



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON GENDER DISPARITIES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION: A CASE OF TANGA REGION, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry Despite efforts made in achievement of gender equality in education, few countries worldwide have been attained full gender parity in secondary education. Tanzania as other SSA countries has worked hard to achieve gender equality in education as given by EFA goal number 5, MDG goal number 3 and currently SDG goal number 5. However, problem of girls dropping out early from schools and poor academic performance continues to be prevalent (URT, 2016). Harmful cultural practices pointed out as one among factors influencing gender disparities in secondary education. This study therefore examined impact of harmful cultural practices on girls' education and its influence on gender disparities in secondary education. The study was guided by three specific objectives, which were carried out through cross-sectional – convergent parallel mixed method research design to allow simultaneously collection and merging of quantitative and qualitative data. The sample was obtained by using simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques making a total of 121 sample size comprising 100 respondents for quantitative data and 21 for qualitative information. Data analysis involved thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative findings. Findings from this study noted that there is gender disparity in secondary education whereas girls are more disadvantaged compared to boys. The observed gender gap is highly contributed by bad cultural practices such as gendered division of domestic roles, female genital mutilation and initiation rites.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in education becomes an issue of interest in development strategies for many countries across the world whereas gender issues have been integrated in the world development agendas including EFA, MDG and SDG goals. Despite efforts made in achievement of full gender equality in education there are very few countries that have attained full gender parity in secondary education in the world. Statistics by UNICEF, (2020) show that only 45% of countries worldwide have achieved gender parity in lower secondary and 25% in upper secondary education. The largest gender gaps observed in Sub-Saharan Africa region where there is low increase in number of countries which achieved full gender parity in secondary education. Statistics by Global Monitoring Education Report (2018) indicated that there is slightly low increase in percentage of countries that achieved full gender parity in secondary education in SSA from 45% in 1995 to only 51% in 2018. Recent statistics shows that secondary education completion rate grew from only 26% in 2010 to 29% in 2019, positioning the region extremely far from achievement of SDG goal number 5 by 2030 (UN, 2021).

Tanzania as other SSA countries has worked hard to achieve full gender parity in education as currently given by SDG goal number 5. However, problem of female students leaving school early and maintain poor academic performance in examination continue to persist (URT, 2016). Statistics by World Bank (2019) indicated that completion rate in lower secondary education in 2018 was 21% for boys and 16% for girls with transition rate of 31% to 22% respectively. Education statistics in Tanga Region indicated that the rate of school dropout among female students was higher than male students whereas in 2019 there were 2,515 female students who dropped out from secondary schools compared to 2387 in (BEST, 2020). Recent trend of school dropout shows that there is larger proportion of girls who drop out from secondary school compared to boys. Education statistic in Tanga Region indicated that number of girls who dropped out from school increased from 221 in the year 2020 to 315 in 2021 (Tanga Region Education Profile, 2021). Impact of bad cultural practices pointed out as one among main factors that contributes to gender disparity in school attendance, school dropout, learning and learning outcomes. Girls pointed out as more vulnerable to challenge of harmful cultural practices compared to boys because of patriarchy system that based on

male dominance. Study by Andiemba (2021) noted that majority of school - aged girls are denied their right to education due to dated and unpopular cultural beliefs. Equally gender based allocation of domestic chores reported to have great impact on girls' school attendance and academic performance (Regesa and Taha, 2015; Msoffe, 2016). Thus, this study examined the impact of harmful cultural practices on girls' education and its influence on gender disparities in secondary education.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine impact of harmful cultural practices on girls' education and the persistent of gender disparities in secondary education. Specifically this study aimed at:

- Identifying harmful cultural practices performed by different societies in the study area
- Examining the extent in which the identified harmful cultural practices impact girls' education.
- Analyzing effects of harmful cultural practices on girls' education

Review of Related Literature

Culture is a powerful identity symbol that distinguishes one group of people from the other. It communicates people's values, beliefs or simplify their way of life to the outside world (Fumpa- Makano, 2019). According to African perspectives rituals are symbolic, routine, and repetitive activities and actions through which one can make connections with what others consider to be the most valuable dimension of life (Kyallo, 2013). Harmful cultural practice is a form of discrimination that violates the human rights of affected individuals, particularly women and girls (Melkizedeck et al, (2018). Cultural practices performed by different societies across the world are traditionally indicated that they add value and dignity of women who pass through them compared to those who did not. However, these practices found to contribute to gender disparities in education particularly in basic education (UNFPA, 2020). In Tanzania for example the Luguru society regards girls who did not pass through different ritual ceremonies as unclean and unfit women to be a mother and wife (Magesa et al, 2014). The same apply in Bangladesh where societies consider an educated woman but uninitiated as an incomplete woman (Adhikari, 2013). Initiation ceremonies reported to encourage poor school attendance, classroom learning and learning outcomes because of time required to accomplish the trainings. Also initiated girls are not allowed to gather with boys and uninitiated girls (Munthali et al, 2018; Phiri et al, 2020). Teachings given in these occasions noted to focus on preparing girls to become better wives and mothers while discouraging schooling (Phiri et al, 2020; Fumpa- Makano, 2019; Schief et al 2018; Magesa et al, 2014). Thus this study targets on girls' education than boys' because of gendered social norms that favor boys over girls. Education studies noted that there is association between initiation ceremonies; early sexual relations and teenage pregnancy because trainings given in these ceremonies encourage initiated girls to practice sexual intercourse even before marriage. Study by Magesa et al, (2014) revealed that teaching given during the confinement period encourage initiated girls to engage in sexual intercourse with adult men as a result ended up in becoming pregnant and

dropout from the school. Initiation ceremony also involves public display of parts/full body of initiated girls, the situation that invites men to hunt for these girls for marriage or engage them in informal sex (Fumpa- Makano, 2019). During Chinamwali initiation ceremony in Malawi for example, girls dance naked and sing love songs that encourages men to pay certain amount of money as fee to touch breasts of initiated girls and finally engage in sexual intercourse with them (Phiri et al, 2020; Schroeder et al, (2022). Female Genital Mutilation also found to be a more challenging problem of girls' education in most of African societies because of the value attached in the practice and in preserving dignity of women (UNICEF, 2020). Study by John, (2018) in Tanzania indicated that majority of societies in the country consider an uncircumcised girl as an unpurified and improper woman to be married. Gender and education studies further acknowledged that traditional division of labor deprives female students enough time to concentrate in their studies because of inequality in allocation of domestic roles (Yebe, 2015; Msoffe, 2016). Study by Regesa and Taha (2015) for example noted that school girls were assigned many household roles including fetching water, cooking meals, washing utensils and other related domestic chores. Study by Dida et al, (2014) revealed that the more school girls participate in domestic chores the more they arrive late at school, the more they miss classes, the more they fail to complete given assignments and hence poor academic performance. Thus, based on review of related literature, this study noted that majority of African countries, including Tanzania, continue to engage in harmful cultural practices that are negatively affect girls' education and widened gender gaps in secondary education.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed the mixed research method in which survey questionnaire, focus group discussion and interview tools were used to collect data. The sample size of the study was drawn from five community secondary schools randomly selected from the study area making a total of **100** respondents for quantitative data and **21** respondents for qualitative data. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis whereas quantitative analysis involved numerical data and qualitative analysis was concerned with descriptive data. Presentation of study findings included quantitative and qualitative methods whereas findings obtained from questionnaires were processed using SPSS.16th version programme while qualitative findings were analyzed by using thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Prevalence and Extent of Harmful Cultural Practices: Despite the fact there is a substantial reduction of harmful cultural practices in most developing countries, these traditional practices are still prevailing among societies in South Asia and Sub-Saharan African Societies (Schief, 2018). However, there is variation in the extent of the prevalence of the traditional practices across the countries and societies. Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and India are among the countries with highest rate of child marriage in developing countries. Practice of FGM/C is highly concentrated in Sub Saharan Africa than any region in developing countries particularly in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan (Biglu et al, 2016).

Statistics by UNICEF (2020) show that in Egypt about 87 percent of girls and women have undergone FGM and more than seven million girls are at risk of being exposed to FGM by 2030 (Ibid). Despite the fact that Tanzania has made significant progress towards ending child marriage there is prevalence of this harmful traditional practice in which three out of ten 18-22 years old women (32%) reported to be married before the age of 18 (TWAWEZA (2021). Findings from this study noted that some of harmful cultural practices are still prevail in the country. Table 4.1 below shows the result:

Table 1. Prevalence of Harmful Cultural Practices in the Study Area

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Female Genital Mutilation	65	28
Early and forced marriage	95	40
Ritual ceremonies	75	32
Total	235	100

Source: Field data, 2023

Result from table 1 above show that 40% of respondents pointed out early marriage as leading bad cultural practice in the study area while 32% mentioned ritual ceremonies and 28% indicated FGM/C. Results from DEO's interview revealed that some societies are still practicing initiation ceremonies as an indication of maturity of their daughters. Finding from interview with DEO justify:

“Community of this area still practices ritual ceremony as an indication of maturity of their daughters. However, these practices have affected academic performance of girl students in particular despite the fact that these ceremonies are normally performed during holidays.”

Result from focus group discussion further gave detailed account on the practiced cultural activities and noted their effects on girls' education. P.2 in school A explained:

“Some tribes like the Zigua and Makonde still practice cultural ritual ceremonies in which adolescent girls were kept somewhere and trained on how to handle their husband when married”

This finding concur with study by Farouki et al, (2021) that noted that 1 in every 5 girls in developing countries married off before the age of 18 are denied their education right. Quantitative findings further indicated the extent in which cultural practices affect girls' education as indicated in table 4.2 below:

Table 2. Extent in which Bad Cultural Practices Affect Girls' Education

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Large extent	49	49
Moderate	24	24
Low extent	27	27
Total	100	100

Source: Field data, 2023

Results from table 4.2 above shows that majority of respondents 49% admits that cultural practices affect girls' in large extent, 24% said cultural practices has moderate impact to girls' education while 27% of respondents argued that there is low extent in which cultural practices affect girls' education.

This result implies that girls' education is significantly impacted by observed cultural practices than boys 'and hence contributing to the persistent of gender disparities in secondary education. This finding concurs with the study by TWAWEZA, (2021) that indicated that there is high extent in which bad cultural practices affect girls' education.

Impact of Harmful Cultural Practices on Girls' Education Effect of Initiation Ceremonies on School Attendance, Classroom Learning, Learning Outcomes and School Dropout:

Several gender and education studies indicated that there is a direct link between gender inequality in education and girls' initiation ceremonies (Magesa et al, 2014; Phiri et al, 2020). Girls' initiation ceremony involves confining girls into special school and gives them an intense training for a specified period of time ranging from one month or more. Thus, initiated school girls experienced frequent school absenteeism and poor participation in classroom learning which in turn lead to poor academic performance and or school dropout (Magesa et al, 2014; Phiri et al, 2020). Findings from focus group discussion noted that initiated school girls are regularly absconded from the school due to the attached ritual norms. P.1 in school C explained:

“Initiation rituals often require us to abscond from school during and after initiation rituals so as to avoid contact with boys and uninitiated girls”

Equally, research by Fumpa- Makano (2019) and Phiri et al. (2020) revealed that some cultural norms encourage initiated girls to drop out of school because they forbid them from associating with uninitiated girls as they are considered as impure and dirty women. This finding therefore suggests that girls' education is more challenged by harmful cultural practices than boys because of the attached values and gender based social norms. Analysis from review of related literature revealed that initiation ceremonies associated with pains and psychological problems. Study by Magesa et al, (2014) reported that initiated girls experienced psychological problem because of mistreatment and brutality kind of affairs they received during confinement period. Thus circumcised girls are psychologically affected even after graduating because of the related psychological trauma. Findings from this study noted that circumcised girls become psychologically affected when FGM/C get criticized in classroom discussion. P.1 in school D narrated:

“Circumcision is conducted secretly and I can even hide this information to my fellow students and my teacher, but this practice may affect me psychologically particularly when its effects are taught in classroom. As a victim of this practice I will become shy and always think about those effects and as a result my study would also be affected.”

This finding therefore entails that girls' initiation ceremonies are highly accompanied with social psychological problems that in turn affect school attendance, learning and learning outcomes hence persistent of gender disparity in secondary education.

Influence of Initiation Ceremonies on Early Sexual Relations/Marriages, Teenage Pregnancy and School Dropout:

Several studies indicated that there is association between ritual ceremonies, early sexual relations/marriages, teenage pregnancy and school dropout among school girls

because some of the trainings given in the initiation schools encourage school girls to engage in sexual relations and subsequently assume marriage responsibilities in early ages (Magesa, et al, 2014; Fumpa- Makano, 2019; Phiri et al, 2020). Basically training given to these girls focus on how to please their future husband in the bed, managing their homes and taking care of their children but do not focus on development of their carrier (Fumpa-Makano, 2019). Similarly finding from this study revealed that majority of initiated school girls are willingly engaging in sexual relations with aged men. DEO's justified:

"School girls are willingly engage in sexual affairs with adult men/young boys on their ways to and from school. These girls frequently abscond from school and finally dropout."

Education studies further indicated that initiation ceremonies inspire adult men to engage in sexual relations with initiated young girls as they dance while partially dressing or fully naked (Magesa et al, 2014; Phiri et al, 2020). Results from focus group discussion noted the same. P.2 in school A narrated:

"Ritual ceremonies also encourage us to start early sexual relations or being married in early age all of which lead into teenage pregnancies and hence dropout from school"

P. 3 in school B further explained:

"There is a case in which my friend whom we were initiated together, engaged in in sexual business after school hours, this girl returned back home in late hours and sometimes she did not go back home. She continued with this trend until when she became pregnant. Very unfortunately, the man who was responsible with that pregnancy was not known."

Quantitative findings further pointed out effects of early sexual relations on school girls. Table 3 below presents the results:

Table 3: Early Sexual Relations Classroom Learning and School Dropout

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	121	30
Strongly agree	150	38
Disagree	77	19
Strongly disagree	51	13
Total	399	100

Source: Field data, 2023

Result from table 3 above indicated that 30% and 38% of respondents respectively agree and strongly agree with the statement that sexual relations affect classroom learning and encourage school dropout among female students. With 19% and 13% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. This finding implies that early sexual relations encourage poor classroom learning and induce school dropout and consequently contributes to prevalence of gender disparities in secondary education.

Impact of Traditional Gender Based Roles on Girls' Education: Gender and education studies acknowledged that traditional division of labor deprives female students enough time to concentrate in their studies because of inequality in allocation of domestic roles (Yeba, 2015; Msoffe, 2016).

Findings from this study indicated that girls are assistants of their mothers in discharging domestic chores as a result they are assigned many domestic roles compared to boys. Participants in focus group discussion notified. P.1 in school E said:

"Normally my brother was assigned very light, simple and few duties than me."

P.2 in school E outlined some of the domestic chores which girls were normally engaged with before and after school:

"Logically girls are assistants of their mothers in performing domestic chores such as; cooking, fetching water, cleaning utensils, cleaning the house etc. Sometimes I was asked to stay at home to take care of my siblings when my mother travelled or became sick. All these domestic chores affect my study"

Quantitative finding was further indicated effects of burden of domestic chores on education of girls. Table 4 below illustrates:

Table 4. Effect of Burden of Domestic Roles on Girls' Education

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Limits choice of subject	207	13.7
Hinder effective classroom participation	268	17.7
Deprive time for effective study	342	22.2
Influences school absenteeism	275	18.2
Favor boys education than girls	223	14.7
Limits opportunity for academic growth and employment	199	13.1
Total	1514	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

Result from Table 4 showed that 22.2% of respondents said that burden of domestic roles deprived study time for girls while 18.2% of respondents reported that burden of domestic roles hindered effective classroom participation. 17.7% of respondents indicated that the burden of domestic roles influences school absenteeism among girls students, 13.7% argued that allocation of domestic chores favored education of boys than girls. While 13.1% of respondents reported that burden of domestic chores limits opportunity of academic growth and employment among girls. Qualitative findings further provided detailed account on effects of burden of domestic chores on school girls. P.1 in school A commented:

"Some parents particularly our mothers, do not want us to go to school but they would rather ask us to stay at home and assist them in performing domestic chores."

P.4 in school B claimed that engagement in domestic chores before and after school has effect on classroom learning.

"I usually engage in domestic chores before and after schooling. So I normally become tired and exhausted and hence sleep during classroom hours."

P.2 in school C further compared the effects of burden of domestic roles on girls' academic performance to boys'.

"Domestic roles deprive us time for studies compared to boys who have enough time to engage in their studies. As a result we perform poorly in examinations and hence considered academically incapable".

Similarly, study by Regesa and Taha (2015) in Kenya noted the same that school girls were assigned many household roles including fetching water, cooking meals, washing utensils and other related domestic chores. Contrary to this finding, study by Greatland et al, (2014) revealed that parents in Ethiopia release their daughters from pressure of domestic roles by re-allocating and encouraging sharing of domestic chores among their daughters and son so as to provide equal opportunity for them to engage in their study. This finding therefore suggests that burden of domestic chores deprives female students' time for private study, encourage late school reporting, poor classroom learning and poor academic performance as a result widened gender gaps in secondary education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined impact of harmful cultural practices on girls' education and gender disparities in secondary education. Specifically the study assessed effects of initiation ceremonies, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and gender based division of labor on education of girls. Evidence from questionnaire survey, interview and deep narratives from focus group discussion justify that the prevailing harmful practices are highly contributing to gender disparities in secondary education, girl students being more affected.

Recommendations

Based on study findings, this study, therefore, recommend on the following for policymakers and the entire community to adopt so as to do away with harmful cultural practices and the related challenges of girls' education and hence achievement of full gender parity in secondary education:

- The entire community should consider revising some of cultural practices focusing on eliminating detrimental traditional norms for the social economic wellbeing of their own children and the entire society.
- Government through ministry of culture and sports should revise some cultural practices that conflicting with international and national development agendas that centered on achievement of gender equality in all sphere of life including education.
- Policy makers should put in place some regulations to prohibit some cultural norms and practices that humiliate and deprive rights of all children regardless their gender.
- Thus, unless these dreadful traditional practices being addressed, girls cannot fully participate in their educational endeavors and hence gender disparities in secondary education will continue to persist.

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