

Cultural Lag Facing Education of Girls in Secondary Schools: The Case of Garissa and Ijara Constituencies in Kenya

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of girls in schools is a serious problem in many parts of the world and a serious one in Africa especially. In the wake of today's occurrences among them women becoming breadwinners because of incidences like divorce, education of girls is being considered equally important in any society in order to make them self-reliant. The study was conducted in Garissa County to identify the cultural hindrance on girl-child education. The study objectively focused on identifying the various cultural aspects that hinder education of girls in secondary schools, then sought to investigate the various effects of these cultural situations on the education of girls in secondary schools. This was a survey study. The target population was the 4478 students, 242 teachers and 14 head teachers in the study area. A sample size of 780 students, 104 teachers and 13 head teachers was obtained from the target population. Interviews, observations and various academic documents were the data collection methods employed. Qualitative data was done by thematic analysis while any quantitative data was by simple statistics.

Key words: Culture, Girl-child education, Gender, Underrepresentation, Schooling.

1. Introduction

Gender refers to the feminine and masculine roles. In the world today, there is struggle to bring about gender parity in many societies. There is common emphasis to move away from the traditional beliefs where women occupied second place while men occupied first place in society. No matter how developed a country is, we cannot easily judge that there is no gender disparity in that particular country. Women in Garissa and Ijara constituencies have been striving for their independence by virtue of the prevailing situations of female suppressions and marginalization.

The issue of gender inequality is not something that is just an issue in non-industrialized countries but is an issue that no country or culture has been able to escape. Even in the United States, girls receive far less attention in the classroom and in regards to computerized education and software. There is no dispute that women face more challenges at home, family, and work than men. Furthermore, more women leave their family, than do men (Clifford, 2007). In the study about the marginalization of Aboriginal women in Canada by Hanson (2008), Aboriginal women in Canada frequently experience challenges and discrimination that are not necessarily shared by non-Aboriginal women, nor are by Aboriginal men. In the same study it is revealed that the discrimination of Aboriginal women is two-fold: being discriminated as women and also being Aboriginal.

In a study about gender disparity, Kombo (2005), outlines the various ways women are discriminated and suppressed in various countries especially Africa. For instance Jobs that are more challenging are given to men but not women. In religion also women are expected to be at a lower level than males. Furthermore, parents prefer to give family inheritance to male rather than females. Even schools, Kombo (2005) avers that subjects that are more challenging are given to boys while the less challenging ones are given to female students.

According to Ombati & Ombati (2015), women who are more educated work for more hours in the market labour force, broadening the tax base and thereby potentially tax distortions. Tembon & Fort (2008), add to this by emphasizing that female education creates powerful poverty reducing synergies and yields enormous intergenerational gains. This therefore means that education of females and specifically the girl-child is very important for the general economic growth of people and the country as a whole. In this context therefore, African development has seriously been retarded by various cultures that suppress the education of girls in many communities and societies. Kenya being a developing country faces a big challenge because it has 42 tribes with different cultures and some of them tend to suppress girl child education.

Africa's culture has always held the belief that females should occupy a lower social status in society than their male counterparts. This is outrageous because today women are forced to become breadwinners as a result of factors like divorce, single motherhood, death of husband, and care of young siblings in case of the demise of parents. This makes education a necessity for girls on equal terms with males in case of any eventuality in future; they would be self-reliant.

Various government and non-governmental agencies have intensified their efforts through workshops; seminars and even provision of scholarships to the girl-child, but the problem of less representation in schools remain unresolved. The cultural impact of negatively interfering with education of girls still persists. This problem needs to be addressed in order to achieve the economic development in Kenya that the country looks forward to. This is put as vision 2030 (Ministry of State Planning, National Development and Vision 2030), when the country is expected to be well developed economically, socially and politically. For this to be done Kenya should have a well-educated population irrespective of gender. The study thus looks at the cultural impact on schooling of girls in secondary schools in Garissa County in Kenya, which is currently at a low rate.

2. Methodology

The survey method was used to investigate the problem of culture in hindering the education of girls in secondary schools in the study locale. The respondents comprised of 780 students, 104 teachers and 13 headteachers. A sample of 117 respondents was obtained for the study. A survey study was used because of the expansiveness of the regions and drawing the respondents from the respective various schools. Teachers were purposely selected while all the headteachers in the selected schools participated in the study. Data were collected from teachers and headteachers by use of interviews. Collected data was analysed on the basis of the study objectives, as presented and discussed below.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Information

The study sampled 13 headteachers, 104 teachers and 780 students from 13 secondary schools in Garissa and Ijara constituencies. Of the sampled 780 students, 766 participated in the study, giving a questionnaire return rate of 98.2%. Out of 766 students who took part in the study, 475 (62%) were boys while 291 (38.0%) were girls. The response to questionnaires was very high and this was attributed to the establishment of a good rapport by the author with the respondents. Furthermore, the author used class teachers to mobilize and arrange the students so that they could answer the questionnaires. The use of class teachers was very important because they were already used and acquainted with students who would easily obey their instructions. The high return rate of questionnaires was important in providing adequate information and data for analysis so that a holistic picture would be obtained about the situation of drug abuse in the two constituencies.

The small percentage of girls depicts the fact that there were few girls' schools in Garissa and Ijara districts in particular and generally in North Eastern Province, more so few girls attending schools. This was attributed to the ignorance of parents who see no need of educating girls since when they get married; they join and benefit another family. Furthermore, there were reported early marriages in the region where some girls would be married off even as early as when in primary school. Many were even engaged for marriage while in school and so possibility of leaving school to get married was very high. Similarly, girls have a lot of respect for their fathers such that if a father requests her to leave school and get married, she would obey that. According to the Somali culture, a parent who was not well off economically would prefer to send a boy to school other than a girl if faced with the two options. Many parents still believed that educating a girl would be educating her for another man in a different family since she would get married. A particular teacher explained this culture that negatively interferes with the education of girls in the following words:

In this region many girls undergo early marriages or are engaged even before reaching secondary schools. Girls respect their fathers so much such that in case a father tells her daughter to leave school and get married, she is supposed to do just that. Even fathers prefer educating boys to girls when faced with the two alternatives in times of financial difficulties. This is because it is believed a girl will get married to another man and benefit another family (Personal communication with female teacher, Ijara, September 14, 2011).

The population of the Somali tribe is sparse in these two constituencies of Garissa and Ijara. Therefore, many children have to walk long distances to attend school. Nearly all primary schools and some secondary schools are day schools in these two districts, and this is a big challenge to parents to send their girls to walk far distances to very far schools amid high insecurity of dangerous wild animals (like lions, hyenas, and snakes), or even some men on the way who would even rape them. Furthermore, many parents view girls as a weaker sex compared with boys; hence parents view girls as not able to manage walking such long distances given the dehydrating hot climate of these arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs).

The division of labour is also clearly defined in the Somali community and heavily weighted towards women and by extension girls. In this nomadic tribe, it is girls who assist their mothers to milk the animals. The girls also assist their mothers to process the milk for instance adding of spices and boiling of the milk to preserve it. Girls assist their mothers to feed the family, to care for the livestock. Girls and women also collect firewood, cook, and feed the children as well as wash the clothes and the utensils (Affi, 2011). These household chores affect their schooling, derailing their interest in school life, and easily make some to drop out of school. However, boys are not exposed to such household chores. In fact, this is a pure illustration of suppression of females which still exists among the Somali community. The downgrading of females starts right at birth when a child is born. Ululations, a high pitched shrilling sound used in times of extreme happiness and celebrations, is an aspect of Somali culture, and is often used after the birth of a boy. However, the family to whom a girl is born feels or experiences no ululations (Mire, 2002).

In the Somali culture, a girl grows while knowing that she does not have equal rights with boys. This culture starts right from the family where the girl is born. In the Islamic law, which Somalis practise, daughters are entitled to inherit half of what the sons get. Furthermore, the Somali women are expected to submit to men and to fulfill their duties as daughters, wives, and mothers (Shurgin, 2011). Such culture instilled in girls, would make them view themselves as destined to occupy a lower hierarchy or socio-economic status in life than boys or men in future. It is a culture which would discourage girls from competing with boys in school for the scarce available job opportunities in future. Parents who follow this culture would also prefer educating boys to girls in times of financial difficulties.

In the family unit, women and by extension girls, are still not treated on equal terms like men or husbands. At home, it is customary for women and girls in the family to serve food to men first, and then eat with children after the man has finished. The food served first to the husband is more special in terms of bigger quantity and also sometimes better prepared. Even with this arrangement, girls are not treated equally like boys. This is because, after serving the father first, next to be served are the boys. Lastly, the mothers, girls and children feed together. Most Somalis prefer eating by scooping food from a bowl with the first three fingers of their right hand or with a spoon. They do not eat with left hand, like with other Muslims, since they believe the left hand is unclean because it is used for washing the body (Shurgin, 2011). This scenario of girls eating last, together with their mothers and young children, after their fathers and boys, illustrates how this culture still negatively interferes with their schoolwork.

In many Kenyan communities, it is the males who built the traditional houses for the family as well as slaughtering and skinning of goats and sheep meant for domestic food. The opposite is true of the pastoralist Somali tribe. In fact, it is the women assisted by girls who have the responsibility of 'building and dismantling the nomadic *aqal* (house or hut)' as the Somalis move from place to place in search of grass and water for their livestock (Affi, 2011). This traditional shelter of the Somalis (*aqal*), is dome-shaped, collapsible hut made from poles covered with hides, woven fibre, or sometimes cloth or tin. Easy to break and reassemble, the *aqal* is carried on a camel's back and set up by women (also assisted by their daughters) of the family once a new camp is made. A bed made from woven stakes covered with hides is the only furniture in the *aqal*. Nomads have few possessions, and each item has practical uses. Cooking utensils, storage boxes, stools, woven mats, and water bags are among the family's only household goods, and this makes it easy for a family to shift from one place to another in search of water and pasture. The fact that women and girls are assigned such responsibilities, which majority of Kenyan communities view as a preserve of males, demonstrates the suppression of females in the Somali culture, which in turn negatively suppresses the schooling of girls.

Mire (2002), explains that women or girls in the Somali community are not encouraged to pursue education. They are confined to the home, forced to do all the household chores. When fathers arrive from their jobs, while boys arrive from day schools, you find only girls working around the clock. Girls and women are ordered to prepare a pail of water for bathing and serve them food. However, the men and boys totter towards their sleeping rooms; while women and girls start washing the utensils (Mire, 2002). Such overloading of girls with so much domestic and household chores make many lose interest in schooling and instead see their role as destined in the kitchen, some even drop out of school because their parents are not encouraging them to pursue and concentrate on their schoolwork. Too much involvement in domestic work makes girls not to attend to their homework from school which then is left undone. Therefore, such girls completely lose interest in school since there is no time for schoolwork at home.

Despite the Kenyan government prohibition of female genital mutilation (FGM), some Somali parents still practice it on their girls. Despite the condemnation by the United Nations and modern Muslim leaders to FGM, these Somali girls are still being forced to undergo the dangerous and disfiguring circumcision rite (Shurgin, 2011). Some girls undergo this ordeal as young as six years of age or even some undergo it as late as when ten years of age depending on the wish of their parents. However, for boys, the circumcision rite begins as early as when the boy is one day old still, depending on the wish of the parent. Therefore, this culture negatively delays the time of starting formal elementary schooling of the affected girls. This culture makes many girls undergo schooling when they are very mature, and coupled with early engagements to potential husbands while in school by their parents; this easily contributes to girls dropping out of school early for marriage. This Somali culture that interferes negatively with the schooling of girls was reflected in the following sentiments by a teacher in an interview:

Female genital mutilation still occurs among some Somalis especially those in the rural areas and among the uneducated ones. Boys are circumcised as early as even when they are one (1) day old. However, girls are circumcised as late as when they are even ten (10) years old. This culture interferes badly with the education of girls since their starting age of formal schooling is delayed. If it occurs so late as when they are ten (10) years old, the girls leave school to go for the initiation ceremony, and this also negatively interferes with their continuity of schooling (Personal communication with Female teacher, Garissa, September 15, 2011).

All the targeted students, teachers and headteachers participated in the study. Figure 1 shows the class levels of the students.

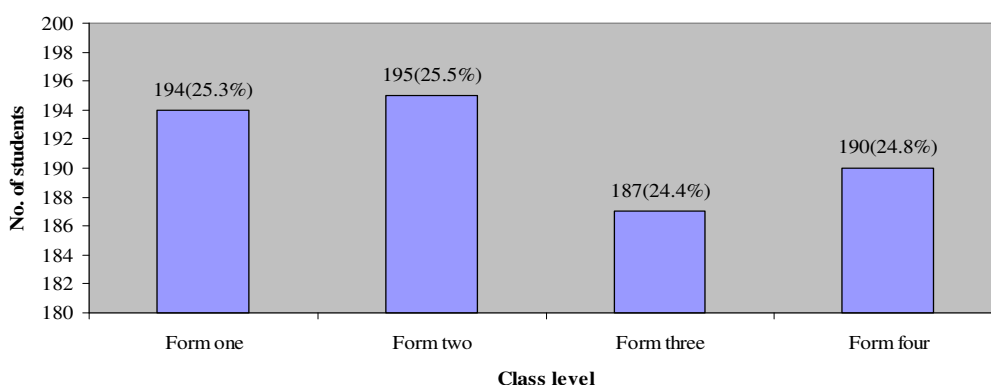


Figure 1: Bar chart showing class levels of the students who participated in the study

Figure 1 illustrates that 194 (25.3%) students were in form one, 195 (25.5%) were in form two, 187 (24.4%) were in form three while 190 (24.8%) were in form four. This implies that there was a fair distribution of the questionnaires among the students in all classes hence the author would get reliable information from the students on the extent of drug abuse in their respective classes.

A gender – frequency table (1) on the questionnaire return rate in schools is shown below. The table shows that 475 of 766 respondents represented males’ responses to the questionnaires while only 291 of 766 represented females.

Table 1: Gender frequency table showing the total number of students responded to questionnaires

Gender	Students who positively responded to questionnaires	
	<i>number</i>	<i>per cent</i>
Male	475	62
Females	291	38
Total	766	100

Table 1 above shows that more boys (62 %) than girls (38 %) responded to questionnaires. One of the obvious explanations is that there were few girls than boys since there were only four girls’ secondary schools out of the total fourteen secondary schools in Garissa and Ijara constituencies. Those students who responded to the questionnaires also positively indicated that drugs were abused in their respective schools. Out of the fourteen unanswered questionnaires, nine were for girls while four were for boys. The main reason is that the community in these areas gives boys more freedom to do what they want while girls fear their community which views them as of lower status than boys (Mire, 2002 & Shurgin, 2011).

4. Conclusion

There is no gender balance in terms of dropout, enrollment rates, completion rates and transition rates in schools in Garissa and Ijara Constituencies. This is as a result of ignorance and the nomadic lifestyles which bind the communities to cultural practices while suppressing girl child education. It is evident that girl’ participation in primary education in the two constituencies is bedeviled by many impediments. The impediments range from the societal culture and beliefs, general parental attitude towards female education, societal biases towards duties of females in the home as well as some factors that operate within the school. Girls tend to be socialized to be passive in society and even those who enroll in school do not put much effort in their studies as the society rates their capacity as mothers to be more important than any other capacity that they may possess.

5. Recommendations

1. To improve girl' participation in primary education, the gateway to any future, there should be more concerted efforts to sensitize the community as a whole on the importance of girls' education and discourage against early marriage of the girls.. Otherwise, any measures taken to make the school environment more female friendly may not yield much impact if the community does not change its perception regarding the role of the girl in a family setup. Measures to improve female participation in education should therefore emanate from the family level
2. The community should be encouraged to discard female circumcision and more so it's symbolic meaning.
3. More boarding primary schools for girls should be started, or the existing ones provided with boarding facilities in order to cushion the girls from the effects of nomadic life of their parents.
4. There is need to reduce the amount of domestic chores that school going girls should be performing at home after school.

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BIO- DATA

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