Human Rights Insights into School and Community Viewpoints of Girl-Child Schooling in Rural Areas of Chadiza District, Eastern Province, Zambia

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Abstract:

Objective: To establish school and community viewpoints of girl-child schooling in rural areas of Chadiza District, Eastern Province of Zambia.

Methods: The study used qualitative research methodology, particularly following the narrative inquiry. The sample comprised 2 primary schools in the district with 32 respondents: 2 head teachers, 10 teachers (5 from each school), 16 pupils (8 from each school) and 4 members of the community (2 representing each school). The study employed a self-sampling method to select headteachers, simple random sampling procedure to select teachers and pupils; and convenient sampling to select members of the community. Data were collected through interview guides and observation guides. Data were coded and transcribed. Thematic data analysis method was employed.

Results: The findings indicated that parents' level of education and distribution of responsibilities of household chores to school-going children affects their (girl-children) academic performance and engagement in extra-curricular activities. The respondents unanimously cited the following vices as perpetuators of girl-child school dropouts: truancy: community-led income generating activities, financial constraints, terminal illnesses, orphanage, child abandonment, female-headed households, marriage break-ups, parent/guardian drunkenness and sexual harassment.

Conclusion: The District Education Office and the Community should intensify media and local community sensitization of girl-child education in Chadiza District of Zambia in order to curb vices that affect school-going girls.

Keywords: *Human Rights; Child; Community; Education; School; Teenage.*

Introduction:

Education prepares the younger generation (boys and girls) for life that lies ahead, informs adults of the world about themselves and ensures character and moral development of the young learners and enhances their attitude (Haruna & Liman, 2015; Mulambia, Mpolomoka, Lufeyo & Muyendekwa, 2023). As such, the right to Education is a primary right of every Zambian citizen. Despite the positive worldview about girl-child schooling, education for girls in rural areas of Zambia has for a long time not been a priority. This is clearly seen in what was reported by the Ministry of Education (1996:62) that "for every 100 girls who begin primary school, only 70 complete the full primary course, 23 proceed into junior secondary school, 9 into senior secondary, and 7 sit for the school certificate examinations in Grade 12". It is against this background that this study explored school and community viewpoints on girl-child schooling in rural areas of Chadiza District, Eastern Province, Zambia.

Towards the end of 2018, the Zambian government working with Plan International, a non-governmental organization, went round Chadiza District to campaign for the promotion of girls' education. Their campaigns focused on discouraging all vices that negatively affected girls' education. This initiative cheered a number of parents, traditional leaders, education authorities and other stakeholders. The vices greatly put the education of girls at risk. Following the campaign, towards the end of 2019, the Zambian government enacted by-laws to discourage vices that impede girls' education. These were circulated to all 59 schools, clinics, churches, clubs, chiefs, indunas and villages in the District by Plan International (Plan International Zambia, 2019). With this background, the authors investigated school and community viewpoints on girl-child schooling in rural areas of Chadiza District.

The objectives of the study were to:

- establish community perception on girl-child schooling in rural schools.
- determine factors that impede girl-child schooling in selected communities in Chadiza District.
- ascertain measures schools put in place to enhance girl-child schooling.

Literature Review:

Girls' education is sometimes affected by cultural practices which hinder participation. Studies have shown how girls' participation in education can be realized in supportive environments and lost if the opposite is the case. Reviewed literature shows that there are factors which influence girl's attainment of education. Factors that contribute to girls dropping out of school can be divided into four groups, namely economic factors, household level factors, school level factors and cultural factors (Shovan, Ghosh, Susmita & Sengupta 2012; Nisha, 2014; Shahidul & Zehadul Karim 2015; Mpolomoka, Mushibwe, Dube, Musonda, Sumbwa, Mabenga & Kanduza, 2019; Mainde, Mpolomoka & Mwansa, 2022; Bimba, Mpolomoka, Sampa, Nyirenda, Chitondo, Muyendekwa, Kangwa, Chalwe, 2023). The trend of girls dropping out of school did not seem so much of a bother as opposed to training them for such roles as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Often times, girls took more loads of household chores than boys. It was also established that rural girls did more household chores than urban girls (Ersado, 2005). Evidently, girls' schooling in the rural areas was characterised by greater risk of absenteeism, poor performance, repetition and dropout. In the past, pregnant school girls in many African countries were forced to leave school once their pregnancy became visible or after giving birth (Chilisa, 2002; Plan, 2012). They were banned from returning to school, either by law or school trends-in-practices. Culture strongly influenced girls to drop out of school to pursue a life that they felt would provide a better living (Komora, 2013; Mpolomoka, Chulu, Mwandila, Muvombo, Simwinga, Kabungo & Sampa, 2023). Then, it was taen that education was an option for the girls could live without as they believed that their cultural practices provided everything they needed.

In spite of Zambia attending the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 that adopted the Education for All (EfA)'s Framework for Action, Mwanza (2010) reports that there were high drop-out rates among girls at both primary and secondary schools in Zambia. The forum requested all nations to ensure that girls have access to free and compulsory primary education of good quality (Nkosha, Luchembe & Chakufyali,

2013; UNESCO, 2010). Hence, Zambia demonstrated commitment to achieving that through enactment of various policy ratifications and deliberate measures to promote girl-child education. For example, the government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) (2008) observed that girls are married off by their parents when they are still very young and at school-going age, especially in rural areas. Cultural values and beliefs have also played a key role in hindering some girls from progressing with their schooling (Mushibwe, Mpolomoka, Botha & Machaka, 2020; Mpolomoka, et al., 2023). Teenage pregnancies and early marriages are also major constraints to girls' education in Zambia (Mwanza, 2010; Mwanza, 2015; Mpolomoka, et al., 2019).

Materials and Methods:

This study used the qualitative research paradigm, in particular, the case study approach. This research approach was selected because the data required were in the form of people's views, observable experiences and feelings about girls' schooling. The approach helped to obtain in-depth views on this topic (Banda, Mpolomoka, Mbono & Sampa, 2017). Ghosh (2003) explains that a case study is a method of collecting information about an individual, family, institution, group of persons that know precisely the factors and causes of a practical phenomenon.

The target population of the study comprised all pupils, all teachers, headteachers and members of the community in the two conveniently sampled primary schools. The reasons for sampling these two schools were twofold: firstly, they were the closest schools the researchers could access; and secondly, there seemed to be much talk around the schools in the zone mostly affected by the issue under study. The study sample consisted of thirty-two (32) participants, namely, 2 headteachers, 10 teachers (5 from each school), 16 grade seven pupils (8 from each school) and 4 members of the community (2 representing each school). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) explain that a sample is the total number of subjects selected to participate in a given study. This study employed a self-sampling method to select 2 headteachers; simple random sampling procedure to select 10 teachers and 16 pupils. Convenient sampling was used to sample 4 community members.

The researchers collected data from pupils through focus group discussions (FGDs), comprising 8 participants. For the teachers, headteachers and members of the community, one-to-one interviews were held. After data had been collected, it was coded and transcribed. This was followed by data analysis in order to generate themes. A six-stage model of Thematic Data Analysis (TDA) was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2022). Literature abounds of scholars who have written and studied thematic data analysis, insisting on its trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Kothari & Gaurav Garg, 2019; Caulfield, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2022; King, 2004).

Findings:

This section presents findings of the study. While some findings are presented under the major themes, other findings are presented in tables.

The researchers asked members of the community to indicate their education level. Findings revealed that there was 1 parent who had never been to school, 2 parents had reached upper primary, while 1 parent had reached junior secondary school.

The researchers wanted to know who headed households where pupils who participated in the study came from. Ten pupils representing 62.5% came from male headed households, while 6 pupils representing 37.5% were from female headed homes.

Participants were asked to mention factors that contribute negatively to girls' schooling. All 32 participants identified the following factors as negatively affecting girls' schooling: early marriage, lack of good parental support, pregnancy, poverty and parents' low education level. Twenty-eight participants representing 87.5% mentioned traditional/local market or trading also known as 'Kabwandile' in the local language. Twenty-seven participants representing 84.4% mentioned truancy as one of the factors while twenty-three participants representing 71.1% mentioned long distance as a factor in the high dropout rate of the girl-child from school. Traditional practices, sexual relationships in schools and lack of female workers as role models in rural areas were also mentioned by 16 participants, which represented a percentage of 50.

Participants were asked to identify some common traditional practices that impeded girls' schooling. All the 32 participants identified Nyau dancing as well as singing and Chinamwali. Dancing was only performed by men and boys who had been initiated in Nyau while singing was performed by all women and girls. Chinamwali is an initiation ceremony organised by elderly women for the girls who have come of age.

Table (1): Retention of girls in school

	# of School	Year						
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	School A	104	91	80	72	81	53	29
2	School B	31	39	31	42	38	36	42
	Total	134	130	111	104	119	89	71

Table (1) shows that there were 134 girls representing 100% who were enrolled into grade 1 in 2014, while only 71 were in grade 7 in 2020 representing 52.9%.

Table (2): Number of girls married

School	2017	2018	2019
School A	3	0	0
School B	2	2	5
Total	5	2	5

Table (2) shows that in 2017 there were 5 girls who were married; in 2018 there were 2 and in 2019 there were 5. Comparatively, school A did not record any girl married in the two years after 2017, while school B recorded an increase in the number of girls who were married from 2, in 2017 and 2018 to 5 in 2019.

Table (3): Number of girls with pregnancies

School	2017	2018	2019
School A	11	8	9
School B	2	2	5
Total	13	10	14

Table (3) shows that in 2017 there were 13 girls who fell pregnant; in 2018 there were 10 girls and in 2019 there were 14 girls. There does not seem to be a significant difference (reduction) in the number of girls who fell pregnant in the years 2017-2019. This still goes to show the persistence of girl pregnancies in schools.

Discussion of Findings:

In this section, the findings of the study are discussed under major themes. These were: literacy level, parents' participation in community activities, single female-headed families, teenage marriages, pregnancies and re-entry policy, truancy, long distance, culture and retention of girls in school.

Literacy Level:

The study revealed high illiteracy levels among women in rural areas. Most of the girls did not advance much in their education. Notably, among the participants, 25% of female parents had never been to school. Fifty percent of the female parents went up to upper primary and 25% up to junior secondary. The researchers posit that the low education levels of the parents made it difficult for them (children) to make sound decisions about (their) girls' education. It is a blame-game that is of a vicious circle nature, from one generation to another. This finding is in line with Sreekanthachari and Nagaraja (2013) who established that more than 40% of India's population was illiterate and could not read or write. Taking 1995 as a benchmark, the various studies undertaken by Mwansa (1995, 1996, 2012) also point to a perpetuation of this scenario in families in selected parts of Zambia. Meanwhile, the 25% found in this study were females who had never been to school, plus the 50% of female who went up to primary school equaled 75% of females who never reached secondary level. Even though the researchers contend that very low literacy levels,

as low as 25%, are found in rural areas among the women, there is need for teasing out statistics relating to such a comparison and contention.

Parents' Participation in Community Activities:

This study established that women with low education levels were less involved in community works that demanded some literacy of some kind (Banda & Mpolomoka, 2016; Banda & Mpolomoka, 2018). A few women, of those (women) who had attained basic levels of education, were also engaged in many local organisations, clubs, health and school committees. One parent even said; "at church some women refuse to be leaders because they fear to be given the position of secretary." This corroborates with the findings of a study on the financial literacy of women marketeers participating in Micro Finance Programmes in selected communities of Lusaka in Zambia (Mwanangombe, Mpolomoka & Banda, 2001).

Single Female Headed Families:

This study also established that some girls were coming from single female-headed families. Literature reviewed contend that single-female-headed households face greater financial constraints than two-parent headed households in general, which impacts differently on girl's academic achievement (Pong, Dronkers & Hampden-Thompson, 2003; Rwechungura, 2014; Paul Amato, Sarah Patterson & Brett Beatrice, 2015). This study shows that there were various reasons why some female parents remained single. Some female parents were widows and others had never been married though (they) had children. Some of these single parents were those who fell pregnant while at school and were not married by the men who had impregnated them. The unmarried status did not seem to deter them from having more children from the same or different men who were not ready to marry them. For some single female parents, providing sound discipline to their daughters was a challenge. For instance, due to lack of sound discipline, some daughters engaged themselves in bad vices such as illicit beer drinking, drug abuse and prostitution. Nonetheless, it was very clear to the researchers that single parenthood does not guarantee that girls will not succeed at school. This was evident from findings of this study that points to some girls who grow up in a single-parent household and succeed to prominence in their educational, entrepreneurial and other life fulfilling pursuits.

Teenage Marriages:

One of the factors leading to girl-children dropping out of school in Chadiza District included teenage marriages. All the participants confirmed that due to teenage marriages a lot of girls did not proceed with their education. The findings were in line with Mansory (2007) who found that early marriage in Afghanistan was the foremost cause of early school dropout of girls. Though the author cited (Mansory) refers to a scenario in Afghanistan, the situation is not different in Chadiza District. This study established that in rural areas, marriage was taken to be the highest achievement for girls, with school being considered as a means for passing time while waiting for a man to come their way for marriage. This is in line with what was said by Holcamp (2009) who demonstrates that in rural areas girls' dropout rate was higher because parents did not consider girls' schooling beneficial. Such a conclusion is advanced because girls left their own family after getting married and join that of their spouse. As such, it was assumed that marriage dignified girls with more respect in rural communities. Hence, in rural areas, a marriage status commanded more respect for a girl in her teen years than a lady who had never been married before (Mpolomoka, Mushibwe, Dube, Musonda, Sumbwa, Mabenga & Kanduza, 2019).

Pregnancies and Re-entry Policy:

The number of pregnancies at these two schools over a three-year period indicated the challenges of girls' education in rural schools. All the respondents reported that cases of teenage pregnancies in schools were common. For many girls, once pregnant, that meant the end of school. This was again true with what was found by Dunne and Leach (2005) in Shahidul & Zehadul Karim (2015) that, though some countries permit girls after getting pregnant to return to school, research found that the school re-entry rate was low. Re-entry to school after pregnancy depended on many circumstances. Despite having such deliberate school policies, in most cases, a young mother would be told to just leave school and take care of the baby (Grant & Hallman, 2006). Only very few parents, especially those who had some sound

education would allow their daughter(s) to go back to school while they kept her baby (i.e. grandchild) (Mutumba, Muyoba, Mpolomoka & Matimba, 2016; Chibesa, Mwendalubi, Mpolomoka, Muvombo, Mushibwe & Chikopela, 2022).

Truancy:

Truancy was another factor that was reported to be negatively affecting girls' schooling in rural schools. Every day there were 1 to 4 girls absent from class. Findings of this study uncovered that the problem was very high in some seasons of the year such as the farming season, marketing season for farm produce and during days of local market. The local market is commonly known by the local name of 'Kabwandile'.

Long Distance:

The study found that some girls walk as long as 8 to 12 kilometres every day to and fro school. Long distance created a big problem because girls reached school late and already tired. The researchers contend that girls being vulnerable as shown herein, easily dropped out of school and or easily got persuaded into early marriage arrangements (Chibesa, et al., 2022). Comparatively, this Zambian scenario is is happening in other African countries. For example, in rural regions of Ghana, even with an amplified supply of primary schools, curbing the home-to-school-distance for thousands of Ghanaian children, Ghanaian parents still hesitate to let their children walk because of their belief that their child must be older than primary age before walking lengthy distances alone (Fentiman, Hall & Bundy, 2010).

Culture:

In Kenya, Komora (2013) found that due to the strong influence of the culture in Oromo and Wardei communities, many children drop out of school to pursue a life that they feel would provide a better living for them. This was also true with this study. Both parents and teachers mentioned that cultural practices and traditional ceremonies such as *Nyau* dancing and singing, and chinamwali were factors that negatively affected girls' schooling in rural areas. Girls and women were expected to sing for *Nyau*, while boys and men danced. Hence, girls spent a substantial amount of their time singing for *Nyau* instead of doing schoolwork. Arguably, when taken as a routine activity, this resulted in girls

having fewer hours of sleep and subsequently became a. Apparently, almost every woman in the village or community was following the trend-in-practice and so all girls and women were religiously doing it.

The Chinamwali ceremony was another factor affecting girls' schooling. The Chinamwali was an initiation ceremony for girls who came of age. It was a transition phase from adolescent to adulthood. However, the problem came with what girls were taught during the initiation ceremony. This corroborates with what one parent recounted regarding the traditional ceremony: 'some parents do not do well because they teach girls who are still at school both hygiene and how to handle a man in marriage'. Findings of this study also confirm what oral literature and tradition upholds that Chinamwali had great influence on girls as it lured them to engage in sexual activities and attainment of adult roles at an early age. This finding is similar to earlier findings by Banda (2016) who observed that cultural values people held about their social obligation determined their perceptions of illiteracy. Some people strongly believed in traditional practices that touched on gender orientation, initiation and marriage ceremonies (Banda, 2016; Banda, et al., 2018; Chibesa, et al., 2022).

Retention of Girls in School:

Nkosha, Luchembe and Chakufyali (2013) found that there was a noticeable positive impact of the girl child education campaigns on enrolment and retention rates in selected basic schools. However, this research observed that retention of girls in school was a problem. The researchers tracked the enrolment of grade ones in 2014 up to the year 2020 when they were in grade 7. School A in Table 4.1 in 2014 enrolled 104 grade 1 girls, by the time this intake was in grade 7, the number had reduced to 29. This means that 75 girls had not been retained in this intake representing 72%. This shows that only 28% of the girls who were enrolled in grade one in 2014 were retained up to grade 7 in 2020. This number was expected to reduce further after grade 7 examinations as some would not make it to secondary school. Thus, the study established that about 72% of the girls in rural areas just learned up to primary level.

Ngales (2005) found that in Ethiopia, female pupils were often absent in class during menstruation and frequent absence led to their poor performance and dropping out from school. However, this was not correct with this study as schools in the district secured all the girls toilets

Conclusions:

This study revealed a number of issues regarding girl-child schooling in rural areas in Chadiza District. The study established that most people in this rural area viewed girls' education negatively. Conclusions show that the community or parents only viewed girls or their daughters as potential wives for some men, mothers of their grandchildren and a family member on the move to another family forever. As such, the education for girls received less attention, some girls' attitude and view of education was indistinct and support as clearly explained by the views of the pupils, teachers and parents. This research identified and explained factors affecting girls' schooling in Chadiza District from a multi-pronged perspective.

Recommendations:

In light of the findings, this study makes the following recommendations to enhance the retention of the girl-child in primary school:

- Schools should provide and strengthen good guidance and counselling to girls, especially those who fall pregnant. This can only be possible if the Ministry of Education deliberately trained more guidance and counselling teachers.
- The government should devise laws and work with the traditional leadership to reprove parents that withdraw their female children from school.
- The Government together with stakeholders should increase advocacy to ensure that pregnant girls return to school after giving birth. This can be achieved if stakeholder consultation is conducted on a continuous basis and successful stories are narrated widely.
- Government should provide proper legal framework that will compel parents to take and maintain girls in school even after falling pregnant. This can only be successful if a law is put in place and defaulters are apprehended.

with washrooms, separate from those of the boys. The toilets were built by the government of the Republic of Zambia with the help of two Non-Governmental Organisations, namely SPLASH and Plan International Zambia.

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