

## **An Exploration of the Impact of Afan Oromo Proverbs on Females' Education (with Particular Reference to Ginchi High School)**

Alemayehu Bishaw\* and Genet Gelana\*\*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to see the impact of some Afan Oromo proverbs on females' education. The proverbs were first collected from native Afan Oromo speakers and evaluated by fourth year Afan Oromo speaking students of Faculty of Education, Bahir Dar University for test of validity. A total of 80 (60 female and 20 male) students of grades 9 and 10 were selected from Ginichi High School using simple random sampling technique. Incidental sampling techniques were employed to select old people in Ginichi town. Two data collection instruments, interview and questionnaire, were used. The interview was presented in Afan Oromo. The questionnaire was employed to check whether or not boys and girls know the available Afan Oromo proverbs and to assess their views of the impacts on females' education. A qualitative method of data analysis was employed. The results indicated that almost all the boys and girls a) know the listed sample of Afan Oromo proverbs; b) believe that such proverbs are the reflections of the negative attitudes of the society towards females in general and female education in particular; and c) believe that the proverbs have negative impacts on females' education.

### **Introduction**

### **Background**

It is hard to know the exact time in history when gender disparity began. In the primitive society, the environment, perhaps more than anything else suggested or demanded equality or near equality of both sexes. However, even at the start there was a division of labor that accorded monotonous and simple tasks such as gathering and preparing materials for food to females and more difficult and risky tasks like war and hunting to males (Power,

---

\* Assistant Professor, Bahir Dar University.

\*\* Assistant Lecturer, Bahir Dar University.

1970). Such tasks provided males with the opportunity to freely move for much of their work and expand the horizons of their experience. The nature of labor division and the emergence of ownership also had elevated male supremacy. Since that time, both direct and tacit factors have widened the gap that had been created by social and political factors. As a means of perpetuating the prevailing social and political status quo, education has magnificently contributed to increase the existing gender disparity.

Gender differences are observed in education and in many other societal situations. For example, Banks (1997) has portrayed the existence of disproportionate access to education based on students' sex. That is, some female students are systematically denied the opportunity to aspire to higher educational goals by the society. To ascertain this, Banks said that in the early grades the academic achievement of girls in science and mathematics is close to that of boys, and the academic achievement of African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians is equal to that of the main stream white Americans. However, the longer these students (girls, African Americans, Hispanics and American Indians) remain in school, the more the girls achievement lags behind that of the boys. The achievements of the minorities also lag behind that of the main stream white Americans. This observation is ascribed to the less attention given to female students at school; and this might also be the attitude of the society in general.

Swardaner as cited in Banks (1997) stated that the situation outside school affects life in school. Thus, there must be a deliberate plan to minimize the effect by providing quality education for all students regardless of their sex. This can be realized if educational institutions take the theme 'gender' and consider the unique strengths and experience of both sexes (Lawton, 1978).

Similarly, the position individuals hold in the social and educational system is influenced by their race, gender, culture, and social class. A very high correlation between one's status in the society and one's level of educational attainment (both are related to one's occupational status) appears to be an

indication for the very existence of both direct and indirect unequal treatment students receive in schools (Ballentine, 1997).

The significant variations in students' achievements in college cannot be attributed only to IQ and low interest in higher education, but it can also be due to the tacit but strong effect of the social communications that favor male children (Gottlieb, 1964).

An overall advancement of a country requires that every citizen get education. Every one should have an equal right to education. Because of this, the issue of equal access to education has become an area of concern to international organizations.

In this connection, Article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights which says "Every one has the right to education and education shall be free in the elementary and fundamental stages..." can be mentioned. This implies that education should be equal for both boys and girls. Girls, like boys, should get free access and equal opportunity to education. This is because the development of the society is determined to a great extent by the place women occupy and the part they play in the life of the nation.

However, there are unequal educational opportunities within countries because of gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background and geographic setting. Of all disparities, none is more earnest than the discrimination based on sex. To this point, Chaboud (1970) said that women do not enjoy all the educational opportunities they should have and often do not have any at all. Although this problem is more adverse in underdeveloped countries, it can also be seen in developed countries. Ethiopia is a developing country, and a home of many nations and nationalities. It is, however, common to find inequalities of educational access because of gender. The extent of the inequality may vary from nation to nation.

The Oromo society is one of the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia in which the problem of unequal educational opportunity based on gender is seen (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1974). The society expresses this unequal distribution of education in different ways. It reflects its apathy in the category using proverbs. Proverbs are among the ways in which the society reflects its feelings, norms and customs. Proverbs show the societal unfair conceptions concerning gender inequality in educational opportunities.

Although many of the proverbs are used to refer to the society in general, there are some which refer only to certain groups of the society in terms of work type, sex, or ethnic background. By taking gender related proverbs into account, it may be possible to understand the society's attitudes towards women in general and women's education in particular. This study, therefore, focuses on gender focused proverbs and their impact on females' education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women play significant roles in social, economic and political life of the society. Despite their immense contributions, women are often regarded to be less than men. This unbalanced conception of the society causes unequal treatment in various social spheres. Regarding the consequences of this unequal treatment, Bizuayehu and Truwork as cited in MOE (1977) have said that such discrimination not only prevents women from achieving complete self-fulfillment as human beings but it also impedes the progress of the society as a whole.

There are no clear-cut rules that push women away from participating actively in the social transformation, but in reality, there are a lot of direct and tacit societal pressures that hinder them from playing active roles. The pressures could be familial or societal. Frarer as cited in Douglas (1964), stated that parental education, living accommodations, social class, cultural

values of the society, parental attitude, etc, correlate with the overall participation and performance of women.

However, the most important and frequently mentioned factor for the discrimination of women is the traditional perception based on cultural values of the society which is transferred from generation to generation. Most of the time, the society perceives women as inferior to men which, as a result, hinders them from playing as active role in social, economic, political and educational affairs. Asfaw as cited in MOE (1995) said cultural thinking and erroneous outlooks have spoiled the social, economic, political and educational positions which women should have enjoyed as a right. Moreover, it is perceived that educating women is useless and wastage of money. For instance, Mechanzie (1993) argues girls are to leave school before boys if there is no enough money for education because there is a belief that boys have more right to education and need it more than girls.

These problems are also reflected in the Oromo society. Women are regarded as having lower status than men. For instance, from the experience of one of the researchers of this paper (he/she is a member of the Oromo society) there are nine gunshots if a male child is born but only five if a female child is born. Women are prevented from participating in the Geda system (although Geda is perceived by the society as one way through which democratic leadership is exercised). Above all, women do not have full right to learn because it is believed that educating women is disadvantageous. Sending them to school is considered to be equivalent to inviting them to be rude. Regarding this, Bizuayehu, as cited in Ministry of Culture and Sports (1974), said that in some parts of the Oromo society women are not allowed to go to school for it is believed that they may be rude and disobedient to their parents and husbands. The prime concern of this study was to assess whether or not similar conditions prevail in the Oromo people by analyzing societal perceptions, as they are reflected through proverbs.

The social images of women reflected in the media and daily affairs have direct bearings upon the educational development of women (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1974). These social images towards women can be shown through different ways, including literature. Strengthening this idea, Asfaw and Menna, as cited in MOE (1995), stated that the hostile attitudes towards women are expressed by proverbs since proverbs are one of the ways through which the society's traditions, customs and norms are reflected. The Oromo society has its own proverbs to express its attitudes towards women. Although there are some with positive connotations, most of the proverbs have negative implications. Tadesse, reported that a large number of proverbs of Oromo people regard women as weak and dependent on men in all social, economic, political and educational aspects. Tadesse further stated that these proverbs contributed to women's lack of self-confidence and feelings of inferiority (Reporter, 1996). However, Tadesse's study did not clearly indicate the parts of the Oromiya zone which were included in the study. The research methods and sampling techniques used in the study were also not made clear. Similarly, Mestawot as cited in MOE (1977) listed some of the proverbs which she thinks have negative impact on women. She indicated that the proverbs made women feel inferior, have low self-confidence and be dependent on men. Mestawot depended only on her experience of proverbs. However there is a possibility to find many other proverbs outside her experience. Therefore, to make the study comprehensive proverbs should be collected from the elderly native speakers of the language.

One of the researchers of this paper has passed through the culture and language of the society. He/she has also been to some extent affected by the attitude of the society. The interest to study the impacts of some Afan Oromo proverbs on women's education with particular reference to Ginchi town students arose from this personal experience. So, the focus of the study revolves around the following leading questions.

1. What are the proverbs that have negative impact on women's education?
2. What negative impacts do the proverbs have on women?
3. How do the problems bring about negative impact on women's education?

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study may be significant creating awareness about the damage some proverbs may cause. They might also help to design a strategy to minimize the impacts of such proverbs to help women engage in education and play their roles in social transformation. A further significance is that it may help concerned officials and language experts to identify other Afan Oromo proverbs that have a negative impact on women's career development.

### **Review of Related Literature**

In this section a brief survey of literature related to the study is presented. The topics involved are definition and concept of proverbs, proverbs and women, and proverbs and their negative impacts on women's education.

### **Definition and Concept of Proverbs**

Proverbs are types of oral literature that a certain society uses to express its sorrows, happiness, regrets, hopes and inner feelings. Harshow (1991, p. 306) defined the word proverb as; "Reflector of ancient truth expressed in simple and understandable language and the author is unknown". Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary (1991, p.1559) defines it as, "A short pithy saying in common and recognized use, a concise sentence often metaphorical or alliterative in form... to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation."

When they explained their use and the long-lasting effects of proverbs in conversation, Asher et al (1994,p. 3386) said "Proverbs are a brief witty sayings in common use that convey moral which couches conversational wisdom in clever form and imaginary there by making it memorable and easy to pass on from generation to generation". Based on his experience with the Oromo people, Cotter (1990, p.1) expressed the decoration or catching purpose of proverbs in conversation as "Dubiin Mammaksa hinqabne, itto sogidda hin qabne," (Its literary translation reads as: 'Conversation without proverb is like stew without salt.')

The contents of the proverbs are related to a society's long-life history. Members of a certain society use a proverb to reflect what the society adores, their emotions, customs and expectations. So, the society puts forward what should be respected and preserved for the next generation through proverbs. Regarding their pedagogical function, Collier Encyclopedia IV (1970: 124) put it as "a way through which a collection of things useful for life obtained from long life experience are expressed in a short and attractive way."

Proverbs told in one area can also be told in another area. In other words, proverbs with the same meaning can exist in different societies. Proverbs may have positive or negative roles in a society. This paper, however, particularly focuses on those that negatively affect woman's engagement in education in Oromia Region. Therefore, the next section deals with how proverbs affect the way women interact or engage in a society.

### **Proverbs and Women**

There are different ways through which the attitude of a society towards women is reflected. One of these ways is oral literature (Yenezer as cited in MOE, 1995). Comparing the difference in the way language is used to teach about man and women, Henley as Cited in Meghan (1996, p. 18) pointed out that "There are many ways in which our language treats male and female



differently and in so doing trivializes, ignores and demeans female." In showing the extent of disparity, Henley as cited in Meghan (1996), conducted research showing that there are six to ten times as many words describing females in negative ways compared to males.

Some researchers have indicated that some proverbs reflect positive attitudes while most of them reflect negative attitudes towards women. Tejitu (1994), for example, in her study about 'saying and women' found that most proverbs about gender indicate the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In support of this, Androma as cited in MOE (1991, p.53), pointed out the following sample proverbs

‘የሴት ልብ ቤሳ ቅቤ ታክላለች’  
‘ሴትና አህያ ክብር አይወድላቸውም’

These sample proverbs reflect that the society sees women as weak and does not give respectation them as equal as males. Such sayings which have negative attitudes towards women can bring about a wide range of negative impact on women’s economic, social, and political participation.

In relation to this, Tadesse as cited in the Reporter (1996, p. 36), mentioned the following proverb.

‘ባሏን የማትፈራ ሴት ጎረቤት አታክብርም’

Proverbs which reflect the society’s negative attitude towards females’ education hinder women from participating in social, economic, political and educational affairs in the society. Moreover, Almaz, (1989), said that some proverbs affect the girls’ educational aspirations and political participation.

Some of the proverbs about women hinder them from taking active part in social, economic and political areas that have direct bearings upon their education. On the other hand, lack of education is the major factor that obstructs women from playing active role in many areas.

This implies that women's education both affects and is affected by social, economic, and political conditions. Therefore, to provide a multisided solution for gender disparity all the factors should be studied. One of the social factors is the oral literature that expresses the attitude of the society towards female. The section that follows has more on this.

### **Proverbs and their Negative Impacts on Women's Education**

The merits of educating women over men have been confirmed by Menna (1992) and Seblework (1991). Both researchers considered that educating men is educating individuals while educating women is educating the society as a whole. However, most women, especially in developing countries are disadvantageous. They do not have the opportunity to learn because their education is viewed by the society as luxury (The Reporter, 1996). The perception of the society towards women as inferior can be expressed through different means that make them stay indoors and not to go to school. Negessu (2000, p. 9), for example, stated some of the proverbs that hinder women from education as follows.

1. *‘ምን ሴት ብታውቅ በወንድ ያልቅ’*

(Whatever knowledgeable a woman may be the decision rests on a man.)

2. *‘ሴት ልጅ በማጅት ወንድ ልጅ በችሎት’*

(A woman's place is in the kitchen while that of a man is in the court of law)

3. *“ሴት ከተማረች፣ በቅሎ ከጠገበች፣ አመል ታወጣለች”*

(If a woman is educated or a mule is well-fed, she will develop a bad habit).

These proverbs hinder women from going to school and from competing with boys. They make women feel inferior and think all things are done by men. Negessu (2000) also reported that such proverbs reflect the assumption that the educated women are not loyal to their family. In addition, Cotter (1990)

citing some of the proverbs of the Oromo people, indicated that women are naturally inferior to men.

1. *'Beekte beekte jennaan niitiin macaafa dhiqxe'*  
(When a woman is admired that she knows everything, she washed the book)
2. *'Nadheen deessuu malee beektuu hinqabdu'*  
(A woman gives birth to a wise man, but she does not have wisdom herself)
3. *'Beekumnii duberti boroo hindarbu'*  
(The knowledge of a woman never goes out of the kitchen)

These proverbs emphasize that even if women have the chance to education, it is worthless for they cannot go out of kitchen and make use of it properly. Cotter (1990) in explaining the effects of such proverbs on women education said that proverbs which are reflections of the negative attitude of the society make girls feel inferior and shy. They also make women develop low self-esteem and give up competing with men for their further advancement in their educational career.

### **Method of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to present and analyze the negative impacts some Afan Oromo proverbs have on women's education. As indicated elsewhere, proverbs are not restricted to time and place. This is why the data used in this study was collected different times. The researchers gathered the data from literature and from the youth and the elderly native Afan Oromo speakers in Ginchi Town.

### **Participants**

The target population of this study was students of grades 9 and 10 in Ginchi Secondary School. Boys were selected to give their opinion about the given proverbs while girls were asked to forward their knowledge and beliefs

based on their experience in how the proverbs affected their education. Besides, the elderly people in Ginichi town were used as sources of data about the types of proverbs that might have negative impact on females' education.

There were 1461 (513 female and 948 male) students in grades 9 and 10 in the school in the academic year the data was collected. Of the total population understudy, 80 students, (i.e., 20 male and 60 female) were selected using stratified random sampling method. Five females were selected using simple random sampling method from each class. However, incidental sampling was used to select 20 male respondents from the school. A total of 20 (11 male and 9 female) from the elderly people in Ginichi town were purposely selected for as interview about Afan Oromo proverbs that have negative impact on female students.

### **Instruments**

Interview and questionnaire were used to collect data for this study. The instrument, interview was held with students and the selected elderly people in the town. The interview was conducted in Afan Oromo since people in the area use the language in their day-to-day communication. In addition to this, 10 (8 male and 2 female) fourth year Afan Oromo speaking students were consulted in the form of focused-group discussion to check the capacity of the questions to generate the necessary data. The questionnaire was employed to check whether or not boys and girls know the Afan Oromo proverbs that are available in the area. Another purpose of the questionnaire was to assess the impacts of the proverbs on females' education.

### **Data Analysis Method**

The data collected through interview was analyzed using qualitative data analysis method. The researchers tried to present the responses in quoted and summarized form and analyzed them against the literature. Moreover,

the researcher's personal experience was used to elaborate the given proverbs.

### **Data Analysis**

This part of the study focused on the analysis and interpretation of data obtained through the questionnaire and interview from boys and girls on the impact of proverbs on women's education. The interviews also included women's social, economic, and political conditions in terms of proverbs since the proverbs directly or indirectly affect education of women. Five questions were used to interview both sexes.

The following sections indicate the responses of students to the questionnaire and the interview regarding the proverbs. The responses of the students are presented in three categories that include responses from both sexes, responses from the female students, and responses from male students respectively. The students were provided with a list of proverbs in the questionnaire.

### **Male and Female Students' Responses to Questions Related to their Knowledge of the Proverbs**

All the female respondents said that they know the proverbs very well. And 95% of them reported that the proverbs are very familiar to them since their parents use them very often. The respondents mentioned that their parents use such proverbs. One respondent said, "Whenever I ask my parents to do me a favor, they usually use proverbs to express their unwillingness."

Similarly, the male respondents said that they know the listed proverbs. Ninety-one percent of them noted that they often heard their families use the proverbs while some 63% admitted that they have even used these proverbs with their sisters.

One of the researchers of this paper has a different view about the use of negative proverbs by her parents. Her parents usually expressed positive attitude towards women's education. The researcher's mother played a great role in educating girls in the family. She was not educated herself because of the wrong perception her family had about women's education. Because of this, the researcher's mother did not want to repeat the same mistake upon her daughters. As a result, she neither discriminated between boys and girls nor used these proverbs to indicate the weakness of women. Even though the researcher's mother is wise enough not to use such proverbs, she is a victim of such wrongly held perceptions. She lacked the privilege that daughters of educated mothers enjoy. This single instance can only help to raise another research question about the relationship between parental background and their use of proverbs that may negatively influence their daughters' education.

#### **Male and Female Students' beliefs about Whether these Proverbs are Said based on Fact**

All female and male respondents think that the proverbs are not said based on facts. They are only reflections of the traditional society's perception and backward cultural outlook that show male domination. Almaz, as cited in ONCCP, MOE and UNICEF (1989, p. 29) confirms this idea when she writes the idea: "Most proverbs concerning females are negative, backward and incorrect since they praise, glorify and revere men while despising and disrespecting women."

When respondents explained why they thought the proverbs are not based on facts they said that there are women who are participating actively in social, economic, and political areas. They also added that those female students, who got equal chance and encouragement for their education, have got good grades. Concerning this, Chaboud (1970) also said that girls who continue their studies up to the examinations for the lower and upper cycle are just as successful as boys and sometimes even more successful.

When the respondents explained the very source of such kinds of proverbs they said that the proverbs are originated from low perception of the society towards women. Tadesse as cited in Amare (1996,p. 36) argued that some proverbs that regard women as weak and inferior reflect the attitude of the society which results in unequal treatment based on gender. Moreover, the respondents suggested that on the one hand the society does not want to provide means for women's well-being, such as education and encouragement. On the other hand, the society is despising or looking down on women. The society thinks women passive and dependent on men. The problems of women require a multi-directional effort from all concerned. Generally, the respondents explained that women's inferiority is not natural; it is only a result of the low perception that the society has towards them.

One of the researchers also does not think that these proverbs are said based on facts because there are educated women who have reached higher levels of social, economic, and political areas. Moreover, the researcher is an instructor at a university. She graduated with a grade that is not less than that of most of the boys in her class. She could therefore good example to demonstrate that women are not inferior to men. It is, therefore, possible to include these proverbs are far from truth and are said based on the negative perception the society has about women.

#### **Female Students' Responses to Questions Related to their Feelings about Proverbs with Negative Implication.**

Nearly three – quarters (i.e., 73%) of the respondents stated that they feel nervous and angry about proverbs that have negative implications for these. Some of them responded that they would be disturbed to the extent that they lose their minds when the proverbs refer to them. About 25% of the respondents, however, said that they feel happy whenever they hear proverbs that show the society's negative attitude. These proverbs rather motivate them to accomplish tasks with greater efforts. One of the interviewees further said, "The proverbs give me strength, and energy I cannot sleep the night I hear the proverbs; rather I start working with greater interest and motivation."

In response to the question: "Do you feel that these proverbs affect your social, economic, and political participation?" more than half of the respondents answered 'yes'. They said they feel they have no place in those areas. This result was similar to the study made by Tadesse as cited in Amare (1996). He said that since proverbs are the reflections of the attitude of the society, they indicate that women have no moral and initiation. They are forced to live oppressed and not to participate actively in the social, economic, and political affairs. Let us see the following proverbs forwarded by the respondents and their literarily translation.

*"Dhalaan nama hinbulchu dhiiratu nama bulcha."*

*(A woman does not lead and manage, but managing and leading are man's role) "Dubbiin dubertiif udaan hindanqo bune hindhabu."*

*(The words of a woman and the crap of a chicken do not lack spots.*

These statements show that women are not good at leading. This hinders them from participating in political affairs. Similarly:

*" Duberttiin beekaa dhalti malee beektu hinqabdu. "*

*(A woman gives birth to an intelligent man, but she is not intelligent)*

*" Beekumsi dubertii boroo hin darbu. "*

*(The knowledge of a woman can not go beyond the backside of the house yard).*

These proverbs indicate that women are not and cannot be intelligent even if they are educated. This can hinder them from education. It has a direct bearing upon their social, economic, and political activities. In addition, proverbs such as the following also have a damaging effect.

*"Dhiira alaan beekna dubertii manaan beekna."*

*(We know men in public affairs and women in a house domain)*

*"Nadheen mana hinqabdu mana dhiiraa galti."*

*(A woman does not have her own house, but she lives in her husband's house).*



The above proverbs emphasize women's dependence on their male partners. Such proverbs again have a de-motivating effect. They obstruct women from working hard. According to some of the respondents, females feel that they are important only at home to accomplish menial, household chores. In relation to this, Amara National State Credit Association (1991: 11) in expressing men's thoughts stated that women, “አራሾችም ነጋዴዎችም አይሆኑም እነሱ ሰርተው ገንዘብ አያስገኙም፡ ቢያስገኙም በረከት የለውም፡” This was reiterated by old women as, “እኛ ሴቶች ማብሰል፣ መስፋት፣ መፍተል፣ መውቀጥ፣ ማንፈስ እንድ የውጪ ስራዎች ላይ ጥሩዎች አይደለንም” Men's and old women's thoughts affect young girls thoughts “ወይ እቴ! ከቤት ስራ ውጪ የገቢ ማስገኛ ማንኛውም ስራ የመስራት ልምዱና ችሎታው የለንም” All these can deter their initiation to work.

One of the respondents shared her special memory with the researchers. She said that when she was a grade 7 student, she was chosen to be the class monitor as she was the oldest of all the students in her class. However, her classmates rejected her because they believed that women could not be good monitor (leader). Therefore, she was replaced by a boy who was younger than her. What makes her annoyed and furious was not her rejection, but what her classmates said seriously affected her. They said, "How can a woman lead us?" (Nadheen nama hin bulchitu). She has already developed the idea that she cannot lead people.

When females are selected to be a leader in a group, they usually transfer the power to male friends. In relation to this, Almaz as cited in ONCCP, MOE and UNICEF (1989, p. 39), noted that proverbs discourage women's participation in politics and engagement in social system. This erodes their shouldering of responsibility in different areas. In relation to the above idea, Tadesse as cited in Amare (1996, p. 36) listed proverbs like:

“የሴት ወፍራም እንጂ ትልቅ የለም”

“መቀመጫህን እንደ አካልህ ሚስትህን እንደ አጋርህ አትመልከት”

“ሴት ልጅ በባልዋ ትኖራለች እንጂ የራሷ ቤት የላትም”

“የሴት አእምሮ እንደ ጡቷ የተንጠለጠለ ነው፡፡”

Taddesse said that these proverbs with negative implications for women obstructed them from taking role in leadership and restricted them to home-based roles, as if they are not effective in activities outside home. The respondents (25%) who suggested that the proverbs do not have any negative impacts on their social, economic, and political participation claimed that the proverbs strengthen and initiate them to compete with boys. The reasons why the 25% of students were not affected by these proverbs might be the family background and their own personal quality. However, if critically seen the responses of these female students could be interpreted differently. Even though these female students responded that they are not influenced by proverbs, their hard work and motivation due to these proverbs is to avoid the impact rather than to maintain their influence. This implies that the proverbs have a negative impact upon the education of the 25% students.

The female researcher also reflects the same feelings shared by most of the respondents indicated above. The researcher thanks her family for not believing in these proverbs. Generally, the researcher believes that the proverbs have negative impacts on women's participation in social, economic, and political activities.

### **Female Students' thoughts about whether the Proverbs have Negative Impacts on their Education**

About 73% of the respondents think that proverbs have negative impact on their education. The society believes that females cannot benefit from education even if they get the opportunity. Since the society believes that boys have better and wider chance to get jobs and succeed in every aspect of life, it gives educational priority for boys (Malech as cited in MOE, 1992, p. 34). Some of the respondents also supported this. The following proverbs assert Malech's findings.

*"Nadheen deessuu malee beektu hinqabdu"*

*(A woman gives birth but she is not intelligent)*

*"Sammuun nadheeni amma dhadhaa baqxu hingeessu"*

*(The mind of a woman is less than melting butter)*

*"Beekumsi dubertii borroo hindarbu"*

*(The knowledge of a woman never goes beyond bedroom)*

The respondents explained that these proverbs reduce women's role in the society. As a result, women lose hope, initiation and aspiration for education. They tend to accept the intelligence and superiority of men. They feel inferior and develop low self-esteem. This has a direct negative effect on their education. In view of this, Almaz as cited in ONCCP, MOE and UNICER (1989, p. 39) said that these proverbs made girls believe that they are subordinate to and less intelligent than men. This destroys their self-esteem and educational aspiration.

The moment this researcher hears negative proverbs from peers, teachers and people in the neighborhood; she thinks that the proverbs have negative impact on her education by reducing her initiation and motivation. This in turn brings about low self-concept..

### **Females Students' Responses to Questions Related to whether or not Proverbs Directly or Indirectly affect their Academic Endeavour**

Nearly three quarters of the interviewees reported that proverbs have negatively influenced their actions. Thus, they refrain from participating in the classroom, working hard on their exercises and contributing to group work. They elaborated that since they are considered less effective in some social spheres by the society, they felt ashamed and regard themselves to be weak and inferior. Since the respondents assumed boys to be more intelligent than themselves, they did not raise their hands to ask or answer questions in the classroom. One of the researchers' long years of teaching experience in the university also supports this. For instance, if he gives group work where a group contains five students (four females and one male), females

immediately choose the male student to be a group leader. This may be attributed to their low self-esteem. However, this must be proved through systematic study. Furthermore, females explained that they never claim and accept group leadership as far as there is a male student in the group. Regarding the influence of traditional perceptions about women's participation in classrooms, MOE (1992) indicated that females, unlike males, are forced to be quiet. The traditional perception, therefore, can be taken as a factor that affects the education of women. Respondents said that proverbs such as:

*" Beekumsi dubertii boroo hindarbu"*

*(The knowledge of a woman cannot go beyond bedroom)*

*"Nadheen beekaa dhalti malee beektu hinqabdu"*

*(A woman gives birth to intelligent man but she is not intelligent)*

These show that women are ignorant even if they learn since they do not out of house. Their moral is affected both at home and at schools by parents, peers, and teachers. Above all, such conceptions greatly affect their initiation and aspiration to participate and work hard in their homework. As Almaz cited in ONCCP, MOE and UNICEF (1989) put it, proverbs hold back women's participation and aspiration to work hard by making them shy and fearful, by encouraging them to hide their creativity and expressive ability. This generally discourages female's competitiveness at home and at school.

The remaining 27% said that the proverbs rather initiate them to work harder and to participate actively in the classroom. In short, it urges them to compete with boys in educational activities. Proverbs such as the following reflect women's inferiority, weakness & ignorance.

*"Nadheen dheertu malee beektu hinqabdu"*  
(A woman can be elegant but not intelligent)  
*"Nadheen furdoo malee guddoo hinqabdu "*  
(There is a fat woman but not a wise one)  
*"Nadheen Lama hin beektu takka hin wallaaltu"*  
(A woman does not know two things but not ignorant of one.)

### **Boys' Opinion about the Proverbs Listed in the Questionnaire**

All of the respondents said that they understand that there is no way for women in the society outside the house. These proverbs, according to the respondents, mean women are mainly engaged in household chores. They are not intelligent and creative as their men counterparts. In addition, they said the proverbs imply that women are inferior in all social, economic and political activities. They understand from the proverbs that women are not like men in leadership, economic contributions and participation in social transformations.

### **Boys' Reactions to the Questions asked to see how they would have felt if they put themselves in Women's Place**

Almost all of the boys interviewed reported that if they were in women's place, they suggested they would not have learned since their parents would tell them through proverbs that they would be no where. The interviewees also added, even if they continue to learn, they would not do it with interest and motivation because they would be de-motivated.

### **Boys' Opinion on whether the Proverbs affect Women's Participation in the Classroom**

More than 95% of the respondents said that these proverbs directly and indirectly affect women's participation, hinder them from studying hard, and weaken their initiation to be successful. They said the society's perception reflected through proverbs usually disregard women's ability, considers them

as ignorant, and makes them shy and calm. Like female respondents, boys also thought that such proverbs will make female students refrain from raising their hands to answer questions or participate in group work and discussions. Moreover, these proverbs hinder women's initiation, motivation and aspiration to play active role in the school.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of proverbs on female's education. The general findings of the study are:

1. Proverbs reflect the society's low perception towards women, and this in turn, results in unequal opportunity of education and low participation of women in education.
2. The proverbs, which are the direct reflections of the attitude of the society, have negative impact on women's participation not only in educational area but also in other social, economic, and political activities.
3. Most of the proverbs despise women and consider them as weak and dependent. This has negative psychological impacts. That is why many women tend to have low self-confidence, low self-esteem and motivation. This eventually makes women passive participants and low achievers in all areas including education

### **Recommendations**

The finding of this study reveals that the psychological impacts that emanate from proverb and sayings greatly hinder women from taking active parts in social, economic, political and educational activities in the society.

Therefore, in order to overcome the problems, the following recommendations have been forwarded:

1. It is better if public organizations and other governmental bodies try their best to make the society change its backward cultural beliefs and customs and understand the importance of education for women. This can be done, among others, through by selecting and disseminating proverbs with positive implications for women.
2. Designing a deliberate means to increase females' participation in farmers association in rural areas, hiring female teachers who act as role models and academic counselors to help girls believe that they are equal to their male counter parts might help to reduce the extent of the problem
3. Teachers and school principals should deliberately select females to be leaders of different clubs, organizations for student affairs, and group leaders in the classroom.
4. To change the attitude of the society, media coverage about the role of literature in general and that of proverbs in particular on women should be high.
5. Sayings and proverbs play a very important role in teaching and learning, therefore; we should be careful enough to be able to use only proverbs and sayings which encourage females' educational participation, achievement, and aspiration. If sayings are not carrying correct messages, they should be discarded.
6. Schools and other social institutions should review sayings, idioms and proverbs which are harmful to women and replace them by those that enhance female students' roles in education.

*For example,*

- Before you do anything, seek the advice of your sister.
  - To obtain quality results, work with women.
  - Education for girls is better than early marriage.
  - The strength of women is her education.
  - Behind every successful man there is a woman, etc.
7. Finally, this study is not complete and final by itself, so further studies need to be conducted in this area.

---



---

## References

- Amare Aregawi. (1996). *The Reporter*. Addis Ababa, Media and Communication Center, 9 (83/457): 36-38.
- Amhara National State Credit Association. (1991). 'Zena Ebiquete'. 1 (1) ; 9-11. Bahir Dar: promotion and Documntation Sevice.
- Asher, R. E. & Simpson, J.M.(1994). **The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics**. UK: Parhgamon Press, Vol. 6.
- Ballentine H.J (1997). **The sociology of Education; A systematic Analysis** (4<sup>th</sup> ed). U.S.A: Simon and Schuster.
- Banks, A. J. and McGee Banks A.C. (1997) **Multicultural Education Issues and Prospects (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)**. U.S.A.: John Wiley and sons Inc.
- Chaboud, Jacqueline, (1970). **The Educational Advancement of Women**. France:UNESCO.
- Cotter, F.R. (1990). *Proverbs and Sayings of the Oromo People with English Translations*. Debreziet: Ethiopia. Unpublished.
- Douglas, J. (1964). **The Home and the School**. London: Mcgibbon and Kee.
- Gottlieb, D. (1964). **A sociology of Education**. U.S.A: Litton Educational publishing Agency.
- Gummi Barsistoota Oromiyaatiin.( 1996). **Mammaksa Oromo (3rd ed)**. Finfinnee: Berhanina Selam.
- Harshow, Morner. (1991). **Dictionary ofthe Literary Terms**. USA: NTC; Publishing. Group.



- Hook, J.M. (1985). **The World Book of Encyclopedia** (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). USA: Library of Congress.
- Lawton, Denis (1978). **Class, Culture and Curriculum**, Great Britain; North Umber Land press.
- Machenzie, L. (1993). **On Our Fate. A Hand Book on Gender and Popular Education Workshop**. Blville; CACE.
- Merghan, Bum S. (1996). **The Social Psychology of Gender**. California: Polytechnic State University.
- Ministry of Culture and Sports. (1974). 'Zena Bahil'. Addis Ababa, 4 (3).
- Ministry of Culture and Sports. (1974). 'Zena Bahil'. Addis Ababa, 4 (4): 31-39.
- MoE. (1977). 'Ketimir Alem'. Addis Ababa, 4 (4): 33-49.
- MoE. (1992). 'Ketimir Alem'. Addis Ababa, 4 (4): 34.
- MoE. (1995). 'Ketimir Alem'. Addis Ababa, 25 (9).
- Negessu Kassie.(2000). *Factors that Hinder Rural Females from Preceding Their Education in School*. Bahir Dar University. Unpublished Senior Essay.
- ONNCP, MOE, and UNICEF.(1989). **The Psychology of Girls Learner (A Training Workshop)**. Gojjam; Bahir Dar Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary. (1970). **Oxford** (3rd ed.). London:The Clarendon Press.
- Power, J. Edward. (1970). **Philosophy of Education**. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- UNESCO (1960). **Women Education Equality**. France: UNESCO Press.