



**THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL BELIEFS CEREMONIES
ON GIRL'S ACCESS TO SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION
PROVISION IN TANZANIA: A CASE OF BENA TRIBAL
IN NJOMBE, TANZANIA**

Leopard Jacob Mwalongoⁱ

The Northeast Normal University,
5268 Renmin Street, Changchung City,
Post Code 130024, Jilin, China

Abstract:

The aim of the study was to examine the role of traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies on girls' access to secondary school education provision in Tanzania. The study was done in urban Njombe region. Specifically at Luhororo, Uwemba and Mpechi secondary, and also at Luponde Madobole and Mkela primary school. The targeted population was students and parents. The study employed qualitative approach. Randomly and purposive sampling were used. Data were collected through structured and semi-structured interview. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that, most of the traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies does not fervor the equal chance for boys and girls in provision of education specifically secondary education in Tanzania. Also the girls' access to formal education been hampered by traditional convictions that girls do not need education, because their main responsibility is limited within the household. The study recommended that the society needs powerful traditional culturally beliefs based campaigns to enable it eliminate all traditional practices, beliefs and attitudes that discriminate against girls' access to secondary education in Tanzania.

Keywords: traditional cultural beliefs, girls, Bena tribal, education

1. Introduction

Education has been the most potent tool since the evolution of man. Education was used to accumulate useful knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the environment and development of man. Therefore, education has been used to pass the accumulated knowledge, skills and experience from one generation to the next (Lawuo, 1978). Education can be grouped into two, informal and formal education. Informal

ⁱ Correspondence: email leopardmwalongo@yahoo.co.uk

education can be defined as education that was given to African youth prior to inception/institution of western formal type of education and was also called Indigenous Education (Marah, 2006; Adeyinka and Adeyemi, 2003; Ocitti, 1973). Indigenous education defined the integrated social, cultural, artistic, religious and recreational life of the respective ethnic group. It started at birth and continued into adulthood (Marah, 2006). In this case, this study is looking for the role of traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies (informal education) on the access and provision of formal education to girls in Tanzania.

Although western formal education was welcome by African parents during the colonial era, but studies that were done on formal education in Tanzania revealed that there is huge segregation between man and women under traditional cultural beliefs for instance in terms of access to schooling, African girls were at the bottom of the hierarchy (Swai, 1991; Kisanga and Katunzi, 1997). Further, studies show that girls' access to formal education has always been hampered by traditional convictions that girls do not need education, because their main responsibility is limited within the household (Garzon, 2006). Moreover, according to Harding (2000), social cultural barriers are mentioned to be factors that hinder girls' access to education for fear that they will transfer their knowledge, prestige and income into the family in which they will marry. In order to address this problem, there are already several initiatives, nationally and internationally that are geared to help girls' access to school. These include world education forum, global plans and other organizations like United Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Although there is a certain level of equality among a boy and girl children in terms of access to education in some areas, but still, there exist some customs and traditions, which work against the rights to education of a girl child particularly in rural areas (UNICEF, 1994). For example, in Njombe Rural District, in Tanzania formal education for a girl child is considered not important because it is to the boy child who is groomed and prepared to be the family head who will also be able to extend the family and inherit the family's wealth (UNICEF, 1994).

In Yemen, for example, it is mentioned by UNDP (2005) report that it has the largest gaps in the world on girls' access to education. The report reveals that in Yemen's rural areas, only 30% of girls get access to education in primary schools. The major obstacle mentioned in the UNDP (2005) report for girls' access to education includes cultural traditions, which continue to keep women at a lower status in society. Cited examples include, avoiding casual mixing of sexes in schools and sheltered environment within which girls are brought up. In Niger, also, girls' access to education is lower at 25.3 % (UNESCO, 2000).

2. Statement of the problem

Evidence from various studies has demonstrated that certain groups of individuals within the community such as girls have unequal access to formal education compared to boys despite the fact that education was considered to be one of the basic rights of

human beings (United Nations, 1949). Several reasons notably, traditional cultural beliefs, teachings ceremonies and practices have been revealed to deny girls access to education (UNICEF, 1994; UNDP, 2005; and UNESCO, 2000). Most parents feel that it is useless to educate their daughters because they do not expect much from them and that girls are not permanent members of the family, for after marriage they would leave home taking benefits of education to the husband's family rather than her own (Malekela, 1996; Hari, 2007). Alan (1997) as cited in Mangia (2003) also argues that the denial of girls' access to formal education was deeply rooted in traditional teachings ceremonies, beliefs, practices and cultural attitudes within families and society at large. The evidence shows that the huge differences on education provision starts during secondary education in Tanzania. This study examines the role of traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies on girl's access to education in Bena tribal in Tanzania.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of traditional Cultural beliefs on girl's access to secondary school education provision in Tanzania among Bena tribal in Njombe region.

3. Methodology

Research design refers to a plan which shows the strategy of an inquiry thought to be appropriate to the research study in question (Kothari, 2004). In this study, a qualitative research approach (descriptive design) was adopted. The approach was selected to enable the researcher examine the role of traditional Cultural beliefs ceremonies on girls access to secondary school education provision in Tanzania among Bena tribal in Njombe region. Qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to get in-depth data from respondents through their personal knowledge, experience and opinions (Best and Khan, 1992; Firestone, 1987). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), qualitative studies are highly exhaustive and reliable because they make a deep exploration of respondents to obtain purposive information. In this way, the researcher was able to collect information from respondents in an interactive manner through interview.

The sampled respondents for this study consisted three categories. The first category consisted elders and parents with children in secondary, primary and pre-primary school. The group was selected because the researcher believed that they are knowledgeable and have experiences on the role of traditional Cultural beliefs ceremonies on girl's access to secondary school education. Parents (both educated and non-educated, females and males) were also expected to give information about traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies on girl's access to secondary school education. The second category included Heads of schools and teachers in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. They were believed to be familiar and knowledgeable on issues pertaining the role of traditional Cultural beliefs ceremonies on the provision of girl's secondary education. They were expected to give information on direct and observable

effects of traditional attitudes, beliefs and practices to girl's accesses of secondary education. The third category of respondents comprised students in pre-primary primary and secondary schools. They were included in the study because they are the main focus of the study. The random sampling technique was used to sample the schools, teachers, parents, and primary, pre-primary and secondary school students for data collection.

4. Results and Discussion

The society believed that the content of traditional cultural ceremonies was useful and helped the child to fit in the society as they wanted. It made them be acceptable and be productive members in the society. Each category of what was in the content was given a certain kind of emphasis. For example, the society stressed the value of domestic chores to all children but more emphasis to girls. Whereby, slowly the girls started to think that they are not part and parcel of education of the society. It insists on domestic chores and also doing all farming activities such as digging, weeding and harvesting. During the interviews one of the elders said:

"...Twivunga uhutigila iligimilo ni nyengo ye dado Nu nyoho kangalage ulimage ulalya humwaha..." Meaning that we put emphasis on a hoe and sickle to be your father and mother, go on digging you will eat in the coming season..."

The study also found out that emphasis on domestic chores, productivity and self-reliance was good to make girls useful and productive members of the society. However, on the other side, such an emphasis had undesirable effects on girls' access to formal education. For example, the study noted that many girls in Wabena society remained at home as additional labour in their families. In Wabena society being predominantly peasant society farming activities such as digging, weeding and harvesting need intensive labour. Thus, the question of additional labour was seen to contribute to the denial of girls' access to secondary education. This was noted by two out of school girls saying:

"...They (parents) did not want me to go to secondary education... There was a lot to be done at home and my mother would not make it on her own..."

"...I left school because of work at home. At home, there were no other people to do the work. So, after the initiation ceremony my parents prohibited me to go to school. I dropped out..."

In support of the forgone content, findings by UNESCO (2005) in Malawi indicated that after puberty some parents say to their daughters:

"... now you are grown up-arrange your life, the school does not give you anything, you can't eat the school..." (UNESCO, 2005:10)

These quotations indicate that girls' formal education after initiation ceremonies in some societies has little value compared to the value of traditional Cultural beliefs content given to girls during initiation rituals. Hence, it can be argued that misconception and the interpretation of some elements in the content of traditional Cultural beliefs are obstacles to girls' access to formal education.

Another aspect in the traditional Cultural beliefs content includes assessment of fiancées qualities. Meaning, the husband selection was very important for girls in Wabena society. The selection of husbands was emphasized to girls because it was believed by society that spouse selection was among the vital steps that a girl had to pass in order to succeed in her family life. It was noted that during traditional Cultural beliefs ceremonies, girls were warned on people who were to be avoided as their prospective husbands. This was illustrated by one interview respondent who said:

"...We caution girls on behavioral characteristics to be avoided in their prospective partners such as drunkenness, laziness, selfishness, jealousy, and diseases such as epilepsy, bodily disability such as crippled, wizard/witches, thieves, and those with uncontrollable anger and so on...."

Such results concur with a study by Mangia (2003 citing Dundas, 1968) and Raum (1940) that traditionally, elements of good behaviour on part of a woman towards her husband and a husband towards his wife were imparted to both boys and girls during initiation (ibid). They helped them to adapt themselves to new life and its moral standards.

Moreover, elders and parents emphasized that traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies was a very important stage to warn girls against misbehavioural manifestations, and was meant to prepare them to marry the right candidates at the right time. Elders and parents were said to remind grown up girls to be respectful to all, humble, as well as keep themselves and their homes clean as expected mothers and wives. One of the elders summarized it in this way:

"...We warn them against some misbehavioural manifestations which they might have already exhibited before liwungo ceremony was conducted. Likewise, they are warned against some possible misbehavioural manifestations in future, for example, selfishness, laziness, jealousy..."

From the above arguments, it can be said that traditional cultural beliefs helped to shape girls' behaviour according to accepted society norms and values. In support of this argument, Mazonde (1994) showed that elderly women in Tonga society tried to reform girls from defects they had earlier observed in them. If a girl had been impolite, she was rebuked and even beaten. But really, the emphasis was on girls nothing to

boys, in this case the boys still continuous with their studies as if the behaviours involved girls only.

When the girls were asked whether or not traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies had any negative effects in pursuing their secondary education, most of the female students mentioned that psychologically, they were disturbed and mentally stimulated as they were surely prepared to be wives. Others left the place ready in mind to get married. That made them disregards the importance of secondary education and hence, lost interest in schooling. According to 10 interviewed parents, they felt that initiation rites were important, because they introduced girls about sexuality and other things that made them good, and respected community members. On the contrary, after the initiation ceremonies, the girls started sexual relations and do whatever they liked because they are now assumed to be grown up persons (UNESCO, 2005). And that is their end of schooling from there they start involved in other activities like taking care families, husband and many other activities in the society.

It was also learnt that truancy by some female students to male partners was a common problem that affected many girls after attending indigenous education and other traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies. After a while, it led to school drop-out. In support of this argument one head of school said:

"...We sometimes have a problem of girls' truancy to male partners after attending indigenous education...early marriages and pregnancies...all these occur after attending indigenous education..."

From the above views, it can be argued that indigenous education and other traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies persuaded school girls to engage in sexual affairs early. It appears that it was done as an implementation of what they were exposed to during indigenous education ceremonies. As a result, female students were affected by early marriages and pregnancies. That is similar to observations by Brock and Cammish (1997) that after initiation ceremonies, school girls ended up in early marriages and early pregnancies, all adversely affected their access and participation to formal education

In this study, the researcher also noted existence of some things/practices that girls were exposed to as part of traditional cultural beliefs that are not helpful in the Wabena society. From the responses in interview most of the female students, mentioned the following things/practices that they found not to be helpful: - *first*, widow inheritance. They said instructions on traditions and customs, which had to do with the practice of widow inheritance, were outdated and dangerous. They said such a practice accelerated the spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) like Human Immuno Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDs). It was learnt that widow inheritance was a traditional practice that was associated with the belief that a woman still needed care and support after her husband's death. Similar observations were made by Mangia (2003) in Kilimanjaro Region that widow inheritance is practiced in order to satisfy a woman's sexual needs, to control all the

wealth left by her deceased husband, to protect children and to carry out other related family responsibilities. On the contrary, Swantz (1985 cited in Mangia, 2003) argues those widows inheritances practices deny women's right to make personal choices in life and are repugnant to justice as well as morality.

They explained their concern on teachings on spouse selection and that marriage life affected them as young girls and students. One respondent wrote the following comment:

"...When they teach us: 'look our daughters, you are now grown up choose yourself a good husband...' It is a contradiction because they know that I am still in school. However, they still insist that wherever I go, I have to choose a good husband..."

The above views suggest that some teachings of initiation rites have serious setbacks for girls. It was learnt that after the rites, some girls did not go back to school, for they were considered ready to be married. In rural areas, after initiation rites, it is common for parents to choose husbands and arrange marriages for their daughters (UNESCO, 2005). That can be claimed to be one of the barriers for girls' access to secondary education in most of African countries.

The study recorded dissatisfaction among girls in relation to distribution of work among family members. It was learnt that traditionally, girls were heavily loaded with domestic duties, field work and other social roles. On this, one respondent stated:

"...Our parents teach us...'when you get married, every responsibility at home is yours...' Because I am liberated mentally I will struggle for equal rights between men and women..."

Traditionally, girls do most of the domestic works in the family, which include: fetching water, cooking, working in the field and looking after their siblings. However, girls' domestic works have negative effects on time and energy left to carry out school works such as homework, and even affect school attendance and finally the performance of the girl child in schools compared with the boy child (UNESCO, 2005).

These results imply that during traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies, female children learn several things, which the society believe would help to mould girls' behaviors, understand their roles as mothers and wives as well as face realities and challenges of life (Dundas, 1968; Mangia, 2003). Traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies content seems to form the basis for social and practical aspects of life, which enable girls in Wabena society to perform their roles in expected standards.

However, results indicated that some aspects of the contents of traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies are now facing challenges among the young generation. This is contrary to old folks who still have strong beliefs on indigenous education to girls as an essential part of life in society. It was evident that traditional education was slowly losing its strength and attachment among the young generation. Such a situation

threatens the future survival of deep cultural roots of traditional cultural beliefs of the Bena society among the current dynamic generation.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies had adversely affected girls' access to secondary education in Wabena ethnic group in Njombe region. Therefore, it can be concluded that:

Parents in Wabena in Njombe region are less willing to spend resources on girls' formal education. Educated girls were seen to benefit their husbands' families after marriage. Therefore, girls' secondary education was found to be wastage of time and money.

Still, parents have negative attitudes towards girls' access to secondary education in Njombe region. It appears to be contributed by parents' little awareness on the importance of girls' access to secondary education caused by low formal education level among parents in society.

Some aspects of traditions and customs such as early marriages, initiation ceremonies, sex preference to educate boys at the expense of girls and perceived gender roles act as barriers to girls' access to secondary education in Wabena ethnic group.

5.1 Recommendation

The society needs powerful traditional culturally beliefs based campaigns to enable it eliminate all traditional practices, beliefs and attitudes that discriminate against girls' access to secondary education. That can be done through public meetings, television programmes, radio broadcasts, video shows, and conferences by "successful" Tanzanian women. Such campaigns would enable society to change their attitudes and values so as to set their expectations in the right direction.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Studies

This study focused on effects of some aspects of traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies on girls' access to secondary education in Wabena ethnic group of Njombe region. The following researches are recommended:

Other studies should be conducted in other regions including other ethnic groups so as to have a better and broader understanding of aspects of traditional cultural beliefs that affect girls' access to education.

Hence, this study dealt with traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies mainly that affecting girls. Other studies can be done on effects of traditional cultural beliefs ceremonies on men in relation to community life.

References

- Adeyinka, A. and Adeyemi, M. (2003), The Principle and Content of African Tradition. *Education Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35(4), 425-440
- Best, J.W. and Kahn, J.V. (1992), *Research in Education*. (6th Ed) New Delhi: Prentice-Hall, Private Ltd
- Bhalalusesa, E.P. (2000), *The Right to Girls Education in Tanzania: The Tanzania Experience*. Copenhagen: Danish Centre for Human Rights
- Brock, C and Cammish, N. (1997), *Factors Affecting Female Participation in Education in Seven Developing Countries-Education Research Paper No. 9.*, DFID
- Cohen, L. Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000), *Research Methods in Education*. 5th Edition, London: Routhledge Falmer
- Dundas, C. (1968), *The Kilimanjaro People*. London: Macmillan Publishers
- Garzon, L. (2006), *Achieving Gender Equality: More Girls Receive Basic Education in Africa*. United Nations: 2006. <http://www.mediaglobal.org>
- Hari, P. (2007). *Parents and Community Attitudes towards Girls' Participation and Access to Education and Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) Subjects*. <http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/steprojects/girls%20africa/femsa/femsa6.htm>
- Harding, J. (2000), *Planning Science Education Provision in General Secondary Schools*. UNESCO – HEP
- Kothari, C.R. (2004), *Research Methodology & Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International Publication Ltd
- Lawuo, Z.E. (1978), "Indigenous Education in Pre-colonial Africa" in Ishumi A.G.M and Mmari, G.R.V. (Eds.). *The Educational Process: Theory and Practice with a Focus on Tanzania and other Countries*, pg 23-41
- Malekela, G. (1996), *Parents Attitude and Strategies Towards Education in Tanzania: Age They Changing Over Time?* In Tomas, Takala (Ed.) *Quality of Education in the Context of Culture in Developing Countries*. Helsinki: Helsinki Tampare University pg 113-127
- Marah, J.K. (2006), "The Virtues and Challenges in Traditional African Education" in the *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 1 (4) 14-20
- Mangia, R. (2003), *Existing Aspects of Indigenous education and their Effects on Women in Modern Society: a Case study of the Chagga tribe in Kilimanjaro Region*, Unpublished M.A. (Ed) Dissertation University of Dar es Salaam
- Mazonde, I.N. (1994), *Culture and Education in the Development of Africa*. London: New Jersey Publishers
- Ocitti, J.P. (1973), *African Indigenous Education: As Practiced by the Acholi of Uganda*, Kampala: East African Literature Bureau
- Raum, O.F. (1940), *Chagga Childhood*. London: Oxford University Press
- Swai, E. (1999), *Women's Educational Needs Analysis for Alternative Approach to Adult Education in Tanzania: A Case Study of Kiroka and Sembeti wards in*

- Morogoro and Kilimanjaro. Unpublished M.A. (Ed) Dissertation, University of Dar es Salaam
- UNDP, (2005), Arab Human Development Report, Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World.
- UNESCO, (2000), Scientific, Technical and Vocational Education of Girls in Africa: *Summary of 21 National Reports*, Paris
- UNESCO, (2005), Multifaceted Challenges A Study on the Barriers to Girls' Education in Zambezia Province in Mozambique. UNESCO
- UNICEF, (1994), *A Report on the study of the situation of the Girl Child in Iringa District, Iringa Region.*

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).