

CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND GIRLS' EDUCATION IN TEREKEKA STATE OF SOUTH SUDAN

Malish, Joseph Festo¹

Chidiebere, C. Ogbonna²

Joseph, M. Makak³

¹National Christian Development Organisation (NCDO), South Sudan

^{2, 3}Kampala International University, Kampala, Uganda

*Corresponding author: chidiebere.ogbonna@kiu.ac.ug

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of cultural orientation on girls' education in Terekeka State, South Sudan. The study focus was on primary school education, specifically on school enrolment and dropout among girls in Terekeka State. The study objectives were: to investigate the impact of cultural orientation on girls' education in Terekeka State, South Sudan; and to analyze measures taking by the government to improve girls' education in Terekeka State, South Sudan. The study was guided by the Social Learning Theory, which opines that learning is a function of observation and often influenced by factors present within our environment. Furthermore, the study employed a descriptive research design and a mixed method approach in data collection. Three methods of data collection that include survey questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion (FGD) were used to elicit data from the study participants. The study population was 206,287 and the sample size was 399 respondents determined through Slovene's formula. On the first objective, the study revealed that the cultural factors affecting girls' education in terms of school enrolment and dropout in Terekeka are: early marriage, domestic issues and cattle rearing. Other factors include poverty, orphanhood, unconducive school environment among others. On the second objective, the study found that the government has implemented awareness campaign programmes that promotes education, particularly education for girls, however, the medium used to convey the campaigns were not adequate to reach the intended target audience. The campaigns were conveyed through the mass media (Television and Radio), whereas many families in Terekeka don't have access to these gargets due to poverty, consequently, the campaign did not produce the expected result. Thus, the government strategy to improve girls' education in Terekeka state has been largely unsuccessful.

Keywords: Culture, Education, Early marriage, School drop-out, Terekeka State.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the recent decades, there has been significant awareness and progress in girls' education. According to UNICEF, between 1970 and 1992, combined primary and secondary enrolment for girls in developing countries rose from 38 per cent to 68 per cent (UNICEF, 2009). However, there is still a significant gap in school enrollment in some countries and parts of the world. In the least developed countries, enrolment rates are only 47 per cent at the primary level and 12 per cent at the secondary level. In 2013, UNESCO reported that about 95 per cent of the 28.5 million children not getting a primary school education live in low and lower-middle income countries; 44 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, 19 per cent in South and West Asia and 14 per cent in the Arab States. The report went further to state that girls make up 55 per cent of the total and were often the victims of rape and other sexual violence that accompanies armed conflict (UNESCO, 2013).

Latest UNESCO report on school enrolment shows that South Sudan has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in the world with at least 2.2 million South Sudanese children not receiving an education (UNESCO, 2018). It is presumed that years of violent conflict, displacement and economic collapse are among the factors that deprive children of education and straining the future of the world's youngest country. Apparently, South Sudan is backward in education, however the situation of girls' education in the country is alarming. About 60 per cent of girls of primary school age (7-year-old) are not in school (UNESCO, 2018). The gender gap widens with age: while about 10.6 per cent of boys were in secondary school at age 16, girls of the same age that enrolled in secondary school stands at only 1.3 per cent (UNESCO, 2018).

Terekeka State is backward in education when compared with other states in South Sudan. The backwardness in education can be deduced from the number of primary and secondary schools in the state. A 2016 report by Education Management Information System (EMIS), indicates that there are a total of 2452 'known' primary schools in the Equatoria region of South Sudan. The 2452 primary schools are located in the eight states that made up the region and comprises of Jubek 470; Terekeka 49; Yei River 807; Amadi 186; Gbudwe 298; Maridi 118; Imatong 378 and Kapoeta 146. With only 49 primary schools, Terekeka State has the least number of primary schools in the Equatoria region of South Sudan. At national level, it is the second state with the least number of primary schools, behind Abyei AA that has only 33 'known' primary schools. (Ministry of General Education and Instruction, 2017).

Statistics from the Department of Education in Terekeka County shows that out of 315 girls that enrolled in primary school in the county in 2014, 25 dropped out within the

first year. In 2015, 396 girls enrolled and 56 dropped out of school. Then, in 2016, 372 girls enrolled and 76 dropped out. Thus, there is a problem of getting girls to enroll in school, as well as retaining them in school. Evidently, children who drop-out of school face uncertain future; they are more likely to face unemployment and economically incapacitated. Also, it perpetrates marginalization, the imbalance in workforce representation in the country is partly as a result of high level of illiteracy in some states and regions. For example, Terekeka state represents only about 1 per cent of government employees, which may be attributed to low education attainment by the people of the state. Therefore, this study examines the impact of cultural orientation on girls' education in Terekeka State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design, specifically cross-sectional survey. In addition, the study employed a mix method approach. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in data collection. The Sample size was 399 determined from a population of 245,744, using Slovene's formula. In addition, 18 key informants were purposively selected for qualitative data. The criteria for selecting the key informants was primarily based on their knowledge of the subject under investigation.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(a)^2}$$

n = sample size; **N** = target population; **a** = level of significance at 0.05

$$n = \frac{245,744}{1 + 245,744 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{245,744}{1 + 245,744 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{245,744}{615.}$$

$$n = 399$$

Table 1: Category of respondents and sampling technique

| Category | Sample Size | Sampling Technique |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Primary School Teachers | 65 | Random Sampling |
| State education officials | 15 | Random Sampling |
| Primary School dropouts (now adults) | 214 | Random Sampling |
| Community Leaders/ Chiefs | 13 | Random Sampling |
| Caregivers/ Parents | 92 | Random Sampling |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|--|
| Total | 399 | |
|--------------|------------|--|

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory argues that learning is a function of observation and often influenced by factors present within our environment. The theory suggests that in most cases, learning occur subconsciously. That is to say that learning takes place without the intention to learn and even without the learner's awareness that learning has taken place (Ogbonna and Lokawua, 2017). Thus, Social Learning Theory believes that a person and his/her environment do not function as independent units instead, they simultaneously depend on each other (Bandura, 1963). Bandura (1977), notes that the simultaneous relationship between a person and his/ her environment facilitates learning deliberately and inadvertently, through the influence of examples. Available empirical evidence suggests that humans in general acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new ways of behavior/conduct through interpersonal relationship. As a result, a person's behavior and attitude are mostly influenced by his/her family, community and environment in general. In essence, when a person is in an environment where school dropout is not frowned at, the person has a high tendency of copying such behavior. Thus, cultural perspective on education in one's family, community or environment is critical to understand the person's behavior towards education. Obviously, in cultures where education of girls is discouraged or perceived as an unnecessary burden to the family, the level of dropout will be high compared to communities where the reverse is the case. In Terekeka State, school dropout among girls is seen as normal and obvious. This practice is transferred from one generation to another, either consciously or sub-consciously. Having elder siblings that did not attend school or those that dropped out of school can influence a person not to consider education as a viable option in life. In addition, communities that don't value education of a girl-child will definitely present a benchmark for imitation. Thus, the environment, cultural practices and orientation therein, influences school enrollment and dropout among girls. In this case, people are influenced by the norm in their environment or society, while learning is a function of observation and imitation. Accordingly, learning may take place consciously or subconsciously as a person and his/her environment function interdependently.

The relevance of the theory to this study is that children learn by observing the behaviors of the people around them; as well they tend to adopt the acceptable standards of personal conduct in their families and society. In society, children are surrounded by many influential models, such as siblings and parents within the family. In the African context, it includes extended family members, such as uncles, aunts and other relatives. These models provide examples of behavior to observe and imitate (Shaffer, 2005). Children pay attention to these people (models) and encode their behavior, which they copy, imitate and replicate in a later time. Often times, they do

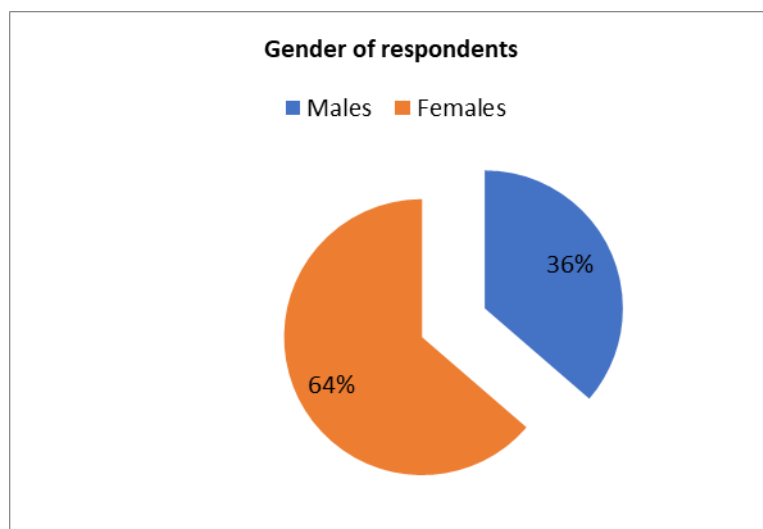
this regardless of whether the behavior is 'appropriate' or not, though a number of factors make it more likely that a child will copy the behavior that its society considers suitable (McLeod, 2016).

First, a child is more likely to imitate those people it perceives as similar to itself. Consequently, it is more likely to imitate behavior modeled by people of the same gender. Second, people around the child will respond to the conduct it emulates either willingly or forcefully. If a child imitates a model's behavior and the consequences are rewarding, the child is likely to continue performing the behavior (Renzetti, Curran and Maier, 2012). For example, if a girl drops out of school and her parents feel comfortable with that and instead encourage her to stay at home or to go and work in the family farm, this makes the girl feel that her decision is appropriate and thus it makes it more likely for her siblings to adopt and repeat the same behavior, because the behavior has been reinforced or strengthened by her parents. Thus, culture has a significant influence in the behavioral pattern of people in a particular society. In the case of Terekeka State of South Sudan, cultural orientation seems to be among the major factors influencing primary school dropout among girls and consequently reinforcing gender disparity in education in the state. The reason being that girls copy and imitate the behavior and footsteps of their models and a behavioral pattern they perceive to be acceptable within their society. Accordingly, the cultural values and norms of the communities in Terekeka State towards girls' education sways the value that girls in the state attach to education, and by extension their behavior regarding school enrolment and dropout.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As depicted in figure 1 below, 64 per cent of the respondents (n=254) were female, while 36 per cent (n=145) were male.

Figure 1: Presentation of respondent's gender



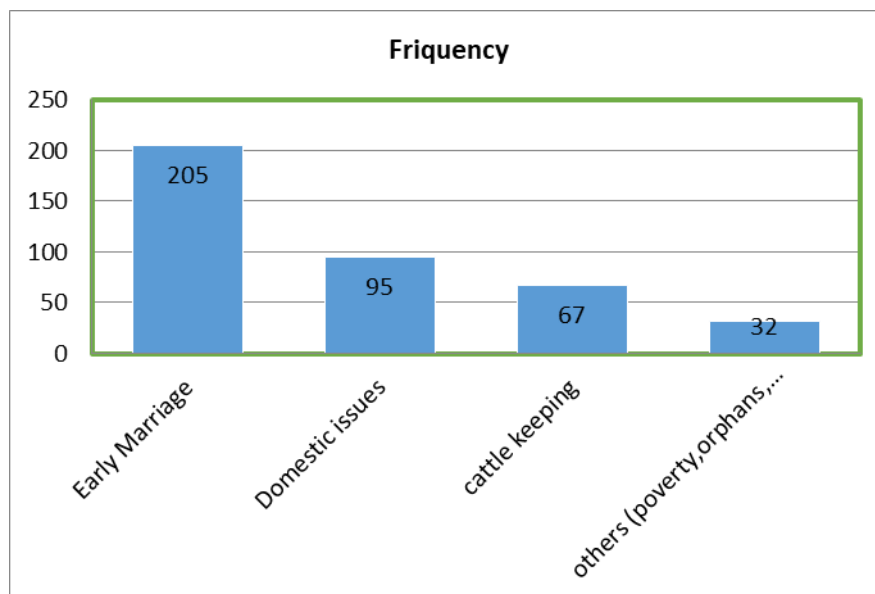
Objectives based discussion of findings

The study set out to realize two main objectives; i) to examine the major factors affecting girl's education in Terekeka State and ii) the measures taken by the government to improve girls' education in Terekeka State. Data elicited from the respondents are presented below.

The major factors affecting girl's education in Terekeka State

The respondents were asked to identify the major factors affecting school enrollment and influencing school dropout among girls in the state. The result of data gathered is shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Factors affecting school enrollment and influencing school dropout among girls in Terekeka State.



As indicated in Figure 2 above, 205 respondents or 51 per cent of the total respondents suggested that early marriage is the number one factor affecting school enrollment and influencing school dropout among girls in Terekeka State, followed by domestic issues (household chores), cattle rearing, and other factors (poverty, orphanhood and unconducive school environment). It is believed that child marriage in Terekeka State is influenced by two main factors: bride price and cultural practice. On one hand, parents give out their daughters in marriage as a way of gaining money and materials, while on the other hand, there is a cultural practice of marrying out girls early when they are still young and virgin.

The above position was corroborated by qualitative data gathered through interview. The community leaders (Chiefs) of Tali County and Gwor County during interview asserted that:

Dowry is of great value to members of their communities and in most cases it is a factor that propels parents to marry off their daughters when they are still young. Dowry, which is mainly paid with livestock is an incentive for giving out our daughters in marriage and because of that we considered early marriage as a blessing to the family. It brings riches and expands family lineage.

Besides the material value attached to early marriage and dowry, some communities in Terekeka State such as the Mandari, upholds a 'cultural sense of pride' when parents marry off their daughters at a young age. According to one of the key informants:

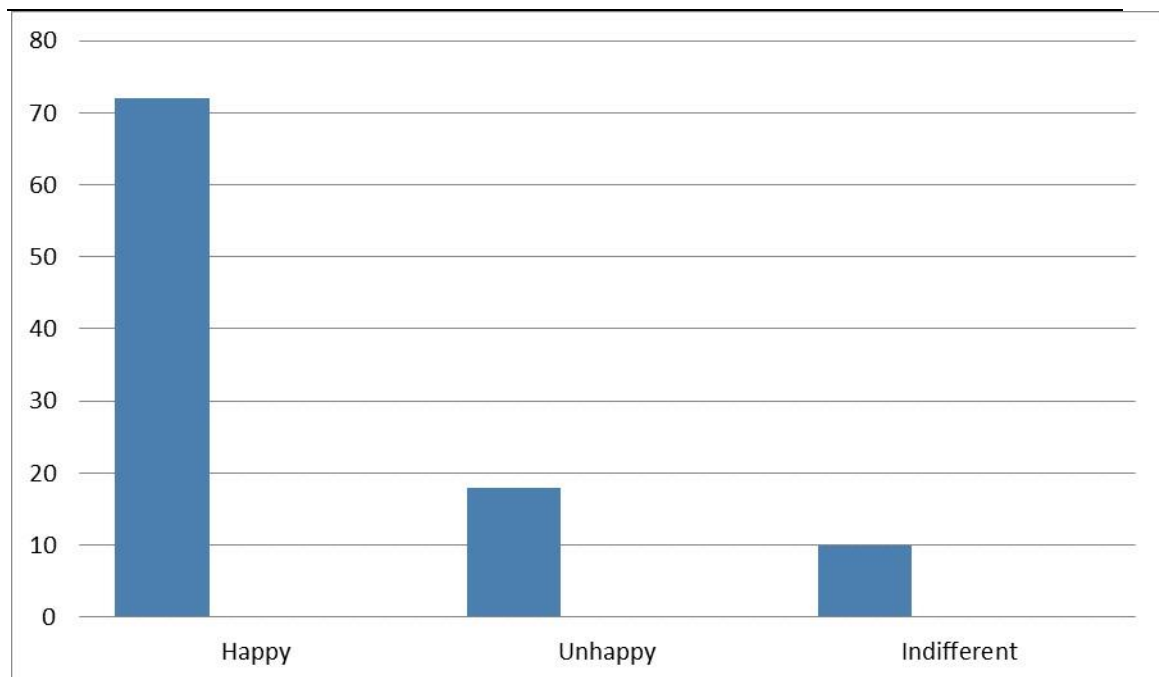
In mandarin culture we honour parents who marry off their daughters at a young age. We praise such parents because it shows that they did a good job in raising their daughters and every family in Mandari community aspire to achieve this feat.

The Mandari people believe that a family that is able to marry off their daughters at a young age is an evidence of 'good parenting', such parents are honoured within the community. This sense of cultural recognition beclouds any rational or logical preposition against child marriage.

During the FGD with the girls that dropped out of school (many of whom are not adults), majority of them stated that it was their parents that influenced and facilitated their marriage. Consequently, they dropped out of school to start their own family. Besides early marriage, domestic issues such as family orientation towards education, peer influence and domestic chores were among the major factors identified as influencing school dropout among girls in Terekeka State. Some of the girls explained that they dropped out of school in order to help their families in farm work and household chores, while others stated that they dropped out when their friends/peers decided to discontinue with their education. Also, it was found out that some of the girls dropped out of school because they were imitating their aunties who did the same.

Parents opinion on the rate of school drop-out among girls in Terekeka were sort. They were asked to rate their feelings when they realized that their daughter(s) has dropped out of school. The result of data gathered can be seen from Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Parental view on dropouts



It was also observed that majority of the parents (72%) were happy that their daughters dropped out of school. In essence, they supported the idea and made no serious effort at encouraging them to go back to school. By implication, parental support towards girls' education in Terekeka is minimal, which justifies the high rate of school dropout among girls. From all indications, parents' lack of support for girls' education is leveraged on personal benefit, such as farming, home chores and cattle rearing activities engaged by these girls when they drop out of school. It was also noticed that majority of the girls who dropped out from school were married between the ages of 11 and 17 years. Though in some places and parts of the world, 11 years is usually the age of primary school completion, in Terekeka, due to low value for education, the average age of primary school enrollment is 9 years. Thus, when children from other places are supposed to have completed their primary education at 11 years, those in Terekeka are still in the early stage of their primary education.

On the basis of the above findings, it can be summed up that early marriage, domestic issues and cattle rearing are destructive traditional norms influencing school drop-out among girls in Terekeka State. Other factors, such as poverty and civil unrest also plays a role in school drop-up, but early marriage is the most common factor identified. An issue of pertinent concern that was also found out is that though most families in Terekeka State own livestock, the culture of some of the communities' frown at families selling their livestock to support girls' education. The reason being that girls are considered as 'marriage resources' and therefore families should not incur extra financial burden for their sake - even though it is acceptable for families to make such sacrifice to support boys' education. Evidently, the above findings show that the cultural practices are the main challenge to girls' education in Terekeka State.

Measures taken by the government to improve girls' education in Terekeka State

This objective was realized through qualitative approach. The key informants were asked to explain measures taken by the government to improve girls' education in Terekeka and following responses were elicited:

The government has shown support girls education through a programme called 'Girls Education South Sudan (GESS). This program is run in all public schools in South Sudan with the aim to encourage girls to enroll and be retained in school. The programme targets all girls particularly in primary school, from the upper primary (Primary 5 to 8). The programme provides incentives to girls and also sanitary kits to motivate the girls to continue with their Education.

It was found that the government introduced free primary education under the Universal Basic Education Programme. The purpose is to help poor families struggling with school fees to be able to send their kids to school, particularly the programme aimed to bridge gender disparity in primary education, whereby families struggling financially prefer male children to go to school instead of girls. Though the programme is a welcome development, however free tuition alone doesn't seem to be enough to keep pupils in school. Public schools are not well equipped in terms of infrastructure and manpower. Most schools in Terekeka State and the rest of the country are understaffed, while many of the available teachers lack adequate training. In addition, the schools lack infrastructures – they lack adequate classrooms and toilet is a scarce commodity in these schools. There are no library or study rooms available to pupils, rather there is apparent paucity of study materials in these schools. As a result, the free primary education programme don't seem to yield the intended result, since the state still records a high level of school dropout among girls.

Another respondent from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology stated that the government has initiated awareness campaign programmes informing the public of the benefits of girls' education. In his words:

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) has put up awareness campaign in Terekeka State and the rest of the country on the importance of girls' education at different levels. The public is conscientize on the benefits of education and why families should make girls education a priority.

The study found that the government has implemented awareness campaign programme to support education and particularly girl's education in South Sudan of which Terekeka is included. However, the problem is that the government employed the mass media as the medium of disseminating the awareness campaign messages. Given that many families in rural communities, which the campaign should be targeting are poor and don't have access to radio and television, the campaign seems not to reach most of the intended audience. Consequently, the government strategy to

address school drop-out among girls in Terekeka State has not been significantly successful.

CONCLUSIONS

Culture has continued to pose a challenge to girls and women in different parts of the world. Early marriage as a cultural practice stands against the principles of international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Elimination of Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) among others. In Terekeka, early marriage violates girls' right to education and as a result compromise their socio-economic potentials and overall well-being. It is therefore the responsibility of the government of Terekeka State and South Sudan to ensure that education of girls is among its priorities. Policies, laws and legislations should be put in place to protect girl's education. Community leaders being the custodian of traditional laws and customs should be reoriented to embrace girl's education as a change mechanism for sustainable development of Terekeka State and by extension, the entire South Sudan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of South Sudan should redesign its education awareness campaign programme to focus on families, community leaders, teachers and other stakeholders with the view of bringing about positive public attitude towards girls' education and their rights to education from the grassroots and household levels. Unlike the present campaign that rely on radio and television as the medium of reaching out to the target audience, the study recommends that the campaign strategy should incorporate regular community engagement outreach, whereby members of the different communities in Terekeka are engaged in a face-to-face deliberation and dialogue on the value and benefits of girls' education. Churches and Mosques can be used as platforms to reach parents and caregivers. As the custodians of culture, the government should initiate a specialized training and enlightenment programmes to engage community leaders and Chiefs on the benefits of girls' education vis-à-vis its contribution to human and community development.

Furthermore, the study revealed that some of the girls who dropped out from school were willing to continue with their education, but the challenge was that when they made attempt to enroll back, the school administration denied them the opportunity for a second chance. This situation therefore, highlights the need for an alternative education that will cater for those young women who left school due to marriage, but desire to enroll back and continue their education. The study therefore recommends that the government should establish special schools for married girls and women who desire to further their education. Besides, the government of South Sudan should enact laws proscribing early marriage and also put mechanisms in place to enforce the law and bring violators to book.

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