



Why surma parents deter their children from formal education: The case of surma community in southwestern Ethiopia

Ablel Tekeste Berhane

Department of Sociology, College of Social Science and Humanities, Mizan-Tepi University, Ethiopia

Abstract

The overall objective of the study is to explore the cultural values plays (negatively or positively) in children's education in the case of Surma ethnic group. The research employed a cross-sectional design and used both quantitative and qualitative research approach. The data collection tools were questionnaire, interview, observation and focus group discussion (FGD). The main result of the research indicated that cultural value particularly parental goal, value, opinion and aspiration was a major bottleneck to the process of formal education for decade hence to children's educational advancement. Negative, (sometimes antagonistic) perception and misunderstanding of education as only means of income generation rather than seen education as a holistic human, social, and economic development for a society was other major factor made the process of formal education problematic. The research also uncovers the highly respected cultural event of Donga (stick dueling) is one of the major hindering factor to the process of formal Education. This attitude, cultural values negatively impacted the process of formal education. It is concluded that parental goal, value, attitude, and aspiration and the intactness of the community with their cultural and social value made the process of formal education difficult to enhance in the community thereby negatively impacted children's education. Thus it needs a multi-faced intervention that considerer's social, cultural, and political environment

Keywords: cultural value, parental goal; attitude, Children's education

Introduction

Culture and Education are inseparable, as they are simply two sides of the same coin. The two concepts can in fact be said to be indistinguishable, as the primary definition of Education is Acculturation. Every human society - whatever its level of technical evolution - devotes considerable attention to transmitting its cultural heritage to the young. This trans-generational transmission of culture has helped to cement human solidarity and to ensure the continued survival of societies over the ages. Before the emergence of schools as specialized agencies, Education took place in society, where the young and the not so young became educated by simply living their culture (A.U, 2007) [17]. Human infants are born without any culture. They must be transformed by their parents, teachers, and others into cultural and socially adept animals. The general process of acquiring culture is referred to as socialization. During socialization, we learn the language of the culture we are born into as well as the roles we are to play in life. Successful socialization can result in uniformity within a society. If all children receive the same socialization, it is likely that they will share the same beliefs and expectations (Flecher.A.C, 1995) [9, 24]. The questioning and debating about the influence and effects of socialization factors on children has been around for centuries. Sapira calls as far back as the 15th century when John Locke said children are born with blank slates which parents and society are responsible for shaping and orchestrating into the appropriate beliefs and values. He also recalls Jean Jacques Rousseau's declaration of children begin born innately good and parents being responsible for fostering this goodness (Sepera.C, 2005) [27]. Research shows that parents from

lower classes and from ethnic minorities tend to be less involved in their child's education (Chavkin, 1993) [22]. So, one important reason to not get involved with schools is the fact that parents' educational attitudes differ with the current pedagogical norms and values in Dutch schools. Apparently, parents and schools differ with respect to their educational attitudes. In western societies, education policies nowadays enhance a strong student-centered approach. The emphases on discipline and academic performance are lessened in favor of emphases on self-directed learning and personal and social development in education (Chandler.L, 1999) [21]. In order to gain more insight in the degree of congruency between family and school as spheres of influence, insight in educational attitudes of parents can be of aid. Moreover, attitudes towards education incorporate conceptions of types of parental involvement. As Epstein suggests, families and schools should act as partners in education (Epstein J.L Senders, M.G, 2000) [23]. This partnership could be at risk when parents differ with respect to their educational attitudes. 'The sources of one's mental programs lie within the social environments in which one grew up and collected one's life experiences. The programming starts within the family; it continues within the neighborhood, at school, in youth groups, at the work place, and in the living community' (Hafsted, 1991) [25] A more customary term for Hofstede's concept 'mental program' is: culture. 'Culture is a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived in the same environment, which is where it was learned. It is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (Hafsted, 1991) [25]. Varying cultural and national identities have had

a clear impact on formal education and different societies have different informal child-rearing and adult-initiation practices (Bierhoff, 1996) ^[19]. In Western Europe, the Marxist educationalists of the 1960s and 1970s clearly established the role of education as a vehicle for socialisation, for confirming and continuing the social order, and for conditioning the populous to their varied roles. In more recent times, education has been similarly viewed, with fewer overt political overtones, as a vehicle for enculturation by both majority and minority cultures. Cultural mores and beliefs relate not just to social behaviours and interests but affect assumptions about ways of learning, even the meaning of 'learning' may be different within different social constructs (Bierhoff, 1996) ^[19]. (Bourdieu, 1977) ^[20] With his concept of habitus and Kelly's construct theory (1973) ^[12] both emphasise the impact of cultural context on thinking and learning, with different communities providing different cultural capital to their offspring. Cultures that have strong respect for ancestors and elders will tend to have a view of knowledge that is heavily based on the notion of a 'body of knowledge', rather than knowledge as a creative and individual voyage of discovery (Kelly, 1973) ^[12]. Ethiopia with a population more than 100,000,000 is a host of more than 85 ethnic groups, southwest Ethiopia is also known for its diversification. Surma community (called also Suri) is one of the community inhabited Southwest Ethiopia with intact cultural and social value for centuries.

Surma/Suri Ethnic Group

Suri is the name of a sedentary pastoral people and its Nilo-Saharan language. They inhabit the southwest Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) in Ethiopia as well as parts of neighboring South Sudan. Some are also found west of Mizan Teferi. Population: 20,622 (1998 est). The males are often shaved bald, and frequently wear little or no clothes, even during stick fights. At a young age, to redecorate them-selves for marriage, most women have their bottom teeth removed and their bottom lips pierced, then stretched, so as to allow insertion of a clay lip plate. Some women have stretched their lips so as to allow plates up to sixteen inches in diameter.—Increasing with exposure to other cultures, however, a growing number of girls now refrain from this practice. Their children are sometimes painted with white clay paint, which may be dotted on the face or body. Their villages normally range in size from 40 to 1,000 people, but a few may reach 2,500 people. Village life is largely collective and communal, sharing the produce of the cattle. Though their chiefs (styled *komaro*) may wear the fur crown of a pagan priest-king, they are merely the most respected elder in a village and they can be removed. Few Surma are familiar with Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, and their literacy level is very low. The Suri have a sky god named Tuma. The Suri also believe in spirits and use medicine men to undertake sacrifices or prayers and directly send them to Tuma. Another belief of the Suri is their rainmaker. This position in the tribe is passed down through heredity and is only given to one male in the tribe. When the tribe feels his services are needed, the men collect chips from a specific tree. These chips are then masticated and the remaining juice is then mixed with clay. This combination is poured and smeared over a man's body. After this process, rain is expected to fall. The economy of the Suri is based on

agriculture. To name a few of the crops planted are cabbage, beans, yams, tobacco and coffee. During the dry season, the Suri also collect honey. The Suri pan gold to make pots in nearby streams which was later used in trade with the Juye and Murle. Trades are also made between the Suri and the Ethiopian highlanders, Amhara and Shangalla. Rifles and weapons are traded with Amhara and Shangalla as are leopard and lion skin, giraffe tails, honey and ivory. The average male in the Suri tribe owns somewhere between 30 to 40 cows. These cows are not usually killed unless they are needed for ceremonial purposes. Every young male is named after their cattle, which they are ruled to look after. Cows are tremendously important to the Suri, and at times Suri risk death to protect their herd; Suri men are judged by how much cattle they own. In desperate times, Suri men risk their lives to steal cattle from other tribes. Men also are not allowed to marry until they own 60 cows. These cows are given to his wife's family after the ceremony. To praise their cattle or mourn their deaths, the Suri sing songs for them.

Methods

According to (Almaida, 2020) ^[2, 18] in the social sciences in general, unlike in the natural and exact sciences, the phenomena are complex. Consequently, it is difficult to separate isolated and exclusive causes and motivations. These phenomena cannot be reproduced in the laboratory and subjected to control tests. They are always partial, depending on contexts, documents, observations, sensibilities, and perspectives. According to (Yin, 2017) ^[29] qualitative methods enable an intensive analysis of data, both in amplitude and depth, which allows the researcher to look at the social units investigated as a whole. To this end this study employed qualitative method to explore the cultural value, attitude and goal of the community member for their children and its impact on the children's education as a whole.

Data Collection

60 individuals in 5 groups for focus group discussion (FGD) and total of 40 individuals 20 from community members, 9 from public servants and government officials of the county and 11 school principals and teachers for in-depth interview were participated. Observation, non-probability (purposive and convenient) sampling was employed during data collection. Data collected was analyzed and presented thematically.

Ethical Consideration

The data collected from the field were approved and supervised by the university's research and community development office. Sensitive data were not used, and all data protected and were anonymized.

Result and Finding

Based on the result and finding of this study there are two major bottlenecks to the process of formal education in the community of Surma. One the cultural event stick dueling (locally known as Donga) which is at the hub of Suri cultural value system and the parental goal, attitude and aspiration is another obstacle.

Parental Socialization Goal, Value and Aspiration

According to the key informant interview, parents, teachers

and principal of the research participants' parental socialization goal, value and aspiration become a major obstacle and challenge to the process of formal education in Surma community. The research finding virtually shows parents have their own goal; value and aspiration to their children when socialize them. These Socialization goal value and aspiration which the community endure and sustain become a profound bottleneck to the process of formal induction in the community. All the community members Youngster and children in particular still persist with those values and they are reluctant and indifferent with formal education. The following direct quotes from parents better assert the situation. When parents asked on what is their ultimate goal to their children a 40 years parent answered: "I want my female children to grow in manner that the community expects and to be married so that I can have as many possible caws. And my male children to be excellent in their herding animals and married to bear a child as many as possible so that I will be respected by the number of children born to my family". A key informant from teachers also asked the same question and asserted as follows: "A Surma female girl is considered as a source of wealth because the bride price is as many as 30-40 caws. So the parents didn't want children especially female children to school because they do not want to miss that opportunity. And wealth in Surma is measured by the number of caws you have. The parents also think and fear if she went to school she will develop disobedience and forsake the cultural values and this will cost them a 30-40 caws which they couldn't afford it." Other participant replied: "I want my male children to be brave have more children and play donga and champion my name in the community. For my female children I only want her to be married and bring more caws as possible to me. This is the only way I can bring wife to my male children and continue my own line of generation." Young participants of the research also asserted to the question on what is your parents' goal and aspiration for you in life; a female 13 years old narrated as follows: "I was raised to be tolerant, loyal and obedient to my parent, elder and the communities my parents always inform me to live in acceptable manner within all social and cultural interaction and activities of my community this will help me to marry as early as possible and earn them a profound amount of caws" The same respondent and other young participants replied to question whether their parents told them about the importance of education; all of the participants reported that they didn't hear the importance of education from their parents. The cumulative response from the different respondents show that parental socialization goal, value and aspiration have had a profound effect on hindering the process and acceptance of formal education in Surma community.

Negative Attitude and Misunderstanding of Education

Challenges of formal education in the case of Surma community have different from the conventional challenges like infrastructure lack of manpower and facilities. It goes beyond that and rests in the attitude and misquoted of education to only as income generating rather than a change instrument. According to the FGD conducted with community members (youth and elders). Elders of Surma community suspect formal education will penetrate to the core values, norms and pollute the cultural assets that the community sustained throughout generation. This threat is

not resulted from scratch. According to them those who have more contact with the urban life style and went to formal school develop sense of disobedience undermines the cultural values and beliefs of the community. These create mistrust to the formal education. This leads them to become more resistant and unwilling to send their children in some cases stand against it. This is evident by only observing the school environment; the year that the school was established and the number of students attending. The school at Kibish the capital of Surma Woreda (county) was established some 20 years before but still the school has only 14 students at high school level. Surprisingly from this no student attend preparatory all fail at the entrance exam. Other opinion that is reflected during the research investigation especially FGD with youth is that considering education as only a means for income generating rather than an instrument for personal environmental and societal change. Most youth participants of the research compare the money they earn from their own activity especially traditional gold mining and the educated person earned form haired in government. And they develop opinions that pronounce getting involved in education for long years is a mere wastage of time. This could be better explained from direct quote of the participants in FGD. A 68 years old participant of FGD reflected on his opinion toward formal education by saying: "I strongly doubted the benefits that formal education brings to our community as it is told. All our children in one way or the other who attend elementary especially high-school totally become a different Surma, starting from their dressing style; more importantly they ignore and disregard the elders and their instruction. I don't know what happened there in school may be they teach them not to obey or made them shame of their own culture." This is the dominant opinion reflected from the elders in the FGD session other session of FGD with youth a 25 years old asserted his opinion toward formal education by saying: "I didn't see any young Surma who is said to be educated and have better living condition than me. All I want is to earn better money. We see some educated Surma earn from government only 1500 birr I can earn this money in a day if I carefully mine gold. Above all we see them all undermine the cultural value and assets of our community. This is a problem a formal education bring to us" This shows the wide gap what a formal education could bring to the community and what the community members think about it. But despite the strong opposing opinions reflected by the participants of the FGD some students of high school give some positive opinion to ward formal education. Even though they are few in number the interviewed students of high school reflected that with all the challenges faced they want to pursue their education. Considerable number of participants' particularly key informant from teachers and principal indicated the other major challenge of formal education is the lovely and highly emphasized culture of the Surma community stick dueling (*Donga*). Key informants assert during this particular cultural event of Donga almost all student stop their learning and participate on the cultural event. Most of the students don't like to miss it. It became the major challenge which the formal structure can't have control over it. If it happened even in the exam time students leave school and go to fields where the cultural event is conducted. According to key informants Donga became a major catalyst of dropout rate in process of formal education in Surma community. The importance of stick dueling (*Donga*) could be best illustrated from the direct

quotes from the participants of FGD and Interviewee. A young participant asserts the importance of Donga as follows: "It is what my community gives more emphasis and value and I want to fulfill the expectation of my community as a member. But not only this participating on donga and showing your talent and boldness brings a social acceptance and prestige at least up to the next contest. And I need that!" A 68 year's old elder asked the importance of donga playing on the community answered: "Donga is not a mere social gathering it is a place where we share our experience as an elder to the next generation by showing them how to solve any problem if arises, how to conduct the playing by itself. Moreover we inculcate and perpetuate the central value of Surma community like loyalty, heroism and bravado. Because as a community we need to have generation that can fight and preserve our community and the only way we can transmit is through stick-dueling or Donga." Another 20 years old girl asked the same question and answered: "Donga for me is a place where I can share my experience and meet peers from different places more interesting is the interaction we have when we prepare the things needed for our community the social cohesion and a sense of belongings and it is also an ideal place where I can find a brave mate."

Discussion

The result and finding of the research revealed that Surma parents and community members see formal education as threat to their core value. Hence they have their own socialization goal, attitude and aspiration in the way they can preserve their culture and fight against any intruding culture. A research conducted in the Massai community shows hindrances to primary school enrollment is part of the parent's goal to protect the tradition and cultural value ((Ginbo, Robinah; Mujawa mariya, Nadine and Sandra Sarah, 2015) ^[10]. According to the same study some Maasai people perceive education as a threat to culture. And seen education as a ruin to Maasai culture this was one of the major factor to the hindrance of education (Ginbo, Robinah; Mujawa mariya, Nadine and Sandra Sarah, 2015) ^[10]. This directly coincides with the finding of this research that Surma elders and youth members develop a sense of hatred to the formal education and act antagonistically because they consider formal education as a threat for their existence as community. Parents' views on their family values emerged from discussions about what is most important for their children (Donkor, 2013) ^[7]. Parents concern and set goals and aspire their children's future fate. Suri community has their own they desire and strive for their children's future socializing them to become a true Suri member. They teach them to become competent, brave and loyal to protect and preserve their identities as a Surma more than anything else. According to (Woodrow, 2001) ^[10], the underlying value systems which are embedded in the ways in which societies and subgroups of societies view the nature of learning makes international exchange on the one hand and social equity on the other problematic. Hence it is needed for a fruitful parent-school relationship. Instead of trying to search for creative ways to get marginalized parents involved in specific/pre-determined ways, schools should begin the process of identifying ways to capitalize on how parents are already involved in their children's educational lives. Schools must make a positive effort to recognize and validate the culture of the home in order to build better

collaborative relationships with parents (Epstein, J.L., & Sanders, M. G. 2000) ^[23]. No matter the effort the government exert and equipped with all necessary infrastructure and facility according to this research and other research conducted in the area shows unless we enable to create a society that value education it will be a failure and loss of resource at the end of the day.

Conclusion

The result and finding virtually shows that socialization process particularly parental goal, value, attitude, and aspiration had a profound effect in all aspects of children physical, social and psychological development particularly in this research we can safely conclude that parental socialization goal, value, attitude, and aspiration become a major bottleneck to the process of formal education in Surma community for the last six decade. The nature and setting of Surma community need a special and grass-root solution in education. As per this research all the previous intervention lacks a solution that considers the cultural and social feature of the community they follow the normative concept that says "Education is important for all" yes it is but it needs a rigorous and systematic approach when it comes to a community like Surma. The research arrays' that the process of formal education creates some negative opinion in the community which made them suspicious and in some cases stand against it. Thus the research leads to the conclusion that early child socialization intricate with parental socialization goal, value, attitude and aspiration and the intactness of the community have with its cultural and social value made it difficult the process of formal education to enhance in the community. It needs a multi-faced intervention that considers the cultural, social and economic activities of the community.

Reference

1. AU. www.africa-union.org. Retrieved from Africa union, 2007.
2. Almida F the concept of Human2Human in the Respons of COVID-19. International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social science. 2020; 9(2):129-151. doi:10.17593
3. Bierhoff. Laying the foundation of numeracy: a comparison of primary school textbooks in Bertain, Germany and Switzerland, Discussion Paper 90. London: National institute for economic and social research, 1996.
4. Bourdieu. Outline a theory of Practice, in bourdieu, Outline of a theory of practice, trance. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1977.
5. Chandler L. traditional schools, progressive schools; Do parents have a choise? A case study of Ohio. Whashington DC: Fordham Foundation, 1999.
6. Chavkin. Families and schools in apulastic society. New York: University of New York press, 1993.
7. Donkor AK. Cultural Practice and Education in Gana: the effect of traditional culture of parental involment in education, 2013, (3).
8. Epstein JL, Senders MG. Connecting, home, school, and community: new direction for social research. In Epstein, Handbook of sociology of education. New York: kulwer academic, 2000, 285-206.
9. Flecher ACSL. Authoretative parenting and Adolescent Adjustment: an ecological Journey. In ASteinger,

- perspective on the ecology of human development
Washington: American Psychological Association, 1995, 423-466.
10. Ginbo Robinah, Mujawa mariya, Nadine, Saundra Sarah. Why massai parents enrolled their children in primary school; the case of Mukuya in Northern Tanzania. *Interdisciplinary journal of best practices in Global development*, 2015, 1.
 11. Hafsted G. Culture and organization, software of the mind. In G. Hafsted, Culture and organization, software of the mind London: McGraw-Hill book company, 1991, 5.
 12. Kelly. A theory of personality. New York: Norton, 1973.
 13. Sepera C. A review of the relationship among parenting practice, parental style, and adolescent school achievement. *Educational psychology review*, 2005, 125-146.
 14. Union, a. culture in education and education in culture. Africa union, 2007.
 15. Woodrow D. cultural determination of curricula, theories and practice pedagogy, culture and society, 2001, 5-27.
 16. Yin. Case study Research and application: design and Methods. California: SAGE Publication, 2017.
 17. AU. www.africa-union.org. Retrieved from Africa union, 2007.
 18. Almada F. the concept of Human2Human in the response of COVID-19. *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social science*. 2020; 9(2):129-151. doi:10.17593
 19. Bierhoff. Laying the foundation of numeracy: a comparison of primary school textbooks in Bertain, Germany and Switzerland, Discussion Paper 90. London: National institute for economic and social research, 1996.
 20. Bourdieu. Outline a theory of Practice. In Bourdieu, Outline of a theory of practice, truce. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
 21. Chandler L. traditional schools, progressive schools; Do parents have a choice? A case study of Ohio. Washington DC: Fordham Foundation, 1999.
 22. Chavkin. Families and schools in a pluralistic society. New York: University of New York Press, 1993.
 23. Epstein JL, Senders MG. Connecting, home, school, and community: new direction for social research. In Epstein, Handbook of sociology of education New York: Kluwer Academic, 2000, 285-206.
 24. Flecher ACSL. Authoritative parenting and Adolescent Adjustment: an ecological Journey. In ASteinger, perspective on the ecology of human development Washington: American Psychological Association, 1995, 423-466.
 25. Hafsted G. Culture and organization, software of the mind. In G. Hafsted, Culture and organization, software of the mind London: McGraw-Hill book company, 1991, 5.
 26. Kelly. A theory of personality. New York: Norton, 1973.
 27. Sepera C. A review of the relationship among parenting practice, parental style, and adolescent school achievement. *Educational psychology review*, 2005, 125-146.
 28. Union, a culture in education and education in culture. Africa union, 2007.
 29. Yin, Case study Research and application: Design and Methods. California: SAGE Publication, 2017.