



CULTURAL PRACTICES CONTRIBUTING TO GIRLS' DROPOUT RATE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KAJIADO COUNTY: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

While enrolment is steadily increasing in Kenya, dropout rate continues to be high, with over 50% of the children, both boys and girls dropping out before completing the primary cycle. This paper analyses the cultural practices that contribute to the increasing dropout rates of girls in primary schools in Kajiado County of Kenya, by making detailed review of available literature. The past reviews on the school dropout phenomenon have been carried out regardless of gender and specific cultural practices that occasioned dropout rate among girls in primary school. This paper demonstrates that cultural practices contribute to increase dropout rate practically for female student. The conceptual framework provided in this study illustrates how cultural practices affect pupil's educational outcome which consequently produce dropout among girls. The study recommends the development of appropriate policies and intervention strategies to improve enrolment and retention of girl child in primary schools in Kenya.

Key word: Cultural practices, girl child dropout, primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a critical role in community's social, economic and political development of any nation. The prevalence of unequal distribution of education among boys and girls hinder the development at every stage of a nation. The basic education Act of 2013 recognises that every child has a right to free and compulsory basic education (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The government is committed to ensuring that quality basic education conforms to the set standards and compulsory admission attendance, retention, and completion of basic education by all pupils (MOEST, 2005a). According to Sifuna (2005) the government of Kenya (GOK) was not committed to providing and improving the standard and quality of education in pastoral communities. These have promoted low enrolment and high dropout rate but boys are marginally better than girls. New statistics indicates that the enrolment and retention of girls have consistently lagged behind that of boys among the Maasai of Kajiado County (Ouda and Ndungu, 2016).

A growing body of literature indicates that girl's dropout rates are higher as compared to boys in most parts of the world. According to UNESCO (2012) the dropout rate is higher for girls in 49 counties as compared to boys. Chimombo (1999) observes that though the enrollment in school is almost the same for girls and boys, boys have a higher likelihood of continuing schooling than girls. Holmes (2003) also found that girls tend to drop out of

school earlier as compared to boys. According to Ouda and Ndungu (2016) enrollment and retention of girls hence consistently lagged behind that of boys among the Maasai of Kajiado County.

According to Shahidul and Karim (2015) noted that dropout varies by gender and girls tend to dropout earlier compared to boys, this indicates that there are some unique factors contributing to the increase in the dropout rate particularly for girls. The study asserts that, there are some factors which extensively contribute to an increase in girl's dropout though those factors also impact on boys dropout rate. The study of Holcamp(2009) also support this argument when the author found that some cultural practices highly impact girls dropout through those factors also contribute to boys dropout rate but to a lesser extent. Therefore some particular practices produce poor educational outcome which consequently increase the dropout rate for girls. The main objective for this paper therefore is to clarify which cultural practices contribute to the increase in the dropout rate particularly among girls among the Maasai of Kajiado County, Kenya which are not clear in the past review. Dropout rate does not occur through a single factor, it is based on particular region, society and cultural perspectives in various parts of the world. In this paper, cultural practices are reviewed and a conceptual framework of dropout for girls which can give further opportunity to research to view the relevant cultural practices that occasion girls dropout among the Maasai of Kajiado County. Specific cultural practices influence the dropout rate of girls in primary schools in Kajiado County, Kenya. The study reviewed literature based on the themes of cultural practices; early marriage, cultural beliefs, initiations and status of women in the community as guided by the objectives of the study.

Initiation Ceremonies

Cultural practices such as initiation ceremonies are responsible for girl's failure to complete primary education. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is recognize internationally as a violation of human right and women (UN, 2007). The practice reflects deep-rooted in equality between men and women, and constitute discrimination against women (WHO, 2011). This cultural practice is skill being practiced by the Maasai community in Kajiado County of Kenya. According to Achoka et al (2013) female genital mutilation is practice as a rite of passage among the Maasai. This practice affects girls education and hence dropout. This is because girls undergo through FGM at the age that in the Kenyan education system the girls are beginning or completing their primary cycle. The effect of this rite of passage is that the girls are given a licence to get married, dropping out of schools. (Nyagah & Luketero, 2016).

In Kajiado County, areas where FGM is skill being practiced on the zone. Once initiated some girls develop negative attitude towards teachers and school. The initiated girls feel that they are now grown-up women who should get married. This is because among the Maasai community girls are expected to get married immediately once they have been initiated (Korir, 2001). According to Abagi and Odipo (1999) pressure is put on them to leave school and meet societal expectations. The practice of female genital mutilation is one of the practices that interfere with girl's access and retention in school. The practice in addition to resulting in absence from school also has negative effect on some girl's attitude towards schooling (FEMSA 1997). Those ceremonies are often held during the school term and result in girls missing a considerable amount of school time, hence poor performance, repetition and ultimately school dropout.

Cultural Beliefs

In a study commissioned by the United Nation on the status and role of women in Eastern Africa, it was argued that the attitude of parents on girl's education has not kept pace with that of boys. Traditional attitude towards girls and their place in the society militate against the education of girls. Among the Maasai of Kajiado County some parents fear to send their girls to school because of fear of loss of income or they withdraw them as they approach puberty stage for initiation and to be married off. Chege and Sifuna (2006) claimed that many cultures, in particular the Maasai favour education of boys more than girls. Maritim (1990) noted that, faced with economic problems parents, particularly in the rural areas, are forced to carefully select their children to go to school. In this selection process, girls are disadvantage as boys are favoured because they are regarded as the long term investment and security in old age. This is consistent with the study that was carried out in 2001 among the Maasai communities of Kajiado.

According to Korir (2001) one of the reasons for not educating Maasai girls was the fact that they forget or abandon their parents and their tradition and lost respect for the decisions of the elder. In the study some parents alleged that education led to immoral behavior such as fornication and even prostitution among some of the educated girls from Maasai community, while other parents believed that education made the girls marry people of their own who may not be ready to pay bride price. The study was consistent with the study carried out by Maleche (1972) that assert that parents were unwilling to educate their daughters because education make them discontented and immoral. According to UNESCO (2010) indicate the tradition values are stronger in rural area in developing counties compared to urban areas and people often do not allow girls to leave homes even for schools. This implies to the Maasai of rural Kajiado County.

EARLY MARRIAGE

Early marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old, in accordance to article 1 of the convention of the right of the child (Berich, 2013). Clark, Bruce and Dude (2004) found that 30 percent of women in developing countries are married at the age of 18 years or below. Buch (2005) asserts that early marriage is a barrier to girl's education as young girls drop out of school to get married which impacts negatively on the future of girls young generation. According to Kwasiga (2000) certain customary practices such as early marriage have negative effects on education of girls in marginalized areas. Mansory (2007) found that early marriage is the foremost cause of early school dropout of girls among pastoral communities.

The reason for early marriage varies from one community to another, most studies indicates that the dominant reason for early marriages is culture. According to International Research for Women (2007) children are betrothed before birth to cement the strategic alliance between families. This aspect of betrothed is also common among the Maasai of Kenya. In Kajiado, the culture provides for respecting the marriage practices of traditional marriage, whereby a person must be married as young as 12 for female and 14 males enhancing the practices Berich (2013). This makes it difficult for girl to continue their education. Among the Maasai, girls are made to choose between education and the tribal values. Obviously most of them opt for the values that come from positively valued and more emotionally attractive practices into their system of action (Korir, 2001). Religious and traditional norms dictate that girls are to be married at certain age and when they are in school with no prospects of marriage when they mature, in puts the family in disgrace. The girls are therefore pulled out

of school as soon as they reach maturity to prepare them for marriage (FAWE, 1997). These are norms that are inconsistent with schooling (Lamine, 1983).

The status of women among the Maasai of Kajiado also contribute to early marriage .accordingly to world youth report (2003). Women are seen as inferior and hence they are neglected and despised. Parents prefer to educate boys and marry off their girls at early age, Boys are therefore expected to acquire as much training as Possible. So as to attain a higher status as head of the respective household. Girls on the other hand are expected to be dependent on their husband for their livelihood once they marry (Korir,2001). This explain why the Masaai parents and in particular mothers are reluctant to send their daughters to school. In Kenya the female: male ratio of marriage before the age of 18 is 21:1, it is even worst among the Maasai community.(Nawal.2006).

Bride wealth enhances early marriage among the Maasai as it is highly valued and encouraged (UNICEF,2001). The practice is a source of wealth and prestige when given in form of livestock such as cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys. The more livestock one has the more wealthy; one is, hence, more respect in the practice. From an economic point of view , some house hold view girls as “gold mines” that increase family wealth through combined cattle and cash dowries. On the other hand, parents are relieved of the economic constraints that come along with rising of children (“Barriers to girls “education, 2007). This occasional girl’s dropout in school and eventual early marriage.

Conceptual framework of cultural practices affecting girls dropout rate

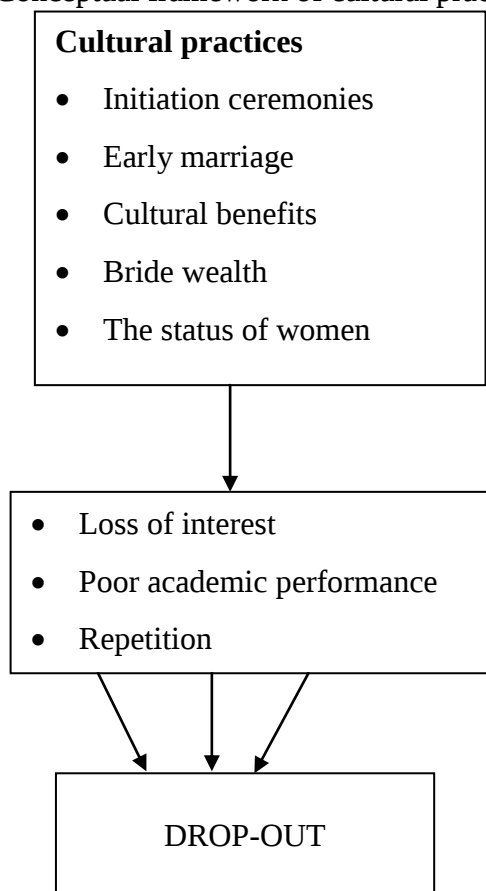


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of cultural practices which contribute to girls dropout in primary schools (source, author)

The conceptual framework shows that cultural practices such as initiation ceremonies, early marriage, cultural belief, bride wealth and the status of women in the society are responsible for school dropout in primary schools in Kajiado County. Girls are expected to participate in initiation ceremonies aimed at preparing them for womanhood and marriage. This affect education in general and when they return to school their performance is poor, leading to repetition and loss of interest of schooling and eventually they dropout. Another effect of these ceremonies is that, once initiated, girls regard themselves as adults and ready for marriage and no longer see the need to concentrate on the school work as they feel that it would be of little use to them in their future roles as mothers and wives.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reveals that cultural practices which include early marriage, initiation, cultural beliefs, bride wealth and the status of women in the maasai community contribute substantially to girls dropout in primary schools in Kajiado county. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is still being practice among the Maasai community. After this rite many girls regard themselves to be adult hence engage in sex and thus end up being pregnant and eventually dropout of school. This study also shows that early marriage is one of the main causes of girl's dropout in primary schools. After female genital mutilation majority of the girls dropout of school to get married. Early marriage is barrier to girl's education as young girl's dropout of school to be married which impact relatively on their education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the study provides important recommendations which the policy planners may adopt for future interventions. The government should plan some special policies to improve female education free for them. Although this have been tried in Kenya it is important to expand it further particularly among the pastoralist communities .Parents and community in general need to be sensitized and made aware of the right of the children and in particular the girl-child, especially to education and the right to be protected from any threats to their well being. Practices that threaten the well-being and education of girls should therefore, be challenged and abolished. Examples of such practices include female genital mutilation and early marriage. Sensitization activities should be aimed at changing the attitude of parents to the education of girls, and develop the believe that there can be no meaningful development in a county, if the education of half the population, girls and women is ignored .The government should also introduced legislation for the right of the girl child. Measures should be formulated and enforced by law to protect girls from the practices which has been obstacles to girl-child education like female genitals mutilation, should be outlawed and the communities educated about or sensitized in the disadvantages of such practices to the girls, her family and the community at large.

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