In brief, *yilugnta* can play a viciously suppressing or deceptive role in student classroom interaction.

In the Amhara culture, there is a persistent outlook which confers omniscience to the teacher and extols passiveness or silence before mentors. In this connection, a high-profile traditional mentor offered the Amharic maxim which can be rendered in English as "Be quick to see and to listen, but keep your mouth tightly shut". (Hiruy, 2000, p. 90). In addition, committing a mistake in public is a dreadful source of embarrassment. *Yilugnta* and various other factors, including deficiency in the English language and poor academic status in general, can lower students' self-esteem which in turn render them confirmed subjects of *yilugnta* with its unfathomed implications for learning.

Empirical evidence regarding the impact of *yilugnta* on classroom participation and achievement is apparently non-existent. Yet both theory (Skinner, 2014; Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978) and empirical studies (e.g. Fakaye, 2013; Pratton & Hales, 1986) consider student participation in the teaching process as an essential mediator of learning outcomes. Thus, on account of intuition and theory, it is imperative to investigate *yilugnta* and other pertinent factors with a view to detect their relative impact on student classroom participation and achievement. Such an investigation does not only provide additional evidence regarding factors impinging on classroom interaction and academic achievement but also add cultural dimension to the conception of PSC.

Problem Statement

The present study investigates the level of *yilugnta* among university students and its effect on class participation and course grade using a model which involves sex, *yilugnta*, self-esteem, English proficiency, class participation and course grade.

Yilugnta is generally understood to be "the tendency to direct attention toward the self as a social object" (Fenigstein, 1987: 545). It the present context, it refers to refraining from expressing one's observations, ideas, observations, opinions, feelings or queries to instructors or classmates during class session for fear of negative evaluation by the audience. Self-esteem refers to one's self-regard or self-respect from the point of view of his ideal self. Class Participation is defined as with-in- class oral communications or activities by students regarding the course under study with the instructor and/or

classmates. English proficiency is taken to mean competency in the English language as measured by the English Score on the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (UEE). Course grade refers to achievement on a five-point scale (0 to 4) based on letter grade at the end of the first semester 2016/17 for the selected courses (Math or English) which the participants took at the time.

Literature

Characteristics of PSC as they apply to *Yilugnta*

As indicated above, PSC is a preoccupation with creating a positive impression of oneself on others and/or avoiding denigration in public. Individuals with high PSC, i.e., individuals who are obsessed with creating a positive impression on others, tend to show relatively higher level of conformity, social desirability, anxiety, and lower level of self-esteem and risk taking behavior (Tunnell, 1984; Scandell & Scandell, 1998). In addition, compared to those with low PSC, those with high public self consciousness tend to show less competition (Abrams & Brown, 1989). They also seem to be more inclined to change their views to suit social expectations (Chang, 2001).

Relative to those with low PSC, those with high PSC are more likely to think that communications in social situations are directed to them personally (Fengstein, 1984). Scheier's study (1980) further suggests that those low in PSC are more consistent in expressing their attitudes than those with high PSC. Furthermore it appears that those with high PSC show greater tendency to conform to social expectation (Abrams & Brown, 1989).

The above brief characterization of PSC is applicable to *yilugnta*. Their basic similarity is that both indicate pre-occupation with the opinion of others regarding their behavior, although this kind of concern may be more salient in the case of *yilugnta* than in the case of PSC. Apparently too no research seems to have been done on the relationship of *yilugnta* to other psychological attributes.

The theoretical bases of PSC are not sufficiently established. However, some of possible theoretical underpinnings, which can also apply to *yilugnta*, can be identified. Thus Psychoanalytic theory proposes that expectations by caregivers that are beyond the reach of the growing person encourage the individual to focus more on presenting himself/herself according to the expectations rather than showing his "true" self (Kohurt & Wolf, 1978, cited in Tunnel, 1984). The Behaviorist tradition recognizes the importance of reinforcement in the development of individual behavior which implies that in as much as society rewards that particular behavior. The Social-learning (or Modeling) perspective (Bandura, 1977) postulates that individuals tend to imitate behaviors that they see to be rewarding. Guthrie's conception of habit formation (Hill, 1963) appears to be pertinent in understanding the persistence of fear of criticism in public forums (such as classrooms) which, as a set of stimuli, evoke specific forms of behavior such as keeping quiet.

Factors impacting on class participation

Behaviorism posits that the learner's observable physical or verbal action in response to some stimulus, if followed by the proper feedback, becomes instrumental in the acquisition of knowledge and skills. (Skinner, 2014). The Information Processing model of the Cognitive perspective recognizes the importance of interpersonal communication (or sensory input) as one basis of intellectual and attitudinal development. The Socio-cultural or Constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) takes social interaction as a cornerstone in the development of knowledge via more knowledgeable others, thereby addressing the Zone of Proximal Development. These perspectives suggest that student learning and retention can be enhanced through appropriate class participation.

Empirically, Weaver and Qi (2005) found that high PSC is negatively related to class participation. Dawit & Demis (2014) conducted a study on class participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in five Ethiopian universities and found, among others, that fear of criticism by classmates negatively affects participation. A study with college students (Morrison & Thomas, 1975) has also found that students with low self-esteem (SE) contribute less to discussions than those with high SE when SE is assessed by Coopersmith School-oriented Inventory. With subjects from EFL classes, Azmand (2014) found a positive relationship between self-esteem and class participation.

Concerning the influence of sex on class participation, some studies suggest that males are more inclined to participate than females. (Wade, 1994; Jaasma, 1997). Others find no such difference (Cornelius, *et al*, 1990). The greater participation by males could partly be due to relatively lower self-esteem among females (Kling, *et al*, 1999).

Language proficiency bears importantly on class participation. Kao & Gansneder (1984) found that non-native speakers of English show less class participation than speakers of the native language attending the same class. Similarly, Sayadi's study (2007) showed that Malaysian first year engineering students who were more proficient in English (the medium of instruction) showed greater class participation than those less proficient in the language. Liu & Kao (1996) concluded that English proficiency is a predictor of class participation. Dawit & Demis (2014) also found that low English proficiency has a detrimental effect on class participation.

Factors affecting academic performance

The factors that affect academic performance include: Sex (Erten, 2009; Abubaker & Oguguo, 2011; Jabor, *et al*, 2011; Aina, 2013; Yazachew, 2013; Ajai & Imako, 2015; Reddy & Reddy, 2016; Sam, 2016); class participation (Voekl, 1995; Fakaye, 2013; Gunuc, 2014); language proficiency (Matirosyan, *et al*, 2015); previous achievement (Mekenzie & Schweitzer, 2010; Mutangi, 2016); and self-esteem (Priyadharshini & Relton, 2014; Pullman & Allik, 2008; Arshad, Zaidi & Mahmood, 2015).

For instance, in Erten's study third year female teacher trainees obtained significantly higher GPA than their male counterparts in a university English Language Teaching program. Sam found that males outperformed females in financial accounting subjects among 'senior' high school students. Martirosyan, *et al* conducted their study among university students and found that English language proficiency is positively related to overall performance of students. In the study by Gunuc, class engagement (participation) explained 10% of the variance in the GPA of first year university students.

The above account highlights various predictors of class participation and academic performance. The factors include PSC (probably *yilugnta* too), sex, self-esteem, and language proficiency. However, some complexity may exist in the relationship between the predictor factors and the two dependent variables (i.e., class participation and academic achievement). For instance, there are studies (e.g. Kearney-Cooke, 1999; Bleidorn, *et al*, 2016) which suggest that females have lower self-esteem than males.

Sex differences in academic achievement favor females over males in some studies (e.g. Erten, 2009) while in other studies (e.g. Aina, 2013) the reverse appears to be the case. Such inconsistencies emanate perhaps from the subject-area under the study, or individual /group differences in cultural orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, or teacher bias. For example, in Erten's study, the differences in achievement related to an English language teaching program while Aina's study dealt with differences in achievement in 'practical physics'.

In spite of complexities involved, however, the account presented above suggests that *yilugnta* has an important bearing on academic activities and outcomes. In addition to *yilugnta*, the variables that impinge on class participation and academic achievement include sex, self-esteem and language proficiency. It further appears that some of the variables can have an indirect effect on class participation and achievement (e.g. indirect effects of *yilugnta* on achievement and sex on achievement (via class participation).

Examining the effect of *yilugnta* on academic activities and outcome is particularly useful, specially because *yilugnta* is potentially damaging to academic achievement. Also, given the above review, the effect of class participation on academic performance is better understood when other potential predictors of performance are included in a prediction model. The following conceptual model is generated based on the considerations just mentioned.

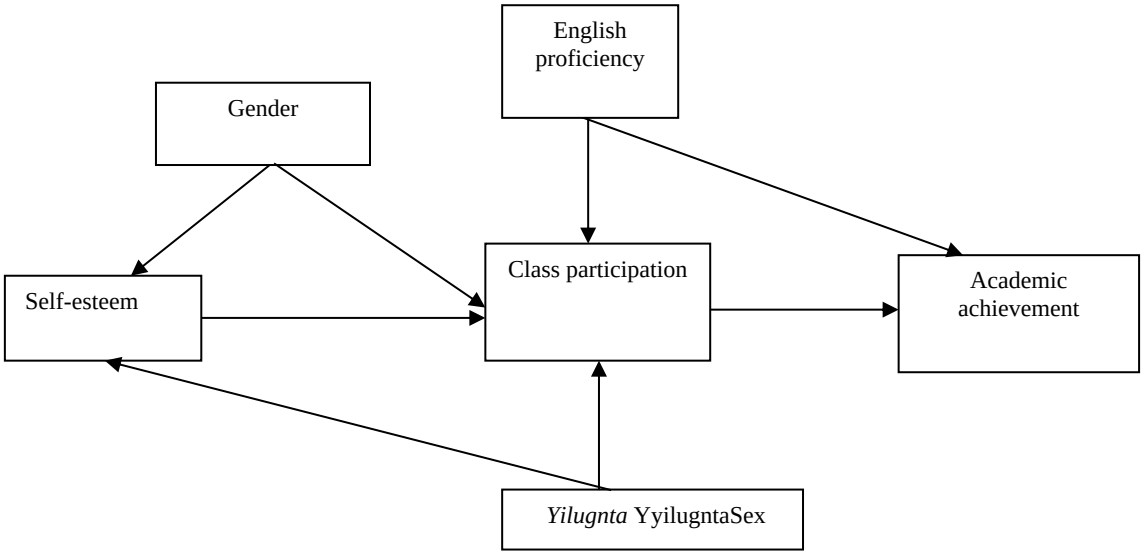

Fig.1. Conceptual framework regarding the effects of *yilugnta* and other selected factors on class participation and academic achievement.

Method

The study is quantitative involving information obtained from participants through a researcher-developed instrument, another commonly used instrument in similar research, a form for assessing class participation, and student academic records.

Sample

The study focused on courses/classes in Addis Ababa University that require a good deal of participation for success. Thus it was decided to include classes in Math and English. The classes that were included in the study were the ones where the concerned departments, instructors and students showed cooperation. Two classes, one in Math and another in English were selected. The courses were: Math for Finanace (Actn 1041) offered by the Department of Accounting and Finance, and Communicative English (Enla 1011) given by the Department of Foreign languages and Literature. Both classes were in their First year First Semester in the 2016/17 academic year. The Math class was attended by Accounting students and the English class by history students.

The two classes were taken intact after securing the cooperation of the students and the concerned instructors. There were 73 students (27 females and 46 males) in the Math class and 38 students (17 females and 21 males) in the English class.

Data Collection

Data regarding sex and English proficiency were collected from the Registrar's office of the respective colleges (i.e., the College of Business and Economics and the College of Social Sciences). Regarding the measurement of *yilugnta,* a 22-item instrument was developed by the researcher and amended based on feedback provided by two psychology instructors. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The instruments were first prepared in Amharic and pilot tested. Their reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) were 0.79 for *yilugnta* and 0.84 for self-esteem. Concerning class participation, for each class, the instructor as well as a knowledgeable team of students (selected by the instructor) assigned a score for each student. In the case of discrepancy between the instructor's and the team's assessment, the average score was used in the analysis.

Method of Analysis

Descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment correlation and path analysis were employed to analyze the data. Before proceeding to analysis, the inter-correlations of scores on the various predictor variables were examined to detect relationships. Normality of distribution was also checked by inspecting skewness and kurtosis indices as well as residual plots. In addition, Leven's test of equality of variance was used to help in deciding if it was advisable to transform the combined data (of the Math and English classes) for analysis. SSPS program 24 was used to compute descriptive data, and path analysis using Amos program was employed to test the model and the effects of variables.

Findings

Descriptive and Correlational Data

Out of the 38 students from the English class to whom the scales were administered, three were returned incomplete. Similarly, nine students from the Math class were either absent during the administration of the data collection instruments or did not properly complete the data collection instruments. So the analysis included 35 students from the English class and 64 students from the Math class. A summary of the composition of the respondents is presented in Table1, below.

Table1. Number of Respondents by Type of Class and Sex

Type of Class	No. of respondents by sex		
	Males	Females	Total
English	19	16	35
Math	45	19	64
Total	64	35	99

Descriptive data concerning the scores of respondents on the variables considered in the study are as follows.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Subject Area and Sex

Variable	Mean & SD by Subject Area		Both Subject Areas	Mean & SD by Sex	
	English (N= 35) Mean (SD)	Math (N= 64) Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Male (N= 64) Mean (SD)	Female (N= 35) Mean (SD)
Yilugnta	46.5 (11.78)	51.2 (13.27)	49.58 (12.90)	51.1 (12.39)	46.86 (13.53)
S-Est.	25.4 (6.22)	19.64** (4.46)	21.68 (5.82)	21.55 (5.65)	21.91 (6.20)
EGrade	41.63 (8.34)	61.64** (6.65)	54.57 (12.04)	54.89 (11.81)	53.97 (12.61)
CGrade	2.49 (0.44)	2.61 (1.21)	2.57 (1.01)	2.81 (0.89)	2.11** (1.07)
Particip.	2.00 (0.84)	2.33 (1.10)	2.21 (1.02)	2.22 (0.98)	2.20 (1.11)

** $p < 0.01$ (t-test) for mean differences between the groups (i.e., English versus Math, or Male versus Female). $p > 0.05$ for all other t-tests.

According to Table 2, given the maximum possible scores for *yilugnta* (110), self-esteem (30), class participation (4.0), and course grade (4.0), generally the participants showed weak-to-moderate status on all four variables. The English group had a significantly higher score than the Math group in the case of self- esteem, but the reverse was true in the case of English proficiency. Regarding differences between males and females, the only statistically significant result was observed in the case of course grade whereby males scored higher than females.

Inter-correlations among the variables for the combined English and Math classes are provided below.

Table 3. Inter-correlations among Variables for the Combined Group

Variables	Variables					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sex (1)	-	-0.158	0.030	-0.037	-0.332**	-0.009
Yilugnta (2)		-	-0.383**	0.192	0.013	-0.236*
S-Est.(3)			-	-0.318**	-0.038	0.060
EGrade (4)				-	0.88	0.215*
CGrade (5)					-	0.303**
Particip. (6)						-

**p<0.01 *p<0.05, two-tailed test

Specially interesting findings in the combined data include the statistically significant negative associations between *yilugnta* and self-esteem, and *yilugnta* and class participation. Positive and statistically significant correlations were observed, among others, between class participation and course grade.

Results of Path Analysis

Before proceeding to path analysis, a check was made on the tenability of assumptions concerning such analysis. Residual plots in relation to the variables included in the study did not show any serious departure from normality. For each variable, the skewness ranged from -0. 779 to + 0.378. and kurtosis from -0.972 to +0.921. However, as indicated in Table 3, statistically significant correlations were evident among the different variables. In preparation for the analysis of the data for the information from two subject areas together, Levene's test of homogeneity of variance between the scores of the groups on the variables were conducted, and the results indicated significant differences in some cases (participation scores, LS (Levene's Statistics) = 11.46, p<.01; course grade, LS=21.1, p < .01). These results coupled with the good possibility that the marking system of the concerned instructors could be different prompted the use of transformed data (via log transformation) in carrying out the path analysis.

Model Fit

Chi-square indicated a poor fit of the model (Chi-square, df7= 20.20, p=0.005). GFI was at an acceptable level (i.e. 0.937), but AGFI was lower (0.811). CFI was much lower than 0.90 (0.694) and RAMSEA (0.139) was above 0.05. A look at the Modification Indices suggested two additional paths , namely English to Self-esteem (MI=5.193; expected parameter change (EPC)= - 0.262, and Sex to course grade (MI= 7.012, EXP= -0.06). Theoretically, it could be argued that among non-native speakers of a language like English, proficiency in the language enhances self-esteem. It was also plausible that there could be a relationship between sex and grade from the point of view of the cultural milieu (such as the context of this study) in which female students are *not* expected to be as

good as males academically. The model which was revised according to the MI looked like the following.

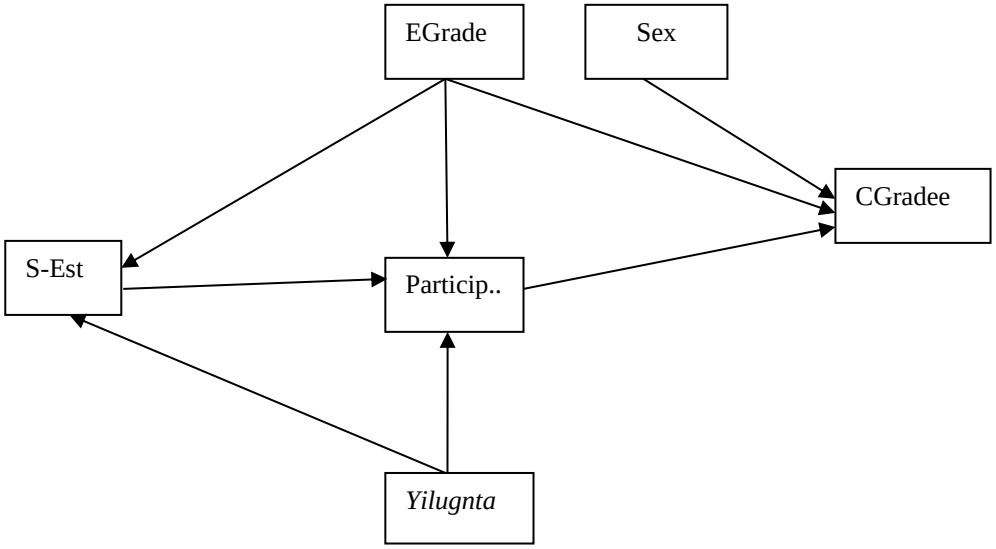

Fig.2. Revised model

Results of the Revised Model

The revised model fit theobserved data well. The chi-square for the model was 8.267 (df= 7; p= 0.310). Both RESEA and RMR were below 0.05. GFI, AGFI and CFI were all above 0.90. Judging from the GFI, the model explains a high proportion of the variance in the sample (variance-covariance). The RMR indicates that the variances and covariances approximated by the model are close to the observed values. The fit statistics are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Model Fit Summary

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN /DF	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RAMSEA	RMR
Default model	14	8.267	7	0.310	1.181	.973	0.918	0.971	0.043	.002
Saturated model	21	.000	0			1.000		1.000		.000
Independence model	6	58.091	15	.000	3.873	.836	0.770	0.0	0.171	.005

Effect of Variables

The direct, indirect and total effects in terms of standardized regression weights (betas) were as follows.

Table 5. Standardized Regression Weights

Parameter (Path)		Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Ind. variable	Dep. Variable	Estimate (B)	Estimate	Estimate
Yilugnta	S-Est	-0. 319**	-	-0.319**
Yilugnta	Particip	-0.246*	-0.012	-0.258*
S-Est.	Particip	0.037	-	0.037
EGrade	Particip	0.223*	-0.008	0.214*
Particip	CGrade	0.296*	-	0.296*
EGrade	CGrade	0.155*	0.063*	0.218**
EGrade	S-Est	-0.224	-	-0.224
Sex	CGrade	-0.250**	-	-0.250**
Yilugnta	CGrade	-	-0.077*	-0.077*
S-Est	CGrade	-	0.011	0.011

****p <0.01; *p<0.05**

Explained variances

Regarding the endogenous variables in the model (namely, Self-esteem, class participation and course grade, the proportions of variance explained by predictor variables were 15.2, 11.4, and 19.4, respectively. The total explained variance is thus 46%.

Discussion

The State of *Yilugnta*

The descriptive data suggest that the prevalence of *yilugnta* among first year AAU Ethiopian students is moderate (among the current sample, Mean= 46.5% for males and 42.6% for females). The difference in the scores of males and females was not significant. Given the fact that the students had substantial schooling which could have enabled them to appreciate the benefits of active participation, one would have expected the pervasiveness of *yilugnta* among university students to be low.

The persistence of *yilugnta* among students could be due to strong cultural influences. These influences probably involve processes espoused by the Behaviorist and Constructivist perspectives of learning. Traditionally, the tendency in many local nationalities (particularly the Amhara) is to follow the trodden path, in attitude and practice, which posits high value on "silence". Divergence often results in castigation or negative criticism. So individuals are very alert to the behaviors and opinions of others and they seek to minimize criticism. A related problem is the inclination to take criticism as personal or as a means of attack on the target person's overall competence or personality, and not as an observation concerning a specific idea or conduct in a particular context.

Another relevant point in terms of explaining the pervasiveness of *yilugnta* among the students is that at least some of the local cultures (e.g. those of the Amhara and the Gurage) have a collective orientation in which an individual is expected to give substantial weight to the consequences of his/her behavior for his group such that if a person does something that turns out to be embarrassing, the

embarrassment or the condemnation applies to all those closely related to the person, i.e., parents, siblings, etc. Students brought up in such an environment do not want to risk castigation or alienation by close ones. They also find it hard to change their mentality, particularly because they normally receive appreciation for avoiding self-exposure.

Students' experiences in school apparently contribute little or none to reduce *yilugnta* since their teachers are most likely products of the inhibitive mental set and tend to encourage passiveness in class. (Yalew, 2004; Seime, 1998).

The Model

Although the initial model was developed on the basis of sound reasoning, it did not fit the obtained data, which prompted the use of a revised model. The revised model was satisfactory, but the fact that it was based on Modification Index may have increased chance results to some degree. This is something that needs to be checked and verified in subsequent research.

Regarding the proportion of variance explained by the model with regard to the endogenous variables (self-esteem, class participation and course grade) it was relatively higher in the case of course grade (19.4%). This is understandable because unlike the other two variables, the prediction of course grade included both direct and indirect effects. As the standardized regression weights indicate, the change in class participation due to *yilugnta* is greater than the changes due to English proficiency or self-esteem, which is indicative of its importance in the model.

The total variance explained by the model (46%) is substantial. Still it is evident that there are other variables such as pre-university achievement and self-regulation or self-discipline and achievement (e.g. Wolfe & Johnson, 1995; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Mekenzie & Schweitzer, 2010) that need to be considered to account more fully variation in university achievement.

Effects of *Yilugnta* and other Variables

The beta weights concerning *yilugnta*'s direct and indirect effects on class participation are both significant and negative (B=-0.246, p= 0.042; B= -0.077, p=0.017, respectively), but the direct effect is more pronounced. The negative effect of *yilugnta* on self-esteem is also considerable and reliable. (B= -0.319).

The indirect effect of *yilugnta* on class participation (as mediated by self-esteem) does not contribute importantly to *yilugnta*'s total effect, but the total effect is significant and noticeable. (B= -0.258, p=0.021).

English proficiency also seems to affect class participation directly. This result agrees with previous findings (e.g. Sayadi, 2001; Dawit & Demis, 2014) and highlights the importance of ability in the medium of instruction in encouraging student class participation. In the Ethiopian context, English is the third language for the majority of the students. This fact coupled with the deleterious effect of *yilugnta* poses a serious problem.

There was no a priori rationale to include *yilugnta* as a direct predictor of grade. However, as proposed in the model, *yilugnta* has an indirect negative and appreciable effect on grade (via class participation). English and class participation also showed significant direct positive and reliable effect on grade, but the effect was more prominent in the case of class participation. In addition, English proficiency had a positive indirect effect on grade (through self-esteem and class participation). (B=0.063, p=0.012).

The importance of English proficiency in college achievement has been detected in earlier studies (e.g. Matirosyan, *et al*., 2015; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995). Matirosyan, *et al*. conducted their study among international students, i.e. students for whom English (which was at least their second language) served as medium of instruction. In the case of the present study, aside from being a third language for most of the school children, it is not well-taught in schools. Another plausible explanation for the effect of English proficiency relates to the admission requirements for admission to Ethiopian universities which, by way of affirmative action, are more lenient in UAE results (including their score in English) for 'Emerging' (relatively less developed) regions", students with disability, and others.

Conclusion

The revised model fits the data well. The importance of *yilugnta* in academic interaction and achievement features noticeably in the results. The same applies to class participation and English proficiency. The study shows the importance of socio-cultural factors in model testing. However, the use of the Modification Index to amend the model could have introduced some bias (error) in the results. Other studies will help to check on this matter. Such studies will benefit from a delineation of the psychometric identity of *yilugnta* by increasing the items in the measuring instruments.

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