Cultural Influence on Girl Child Education in Public Secondary Schools in Ijara Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Culture is at the centre of any development process, the relationship between education and culture is described as reciprocal and a mutually influencing one. Education is the main agent of cultural transmission that stimulates change and accelerates the process of cultural development. Kenya contains various cultural practices by different communities. It has been observed empirically that cultural values, beliefs, attributes and practices may impact on the education system in ways that undermine the achievement of education for all as right of boy and girl children. Ijara Subcounty Kenya is the area of study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the cultural Practices that influence girl child education in public secondary schools in Ijara Sub-county, Kenya. The school enrolment ratio of girls to boys stands at 1:2 in every class in Ijara Sub-county. This state of affairs has been caused by cultural practices that tend to favor the boy child more than the girl child. The inferiority complexes that the girl child develops because of the cultural context undermine her confidence and this is reflected in the poor performance in class work compared to boy children. The objectives of this study to establish the influence of early practices of infibulations, gender and early marriages on girl child education. The study adopted descriptive research design with a sample size of 145 respondents. Among other findings, female genital mutilation is a culture that has existed in Ijara constituency. The study recommends among others that the government should assist in eradicating female genital mutilation in Ijara sub-county for better girl child academic performance.

Key Words: Cultural influence; Girl child education

Introduction

Education as a form of knowledge, values, skills, habit and benefits of a group of people that are transfer from society to another and one generation to the next generation through discussion, storytelling, teaching training or research (Schultze & Avital, 2011). It is equally described as the most significant aspect of human and societal development, and a strong weapon for a successful living, most especially girl child education (Obinaju, 2014). Furthermore, girl child education is a tactical process of producing wonderful women that would contribute positively to the development of society, and it would motivate her to be aware of herself and her immediate family (Atama, 2012). According to Etumbo (2016), women education is the education that would make a woman become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her to become functional in the society. When maternal care is adequately provided for the girlchild the aims and objectives of education will be achieved.

According to Andiema (2021), the United Nations Sustainable Development goal seeks to ensure that by the year 2030, all girls and boys have equal access to quality basic education. However, its important to note that the social and cultural activities of any community determine the education aspirations of such communities and the importance put on education directly corresponds to the extent to which the two variables conform (Ochieng, 2015). According to Maichuhie (2020), research shows that prohibitive social and cultural practices have been the main obstacle to girl child education in developing countries. A study by Mwakio (2017) indicates that cultural factors tend to affect the girls' capacity to access education more than other factors, especially in developing countries.

According to a report by UNICEF (2010), it noted that one of the cultural factors affecting girl child education early marriage denies girls the right to basic education. Girls are victims of turbulent circumstances that lead them to either drop out of school or perform low quality academic work (Mwakio, 2017). When they are sexually coerced, have unwanted pregnancies and early marriages, their education development suffers and results in them dropping out of school.

Infibulation practice and its effects on education and professional growth and social development of the girl child is another issue. For the purpose of this study the two terms female genital mutilation (FGM) and infibulations have been used interchangeably. According to Chebitwey (2013) who investigated the effects of circumcision on girl child school participation and educational standards of girls in North Pokot Sub county in Kenya, it was established that the area lacks middle-level college but only one vocational training centre and one youth centre. The researcher found out that education equity was the most pressing issue affecting girls since most of the locals still practice Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early and forced marriage as well as child labour. Another study by Chepleting et al. (2013) aimed to find out the influence of social-cultural factors on girls' participation in free primary education in Kapenguria Division in Kenya. The findings revealed that the enrolment of boys was higher than that of girls and if this scenario continues, girls will be underrepresented in the school system. This will mean gender disparity in favour of boys in enrolment will continue to be witnessed.

Further, Chematui et al. (2019) investigated the effects of Female Genital Mutilation on the educational performance of girls in primary schools in West Pokot Sub County. It was evident that infibulation was practiced either openly or secretively. Many girls' participation in school was thwarted by female genital mutilation along with early marriages and child labour hence dismal performance. The study established that FGM and education performance correlates basing on an interview from the respondent who testified to have boldly abused and demeaned her female teacher from a community different from her and who do not practice FGM calling her 'clitoris' in the mother tongue. Her relationship with the victim teacher and all others was unbearable and so led to many and dropped out of school.

Another teething cultural issue is the traditional preferences for boys as successors and this mentality promotes sending boys to school to the completion level rather than gild child (Ademola et al., 2014). It was noted by Abdulkadir et al. (2018) that these attitudes of the people resulted in the insufficiency of an educational system to limit the number of students that can be admitted to schools and also to consider boy education. This attitudes equally denies the girl child access to education and is a direct consequence on women low status which is made inferior to that of men. Thus, the main reason behind this is that boys are the once that the tradition believes to have money to that to take care of their parents in the society (Hartmann, 2018).

Kenya is a nation that comprises many different people each with their own diverse cultural values and practices.

Indeed, the Government of Kenya seeks to ensure equity in terms of equal access to education (Republic of Kenya, 2005). This commitment to achieving equity is of utmost importance since equity in education is a fundamental principle of the Education for All (EFA) agenda. According to UNESCO (2008), equity in education should ensure provision of appropriate, relevant and viable learning opportunities to all children without distinction of location. Some of the cultural practices are positive while others may be negative on learning process from the ECDE level upwards (UNICEF, 2008). As a consequence, it leads to low level of achievement in education. However, it has been observed that cultural values beliefs, attributes and practices may impact on the education system in ways that undermine the achievement of education for all as right of boy and girl child. People in Ijara sub-county are one of the pastoral communities in the region that mostly depend on traditional nomadic life. They move from one place to another in search of green pasture and water for their animals. The people depend on their animals that include goat, sheep, cattle, camels and donkeys to secure their basic needs. Somali people have practiced Islam for such a long time that many Somali customs are derived from this religion. Islamic influence is manifested in the Somali way of dressing. Polygamy is widely practiced among the Somalis since Islamic laws allow a man to marry as many as four wives.

The sub-county is inhabited mainly by the Kenyan Somalis whose culture is predominantly Islamic in orientation. The Somali people have practiced Islam for a long time that many Somali customs are derived from this religion. Somalis in Ijara sub-county also practice cultural beliefs and values that consider children as source of dowry. Boys provide protection and security to the family and society. Such cultural practices tend to undermine enrolment to ECDE centers and primary schools. Clearly when pastoralists have to move from place to place together with their children opportunities are undermined to enroll children in ECDE centers and primary schools (www.action and org, 2014). Among the people of Ijara sub-county, it is believed that educating the girl child is a waste of time and money.

It is also common for girl-children to be married off very early before they complete their education. This attitude that is informed by the culture among people in Ijara sub-county undermines the education for all philosophy. The Ministry of Education noted that outdated social-cultural practices contributed to girls having a higher chance of dropping out of primary and secondary schools in the country (Krop, 2017). Form the aforementioned studies, a critical analysis of girl child education in Kenya depicts a worrying trend, hampered by cultural practices. This scenario is likely to affect girl child performance and more so those living in rural areas. Poor performance in national exams triggers a vicious cycle wherein poorly educated women are left ill-equipped to obtain well paid jobs, and this in turn reduces incentives for parents to invest in girls schooling thus forming the basis for this study.

Methodology

Saunders et al. (2016) portray a design in research as the overall plan for the research. This research utilized a descriptive survey research design. The choice of the design was guided by the objectives of the study and philosophical establishment of this investigation. When utilizing this design the researcher didnot control any factors but just depicted the circumstances at specific points. The choice was suitable in this study because descriptive research helps examine the tendencies, spread normality and reliability of the data sets. The study was carried out in Ijara sub-county in Garissa County, Kenya. The sample for the study was 145 respondents. The questionnaire was used as the main data collection tool. Data was presented by use of tables, percentages, frequencies and means.

Results

Form the data collected, the following results were obtained.

Infibulation (FGM) on Girl Child Education

Learners were asked in the questionnaire to indicate how FGM affected girl child education. The responses were as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Infibulation (FGM) on Girl Child Education

Response	SA		A		UD		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
Sexual permissiveness must be discouraged and sanctioned so that it does not lead to premature pregnancies	48	33.1	77	53.1	10	6.9	10	6.9	0	0
Cases of girls being married off early in the society should be reported to authorities to encourage school attendance	83	57.2	52	35.9	0	0	5	3.4	5	3.4
Increased interest in homework must be rewarded to enhance performance in class	67	46.2	56	38.5	0	0	16	11	6	4.1
Girls should be encouraged to participate in all chores regardless of gender to discourage stereotypes	46	31.7	94	64.8	5	3.4	0	0	0	0
Being chaste must be rewarded to discourage unwanted pregnancies	71	49.0	63	43.4	5	3.4	6	4.1	0	0
Female genital mutilation should be done away with in Ijara Constituency	44	30.3	61	42.1	30	20.7	10	6.9	0	0.0

KEY: SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree UD=Undecided D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree f=frequency %=Percentage

As shown in table 1, respondents strongly agreed that sexual permissiveness must be discouraged and sanctioned so that it does not lead to premature pregnancies (53.1%). Similarly, 57.2% agreed that cases of girls being married off early in the society should be reported to authorities to encourage school attendance. The learners further strongly agreed (46.2%) that increased interest in homework must be rewarded to enhance performance in class. Girls should be encouraged to participate in all chores regardless of gender to discourage stereotypes as agreed by 64.8%. Learners strongly agreed that being chaste must be rewarded to discourage unwanted pregnancies as noted by 49%. However, 42.1% indicated that female genital mutilation should be done away with in Ijara Constituency. A Principal from school C lamented that some politicians in the area collaborated with parents to block efforts he was trying to make towards FGM practices in the school. She lamented that this cultural practice could not be assumed as it exists to some extent. A teacher from school B noted that many girls were often absent from class during FGM practices and their absenteeism contributed to their poor performance. According to Pareiyo, a crusader against FGM in Narok sub-county" a girl who has undergone infibulations means many things to many people, this explains that poverty is the cause for the persistence of FGM" (Standard newspaper, 2005).

Gender Stereotype effect on Girl Child Education

Learners were asked in the questionnaire to indicate the influence of gender stereotype on girl child education. The responses were as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Gender Stereotype effect on Girl Child Education

Response	SA		A		UD		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
Perpetuating the attitude in words and deed that all children are intelligent and equal	47	32.4	73	50.3	5	3.4	15	10.3	5	3.4
Perpetuating the attitude in words and deeds that all children have the same place in society	67	46.2	67	46.2	11	7.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Perpetuating the notion that paying school fees for the girl-child is a waste of resources because they will get married	94	64.8	35	24.1	16	11.0	0	0	0	0
Perpetuating the attitude in words and deeds that the most important role for the girl –child is motherhood and childbearing.	48	33.1	67	46.2	5	3.4	10	6.9	15	10.3
Perpetuating the attitude in words and deeds that the girl-child should concentrate more on performing household chores that make her a good potential wife	0	0	6	4.1	0	0	56	38.6	83	57.2
Clinging to the pastoral way of life that often involves migration and thus interruption of school life	21	14.5	109	75.2	5	3.4	10	6.9	0	0
Heavy workloads for the girl-child that interferes with school work	25	17.2	78	53.8	21	14.4	11	7.6	10	6.9

KEY: SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree UD=Undecided D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree f=frequency %=Percentage

As shown in table 2, the responses on gender stereotype that influence girl child education were provided. Perpetuating the attitude in words and deed that all children are intelligent and equal was agreed on by 50.3%. Learners agreed (46.2%) that perpetuating the attitude in words and deeds that all children have the same place in society was important. Furthermore 64.8% disagreed with the notion that paying school fees for the girl-child is a waste of resources because they will get married. From the study 46.2% disagreed that most important role for the girl –child is motherhood and childbearing. However, 57.2% strongly disagreed that the girl-child should concentrate more on performing household chores that make her a good potential wife. From the study 75.2% agreed that clinging to the pastoral way of life that often involves migration and thus interruption of school life. Lastly, 53.8% agreed that heavy workloads for the girl-child interferes with school work. A religious education teacher from one of the schools noted that since culture was a unit in the syllabus she used that chance to probe girls give grievances they faced. Regarding this some noted they were taken as lesser beings in the society, they were denied school fees rights, their boys counterparts disrespected them and therefore they

had given up with school life. This agrees with Hannover (2004) who notes that the issue of gender differences in the academic achievements has been extensively broached in the social sciences since the 1970's with numerous publications examining disadvantages for women and girls.

Effect of Early Marriages on Girl Child Education

Learners were asked in the questionnaire to indicate the influence of early marriages on girl child education. The responses were as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Effect of Early Marriages on Girl Child Education

Response	SA		A		UD		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
Importance placed on inheritance systems	22	15.2	56	38.6	16	11.0	41	28.3	10	6.9
Preference to invest in the boy-child's education than the girl-child's education	16	11.0	67	46.2	10	6.8	31	21.4	21	14.5
High status accorded to marriage and motherhood	17	11.7	72	49.7	11	7.6	40	27.6	5	3.4
Importance placed on the performance of household chores at the expense of school work	6	4.1	93	64.1	15	10.3	31	21.4	0	0
Encouragement and facilitation of early marriages for the girl-child	6	4.1	57	39.3	26	17.9	51	35.2	5	3.4

KEY: SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree UD=Undecided D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree f=frequency %=Percentage

As shown in Table 3, the researcher learned with a lot of concern that importance was placed on inheritance systems as agreed by 38.6%. Similarly, 46.2% agreed that preference to invest in the boy-child's education than the girl-child's education existed which killed girl child education desire. In this regard 49% agreed that high status accorded to marriage and motherhood affected girl education and 64.1% agreed that importance placed on the performance of household chores at the expense of school work affected girls. Furthermore, 39.3% agreed that parents encouraged and facilitated early marriages for the girl-child which was saddening. Guiding and counseling teachers from all the three schools indicated that most cases they counseled were related to early pregnancies and marriages. They noted that some parents facilitated girl child marriage to get wealth and be relieved in expenses related to girl child up bring. According to Population Council (2000) in Egypt, data indicates that 29% of married adolescents were beaten by their spouses or their spouses and others. Of these, 41% were beaten when they were pregnant. This grants reason for discouraging early marriages.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the challenges experienced by the learners regarding female genital mutilation is a culture that has existed in Ijara sub-county. The government efforts to eradicate it are still minimal and this has affected girl child education. Further, it was noted that the most important role for the girl child is motherhood and childbearing. This has affected girls' concentration at school with desire to partake this role. Therefore, by girl-child concentrating

more on performing household chores that make her a good potential wife as they purport affects her school performance. Lastly, by parents encouraging and facilitating early marriages for the girl-child, which was saddening affected girl child academic performance.

Recommendations

It is recommended that cases of girls being married off early in the society should be reported to government authorities to encourage discourage this practice. The government should put in place measures to assist in eradicating female genital mutilation in the area of study for better girl child academic performance. Also, parents should not burden girl child with heavy workloads for this interferes with school work in order to enhance their academic performance. Further, the society should treat both boys and girls equally to avoid cases of boy counterparts disrespecting them. On the part of the school management, principals should network and consult the stakeholders whenever they are in doubt regarding girl child school performance in order to minimize the cultural influence on girl education.

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