Cultural Threats to the Education of an African Girl Child

Emmanuel Ayodeji Ekundayo*

European University of Lefke, Lefke Avrupa University, Gemikonagi, Mersin 10, PO Box 99728, Cyprus

*Corresponding author: Emmanuel Ayodeji Ekundayo, Master's student, European University of Lefke, Lefke Avrupa University, Gemikonagi, Mersin 10, PO Box 99728, Cyprus, Tel: +9 (0) 5338255591; Email: emmanuelekundayo89@gmail.com

Citation: Ekundayo EA. Cultural Threats to the Education of an African Girl Child. Global Media Journal 2019, 17:32.

Abstract

This study focuses on the relationship between culture and education and how it affects the African girl child. This study first tries to define what culture is, from the etymological meaning and also definitions from scholars. It further defines the meaning of education also from its etymological perspective to its scholarly point of view. It then shows the importance of education to every individual, nation and at the international level giving a statistical analysis of the number of people most especially the girl child who has been denied access to education in Africa.

This study further explains the various factors that have threatened the education of the African girl child and later give reasons for girl child marriage which seems to be the major threat. This study went further to give the various constraints that has prevented the protection of the African girl child with various recommendations outlined in tackling these setbacks.

This study finally concludes with an emphatic appeal on the important need for drastic actions meant to be carried out with a united joint effort from all stakeholders.

Keywords: Culture; Education; Marriage; Girl Child; Sexual Abuse

Introduction

Culture is said to be derived from a Latin word 'Cultus' which means to care for something and from the French word 'Colere' which either means to till the ground and grow or to cultivate and nurture.

Therefore, culture can be defined as the features and acquired knowledge of a particular set of people which encompasses religious beliefs, language, cuisine, arts, music and social characters [1]. These features and acquired knowledge are taught, learned, developed and passed down from one generation to another thereby making education play a vital role in achieving cultural development.

Education is being differentiated from literacy. Literacy is being described as the ability to read and write while education is broader than reading and writing. The etymological meaning of education is being derived from several Latin words;

- ''Educatum'' meaning an act of training or teaching
- ''Educare'' meaning to bring up or to rise
- ''Educere'' meaning to come out or to lead forth

Some western philosophers define education such as Aristotle who sees education as ''a process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the faculties to the fullest extent as a member of society''. Socrates also defines education as ''the bringing out of ideas of universal validity which are latent in mind of every man''.

Education can therefore be defined as a process of learning with the aim of developing the innate ideas and skills of an individual, helping to achieve his/her full potentiality thereby adding value to both his/herself and to the society at large.

The western education which has brought about the understanding of the revolving nature of the society has become imperatively important based on the interdependence and survival needs of various countries in the international system.

Mark K. Smith while exploring the definition of education, defines the term as the ''wise, hopeful and respectful cultivation of learning undertaken in the belief that all should have the chance to share in life''. This definition seems to be under threats as regards to the last phrase '...all should have the chance to share in life'. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), released a data report stating that sub-Saharan Africa compared to other regions of the world has the highest rate of children being excluded from education. Over one out of five children between the ages 6 to 11 are out of school. One-third of children between the ages of 12 to 14 are not in school. UIS data shows that almost 60% of teenagers between the ages of about 15-17 are not in school or are denied formal education. The most worrisome of it all is that 'Girls' education has become of major priority due to the fact that about 9

million girls between the age of 6 to 11 are feared never to have the opportunity or privilege of going to school to get a formal education as against 6 million boys of the same age.

Factors that Influences Threats to the African Girl Child Education

Cultural beliefs and assumptions have played a major role in the set back of an African girl child education. One major cultural custom is early marriage. Teenage girls are being given out in marriage as soon as they enter puberty stage. According to Plan International, 12 million girls are married before the age 18 and by 2030 if drastic measures are not taken; there would be over 150 million child brides. The organization further establishes the fact 38% of forced child bride marriage takes place in Sub-Saharan Africa. Common phrases being used by parents to convince their children when reluctant are; ''you will grow up to love him'', ''He will train you through school'', ''He will take good care of you'', ''the family needs this money to survive''.

Most often, these phrases never happens because they are quickly put into the family way (pregnant) to either frustrate or abandon their ambitions and dreams. They end up not being sent to school as promised or being taken good care of. Some of them grow to hate both their parents and their husbands, the family never tend to have a better life even after the girl child is being given out to marriage against her own wish. Some of these girl children try to fight back with no proper guidance or institutions to protect them. They end up being physically and sexually abused causing fear and mental destabilization. The case of a 14yrs old girl from Northern Nigeria who poisoned and killed her 35yrs old husband after being forced into child marriage is a typical example [2].

Some political and traditional institutions give so much credence and protection to this act using religious beliefs to justify their actions, making it so difficult for the girl child to find an escape route out of this marital slavery and bondage. Another case study is a Nigerian parliamentarian named Ahmad Sani Yerima who reportedly married a 13yrs old girl from Egypt in 2010 and also reportedly married a 15yrs old girl in 2006. These are legislatures who are expected to make laws to protect the girl child but are the violators of the girl child Act using the Islamic Law or religion as a defense to his paedophile cravings [3].

Reasons for a Girl Child Marriage

This girl child are allegedly giving out in marriage based on several reasons:

An escape from poverty

The girl child parents often believe that their female children are their 'cash cows' to enrich themselves and escape poverty. The girl child is being given out to marriage against the girl child wish in exchange for some dowry (a price being paid to the girl bride parents) which is most times in form of money. This money is meant to help the parents to gain some financial standing which still is never enough.

Avoid unwanted pregnancy

Some cultures believe that pregnancy outside wedlock brings shame to the family of the girl even though in some Southern African cultures, it is a means of making more money whereby the man or boy responsible for the pregnancy is being made to pay for damages and care for both the mother and child. But to some other African cultures, pregnancy outside wedlock is a reproach to the family of the bride. Some part of Cameroon sees it as a common tradition to give out a girl child for marriage to avoid pregnancy outside wedlock especially when she has attained the puberty age and has beginning to get attracted to some masculine folks. Marriage rites is been conducted by both parents on behalf of the two parties not considering the financial and emotional readiness of the two parties involved.

Betrothed marriage

This is when the girl child is being betrothed to the son of another family or man. This man could be old enough to be her father or grandfather. When the girl child is born or very young, she is being betrothed to another family to tighten the relationship between both families without her consent. While she is growing up, she is being reminded that she is betrothed to someone even if she falls in love with someone else or against her wish. Religion and traditions forces her to obey the wishes of her parents as against hers and offer herself as a sacrificial lamb for the selfish desires of both parents.

Ignorance

Another major reason is ignorance based on the fact that most African traditions and cultures see the girl child as a burden and less worth than a male child. They believe she will end up in the kitchen and bedroom of another man's house, bearing his name and abandoning them as against the male child who will continue to bear the family name and extend the generation of that family. This assertion could be verified with the response of the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in 2016, while on a visit to Germany during a press conference where he was asked about his wife's criticism about his government. He responded by saying he does not know what party his wife belongs to but he knows she belongs to his kitchen and his bedroom. The shocking response didn't go down well with the public especially when the German Chancellor Angela Merkel is a woman and also one of the most powerful women in the world [4]. If the president of a country sees women like that, it only shows that we have a long way to go when it comes to saving a girl child.

These primitive thoughts are still very common among Africans even among some educated elites where more value and priority is placed on the male child than the girl child.

Constraints Affecting the Protection of the African Girl Child

There have been several efforts by various national organizations, international organizations and institutions to safe the African girl child from this cultural captivity they find themselves [5]. Though several successes have been achieved at various levels but are minute compared to the vast number of girl child caught in the web and captivity of traditional and cultural slavery.

Most of these projects and programs by several organizations and institutions are majorly accessed by the elites who live in urban regions of the various African countries. The locals have no access to these information's and opportunities. These elites end up getting these opportunities just for themselves and a very little proportion of these opportune elites, go back to make a difference or save others. Some even attain high political influence but do little or nothing to safe the girl child from this slavery [6-8].

Some of these organizations and institutions trying to save the girl child are also structurally located in urban areas and only few are located in the rural areas. These few are most times faced with threats and violence by locals who feel threatened by their presence. Some of the traditional and religious leaders have attained a high level of political influence making it difficult to put in place policies that can be enforced to safe the girl child [9,10].

Recommendations

The following recommendations are vital in fighting girl child marriage;

- Various governments need to adopt the December 19, 2011, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/170 which declare October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child, recognizing girls' rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world.
- Enforcement agencies need to be set up to ensure the non-violation of girl child rights.
- Continuously synthesize people on the rights of a girl child, the disadvantages of a girl child marriage, benefits of a girl child being educated, emotional and mental balance of both parties before marriage especially at the local level should be carried out. This should be done in various local languages and dialects for proper understanding.
- Governmental and Non-governmental Organizations and institutions need to be structurally stationed at the local levels working together to accomplish better results. There should be a structural platform that the girl child can easily access and seek refuge when her rights are threatened or about to be violated.
- Those who benefits from various successful programs for a girl child should be sent to the local regions to inspire other young girls in pursuing their dreams and visions.

Conclusion

While a number of this girl child have been forced to take laws into their hands by killing their enforced husbands, committing suicide or running away to nowhere in particular, when caught, they have had to face capital punishments and public humiliation. They are also been forced to early child birth which has had adverse effects on them medically and emotionally. It is therefore imperative to say that drastic actions with a united joint effort from all stakeholders need to be put in place in-other to stop these cultural defects.

Author Biography

Born on the 27th of March, 1989 in Lagos, Nigeria, Emmanuel attended Corolla International Nur/Pry School in Lagos State, Nigeria and had is secondary education at Lighthouse International Secondary School in Lagos, Nigeria. He proceeded to Babcock University where he attained his Bachelor's degree in International Law and Diplomacy. He was a member of different committees and associations while at Babcock University and later became the President of the Student Association of his department with an outstanding performance that drew the attention of several international institutions and bodies such as the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs which donated over 300 books to the department library. He also organized a student lecture exchange program with the University of Pretoria, South Africa with the assistance of the South Africa High Commission in Nigeria. In 2013, Due to his outstanding performance while he was the president earned him an appointment has a member of the Planning and Strategy Committee of the Nigerian Society of International Law where he served has the student representative for 4 years. In 2015, he was also appointed has a Country Director for Ghana International Model United Nations before embarking on a Master's program in International Relations in 2017 at the European University of Lefke, Northern Cyprus where he emerged has the best student in his department with high honors. In 2018 he published an article titled 'The Sensitivity of Cultural Identity: A Focus on Cameroon' and has other publications on culture under review.

References

1. Zimmermann K (2017) What Is Culture? Definition of Culture.

2. BBC News (2015) Nigeria court drops child bride murder case in kano.

3. BBC News (2010) Nigerian senator sani denies marrying girl of 13.

4. Mikailu N (2016) Nigerian first lady 'belongs in kitchen'.

5. Berger AA (2000) The meanings of culture. Culture 3(2).

6. Plan International (2019) Child marriage.

7. Reddy C (2019) Why Education is Important? Top 13 Reasons - Wise Step.

8. Saeed R (2019) definition of education; tradition and modern concept of education; aims of education definition of education.

9. Smith MK (2015) What is education? A definition and discussion. The encyclopedia of informal education.

10. United Nations (2019) International Day of the Girl Child.