Full Length Research Paper

Socio-cultural practices and girls schooling system in the upper west region of Ghana

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The United Nations Convention guarantees fundamental human right for all children. In Ghana, this right is guaranteed by the 1992 Constitution with the introduction of the Free Compulsory Basic Education for all children of school going age, irrespective of religion, gender, ethnicity and geographical location. However, basic education, to some extent, is still far from being a reality for most children, particularly, those in the rural settings facing socio-cultural challenges, especially the girls. This paper therefore explores the socio-cultural factors accounting for the low access, retention and participation by girls in basic education in the Jirapa District of the upper west region of Ghana. The study employed the mixed (qualitative and quantitative approaches) to the collection and analysis of data. The tools used in the data collection include questionnaires and interview guide. Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and qualitative data was purely descriptive. We found out that NGOs efforts are complementing the efforts of the government in promoting girls' basic education. However, their efforts are not yielding the necessary fruits as expected. The study revealed that socio-cultural values serves as the major obstacles to girls' participation in basic education in the study area. The socio- cultural values, beliefs and practices perpetuate formal educational imbalances in terms of gender. Boys are preferred to girls in terms of formal education in the study area. The socio-cultural practices include early marriage, being housemaid, performing household chores, female genital mutilation and funerals rites and other economic related activities. It was revealed that girls are discriminated when it comes to funding children's formal education. The following recommendations were made: Government and NGOs should institute scholarship schemes for the girl-child, provide separate wash room for girls in schools and enforcement of laws on outmoded socio-cultural practices (early marriages, betrothal, female genital mutilation, elopement and the use of charms in marriage).

Key words: Socio-cultural practices, School enrolment, School retention, girl-child education.

INTRODUCTION

The development of every country depends on their educational attainment of the citizens in the country. It is the priority for every government to improve the status of their educational sector in their respective countries.

As governments of other countries are improving on their education status, so has the past and present Ghanaian governments helped in the development of

education in the country. The previous government (NPP from 2000 - 2008) helped built about 7829 blocks for kindergarten to the junior high level and upgraded about 38 training colleges (Agyemang, 3rd June 2012. Ghanaweb.com). The present government (NDC 2008 to date) is also doing well by continuing to improve on it, in maintaining the school feeding programme and the capitation grand (fee free policy). The NDC government also introduced free uniform and exercise books for the basic schools and laptops to senior high schools and

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tertiary institutions to improve the level of education in the country.

The issue of inequality can be seen from the dimension of disparities between boys and girls where boys are given the utmost opportunities and encouragement to be in school while girls are discouraged and sometimes prevented from going to school. The issue of low level of girls' participation and high level of drop-out is a problem in the upper west region and the country at large.

Research by Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004) shows that while much progress has been made over the past decade by the government of Ghana in rectifying gender imbalances in basic education and development, socio-cultural, and political challenges nevertheless still constitute barriers to girls' education. As indicated earlier, frantic effort has been made by the government of Ghana since independence to bridge the gender gap via various policy formulations. The national JHS GPI increased slightly from 0.93 to 0.94 in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 respectively. In the upper west region, GPI decreased from 1.07 to 1.06 in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 respectively. In the Jirapa District, GPI decreased from 1.19 to 1.09 in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 respectively (GES, 2013) and decreased to 0.98 2013/2014 academic year. The district decrease rate was the highest.

There are efforts of Non-Governmental Organizations (World Vision International, Action Aid, Plan Ghana, Pronet North, etc) in the upper west region and in the Jirapa District to ensure parity by the provision of bicycles, books and school uniforms to girls in order to motivate them to be in school. In spite of all these efforts, there is still the problem of low access retention and participation by girls in basic education in the Jirapa District. This paper therefore explores the socio-cultural factors accounting for the low access, retention and participation by girls in basic education in the Jirapa district of the upper west region of Ghana. Specifically, the objective is:

To identify and discuss the socio-cultural practices that pose as barriers to girls' access and participation in basic education in the Jirapa District?

Literature review

The importance of female education, especially in the developing countries cannot be overemphasized. There is considerable evidence in the management of resources, child's health and family planning, that the education of women has a direct impact on various aspects of the social, economic, and political well-being of a country. For instance, (Swainson, 2001, as cited in Tanye, 2003) suggests that the mother's educational level has a direct influence on economic productivity and on the level of her daughter's education.

Research findings show that investing in females' education may be the most cost-effective measure a developing country can take to improve its standard of living (Donkor, 2002). Furthermore, Kofi Annan, Ghanaian UN Secretary General, at the World Education Forum, 2000, also stated:

No development strategy is better than one that involves women as central player. It has immediate benefits for nutrition, health savings, and reinvestment at the family, community and ultimately, country level. In other words, educating girls is a social development policy that works. It is a long term investment that yields exceptionally high returns. We need those with power to change things to come in alliance for girls' education: governments, voluntary progressive groups, and above all, local communities, schools and families.

Also, the Preston Education Fund for Girls (1995), a sub-group of the Global Fund for Women reports, "failing to invest in the education of women and girls has long-term consequences for health, population growth, and environmental security".

Econometric studies within individual developing countries looking at the effects of education on fertility found that an extra year of female schooling reduces females' birth rate by 5-10%. This is partly a consequence of education lowering poverty, as the latter is associated with high fertility rates. Education can influence birth rate by changing perceptions of the costs and benefits of having children, postponing the time of marriage and helping shape attitudes to contraception.

In the long run, it is usually the case that increasing education, especially of girls, will ultimately reduce fertility rate (King and Hill, 1993). Moreover, female education creates intergenerational educational benefits and is an important predictor of children's, especially girls, educational attainment. All things being equal, educated mothers are more likely to send their children to school. Research in many countries indicates that each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her offspring remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year (UNICEF, 2000).

Educated women are also better equipped to enter into the paid labour force, which is critical to the survival of the many female-headed households in developing countries. It is not surprising then, that nations with higher levels of female school enrollment in the past, today show higher levels of economic productivity, lower birth rate, lower infant and maternal mortality, and longer life expectancy than countries that have not achieved as high enrollment levels for girls(Yakubu, 2012).

Constraints to girls' education

The factors that account for low female participation in education are enormous, amongst them, socio – cultural values, norms and practices, with economic realities superimposed on these (UNICEF, 2008). The factors interact in complex ways that perpetuate and reproduce gender disparities. These factors exert their influence from birth, through the child – rearing practices followed by different communities, initiation and marriage, to old age. In some communities, for example, reports indicates that the girl – child is prized for the labour she provides to the family, and for the dowry she brings. This pushes up the opportunity cost of educating a girl, and exposes her to early marriage. However, there are also pockets of communities where male children absent from school because they are at the cattle or fishing camps, but the number of disadvantaged boys is regarded as being substantially smaller than that of disadvantaged girls.

The World Bank (1988) findings reveal that the capacity to finance and manage the education sector is increasingly under threat in many Sub-Saharan countries. Due to a fiscal crisis, inadequate public support is given to the education sector, at almost at all educational levels.

The socio-traditional environment, which is rooted in culture, creates the barriers that rob females of their human identity and social rights. A negative attitude towards women's education, the dowry system, control of women's lives, male privilege and time constraints as well as the multiple roles women must perform are some of the cultural barriers impeding women's access to education (Tanye, 2008).

Negative attitudes toward girl's education are serious societal impediments to girls. In Ghana, when a woman gives birth, it is common to hear men ask the question: "Is that a human being (boy) or an animal (girl)?" – Nepaanaaaboa"? (Twi). At the 1998 International Conference on Girls' Education in Washington, D.C., countries were asked to remove the social and educational inequalities that make women "second – class citizens." Ghana former president, Jerry John Rawlings (1998) confirmed that negative attitudes in the home and community undermines the education of females. He points out that the attitudes of parents, relatives, and some females themselves are contributing factors. Most people in Ghana hold the view that educated women tend to equate themselves to men; hence, if they are denied the chance to education, so much the better (Gyekye – Nimako, 1983).

Indeed, the bride wealth is devalued when a girl gets pregnant before the customary marriage rite. The dowry also loses value with the length of time a girl remains in school. The longer the girl remains in school, the more limited the number of children she may have. These beliefs are validated by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (1996), which estimates that when girls remain in school, their fertility declines by 10%. Ghanaians, like most Africans, value large families. In some parts of Northern Ghana, the initial dowry is seven cows, supplemented by three more when a daughter gives birth to dowry wives for their sons or other males in the family. A Zimbabwean proverb aptly represents the economic value of girls with respect to the dowry: ''A man is poor when he has no daughters'' (Tanye, 2003). Marriage puts Ghanaian women in bondage, thereby suppressing their efforts towards higher education. The dowry system places women under the rigid control of husbands. Wives become the property of and slaves to their husbands and their families. The situation is worse for educated women whose parents collect the school fees they spend on their daughters from their sons-in-law.

According to Human Rights Watch (2012), children usually do not have a place to rest and are forced to marry at tender age, depriving them of the basic human rights. They are always attacked in schools in Somalia. These do not give the girl child the freedom to basic education.

In South African schools, girls are not free to express themselves and enjoy their fundamental human rights as humans (Bhana, 2013).

Torgan (2012), lamented over acid attacks on Afghan girls who were in school.

There were at least 185 documented attacks on schools and hospitals in Afghanistan 2012, according to the United Nations. The majority were attributed to armed groups opposed to girls' education. According to Torgan, it is heartbreaking to see the way some terrorists treated women. To them, a woman is an object that they can control. They are scared that when these girls get an education, they will become aware of their rights as women and as a human being.

Human Rights Council, Resolution called for a Panel discussion on realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl (A/HRC/27/L.8 (2014)). This means girls do not enjoy equal rights to education.

Hence, there is the need to ensure that girls enjoy their basic rights.

Gender inequality is evident in Africa. Transforming relations, norms, and systems that sustain gender inequality and violence is urgently - but also consistently - required. The lack of success is disconcerting and has often been attributed by some to a lack of political commitment (Jewkes et al., 2014).

Trokosi is an aspect of African religious practice that violates human rights of females with impunity. In his

article entitled ''Trokosi in Ghana: Cultural relativism or Slavery", Owusu-Ansah (2003) explains that majority of women and girls are voiceless, disempowered in many areas, circumstances including education and not having significant roles in the area of policy formulation and decision – making.

He emphasizes that old cultural practices in many circumstances render women vulnerable and that these practices abuse the fundamental human right of the victims.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study was basically the mixed approach. Key informant interviews and self-administered questionnaires were used in collecting data from respondents. Key respondents were the school girls, Head Teacher and Teachers, Officer in charge of girl child education, girls who have dropped out of school, parents and Opinion Leaders.

The research is conducted in the Jirapa District of the Upper West Region of Ghana.

Sampling techniques

Purposive sampling

In this technique, the researcher purposely chooses individuals who, in their opinion, are relevant to the project. The choice of respondents is guided by the expert judgment of the investigator. For this reason, it is also known as judgment sampling (Sarantakos, 2005). Purposive sampling was used to sample individual such as the officer in charge of girl child education, head teachers, females who dropped out of basic school, women opinion leaders and circuit supervisors. This was because of their knowledge and experience in the subject of study.

Snowball sampling

This method is employed when there is lack of sampling frames which makes it impossible for the researcher to achieve a probability sample when the target population is unknown. In many cases, snowball sampling is the only way of securing a sample for a study. In this technique the researcher chooses a few respondents, using accidental sampling or any other technique and asks them to recommend other people who meet the criteria of the research and who might be willing to participate in the project. This process is continued with the new respondents until saturation-that is, until no more substantial information can be acquired through additional respondents or until no more respondents are available (Sarantakos, 2005:165-166)

Snowball sampling technique was used to sample 10 females/girls, from each circuit, who, had dropout of school and their parents. Some of the school girls contacted directed us to few of them, who also recommended others. They were adults and non-adults (15 - 45) years. Although, this non-probability sampling procedure is critiqued as not ensuring representativeness, it is the ideal procedure for this research as the dropouts are scattered and can only be identified by their colleagues.

Simple random sampling

The simple random sample is selected in such a way that each unit in the universe stands an equal chance or probability of being included or excluded in the final sample (Kumekpor, 2002). Hence, biases will be avoided. This was used to sample 3 circuits, 3 - 5 schools in each circuit and 6 - 12 girls enrolled in schools in order to obtain data on factors affecting their education. In all, 52 school girls were contacted. We employed the fish-bow method of simple random sampling. The technique was employed because these elements were homogenous, and also to avoid bias.

Quantitative methods of data collection

Questionnaires include standardized questionnaires, un-standardized and semi-standardized questionnaires (Sarantakos, 2000).

A questionnaire can be defined as document containing questions and other types of items such as statements designed to solicit information on specific issues, themes, problems or opinions to be investigated (Babbie, 2005;

Kumekpor, 2002).

Individuals who were contacted through questionnaire included opinion leaders, assembly men and women, some NGOs officers, teachers, selected students and some GES officers. These respondents were purposively sampled because of their experiences and knowledge in socio-cultural practices that impede girl child education. Also, their level of understanding of the research questions was taken into consideration.

Qualitative methods of data collection

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews involves interviewing a selected group of individuals who are deemed likely to elicit rich information, ideas, and insights on a particular subject (Kumar, 1999). An informant is someone who possesses knowledge about the social phenomenon that researcher is searching into (Babbie, 2005). Key informant interviews are purely qualitative interviews and are conducted using interview guides that list the topics and issues to be covered during the interview.

Interviews were conducted to obtain the views, opinions, and experiences of individuals about the efficacy of government policies and how social and cultural practices impede girl child education. Interviews with individuals were conducted in each study circuit and the participants included women, opinion leaders and dropout from school (girls), family heads. A total of ten respondents were purposively selected to obtain their individual views during the key informant interview.

Data analysis and presentation

Data analysis is summarizing data and organizing it in such a manner that answers your research questions (Yin, 1993). It involves examining for consistencies and inconsistencies between knowledgeable informants, finding out why informants agree or disagree on the subject matter.

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis is the numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of

describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect (Babbie, 2005). There was debriefing after each day's data collection to find emerging trends and relationships. Issues which required further probing were reconsidered while on field.

A quantitative data analysis was done using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 19.0 to draw cross tabulation and other statistical relationship between variables in the structured questionnaires that were used. SPSS was used because of its clarity in expressing quantitative relationships between variables in the form of graph, frequencies, percentiles, cross-tabulations amongst others (Leech et al. 2005 cited in Yakubu, 2012). These quantitative analyses from the SPSS are further explained by qualitative interpretation such as informants' interpretations in form of stories, beliefs, experiences and their general perceptions from their worldviews. In this regard, survey data obtained from questionnaires were codified and inputted into a spread sheet on SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and cross-tabulations.

Qualitative data analysis

This deals with description of data or phenomena. Qualitative data analysis is a method for examining social research data without converting them to numerical format (Babbie, 2005).

It is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic question, and writing memos throughout the study (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative data were analyzed through the use of tools like content analyses. This was done by describing the issues as the respondents say them based on the thematic areas.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Educational status of parents

Formal education is a major factor that influences greatly the socio-cultural practices of people. It determines people's attitudes and perceptions in the society. The study ascertained the educational background of the parents in order to determine the extent to which formal education can influence parents' attitude towards their girl child's education. This was conducted on only parents
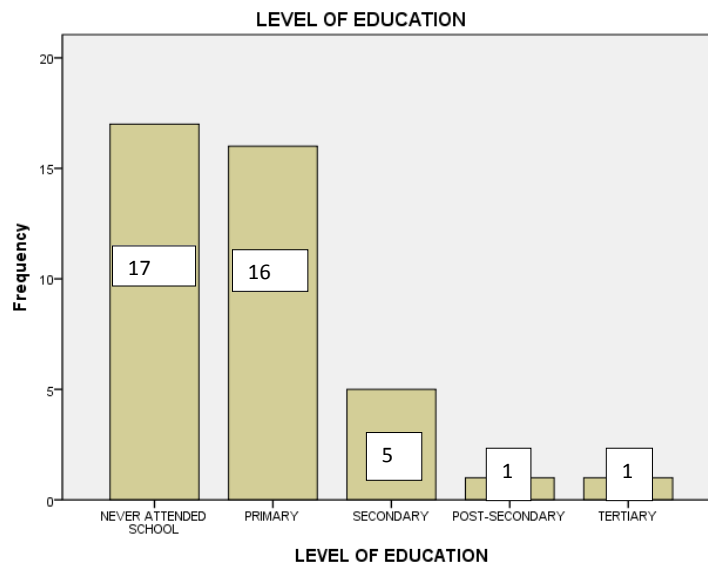
Figure 1. Educational status of parents.
Source: This study

Table 1. Attitude of educated females.

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
High	30	75
Average	8	20
Low	2	5
Total	40	100

Source: This study.

whose girls have dropped out of school in order to determine the relationship between the level of education of the parents and the rate of drop out of their girls.

From the Pareto diagram (Figure 1), it is clear that the level of education of parents is very low. Out of 40 respondents, 17(42.5%) never had any formal education and constitute the highest, meaning they had greatest number of school dropout. This was closely followed by 16 out of the 40 (40.0%) being those who had primary education, and only 7 out of the 40 had at least secondary education (5 had secondary, 1 had post-secondary and 1 had tertiary) and being the least number of respondents means that the higher their level of education, the better the chances of educating the female child. Hence, the level of education of the parents and school dropout of their girls is inversely related. The lower the level of formal education of the parents, the higher the rate of school dropout of their girls and the higher the level of formal education of the parents, the lower the rate of dropout of their girls from school.

How attitudes and perceptions of parents affect the enrolment and retention of girls' in basic schools in the jirapa district

Attitude of educated females (rough, disrespectful and arrogant) towards men

This was conducted to ascertain the views and perceptions of respondents on the behavior of educated females in their communities. The outcome shows that 30 (75%) of the respondents are of the view that the tendency of educated females becoming rough, disrespectful and arrogant is high, 8 (20%) rated averagely and 2 (5%) rated them low. Thus, 38 (95%) of the respondents supported the view and the perception that educated females become rough, disrespectful and arrogant. According to respondents, these attitudes make society frown on female education as identified by Tanye (2013) and Rawlings (1998). This is summarized in the Table 1

Table 2. Girls do not make a difference to a community like educated boys.

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
High	35	87.5
Average	2	5.0
Low	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Source: This study.

Table 3. Girls roles change when they are educated.

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
High	38	95
Average	2	5
Low	-	-
Total	40	100

Source: This study.

Table 4. School drop out for girls.

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
High	23	57.5
Average	10	25
Low	7	17.5
Total	40	100

Source: This study.

Boys versus girl-child education

In an attempt to determine the preference of parents in the education of their boys and girls, indicated that, majority of the parents prefer to educate their boy child rather than their girl child. From Table 2, 35 (87.5%) of the respondents rated high the perception that girls do not make a difference to the community like educated boys do, 2 (2.5%) rated this perception average and 3 (7.5%) of the respondents rated it low. The reason they gave was that, the girl ends up "somewhere" as a wife. The discrimination against females begins at birth. Tanye (2008), identified that, in Ghana, when a woman gives birth, it is common to hear men ask the question; "Is that a human being (boy) or an animal (girl)?" "Nepaanaa, aboa" (Twi). The perception that girls will get married and may not remember their parents is a major reason for discrimination against girls' education in the study area.

The impact of educated girls on community

The purpose of this was to know the perception of the parents on the changes of roles of educated females in their community. The results showed that all the respondents supported the fact that females roles change when they are educated. 95% of the respondents rated this perception high, and 2 (5%) of the respondents rated it average. To them, the traditional perception is that, once the female adapts western culture, her roles as female in the African typical family (cooking, washing, sweeping, child care, fetching water and fire wood) changes totally (Gyekye, 1988). This is shown in Table 3. These culturally defined roles are seen in every community as normal. So, if there are changes in the performance of these roles, and causes of the changes are known to the men in the community, they will do all they can to ensure that the roles are performed as culturally assigned. Hence, society frowns on policies to promote girls' education.

Questionnaires were administered to ascertain information on the attitude of parents on whether girls should be dropped out of school for any reason.

From Table 4, 23 (57.5%) of the respondents rated high the perception that girls should not drop out of school, 10 (25%) rated it average and 7 (17.5%) rated low. This shows that the majority support the fact that no girl should drop out of school for any reason. However, this differs from their previous responses on: educated females are very rough, disrespectful, and arrogant, educating girls do not make a difference to a community
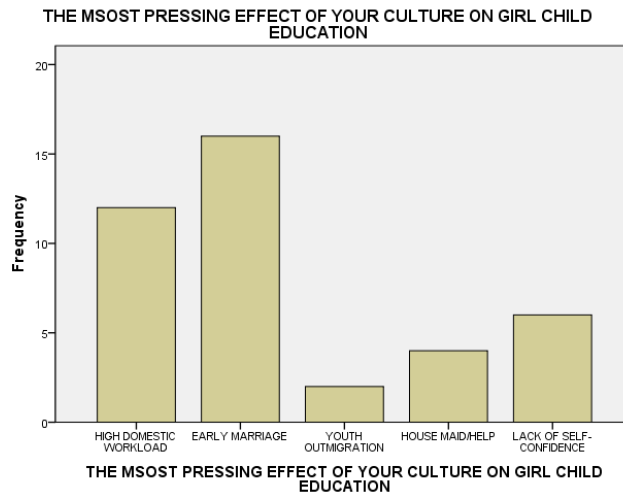
Figure 2. The effects of culture on girl child education.
Source: This study.

like educating boys because they go elsewhere as wives and girls roles change when they are educated. With respect to their responses to these, one would have expected that, they would not be in favour of retention of girls in school. In an attempt to find out why, this is what one of the parents said:

"It is a government policy that our girls should be sent to school and remain in school till they complete. This we accepted verbally but not practically. This is a force on us the parents. So, we do send them to school alright, but when they are15-18 years, we have our way out. It is not in line with our culture. In our culture, if you give birth to a girl, we say she belongs somewhere. The somewhere here is the husband's house. The husband has to pay for her in the form of cowries, money, animals, etc, to compensate me for taking care of the wife for eighteen or less years. To waste my money on her education for her to go and marry somewhere will be a mistake on my part. Will the husband agree to pay for her school expenses that I incurred? Or you do not know that education is very expensive"? (Source: Parent respondent, November, 2014).

This means that, because society does not want to be in conflict with policy makers, they accept them verbally, but do not have girls' education at heart.

Girls should marry instead of completing school

In an attempt to determine the rate at which parents would allow their girls to complete basic school, it was revealed that, 21 (52.5%) of the respondents rated high

the perception that parents would rather allow their girls to marry instead of completing school, 16 (40%) rated average and only 3 (7.5%) rated low. In all 92.5 of the respondents prefer the girls to marry to completing school. Their perception was that, the value of the bride price reduces as the girl grows beyond certain age. To them, when girls are highly educated they don't get husbands and they turn out to control their husbands. 35 respondents representing 87.5% rated high the perception that highly educated females do not get husband and even if they marry, they turn out to control their husbands. Thirty four (34) representing 85% of the respondents rated it high, the perception that highly educated girls turn out to control their husbands and that their fertility rate diminishes as the girls are ageing. All these perceptions go a long way to hinder the girl child from being enrolled and retained in basic education in the study area. These were identified by Tany, (2003); Forum for African Women Educationalist, (1996) and Gyekye(1988).

The effects of culture on girl child education

According to some respondents, cultural practices such as, early marriage, youth-outmigration, house maid/house help and lack of self-confidence pose some pressing effects on girl child education. In an attempt to ascertain the pressing culture practice on the girl child education, the outcome showed that the most pressing cultural practice is early marriage with 16 (40%) of the respondents, followed by high domestic workload with 12 (30%) of the respondents and the least being youth outmigration (Figure 2). In a typical African social setting,

Table 5. Cross tabulation of sex of parents respondents and their perception of the most pressing cultural practice affecting girl child education.

		The Most Pressing Cultural Practice Affecting Girl Child Education (In Percentages)					
		High Domestic Workload	Early Marriage	Youth Outmigration	House Maid/Help	Lack Of Self-Confidence	Total
Sex	Male	20	37.5	2.5	7.5	10	77.5
	Female	10	2.5	2.5	2.5	5	22.5
Total		30	40	5	10	15	100

Source: This study.

the perception that there is the tendency that a female can give birth to more and healthy children at early ages is still held in high esteem. Also, premarital children are disliked in the study area. These perceptions compels parents to force their young female children into early marriage, a practice that hinders female formal education, just as indicated by Tanye (2008).

In all, 77.5% of the respondents are males because of the fact that female only become a respondent in the absent of the husband or a male person in the family at the time of contact. No sex scored 50% and above. This means that, averagely, all the above cultural practices have equal impact on the girl child education. Combining sexes, the highest score is 40% for early marriage. The most pressing cultural practices are the early marriage and high domestic workload which are rated by both sexes; 40% and 30% respectively (Table 5). Early marriage is therefore, a major cultural factor that impedes girls' education in the study area as both sexes rated it high.

Socio- cultural challenges to girl-child education

Questionnaires on socio-cultural factors that pose as impediments to girls' access and participation in basic education in the Jirapa District were administered to the school girls to ascertain their views on the effect of these practices (values, norms, believes and practices).

Education is more useful to boys than girls

Eighty-six (86) (96.6%) of the respondents disagreed with the belief that education is more useful for boys than girls whilst only 3 (3.4%) of the respondents agreed with this belief. At least, some girls even prefer their brothers to be educated instead. To the school girls, majority agreed that formal education should be for both boys and girls, though few of them prefer that their brothers should be given formal education. To these few school girls, the boys can take good care of their parents at old age and that they will one day be in their husbands' homes.

Washing clothes every week before or after school

In an attempt to find out the extent to which the school girls do wash at home, it was realized that 62 (72.1%) of the 86 who responded to this rated this very strong, 11 (12.8%) rated it strong and 13 (15.1%) rated it fair. Thus, they do wash clothes every week before or after school. Washing is one of the household chores of every Ghanaian family system. To the girls, it is preserved for only girls in most traditional communities such as Jirapa District. This consumes most of the girls' study time and this can contribute to their poor performance leading to dropout. This is because poor performance in terminal exams usually compels school's authority to repeat those who perform poorly. This repetition is disliked by students due to teasing habits from their fellow students. Those who cannot withstand it will definitely stop schooling.

Sweeping every day before or after school

Every home activity does affect the girl child education as most of the household chores are performed by them. The outcome on the extent to which the school girls sweep every day as part of their household chores either before or after school revealed that 79 (91.9%) of the respondents rated very strong and only 7 (8.1%) rated it strong. None rated it fair, weak or very weak. This means that, they do spend a lot of time to sweep. I was told by one of the girls that, traditionally, it is a taboo for a male to sweep in the yard. If he does, his manhood will disappear. This and other superstitions, push almost all the household chores to the girl child, giving her a heavy burden every day. Thus, she has very little time for her studies.

Fetching water every day before and after school

In an attempt to find how often the school girls fetch water either before or after school, it was realized that 76 (90.5%) of the 84 who responded to this rated it very strong, 6 (7.1%) rated it strong and 2 (2.4%) rated it fair. Hence, 97.6% rated that they fetch water at home. From respondents, water is used every day by each household.

Be it domestic uses (cooking food, washing dishes, clothes, bathing) or commercial uses such as brewing pito which is a common practice among the Dagaaba. It is the sole responsibility of the girl child to ensure that there is always enough water in the house for everyone to use, irrespective of the distance to the source of the water. In such situation, a family of one girl with many males who will definitely use water every day and will not help in the fetching, then she will have no time to attend to her books.

This research on the above was conducted to ascertain how often the school girls take care of their younger siblings before and after school. The end results showed that, only 6 (9.7%) of the 62 who responded to this rated it very strong, 27 (43.5%) rated it strong, 17 (27.4%) rated it fair and 12 (19.4%) rated it weak. In an interaction with a few of them, they agreed that they can take better care of their younger siblings than their brothers. In a traditional setting, it is very rare to see a male "backing" a child. It is the work of the females. When the girls are with a child, she cannot concentrate on her books.

This was an attempt to ascertain how often the school girls do cook every day before and after school. The outcome indicated that, 19 (22.4%) of the respondents who responded to this rated it very strong, 54 (63.5%) of them rated it strong, 12 (14.1%) rated it fair, no girl rated weak and very weak. It can be concluded that the extent to which the school girls do cook every day before and after school is very strong (at least 85.9% strong). According to one of the school girls, cooking is done every day, at least once which is done with other related activities like washing dishes, making sure there is water for the cooking and sweeping. This consumes much of their study time leading to poor performance and subsequent dropout.

Girls in every traditional setting always have to collect and wash dishes every day before and after every meal. With regards to washing of dishes, the results showed that 51 (60.7%) of 84 respondents rated it very strong, 19 (22.6%) rated it strong, 6 (7.1%) rated it fair, and 8 (9.5%) rated it weak. Adding very strong and strong, 83.3% of the school girls wash dishes a lot before and after school. From the interaction with the school girls, one of them said that, she was the only girl in a household of fifteen and therefore has to wash at least fifteen bowls and at least a pot after every meal. This takes much of her study time.

The end results on the extent to which the school girls work on their parents' farm before and after school showed that their participation in farming activities is averagely low. Four (10.5%) of the respondents rated it very strong, 7 (18.4%) rated it strong, 15 (39.5), 4 (10.5%) and 8 (21.1%) rated it fair, weak and very weak respectively.

Fifty one (51) of the school girls whose questionnaires were retrieved did not respond to this question because it was only meant for those who do work on the farm to rate the extent to which they do work on the farm. This means that, the 51 girls do not work on the farm at all. In an interaction with some of them, they said that, traditionally, in the Dagaaba communities, women were initially not allowed to do hard work on the farm except sowing and harvesting. However, this tradition is fading because of western culture and the confiscation of farm lands by husband's relatives upon husband's death has compelled the women to take part in farm activities in order to keep the land safe for their children. Hence, farming activities have low negative impact on girls' education.

Selling in the market every day before or after school

This was carried out to find out how often the school girls do help their parents to sell in the market. The results showed that out of the 73 who responded to this question, 10 (13.7%), rated it very strong, 38 (52.1%) rated it strong, 14 (19.2%) rated it fair, 9 (12.3%) rated it weak. Only 2 (2.7%) rated it very weak. Adding "very strong" and "strong", 48 (65.8%) of the respondents, thus the majority of the school girls, are actively involved in selling things in the market, rather than being with their books. This leads to poor performance, demotion and subsequent dropout.

Pounding grain before or after school

In an attempt to find out the extent to which the school girls do pound grain, it was realized that no school girl rated this very strong, only 3 (4.0%) of the 75 respondents rated it strong. As many as 42 (56.0%) rated it fair, 26 (34.7%) rated it weak and 4 (5.3%) rated it very weak. Thus their participation in the pounding of grain is averagely low. According to them, pounding grains is not a daily chore, as grains are pounded and stored for several months. So, this is not a major barrier to girls' education in the study area.

Insecurity on the way to school as a challenge

In African traditional settings, some socio-cultural practices such as elopement and the use of charms to marry young girls, though outmoded, remain sources of insecurity to females, particularly, girls of school going age. This was conducted to determine the risk that school girls face on their way to school. The outcome showed that 15 (25.9%) of 58 respondents rated insecurity very strong, 27 (46.6%) rated it as being strong and 16 (27.8%) rated it as being fair. At least, 42 (72.4%) of the 58 school girls who responded to this questionnaire, rated insecurity

Table 6. Insecurity on the way to school as a challenge.

Rate	Frequency	Percentage
Very strong	15	25.8
Strong	27	46.6
Fair	16	27.6
Weak	-	-
Very weak	-	-
Total	58	100

Source: This study.

Table 7. Discouragement from parents and relatives as a challenge.

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
Very strong	79	95.1
Strong	1	1.2
Fair	3	3.6
Weak	-	-
Very weak	-	-
Total	80	100

Source: This study.

Table 8. Early pregnancy as a challenge.

Assessment	Frequency	Percent
Very strong	85	97.7
Strong	2	2.3
Fair	-	-
Weak	-	-
Very weak	-	-
Total	85	100

Source: This study.

as a significant factor. Hence, insecurity on the girls' way to school is a serious challenge to female education in the Jirapa District. This is shown in Table 6.

According to the school girls, the use of charms and elopement as forms of marriage is still practiced in the study area. This scares them anytime they meet men on their way to school or home. According to the school girls, the charm can be done by ways of a hand shake, eye contact, drinks and even a shout.

Discouragement from parents and relatives as a challenge

The Table 7 shows how parents and other relatives' discouragements influence the rate at which girls' dropout of school.

From Table 7, the following ratings were made in relation to parents and other relatives' discouragement to the girl child education. 79 (98.1%) rated it very strong, 1 (1.2%) rated it strong, 3 (3.6%) rated it fair and no respondent rated it weak and very weak. From the results, it can be concluded that, parents and other relatives' discouragement, play a major role in the rate at which girls drop out of school. Some of the school girls said that, parents, particularly grandparents, do put a lot of pressure on their girls to let them see their grandchildren before they die, late marriage can cause barrenness, how many women in the community has been successful in formal education? Those who have not had formal education are they not making a good living? and a whole lot.

Early pregnancy as a challenge

The Table 8 shows the extent to which early pregnancy affects the girl child education in the study area.

From the Table 8, 85 (97.7%) of the respondents rated that early pregnancy is a major challenge to girl child education in the Jirapa District with only 2 (2.3%) rating it as being strong. None rated it fair, weak or very weak.

Table 9. The various cultural practices that hinder the girl child education in the Jirapa District.

Cultural Practices	Frequency	Percentage
Early Marriage	81 out of 89	91 of 89
Insecurity (Elopement and the use of charms)	36 out of 89	39.9 of 89
Child Labour	65 out of 89	73 of 89
Female Genital Mutilation	15 out 89	16.9 of 89

Source: This study.

Table 10. Girls as family assets.

Assessment	Frequency	Percentages
High	30	85.7
Average	3	8.6
Low	5	5.7
Total	35	100.0

Source: This study.

Thus, 100% of the respondents agree that early pregnancy poses a strong challenge to female educational attainment in the district. Respondents indicated that, some of their parents are so worried that their girl child will become pregnant, because the value of the bride price depreciates when the girl is pregnant before the traditional marriage (Gyekye, 1988). Also, pre-marital children are ridiculed in the study area. So, parents will not want their grand-children to be ridiculed and so, will not want their girls to stay in school for long for the fear that they may become pregnant.

This was conducted to determine the level of knowledge of the school girls on the various cultural practices that pose as a challenge to their educational attainment in the district.

From the Table 9, 91% out of the 89 respondents are aware of early marriage, 39.9% out of the 89 respondents are aware of insecurity (elopement and the use of charms), 73% out of the 89 respondents are aware of child labour and 16.9% of the of the 89 respondents are aware of female genital mutilation. These cultural practices either terminate or retards girls' formal education in the study area. For instance, early marriage terminates girl child education whilst female genital mutilation retards girls' education as they have to stay indoors for some number of weeks for the sore to heal. According to some schools girls, it can take some females three to six weeks before they can even walk.

Girls as family assets

It was investigated to know the extent to which the community members see girls as assets to the family rather than family members.

The results showed that 30 (85.7%) of the respondents rated that girls as family assets is high, 3 (8.6%) rated it as average and only 2 (5.7%) rated it as being low. Thus, to a large extent, girls are seen as family assets and can therefore be used as a medium of payment to offset debt or any problem if the need arises. From an interaction with students respondents, it was realized that, in a typical African traditional setting, illiterate parents see the number of girls they have as the family's' wealth. Tanye, (2003), "A man is poor when he has no daughters." This is illustrated in Table 10.

The girl child's contribution to the household

This was conducted to know the extent to which the girl child contributes to their household. The results showed that, 5(14.3%) of the respondent rated it as being high, 28(80.0%) rated it as average and 2(5.7%) rated it low. Thus, the general public, on average think that, girls do contribute to the household.

From an interaction with a school girl, she said:

"We do contribute in every aspect of household chores, yet our contribution is not recognized simply because we are considered as family property or members of another family (husband's family)" (A respondent, November, 2014).

It is these chores that consume their study time leading to poor performance.

Assessing the extent to which performance among girls affect their dropout rate in basic school in the Jirapa District

Factors that contribute to poor performance among girls and how that contributes to their dropout rate

Key informant interviews were employed to solicit the views of the females who have dropped out of school on factors that led to their poor performance and how that contributed to their dropout of school. Most of the dropouts agreed that it was due to poor performance emanating from other causes such as too much house chores that left little time for them to engage in any serious studies (Fant, 2008). One of them said:

"I had very little or no time to study after school and during weekends due to work overload. I am the only girl of my mother. So, I assist in cooking, sweeping, washing, selling, etc. On market days, I do not even go to the house to change my uniform. I have to always go to the market right from school to assist my mum to sell pito. On non-market days, I do go to the house to change my uniform and rush to the market to assist her. I perform about 80% of the brewing process of the pito. I am only free latest by 9:00 pm, a time that I will be very exhausted. I always tried to study but I always wake up the next morning only to realize that I have studied nothing. All these and others made me score very low marks during terminal exams and this made the school authorities to repeat me on two occasions. I could not withstand the teasing from my friends who have been promoted. I decided to stop schooling and this was good news to my mum. I wanted to be a nurse or teacher in future but my dreams never came to pass. I was not happy when I stopped schooling. What surprised me was that, there was no advice from any family member for me to return to school and so, my education came to an end" (Key informant, November, 2014).

This is not strange of any typical traditional setting of an African society such as Jirapa, though it embraced Catholicism in the early 1900s. Parents who should have encouraged their girls to stay in school, rather want them at home and perform household chores. This negatively affects the girls' academic performance.
Another female dropout and a mother of three children said:

"I dropped out because of poor performance. My late mother was a nurse. She did all she could to get me back to school but I refused to return to school because I will attack any of my colleagues who teases me due to my poor performance and the school authorities will always

punish me for that action. Anything I needed as a student I always had it at the right time but I realized my mind was not in education and I don't know why?" (Key informant, November, 2014).

From this informant, it is clear that poor performance among girls in school is a contributory factor to their dropout rate in the study area.
Most of the informants also complained about the distance they have to walk every day to and from school. One of them said:

"I used to walk about 4-5 kilometers to school and back home. I am always tired when I get to the house. While my household chores awaits me upon my arrival from school. By sun set, I have no energy left in me to sit down and study, even if there is any, source of light was a problem. Again, on my way to school and back home, I used to meet wild animals particularly in the morning. I meet wild animals such as monkeys which I feared most because I used to hear stories about monkeys having sex with you and giving you all kinds of diseases including HIV/AIDS. So, my parents particularly my grandmother, used to put a lot of pressure on me to marry and for them to see their grandchildren before they die. Thus, I stopped schooling". (Key informant, November, 2014).

Distance poses a lot of challenges to basic education particularly the countryside of which Jirapa community is no exception. Both boys and girls walk to and from school. But when the get home, the boys have time for their books. The girls will go to fetch water, fire wood, wash dishes and cook. They will be exhausted and will need to rest by the end of the day without opening their books. Hence, poor academic performance, which leads repetition and dropout.
Other socio-cultural problems mentioned by the informants included: early marriage, teenage pregnancy, abortion, funeral rites and poverty.
On early marriage, one of the informants has this to say:

"I was schooling and doing well when it comes to terminal exams. Though there was discouragement from family members, I never thought of dropping out of school. One day, on my way to school, a man approached me and asked me to marry him, claiming that he would provide me with anything I needed. So, I should not bother myself walking every day in and out. I never told any of my family members because I knew if I did they will say I should accept the proposal. This man kept disturbing me on my way to school and back home but I never gave up. One day, I saw him in my house talking to two of my uncles. I was later called and told that, there was a man they wanted me to marry. I disagreed, though I had no

power over them. They kept putting pressure on me till one day I followed the man to his house on my way to school and that ended it. By the time I was able to think well again, I had given birth to the man's third child. I believe he did something spiritually just to marry me" (Key informant, November, 2014).

Hence, one can conclude that, "African electronics" worked (the use of charms in marriage). This is confirmed by the students when some of them mentioned elopement and the use of charms by men to marry young girls. These socio-cultural practices are serious impediments to female educational attainment in most typical traditional settings such as the Jirapa community.

Opinion of parents on socio-cultural practices and how it contributes to the poor performance of their girl child and how that affects their dropout rate

Key informant interviews were carried out to determine the extent to which socio–cultural practices and beliefs contribute to girls' poor performance in school leading to their dropout. When a parent in her mid-30s was interviewed on why she did not complete basic formal education, she said:

"To my father, marriage is more precious than formal education. I stopped schooling because I got married at the age of 16. There was constant pressure on me from my father to learn the various household chores from my mother instead of being with my books. Because of this, I was not good in school" (Key informant, November, 2014).

This is same as the response of a retired teacher who happens to be a parent. He indicated that the retention of girls in school is not encouraging and he cited early marriage as a major factor, adding that, it is usually a force on the girls. If she resist, she is usually given work load at home so that, she will not have time to study, leading to poor performance. The ultimate aim is to stop her from schooling.

Early marriage seriously affects girls' education. Girls are either taken out of school or not even given the opportunity to be enrolled. It inevitably denies girls their rights to formal education, which is very essential for their personal development and their effective contribution to their future well-being, their families and societies as a whole.

Some respondents also lamented the lack of access to formal education. They indicated that some girls stay in the interior and have difficulties in walking to- and-fro. They are not safe on their way to a distant school due to

outmoded cultural practices such elopement and the use of charms by men on young girls to marry them.

Lack of access to formal education means that, these girls are denied the needed technical know-how and skills that are needed for the attainment of jobs that can earn them a good living. It is common to see illiterate girls who are abandoned, widowed or divorced, or even who are victims of growing urban poverty, forced into commercialized versions of their work as wives, such as cleaning, cooking and child minding. They stand the risk of entering into commercial sex (Fant, 2008).

Traditional gender roles

Certain roles are traditionally delegated to women in the study area. Traditional gender roles such as what the family eats, childcare, fetching firewood and water, cleaning and washing, traditionally was and still is done by women. Among the Dagaba people, though it is socially accepted for a man to do some cooking if he has no woman in the house, he will do all he can to find a female relative to save him from the social stigma.

Informants complained bitterly about the work burden of girls in the study area that do not allow girls to attain formal education. For instance, an informant (parent) in response to question on who does domestic work in the home, said:

"Cooking, sweeping and fetching of water and fire wood is done mainly by the girls in our culture. The girls have to be trained as to how to do some of these domestic works such as cooking, washing, sweeping and fetching of water and fire wood, so that when they are married, they will do these chores very well and would not bring disgrace to their family for not knowing how to do these domestic work that makes them complete women. In our culture, a lady's inability to prepare good food such as tuozaafi (TZ) and ' kpoglo'(local food prepared from the flour of roasted maize/millet), cannot get a good husband or will be sent back to the father's house in case she is already married. To avoid this, there is the need for tutelage". (Key informant, November, 2014 and Fant 2008).

Another informant said:

"The girls are born to do so and must do that. Our great grand parents did same and they even lived better lives than we do now, so, why should formal education prevent you from doing what you were created to do? It is the creation of God that girls are made to do whatever they do in the home." (Key informant, November, 2014).
The field interviews showed that, this above assertion

cuts across. Families are therefore reluctant to enroll their girls into formal school. Even if they send them, they will not encourage them to stay in school for the fear that they will learn new values, and become less inclined to accept domestic chores as expected of them. Eventually, girls perform poor in school due to workload at home whereby girls get to do almost all the household chores and therefore have very little time to study.

Teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is one of the many social problems that the interviewees mentioned. It has become part of a way of life among girls in the study area. The issue of teenage pregnancy kept popping up among the school girls, parents and opinion leaders, putting the blame on the district hospital as a contributing factor that fuels the social problem by allowing abortions to be carried out in the hospital.

Due to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the study area, majority of parents felt that, it is economically unwise in investing in their girls' education even if they are fully aware of the great benefits of educating their girls. Teenage pregnancy had ruined the future of a good number of girls in the study area. A parent in explaining his reason for educating the boy child and not the girl child said:

"Pregnancy is always a source of worry to us as parents. This is so because it brings disgrace and frustration upon us and the family. The girl child terminating her education as a result of pregnancy is also a waste of resources. Again, she ends up as someone's wife and may not even remember her parents or family members". (Key informant, November, 2014).

A survey conducted on teenage pregnancy in schools by the Ghana Education Service (GES), reports that teenage pregnancy is one of the main causes of girls dropping out of school at the JHS-level. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) states that in 2003, 14 percent of Ghanaian 15 - 19 year-old girls had begun childbearing; a high percentage given that it does not take into account pregnancies that had not reached them, either because of miscarriage or abortion (Daily Graphic, 2007 cited in Fant, 2008).

Conclusion

Socio-cultural practices such as early marriage (elopement, the use of charms), traditional gender roles and teenage pregnancies were some of the barriers accountable for the poor access, retention and

participation of girls in basic schools in the study area.

Indeed, the household workload of the girl-child works against the girls in the study area. The information obtained from the field interviews suggest that, traditional gender roles within the household are performed by girls. Infact, Government and NGOs have been assisting girls in the study area with free school uniforms, exercise books and mathematical sets to promote their basic education in the district. However, some socio-cultural practices make their efforts in the promotion of girl-child's education sometimes fruitless.

Notwithstanding the above, the large family system, that is social net-works standing in for others have helped few girls to be enrolled into basic school in the area. There is also experiential learning in the area; that is learning by doing.

Recommendations

The District Education Office and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) should institute award scheme on termly bases mainly for girls who excel in the end of terminal exams. This will motivate the girls to be regular in school and spend much of their time on their books.

There should be mass education in the area on the need to enroll and retain the girl-child in school by all stakeholders. This should be backed by government policy on girl-child education.

Ghana's laws do not allow families to force their girls into marriage. The girls can refuse betrothal and early marriage before age 18. The Children's Act of 1998, Act 560 states: 'No person shall force a child – to be betrothed; to be the subject of a dowry; or to be married'; and gives 18 years as the minimum age of marriage irrespective of whatever kind. Though the laws are in place, the major problem is how to enforce the laws. It is important to make it known to the parents, the consequences of withdrawing their children from school and forcing them into early marriages. They must be aware of the price they will pay when they do that.

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