

Original Research Article

THE EFFECTS OF TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES AND EARLY MARRIAGES ON GIRLS' ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN KILOLO DISTRICT, A CASE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriages on girls' access to secondary education in Kilolo District Council; A case of public secondary schools. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The cross-sectional design was employed to the study. The population of this study was secondary school students in the selected wards of Kilolo District; teachers, ward educational officers, and ward executive officers as key informants. A random sample technique used to randomly select of 108 respondents who were secondary school's students while purposive sampling technique adopted to the selected 12 key informants for this study. A questionnaires, interview and Focused Group Discussions were used to implore information from the respondents. The Quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistic measures through the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while Qualitative data were divided into themes and then subjected to content analysis to supplement quantitative data. The study findings revealed that, lowering academic performance, increase number of school droppers and lowering attendance were among the effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriages on girls' access to secondary education at Kilolo District. Basing on the study findings, it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders should take appropriate actions to those people who forced girl's students to engaged in traditional ceremonies and early marriage with enforcement of law relating with the particular incidents, while at the same time, education on the effects of harmful cultural practicing including early marriage should be disseminating to all over the societies so as to reduce the persistence of the problem with advocacy for girls right in accessing education at all level.

Keywords:

Traditional ceremonies, Early marriage, Kilolo, Secondary School.

1.1 Introduction

Education is the best legacy a nation can give to her citizens especially the youth; this is because the development of any nation or community depends largely on the quality of education of such nation. It is generally believed that the basis of any true development must commence with the development of human resources. Access to education by women is considered a significant indicator for the progress of a society (Murphy, Belmonte & Nelson, 2009).

According to a survey, done by the UNESCO (2013) in African countries, girls seem to be doing better at key competency tests. Girls participate better in higher education than boys especially in secondary schools. Even though there has been several reforms such as free education, mobilization for child rights and child protections, in rural areas social and cultural patterns, combined with the relatively poor quality of schooling, distance from domestic environment to schools influence girls and their education to be in a disadvantaged position. Girls and their education are also disproportionately affected by cultural and economic issues like domestic duties, transport, and school fees.

Countries throughout the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR) have made progress in ensuring girls can enjoy their right to education. However, major challenges remain. At secondary level, girls' enrolment remains lower than that of boys, with a ratio of 0.97. The gap is significant in countries such as Angola (22% for boys/20% for girls), Eritrea (30%/20%), Ethiopia (30%/23%), Malawi (25%/23%), Somalia (9%/5%), Zambia (38%/35%) and Zimbabwe. In addition, repetition and drop-out rates of girls in the region remain unacceptably high throughout secondary education. The gap is significant in countries such as Angola (22% for boys/20% for girls), Eritrea (30%/2%), Ethiopia (30%/23%), Malawi (25%/23%), Somalia (9%/5%), Zambia (38%/35%) and Zimbabwe. In 2011, boys in Somalia had higher completion rates than girls (27.3% for girls/44.9% for boys), Mozambique (38.3%/32.6%), Malawi (22.3%/13.8%) and Burundi (51%/48.3%) (UNESCO, 2013).

In Tanzania, the constitution of United Republic of Tanzania provides equality in education at all levels regardless of gender, religion, and tribe; hence give the opportunity for all people to acquire education as they can (URT 2005). However, the country suffers from gender inequality regarding access and success in girls' education. The problem of access to education opportunities has remained as a big problem among girls (Temba, Leticia & Msabila, 2013).

The data indicate that the number of girls who complete different levels of education is deficient. In the post-primary level, girls' participation in education is significantly lower than that of boys. Gender parity indexes fall from 1.04 (whereby the number of girls' enrolment is greater than boys') in primary school to 0.65 at the higher/tertiary level of education. Similar data show that girls' enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training is still low for girls, whereby boy students accounted for 55 percent of learners in 2008. The situation is essentially bad at the higher education level; girls' enrolment has barely reached 34% (UNESCO, 2011). Repetition and dropout proportion are significantly higher to girls while completion rate is very low; also, there is a strong gender inequality in providing education and performance in education between girls and boys (USAID, 2013).

Kilolo District Council has a total of 114 primary schools; all these schools have 55,621 pupil's enrolment. A total of 27,274 (49%) are boys and 28,347 (51%) are girls. There are 39 registered Secondary schools (24 Government Secondary Schools and 15 Private Secondary Schools), among these 4 are "A" level schools of which two are government schools. The 24 government schools are located in 22 wards. Total number of students in these schools is 12,760 while 5955(46.67%) are boys and 6,805(53.33%) are girls (Kilolo District Council Strategic Plan, 2021). Statistics from Kilolo District show that the number of girls required to study in secondary schools has rapidly increased but the percentage of those who do not report in

secondary schools is increasing yearly, for example in 2016; approximately 18.8% didn't report while in 2018; 22.3% didn't report (Kilolo District Education Office, 2019).

Few studies have been conducted regarding factors affecting girls' access to secondary school (Mdachi, 2011; Songawa Songa, 2012; Mtinda, 2015; Mollel & Chong, 2017). Among the associated factors affecting girls access to secondary education are traditional ceremonies and early marriage, however there little and current findings which describe the influence of traditional ceremonies and early marriage on girls access to secondary education at Kilolo District, therefore this study sought to assess the effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriage on girls' access to secondary education at Kilolo District so as to revealed the reality.

2.0 Materials and Methods

2.1 Materials

Traditionally, girls have been expected to be mothers and wives, in Africa and in many other parts of the world even in those places where women participate in productive activities they are still expected to perform their main roles which are being wives and mothers and that when it happens that women are engaging in activities which are considered to be males centered, they are not treated fairly (Kahise, 2013). Parker *et al.* (1997) provides that traditionally, the only roles available to women were those of wives and mothers. Women were thus seen as nurturers and mainly as providing support for men who worked to provide for the family. Being physically weaker, women were therefore also perceived as being less capable and requiring the protection and guidance of men (Parker *et al.*, 1997). These attitudes have prevailed even in current times when socio-economic changes have resulted in changes to roles women are now expected to undertake.

A study conducted by Ray & Lancaster (2003) on cultural practices that compromise girls' access to education in Somalia particularly in Puntland found out that their participation in complete cycle of education is still poor due to practices associated by cultures and indeed in many areas in Africa. Girls like in traditional times continue to be considered the property of their families, with little or no say in their future. Traditional customs describe domestic roles for girls. Domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning the house which take up a lot of time are assigned to girls. Girls therefore have little time for study or do homework. Household's chores affect school work more particularly the education of girls who are overwhelmed by a burden of work at home and at school. In other areas of Puntland, girls and women cross over into neighboring towns and villages to carry out trading which is often a lucrative activity. Their success has been found to lure other school girls to try this business, leading to school dropout.

Mollel & Chong (2017) in a study on Socio-cultural Constraints of Girls' Access to Education in Mtwara District provided that traditional practices like Unyago (which is considered as a local rite of passage, which girls undergo through it at an early stage of maturity, aims to introduce girls to social roles and sexually related roles as women in Mtwara) affects girls' education. Study results indicate that girls who undergo Unyago become rude to teachers as agreed by 56.7% of respondents. Also, the girls who undergo Unyago isolate themselves from those who do not undergo Unyago as agreed by 62.7% of respondents, likewise the girls who undergo Unyago use vulgar language to those who do not undergo Unyago as agreed by 57.3% of respondents. These ceremonies also increase absenteeism of girls in school as 60.7% of

respondents agreed on it, moreover Unyago increase girls' drop out of school as agreed by the majority 66.7% of respondents.

Further, Kainuwa & Najeemah, (2013) found that girls who undergo initiation ceremonies considers themselves as adults and perceive school as an institution for children. As a result of this, they become rude to teachers, and often misbehave and become absenteeism in school hence perform badly in their studies and lead to drop out of school and opt to be married. Likewise, Helgesson, (2001) found that some girls lost their interest in schools soon after they pass through the initiation ceremony. They were introduced to another kind of life than they used to hence thoughts about boyfriends, beauty and marriage became more significant to them than studies. The initiation ceremony considerably based on sex; hence it encourages many girls to engage in sexual relationships immediately after undergoing through Unyago ceremony. In view of the literature reviewed on traditional ceremonies and early marriages' effects on girls' access to secondary education, the current study focused on how these two variables hindering girl's access to secondary education at Kilolo District, Iringa.

2.2 Methods

The study was conducted in Tanzania, Iringa Region at Kilolo District in public secondary schools whereby the attendance of girls in secondary school in Kilolo District is still low despite the statistics showing the highest number of girls' enrolment to secondary schools due to cultural practices including traditional ceremonies and early marriage (Kilolo District Council Strategic Plan, 2015/2016-2020/2021). The nature of the study required the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative approach. The cross-sectional design was employed to the study while the sample size of the study including 108 respondents who were selected used simple random sampling technique from secondary schools found within Kilolo District with additional of 12 key informants who are selected used purposive sampling technique so as to add more description to the study findings. The data were collected using a questionnaires, interview and Focused Group Discussions. The Quantitative data collected from the field was verified, edited, summarized, and organized to answer each objective in the study. Respondent' s answers were assigned numerical and ordinal codes and all questions and their codes were entered and saved in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which helps analysis quickly and easily while Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis technique where by data were organized and summarized into different themes based on conceptual description of ideas.

3.0 Results and Discussion of the Findings

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

In this study, the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as sex, age and education level were assessed. The researchers attempted to associate the demographic variables with the aim of understanding the effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriages on girls' access to secondary education in Kilolo district. The demographic data results have indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Response on the demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=108)

Categories of Variables	Variables	Frequency	Percent
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<i>Sex of Respondents</i>	Female	57	53.0%
	Male	51	47.0%
<i>Total</i>		108	100.0%
<i>Age of Respondents</i>	-14 ages	31	29.0%
	+15 ages	77	71.0%
<i>Total</i>		108	100.0%
<i>Education Level Of respondents</i>	Ordinary level	69	64.0%
	Advance level	39	36.0%
<i>Total</i>		108	100.0%

Source: Research data, 2021.

The result indicates that of 108 secondary school students, 57 (53%) were female and 51 (47%) were male. The results further show that majority of respondents 77 (71%) aged +15, 31 (29%) aged -14. The result of the demographic characteristics of respondents also indicates that 69 (64%) were Ordinary level students and 39 (36%) were advance level students. The findings imply that all the demographic characteristics of respondents were considered in this study.

3.2 Traditional ceremonies and early marriages' effects on girls' access to secondary education

This study aimed to find out the effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriages on girls' access to secondary education at Kilolo District. The study revealed that, all respondents agreed that traditional ceremonies and early marriage affect negatively the access of secondary education to girls. Furthermore, the findings indicate that among major effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriage practices revealed were:

- The increase of number of school dropouts
- Poor academic performance
- School absenteeism

The above variables were indicated to the tables 2 below and described to the below discussion

Table 2: Response on the traditional ceremonies and early marriages' effects on girls' access to secondary education (N=108)

Categories of Variables	Frequency	Percent
School absenteeism	13	12.0%
Lowering academic performance	17	16.0%
Increase number of school dropout	78	72.0%
<i>Total</i>	108	100.0%

Source: Research data, 2021.

3.2.1 School absenteeism

The study revealed that, out of 108 secondary school students, 13 (12%) were considered school absenteeism as one among the effects of the traditional ceremonies and early marriages on girls' access to secondary education. They considered that, when traditional ceremonies such as Unyago practicing to secondary school students who are reach at puberty age, most of them become absent to school for not less than two weeks up to one months something which caused them to dropout school, likewise, those who were practicing Unyago were more targeted to early marriage practicing so as to feed their family and helping them in overcoming their household poverty, hence they either denied their right of accessing education or they faced a strong obstacle on the way of obtaining their education right. This evidenced by almost all key informants of the study including secondary school teachers and Ward educational Officer.

The findings above correspond with the findings of the interview held with teachers, whereby they revealed that, traditional ceremonies and early marriage are practiced within the village as there is a huge number of school dropouts due to early pregnancy and low academic performance among girls students, where they further exposed that most of the parents involve their daughters into the practices of traditional ceremonies and early marriage due to economic reasons which mostly untie them from poverty, and also low level of education among parents regarding the side effects of practicing traditional ceremonies and early marriage.

... In each period when the school is opened, we encountered the challenge of school dropout where most of them were girl students compared to boys, and when we trace back, we found out that, the girls are pregnant and they are already married and their parents are aware of that and they permit... (Teacher 3)

Another key informant added that:

... Most of the parents live under poverty line thus they have tendency of using their daughters as assets to push them back to the life but forgetting totally about the effects resulted from practicing early marriage and traditional ceremonies such as initiation ceremonies most known as "Unyago" (Teacher 4)

Additional the interview held with Ward Educational Officers, is supportive to the findings above as if exposed that parents mostly limiting the access of education to girls due to their lust of getting money and honor to their families, thus they automatically engage their daughters to practice traditional ceremonies and early marriage.

... In our village they practice it for sure, the major reason was lust of small things from rich families nothing else but they always regret later sure am telling you... (Ward educational officer 2)

The findings of this study are in consistency with the study of Munthali (2010) who investigated the education of girls in Malawi regarding its access and retention. The study employed qualitative method, where semi-structured and unstructured interview, observation and focused group were employed to collect data from 229 respondents. The findings exposed initiation ceremonies as a factor which continued to affect girls' education particularly study area, findings further elaborated that initiation ceremonies bring dilemmas for girls as they are affecting their

school attendance and performance and even leading to dropout, initiated girls find it difficult to return to formal school or concentrate on their studies because their next expectation is marriage.

Based on researcher's views considered that, traditional ceremonies like Unyago take much time than any other ceremony in the society, therefore, girls were engaged in traditional ceremonies, they become absenteeism in secondary school, while sometime during or after the ceremonies, they faced other obstacles of early and forced marriage, hence their dream of accessing education ended here.

3.2.2 Low academic performance

Low academic performance is also among the effects of early marriage and traditional ceremonies on girl's access to education, out of 108 respondents from public secondary school, 17 (16%) mentioned lowering academic performance as the traditional ceremonies and early marriages' effects on girls' access to secondary education. They considered that, girls who forced to practicing traditional ceremonies were likely to have poor academic performance since they engaged much in performing what they learnt during traditional ceremonies classes including sexual practicing, this also motivate them to engage in early marriage since they were aware with all things that a woman supposed to do to men while they are in a domestic environment. Likewise, girls who were already faced early marriage they are more likely to focus in household matters and ignore their school responsibility. This evidenced by one among the key informants who assert that:

...Many girl's students who already engaged in traditional ceremonies or early marriage they have a tendency of having low academic performance, many of them like to engage in social and domestic activities instead of focusing in their study... (Teacher 1).

Likewise, another key informant added that:

...girls who faced early marriage they are in danger condition of stopping to attend in school due to the extent of domestic responsibilities, early pregnancy and sometimes feeling shameful to their school colleagues, this also influencing them to dropout school... (Teacher 6).

This also supported by Kihombo (2017) who assessed factors contributing to girls' school attendance and academic performance on form four national examinations in Mbeya Region, Tanzania. Study employed grounded theory approach where 98 respondents including students, teacher and parents were employed for data collection. The study found that, cultural practices including traditional and customary practices among ethnic groups in study area cause some girls to have low attendance and poor performance due to trauma where the study further expose that, initiation rituals to shape adolescent sexuality was among of the cultural practices, once a girl is ritually initiated may be sexuality active resulting in pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Based on researcher's views considered that, traditional ceremonies are root cause for hindering girl's access to education while early marriage become an immediate results of traditional

ceremonies which denied girls to access secondary education especially in public primary schools and caused number of catastrophes like early pregnancy, pre-mature delivery and death.

3.2.3 The increase of number of school dropouts

The result indicates that, out of 108 secondary school students 78 (72%) revealed that, increase number of school dropout as a major traditional ceremonies and early marriages' effects on girls' access to secondary education. Many girls who involved in traditional ceremonies changed their direction form education engagement to social engagement including marriage, they considered that, education is the way of losing their time and efforts while marriage is the only way to success, however some of them faced early pregnancy when decided to practicing what they learnt during the training sessions of traditional ceremonies especially Unyago. This revealed by one among the key informants of the study who asserts that:

...traditional ceremonies motivate girls' students to engage in early marriage, girls need to practice what they learnt from their elders, hence they become ready to accept early marriage rather than proceeding with their study... (Teacher 7).

In line with above findings, one key informants added that:

...girls who attended traditional ceremonies were more in danger of facing forced and early marriage, their parents forced them to engage in early marriage in order to gain money, social status and social rank within their society... (Ward Education Officer 1).

The findings of this study are in line with the study conducted with INTERSOS & European commission (2016) on examining barriers to girls' education in South Central Somalia where the study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data from 384 participants. The Findings exposed that, early marriage is the second and most significant barrier to girl child education in South-Central Somalia, 29.2% of the survey respondents said early and forced marriage is a big threat to girl child education as it ends their dream of education plunging them into mother and caretaker roles hence hindering their chances of progressing in school.

Similarly, Unterhalter & Heslop (2011) conducted a study on transforming education for girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT). A cross country analysis baseline research was adopted where collected data obtained through the survey interview and questionnaire from 1053 respondents. The study revealed that, early marriages and cultural practices contribute to low attendance and academic performance among girls in secondary school. Further it revealed that, in some societies in Tanzania, traditional norms and religions encourage girls to drop out from school and get married because there is an expectation that girls need to be married at a certain age. These practices lead some parents to pull girls out of school as soon as they reach maturity in order to prepare them for marriage.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The major objective of this study was to find out the effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriage on girl's access to education at Kilolo District in public secondary schools as a case study area. Study revealed that, school absenteeism, poor academic performance and school dropout were among the identifiable effects of traditional ceremonies and early marriage on girl's access to secondary education at Kilolo district. The study revealed that, girls used school time to engage in traditional ceremonies especially *Unyago* while at the same time, those who faced early marriage were more in danger of becoming absents to school. Likewise, girls who received knowledge on traditional ceremonies like *Unyago* and those who already faced early marriage they considered more social issues including domestic activities rather than school responsibilities, hence they faced poor academic performance. However, those girls who involved in traditional ceremonies were also in danger of facing early marriage caused by their parents so as to obtain wealth and social status. Hence girl's access to education become a serious persisting problem in Kilolo District.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders should take appropriate action to those people who forced girl's students to engaged in traditional ceremonies and early marriage with enforcement of law relating with the particular incidents, while at the same time, education on the effects of harmful cultural practicing including early marriage should be disseminating to all over the societies so as to avoid the persistence of the problem with advocacy for girls right of accessing education at all level.

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