



THE EFFECTS OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ON GIRLS' ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN TANZANIA: THE CASE OF WABENA COMMUNITY IN NJOMBE REGION, TANZANIA

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Abstract:

Globally the access of women education is still a debatable issue in most of developing countries. This study investigated how some aspects of indigenous education affected girls' access to secondary education in Wabena tribal in Njombe region. The study focused the role of indigenous education on girls' community life, and its effects on girls' access to secondary education. The study employed qualitative research approach. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions and documentary reviews. The study found out that on reaching puberty, girls were denied access to secondary education or withdrawn from secondary schools to attend initiation ceremonies locally known as liwungo/likulo, which prepared girls for marriage. After initiation ceremonies, some girls engaged themselves in sexual relations, got pregnant while others were married and hence, lost their education opportunities. Therefore, perceived gender roles on household responsibilities and farm work, kept many girls at home as additional labour instead of attending secondary education. It was suggested that the society need to be sensitized on child rights to education; bad traditional practices; beliefs as well as attitudes that discriminate against girls' access to education. Sensation campaigns have to involve stakeholders such as the government, CBOs, NGOs and religious organizations, public meetings, seminars and conferences.

Keywords: indigenous education, Liwungo, Wabena girls, access, secondary 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

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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 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 as the integrated social, cultural, artistic, religious and recreational life of the respective ethnic group. It started at birth and continued into adulthood (Marah, 2006).

Indigenous education was developed differently in various groups depending on expected roles of that society, and what was expected to be learned to adulthood. For example, girls were socialized to effectively learn roles of motherhood, wife, and other sex-appropriate skills depending on how that particular ethnic group derived its livelihood (Marah, 2006). This was and still practiced in most of African society especially Wabena in Njombe region. Even though western formal education and other initiatives were welcomed by African parents and political leaders from colonial era, yet studies done on formal education in Tanzania revealed that in terms of access to schooling, Tanzanian girls were and are still at the bottom of the hierarchy (Katunzi, 1997 and Mwalongo 2016).

Moreover, according to Harding (2000) and Mwalongo 2016, social cultural barriers are mentioned to be factors that hinder girls' access to education for various reasons including the fear that they will transfer their knowledge, prestige and income into the family in which they will marry.

The studies revealed that there are several initiatives, nationally and internationally that are geared to help girls' access to school but still there is evidence that most ethnic groups in Tanzania particularly along the Indian Ocean coast namely Mtwara, Lindi, Tanga and Coast Region are still practicing initiation ceremonies (*Unyago*) to transmit knowledge and skills to youth when they reach puberty (Shuma, 1994; Tumbo–Masabo and Liljestrom, 1994; Peasgood and Samarra, 1997, and Bhalalusesa, 2000) as cited in (Nasoro, 2004. Wabena of Southern Highlands in Tanzania practices the initiation ceremonies called *Liwungo/likulo* to girls who are confined in a house for eight days on reaching menarche. This study therefore investigated the impact of indigenous education on girls' access to secondary education among the Wabena in Njombe Region.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It has been confirmed from various studies that 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 both boys and girls (United Nations, 1949). Several reasons remarkably, cultural and traditional beliefs, teachings 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 family (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, beliefs, practices and cultural attitudes within families and society at large.

However, the idea of educating girls had for quite some time met strong opposition even from women parents. For example, Hari (2007) gathered the following statements from women parents in Ghana, which complicated and interfered with efforts for an increase in girls' access to education:

"...As a mother, I don't have any difficulty even though I did not go to school. No matter how much education you give to a woman, she will one day end up in someone's kitchen and all her needs will be catered for'. 'The boy is the breadwinner; therefore he must be given the best opportunities right from the beginning, including the best education. This will enable him to perform his manly duties properly in the future..." (Hari, 2007:4).

These traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes have prevailed even in current times when socio-economic changes have resulted in changes of roles women are now expected to undertake. Education for girls is made necessary to improve income earnings, opportunities, improvement of living standards of individuals, families and communities (Hari, 2007). This study, sought to find out whether indigenous education had any effects on girls' access to secondary education among the Wabena tribal.

2. Objective of the Study

The general objective was to investigate how some aspect of indigenous education affected the girl's access to secondary school education.

2.1 Specific Objective

The study specifically ought to investigate

- i. The role of indigenous education on Wabena tribal;
- ii. The effect of indigenous education in girl's access to secondary education among Wabena Tribal.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Indigenous Education

In an African perspective, indigenous education is native education particular to African ethnic societies. Moreover, it is a justification that absence of western formal education in pre-colonial African societies does not mean that education did not exist among African societies (Adeyinka and Adeyemi, 2003). Africans had their own type of education based on religious, social, political, economic and cultural values (Mangia, 2003). This is equally supported by Junaid and Esu (2007) who observed that

educational systems also existed in African societies prior to the coming of Europeans. Such education was delivered since birth continued to adulthood and ended with death (Kenyatta, 1968).

It is explained that indigenous education differed from one society to another depending on the physical environment and cultural norms (UNESCO, 2004). For example, in coastal areas, fishing skills was emphasized, while in pastoral areas, herding skills were emphasized as well as in agricultural areas, farming skills were emphasized (Mangia, 2003). One can argue that such kind of education inculcated the sense of social responsibility of an individual in that community so that he/she became a productive member of that society.

Therefore, this education was essentially designed to enable individuals play a useful role in a society (Kenyatta, 1968). Moreover, the Indigenous Education was based on the philosophy of functionalism and productivity (Junaid and Esu, 2007; Adeyinka and Adeyemi, 2003). One thing that should be noted here is that the accumulated useful knowledge, skills and experience were being passed on to succeeding generations for preservation, development and onward transmission (Lawuo, 1978). It was transmitted from one generation to another through storytelling, legends and real practices. Thus, indigenous education enabled pre-colonial society members to fulfill their responsibilities in such a way that children and adults developed a sense of obligation towards their community in which they lived.

3.2. Indigenous education among Wabena

Between birth and around eight years of age, Wabena children of common origins spent most of their time learning by means of playing games of being grownups. Learning through work was not yet demanded for them on account of young age. But great emphasis was put on learning good manners and respect for authority; social behaviours that were acceptable to that society; things that were the best were left undone or unsaid (Culwicks, 1935 cited in Ocitti, 1967, 1973). In this case, social behaviour was learned mainly from adults through observation and imitation (Ocitti, 1967).

From the age of nine or so, Wabena children separated more and became preoccupied with affairs and occupations of their respective sexes. For example, girls began to work with and for their mothers in homes and out in the fields (Culwicks, 1935 cited in Ocitti 1967, 1973). Therefore, indigenous education for Wabena girls equipped them with basic survival skills related to sex determined tasks of the family. This shows how girls were prepared for their future roles in society as wives and mothers with nurturing functions.

3.3. Indigenous education among Wabena Girls (liwungo)

In terms of learning experience for girls in Wabena society, Culwicks (1935) mentioned a number of lessons given during initiation ceremonies associated with circumcision and menstruation. *Lesson 1* included division of work, food, and goods in the household. *Lesson 2* comprised sex education. Teachings were based on sexual relations,

child birth and lactation. *Lesson 3* was based on domestic etiquette. *Lesson 4* was concerned with sanctity of husband's belongings. *Lesson 5* was about choosing a husband. *Lesson 6* emphasized on duties to mother-in-law, and *lesson 7* was based on various subjects symbolized by different plants. During the last two ceremonies at married time and at first pregnancy, the girl, together with her husband, jointly received instructions on the topic about family, community and ethnic group life, befitting their status in the stratified society (Culwicks, 1935; Ocitti, 1967, 1973).

Hence, curriculum content was structured and embraced all aspects of human life as well as development. It was designed to enable girls to socially adjust and interact within their families including the society at large. Therefore, the content of traditional education was very comprehensive and covered various girls' responsibilities in society therefore this study investigated the role of indigenous education and its effects on girl's access to secondary education.

3.4 Formal Educations for Girls

It is no longer a matter of debate that females constitute more than fifty percent of the world's active population (UNESCO, 2003). Nor is it in doubt that although they make immense contributions to national development in terms of agriculture, trade, health and political arena, they face several inequitable difficulties that limit their potentials in promoting personal and collective developments (Assimang, 1993) cited in (Indabawa, 2004). In due regard, a key area of concern is that of their access to education, which can only at best be described as dwindling less than equal to that of their male counterparts (Indabawa, 2004). Women are still depicted as passive and domestically oriented, while men are depicted as dominant and breadwinners (UNESCO, 2003).

Thus, provision of formal education is recognized as a major vehicle for promoting and improving women's status who has long been victims of access to education (UNICEF, 2001; Okojie, 2002). According to UNICEF (2006), formal education is the basis for full promotion and improvement girls' status. It is the basic tool that should be given to girls in order to fulfill their roles as full members of society. Therefore, education offers the female child an improved opportunity to be less dependent on men in later life (UNICEF, 1979). It increases her prospects to obtain work outside the home (UNICEF, 2006).

As laid down in Article 28 and 29 of the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC), all children have the right to education. The content of such education should be directed to development of the child's personality, talents and mental as well as physical abilities to the fullest potential (UNICEF, 1979). However, people tend to believe that provision of education for men is acceptable as a major route to progress. But, this is not the case for girls because of their family roles and of the fact that they are viewed both as examples and repositories of traditional values as mothers and wives (Mangia, 2003; UNESCO, 1993). In African cultures, women and girls are expected to assume roles of mothers and wives, being homemakers and taking care of children (Hari, 2007).

Studies have revealed several factors that have been identified to explain the state of affairs that inhibit girls' opportunities for attainment of secondary education. Among the most common factors mentioned to hinder girls' access to education, include the long held aspects of parents and community attitudes towards girls' education, traditional beliefs, practices and other cultural attitudes regarding gender roles as well as perceptions on females' abilities in academic performance (Hari, 2007; Manyire, 1997; FAWE, 2006; UNICEF, 2007).

3.5 Influence of Perceived Gender Roles in Society and Formal Education for girls

Gender roles assigned to children by the society have a determining effect on their future and access to education. For example, girls are less likely to be educated, especially beyond primary education level because they are kept at home as additional domestic, agricultural or informal labour (WHO, 1994). This is also supported by Mzingira (2002) who reported on traditional gender roles in Tanzania that girls are also expected to care for the sick and young siblings. In this case, therefore such unequal treatment in between boy and girls prevented girl's access to education opportunities in different levels. As a result, many parents do not enroll their daughters in school or withdraw them before completion (Hari, 2007).

4. Methodology

The study were conducted in Njombe region specifically in Luponde ward whereby five villages namely; Luponde, Lugenge, Lusitu Igola and Miva were involved and two public secondary school Luhororo (lusitu village) and Kisilo (lugenge village) were involved. The study involved all five villages in the ward and all secondary public secondary schools situated in Luponde ward. The study used a qualitative research design. The purposive sampling was used to get a sample of 20 respondents whereby 10 were girls from two secondary school 5 from each school. 5 girls who did not attend secondary education one from each village and 5 female elders/parents who are involved in providing indigenous education one from each village. These participants were included in the study because they were directly involved and affected by indigenous education Liwungo in Wabena tribal. The data collected were analyzed by thematic analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The Role of Indigenous Education on Girls' Community Life.

This objective sought to examine the role of indigenous education on girls' community life. It was learnt that IE on Wabena girls reaching puberty was a tradition compulsory and important to attend. 12 interviewees' respondents confirmed to have attended the indigenous education. Only 3 female students indicated that they had not attended indigenous education. It was learnt that the ritual aimed at introducing girls into womanhood and community responsibilities. It was observed that indigenous

education in Wabena society played two important roles. First, to introduce girls to the society as grown-up girls (*vakudzi*). Second, through *Liwungo/likulo*, girls were introduced to new roles and responsibilities as near future mothers and wives. Commenting on this, an elder/*mkola* said,

"...Our intention is to teach girls how to take care of themselves, their families, their homes and surrounding environment...They should have a committed spirit in establishing and consolidating their families..."

Findings revealed that indigenous education was designed to enable girls play a useful role in society after puberty. This suggests that traditional education holds some cultural significance within the framework of community needs and cultural values. It was also revealed that indigenous education intended to impart various aspects of community life that were accepted and valued by Wabena community members. This is in line with a study conducted by Diallo (2003) in Mauritania who reported that initiation ceremony is a very important stage in the life cycle of the African girl child. It marks a transition stage from childhood to adult life. It is the time when education about community life and making of the family is provided to girls (Diallo, 2003).

The study also noted that indigenous education was accompanied by isolation and confinement of girls into the house or bush for eight days. The confinement practice was done due to the strong belief that if the girls are not isolated, they will not bear children in their lifetime (*valalumila*). Girls' isolation and confinement automatically required them to stay out of schools temporarily or permanently if girls were engaged (*valondwidze*). This is in line with a study by Mazonde (1994) in Tonga society that revealed that on reaching puberty at the age of 14-15, girls were confined into the house between six weeks and two months during which girls attaining maturity were subjected to an intensive training given by senior women in that community.

According to 12 interviews in Wabena society puberty, marked a transitional point between childhood and maturity. After attending traditional initiation ceremonies, the girls are now called grown-up girls (*vakudzi*). From there on, they were expected to act and behave as grown-up girls. It was learnt that the ceremony was accompanied by drinking local brew and eating food (*hibanga*) for termination of the ceremony and sending off the girl in adulthood. The ceremony was associated with presents giving to the grown-up girl. Presents included things such as clothes, money, household utensils and farm implements. In most cases, parents, through these ceremonies, encouraged their daughters to marry rather than go to school because parents would benefit from them socially and economically (Hyera, 2007).

5.2 Effects of IE on Girls' Access to secondary Education

The study sought to determine whether or not that some aspects of indigenous education had a great deal of effects on girls' access to secondary education. It was found out that effects were mainly influenced by society members' belief on formal education, girls' self-esteem in educational procedure, parents' awareness towards girls'

education abilities and access, and the relationship between the perceived gender roles on girls' access and formal education among Wabena society

5.3 Society Members' Belief on Formal Education

The study explored the society members' belief on formal education. From the interview responses conducted, 5 elders (*wakola/vasehe*) and who were parents, respondents believed that secondary education was eroding foundations of indigenous education for girls. It was learnt that society members' believed that indigenous education enabled girls acquire family and life skills rather than formal education.

Three of the respondents made the following statements:

"...It destroys; when they go to secondary schools, girl's start their own different education from day one they were exposed to during liwungo..."

"...In secondary schools, girls get mixed with groups of mates from various ethnic groups having different traditions and customs; hence, they learn sets of behavior, different from what we previously imparted to them..."

"...girls in secondary schools engage themselves in different forms of misbehaviours. They are uncultured, ill-behaved. They get pregnant, and bear children only to end-up being expelled from school. As a parent, you incur huge losses, it is discouraging..."

These quotations indicate that society members hold the view that multicultural mixing of students in formal education make their daughters neglect their indigenous education training and hence, acquire different traditions and customs. It was learnt that parents who still hold this view do not send their daughters to secondary education. In the same vein, some parents in Ghana have been reported to be reluctant to send their daughters to school because of the traditional belief that formal education and school could be a corrupting influence on girls' morals (Hari, 2007). Other parents fear that formal education system is capable of instilling strange attitudes, values and beliefs that could make a girl's child disobedient in her character disposition (Indabawa, 2004).

On the other hand, eight respondents confirmed that formal education did not destroy foundations of indigenous education and that it was very important for girls' life. Essentially, they insisted on the importance of formal education to girls. Narrating on this, two respondents said:

"...It does not destroy. Training in secondary schools is also important for girls' lives..."

"...If a girl stays for a very long time at home, she will be married very early and if she is not educated, her future life will be uncertain... she will not be employed. If educated, she will get education, which will be useful for her personal life and those of others..."

These findings indicate that traditional thinking on formal education for girls is now changing among rural people. As it is Wabena rural society people are now talking of importance of formal education for girls. This was also reported by UNESCO (2005) that education for girls is important for their preparation for the future-especially for a job, health care, family planning and nutrition.

When respondents were asked to choose between indigenous education and secondary education as their best option, all 15 respondents opted for indigenous education to be given first before secondary education. Their argument was based on a traditional belief that indigenous education enabled girls acquire family and life skills. Two elders (*vakola/vasehe*) emphasized that:

"...Umwana nde si muvunge ivedza ngita mtamwa yitahiwa tumpele umugoda..."
Meaning that a child to whom indigenous education has not been made is like a sick person and hence, she needs curative measures..."

"...Under no circumstances should a girl attend secondary education without having first to be given Liwungo?..."

These findings indicate how cultural belief on indigenous education still prevails in Wabena. It was learnt that in fulfillment of the girls' attendance on indigenous education, it was accompanied by isolation of girls on menarche from other members of the society. That was practiced due to a strong belief that if not isolated, the girls will not bear children in their life time (*valalumila*). Girls' isolation required them to stay out of school temporarily or permanently if they were engaged (*valondwidze*). That interferes and disturbs girls' formal educational trend.

The study learnt that Njombe region had introduced several initiatives to increase girls' access and retention to secondary education in the region. Initiatives included making follow-up of all girls who did not report to secondary schools and taking effective legal measures against individuals who impregnate school girls. Most of news and announcement by Njombe region education stakeholders showed the emphasis and agreement to ensure that all girls selected to join secondary education report to their respective schools and complete the education cycle.

5.4 Girls' Self-Esteem in educational procedure

Findings revealed that girls in Njombe region suffered from lack of confidence in facing challenges of education and were not allowed to compete with men (boys) in any circumstances. Data obtained from 10 girls revealed that some girls dropped out of school due to fear from difficult subjects. Also, some of the girls who failed in the national form two examinations did not go back to school when required to repeat a year. It was reported that girls who had low performance in school subjects tended to be inferior and had low confidence. Parents and the community could promote a positive rating for girls who attempted to succeed in school if they adapted supportive attitude towards girls' education. In a similar argument, Gross (1992) observed that

young girls' inferiority complex, low confidence and fear developed gradually as they matured and interacted with others in the community.

Research found out that girls' self-esteem instilled during socialization at home/community made some of them to develop inferiority complex, lack of confidence and fear in influencing girls' access to education for other positive changes in community life. Girls were seen to be encouraged to take all sorts of works in the family from cleaning the compound, preparing family meals and taking care of siblings to farm work. They were not encouraged to undertake education the way boys are encouraged. It was learnt that girls were to wait to be married and were to do petty activities. The study found out that Wabena society considered girls as weak people, not allowed to argue in front of men and were not involved in decision-making in some family affairs such as access to education.

5.5 Parents' Awareness towards Girls' education Abilities and access

Another attempt was also made to interview 5 elders/parents and 5 girls out of school. They were asked if they thought girls could be educated, graduate and pass their lessons. Findings revealed that all 10 respondents doubted the girls to be educated and perform well in their lessons. It was learnt that parents did not expect their girl children to study and pass, no matter how intelligent they might be. Other parents claimed that their daughters were not intelligent enough to pass their lessons at school. That was put clear by two parents who said:

"...They cannot pass... they will end up being expelled from school. For example, some are studying while they are already engaged..."

"...girls are not intelligent compared to boys..."

Findings reveal that parents have little trust in girls' good academic performance. The society has labeled them as low achievers. Thus, many parents do not value taking their girl children to secondary education due to their low understanding level on the importance of girls' education. This is contrary to Dorsey (1990 cited in Mwisomba, 2004) who mentioned that scientifically, intelligence is equally distributed for both sexes, and even biologically, they are the same.

Thus, many parents do not value taking their girl children to secondary education due to their low understanding level on the importance of girls' education.

In support of the foregone discussion, an attempt was made to find out female student parents' education level to see if there was any relationship between parents' low awareness level and their education level. Data collected from 10 female students and 5 girls who did not attend secondary school revealed that 28 parents (fathers and mothers) were standard seven leavers. There was only one father who was a university graduate and one mother who was a certificate teacher.

The findings indicate that there was a positive relationship between low society awareness level towards girls' access to secondary education and parents' low formal

education level. Since parents had not attended formal education above standard seven levels (primary school), it was difficult for them to realize the significance of secondary education for girls. Rather, indigenous education, which prepared girls for family life and social responsibilities, seemed to be more valued than secondary education. This is similar with a study done by UNESCO (2005) that reported that majority of parents are illiterate, lack confidence and are unwilling to invest resources on education for girls.

5.6 The relationship between the Perceived Gender Roles on Girls' Access and Formal Education among Wabena society.

It was also learnt that girls in Wabena society were expected to take up all household responsibilities such as cooking, feeding, take care of husband as well as children, doing all farm work such as digging, weeding, and harvesting, taking care of the sick and the elderly. These roles were specifically insisted during indigenous education. At that juncture, secondary education for girls was meaningless. One elder/parent revealed that:

"...once you reach puberty, schooling ceases to be your part. You come back home to engage yourself in farming, get married or take care of parents..."

These findings reveal that girls' socialization at home, and in community is directed towards preparing girls to carry out household responsibilities. Because girls are responsible for diverse household tasks, some parents prefer to keep their daughters at home instead of accessing them to secondary education (Hari, 2007).

6. Conclusion

Based from the findings of this study, it has discovered that indigenous education had affected much the girls' access to secondary education in Wabena tribal in Njombe region. The study can conclude 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. However, 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. Finally, 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 tribal in Njombe region.

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