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Mitigating the Effects of Cultural Practices Hindering Maasai Girl Students' Access to Formal Education in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the ways to mitigate the effects of cultural practices hindering Maasai girls' access to formal education in Tanzania. The study employed collective case study design and sampled fifteen respondents whereby secondary school girls, community education leaders, educated Maasai parents, school board chairperson were crucial participants. The study used snowball technique was used to gather data from knowledgeable Maasai parents while the typical case sample was used to Maasai girl students and school board chairperson. The study collect data through interview, focus group discussion and open-ended questionnaire. Data was analyzed based on the theme emanating from the study objectives. The findings of the study revealed that the negative impacts of cultural practices that contribute to Maasai girls' failure to access formal education can be mitigated by encouraging positive attitudes and beliefs among community members. This also involves recognizing the value and benefits of educating girls and to empower them to manage the blockages from their community's culture. Once more, minimization of gender-based violence as well as gender balance practices in education access should become potential benefits. The study recommends that the government, Maasai community, parents as well as Maasai girl students should fight against gender-based violence to liberate girls from cultural practices bondages. The study concludes that there are effects of cultural practices that contribute to girls' loss of access to formal education. Consequently, it is important for the community to adopt and implement policies that value education for both genders without cultural boundaries.

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1. Introduction

The culture of people is what marks them out distinctive from other human societies in the family of humanity. Maasai societies are endowed with various cultural practices such as traditional dances (ngoma), gender stereotyping and female genital mutilation (Mollel & Chong, 2017). These practices have been controlling the life of Maasai community members in different parts of African continent for a long time as from pre-colonial, colonial as well as post-colonial era (Mollole & Mwakalinga, 2022). It is also postulated that most of these cultural practices are considered to be much more positive and supportive to boys; at the same time, they seem to be not in favor to girls in various fields of life such as education.

The girls' education situation in Maasai communities, sometimes, is not good because girl students face traditional and cultural barriers in each and every stage (UNGEI, 2020). In countries having Maasai ethnic groups especially Kenya and Tanzania, this tendency of rejecting Maasai girls' access to school is somehow common. Adherence to traditional cultural practices still exists among the Maasai, though some of them have changed and others are changing the way they perceive their cultural values and norms (Leggett, 2005 in Heather, 2009). Statistics show that in Maasai community, education rates, especially for girls, are lower than the national average, dropout rates are higher, pass rates are lower than the non-Maasai community, and the number of students coming from Maasai areas who pass into higher education and training are small (Sharp & Twat, 2016).

Girl students face traditional and cultural barriers inside and outside the classroom. For example, traditional beliefs in Maasai communities ground parents to value sons more than daughters. Unfriendly cultural effects which girl students face are from the family, society and schools; and this may have impacts on girls' access to formal education with much attention to secondary school. Globally, education plays a vital role to human well-being since it is a necessary tool for successful participation in social and economies of the countries concerned (Stern et al., 2020). The United Nations launched a Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, in which article number 26 states "Everyone has the right to education". Primary education should be compulsory; technical and vocational education should be accessible to all; and higher education should be equally accessible to all because of merit (UN, 2015).

In African continent, education is a critical means by which Africans human capital can be developed; however, in 2019, approximately 105 million children of primary and secondary schools' age were out of school (UNICEF, 2022). Due to differences in cultural practices that control the lives of many people in African societies, the study by Mollole and Mwakalinga, (2022) noted that since pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, most of these cultural practices have been considered very positive and favourable to men; while, at the same time, they seem to harm women in various areas of life such as education. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there is the highest rate of education exclusion. According to UNICEF's data, almost sixty percent of youth between the age of about 15 and 17 are not in school. On the other hand, education situation of young girls is not good; they face cultural barriers at every step outside and inside the classroom (UNESCO, 2021). In almost all the Sub-Saharan countries, education for girls from pastoral communities is unbalanced due to cultural practices, which act as a source of harassment and abuse to young girls (Evans et al., 2021). Several interventions were made to achieve the Millennium Development Goal for universal education (UNESCO, 2018). However, some cultural practices still act as negative impacts to girls' academic progress

Education has played a vital role in Tanzania's development since independence, whereby in 2016, Tanzania achieved nearly free universal access to primary and secondary education. However, since then, the enrolment of primary school aged children has been dropping (UNICEF, 2021). The issue of access to education has always been a major concern among girls especially those living in rural areas (Dhar et al. 2020). The study done by Temba, et al,

(2013) which aims to assess the various efforts made in Tanzania to enhance girls' education among the Maasai, with Monduli district as the case study discovered that the Maasai are among the tribes that have been marginalised in terms of education provision with much accounts to girls. These are largely nomadic pastoralists who have been migrating from one place to another—leading to difficulties in terms of providing education to them. This affects girls a lot as they become much disadvantaged in terms of education access.

Girls in low-income countries face challenges in their educational processes, possibly, due to widespread of cultural practices (World Bank, 2020). These cultural practices, therefore, keep girls out of the school system to perform tasks other than studying, leaving them unaware of their basic human rights in their respective societies (Mollel and Chong, 2017). The issue of accessing educational opportunities in Tanzania has always been a major problem among girls, and this was very evident from rural people. In most of low-income countries, education to children, in primary and secondary schools, has been a focus of many governmental and non-governmental organizations in Tanzania (Thomas and Rugambwa, 2011). But due to the availability of different cultural practices in many parts of Tanzania, these cultures tend to pose challenges that discourage girls from pursuing secondary education (Randall and Garcia, 2020).

According to URT (2016), governmental and non-governmental organizations strive to empower women and girls through education, with a focus on reducing the gender gap in access to education, as called in the second and third millennium development goals. UNESCO (2018) explained that several organizations in Tanzania, including Action Aid and Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), are working hard to give girls access to education. This was done to reduce the gap between girls and boys in access to formal secondary education. The introduction of Free Basic Education Policy (FBEP) in 2016 aimed at generalizing the 12-year basic education and eliminate fees in public primary schools. The URT (2016) reports that Tanzania has eliminated many of the gender gaps associated with access to education; nevertheless, significant gender gaps in learning begins as early as primary school and continues to widen through secondary school.

On the other hand, Mallole and Mwakalinga (2022) established that negative cultural impacts reduce girls' overall skills, hinder their chances of progression to higher education and mitigate the impact of investment in education on economic growth, reduction of poverty and health (London, 2021). Therefore, discrimination against a girl, especially in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards social development and the pursuit of culture-based education, should not be prioritized. Specifically, the paper discusses the current perceptions towards girls' education among the Maasai, enrolment status of Maasai girls in secondary schools, efforts to promote girls' education among various stakeholders and challenges prevailing in the provision of education to girls among the Maasai. The public education system treats men and women differently to the extent that gender inequality forces girls to assume marital and family responsibilities when they have not completed their education, reducing their chances of securing employment (Bandiera, et al 2020). In general, this practice contradicts the call for gender equality in education. Therefore, this study explores the ways to mitigate the negative effects of cultural practices that prevent Maasai girls from entering secondary education in Mvomero district. This study generally assessed the ways to mitigate the effects of cultural practices that hinder Maasai girl students' access to formal education in Mvomero district. More specific the study sought to answer the following research question:

- i. What are the effects of cultural practices hindering Maasai girl students' access to formal education in Mvomero district?
- ii. What are the measures to take to mitigate the effects of cultural practices hindering Maasai girl students' access to formal education in Mvomero district?

- iii. What are potential benefits of mitigating the effects of cultural practices hindering Maasai girl students' access to formal education in Mvomero district?

2. Literature Review

Cultural practices and Maasai girls' access to formal education

Lukule and Zakayo (2022) investigated the factors hindering Maasai girls' transition from secondary school to higher education. The study adopted a qualitative research approach with a convergent parallel design. One hundred and thirty-six respondents were selected, and qualitative data were analysed normatively. The findings indicate that there is a significant low transition of Maasai girls from secondary to higher education, which is mostly due to early and forced marriages, parental gender preference and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The study recommends and appeals to government leaders, educators and non-governmental organizations to strive further towards safeguarding and reinforcing Maasai girls' rights to education at different levels, by educating parents and Maasai elders on the importance of higher education to girls.

The study adds that Maasai girls should also be encouraged and supported to pursue higher education as a means of empowering, nurturing and giving them more voice. They need this voice in demanding their rights and resisting the outdated and oppressive cultural practices, which hinder them from realizing their potential and advancing economically.

Moreover, according to UNICEF (2019), a decision regarding girls' participation in education and other activities was made to ensure that they are largely controlled by the head of the household within the framework of family relations. Girls work longer hours than boys. Safety and the need for physical security or protection are traditions that often require special attention to the privacy and social status of girls. Apart from the achievements in the primary school entry phase, the educational attainment of girls in upper secondary and tertiary education lags far behind that of boys (UNDP, 2020). When men control social situations, women are generally disadvantaged in decision-making power and entitlement to academic performance due to traditional male norms that treat women unfavourably. Thus, the effects of cultural practices, such as gender inequality, hamper girls' ability to access education.

UNESCO (2018) shows imbalances in access to education, with rates of return for a selection of East Asian and Pacific countries in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education differing by gender, wealth and location. It draws attention to the significant differences in access to school between girls and boys from the poorest families. In addition, overlapping gender characteristics and other characteristics (e.g., cultural barriers) for girls and boys increase the likelihood of girls being excluded from education. Batha (2022) did research on parents' expectations of girls in Afghanistan in acquiring education compared to boys; the study intended to assess the attitude of community members troubled by the achievement of girls to education. This is due to parents' perception that more educated women could not easily get a husband or access to employment opportunities. Thus, such practices hinder education efforts for girls with much attention to access secondary education.

Efforts to mitigate adverse cultural practices to Maasai girls access to education

Gimbo et al (2015), explored the roles of community members and leaders in the fight against FGM; and the reasons for continuing the practice in some societies. The study analyzes the reasons why the Makuyuni parents of Northern Tanzania do or do not enroll their children in school. The findings revealed that the reasons for enrolling children in school included future economic stability for the family, social wellbeing, government policies enforcing parents to enroll their children in primary school, partnership with World Vision, increased physical accessibility to education. This study suggests that increased commitment to education would benefit the Maasai people by better equipping them to secure and maintain employment.

On the other hand, Joseph et al, (2021) demonstrated the predominance of teacher-centred and rote-learning approaches, as well as poor interactions between students and teachers in the classrooms. Equally, the results revealed not only tough and challenging school experiences for the Maasai students due to the lack of support from parents, long walking distances, absence of midday meals and strong cultural tensions caused by difficulties in reconciling the requirements of the traditional life with those of the formal schooling. Alongside the fundamental reforms in educational policies and practices, the findings suggest the need for school-based professional development programmes, which can sensitise teachers working in Maasai vicinity to culturally responsive curricula and learner-centred pedagogies for the Maasai students in the classroom contexts. A study by Mwakio (2017) indicate that socio-cultural and economic factors contributed to girls being out of school especially in Samburu and Maasai communities, and cultural practices such as FGM, early forced marriages, among many others were persistent. The majority of the participants desired more women's empowerment programs in and out of school.

Benefits of mitigating cultural practices affecting Maasai girls' education

According to Nazneen and Hickey (2019), when women have a greater voice in local government, policy forums and are engaged in promoting gender equality, there is a greater likelihood of progress in policies and budgets that address gender inequality and mechanisms of liability. Moreover, socially formulated gender norms and power relations within institutions play an important role in how policy is made, and resources are allocated (Emara & Hegazy, 2017; Nazneen, 2016). All formal institutions operate with their own culture and gender norms, which, through the history of women's subordination in public life, have led to a legacy of male-dominated bureaucracies. Thus, equality for both genders in accessing educational opportunities becomes an inevitable undertaking. Greater spending on education than ever before must be coupled with a comprehensive gender analysis and plans to address barriers and drivers of gender inequality in order to improve girls' education. The East African Member States have initiated and are striving to implement significant and appropriate policies, laws, programs, projects and activities aimed at ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women.

Plan International (2020) examined that the members of the community have changed a lot as many of them have started to emphasize the importance of girls' education. Getting young people, especially girls, in school and keeping them in school dramatically reduces their vulnerability to HIV, gives them greater independence, empowers them to make decisions about their lives and offers them greater potential for income. Gender policies make a significant contribution to promoting and improving gender equality, strengthening and protecting women's rights to land ownership and housing. Therefore, this awareness of the benefits of educating girls should be given wide space to spread in many parts of the world.

The United Nations General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 became the first international apparatus to clearly lecture on violence against women (Msuya, 2017). This declaration provides a charter for national and international action to abolish violence against women. This statement describes violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, which may include threats of such acts, harassment and deprivation of liberty, whether committed in public or in private life (UN, 2020). Under this protocol, African governments are required to incorporate a gender perspective into their state policies, legislation, development plans and activities, to ensure the overall well-being of women. In general, this meaning of violence against women is currently the most widely accepted.

3. Method

This study employed qualitative research approach to collect in-depth information. This study used collective case study to collect data from ethnic respondents by addressing the effects of existing cultural practices and conditions that delay girls' efforts to enter education. This study was conducted in Mvomero district because there of a markedly insufficient and/or lack of literature on the problem of Maasai girls in terms of access to education. The study was conducted in 1 secondary school where 6 Maasai girls were sampled as follows: 1 Maasai girl in class 1, 1 Maasai girl in class 2, 2 Maasai girls in class 3 and 2 Maasai girls in class 4. The study also involved a Ward Education Officer (WEO), a head of the school, a school board chairperson and six educated parents who were determined through snowballing sampling, four parents being females and two parents being males. Educated Maasai parents were involved in this study because they were adults and that their input was believed to be accurate. Moreover, researchers assumed that they had sufficient experience of issues related to cultural practices of the Maasai ethnic group. Thus, 15 respondents participated in this research study.

The study used a semi-structured interview with the Maasai parents and the school board chairperson. Also, open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the Ward Education Officer (WEO) because he/she was the one who could respond by reading the questions, interpret what is expected, and then write down the answers by expressing his/her feelings concerning the questions.

In this study, researchers established the procedures necessary for ensuring triangulation, with the study using three methods of data collection and using different respondents such as female students, Maasai literate parents, the head of the school and the school board chairperson to obtain reliable information that gives a true picture of the study. Researchers ensured the credibility of the study such that the information gathered from the participants was reliable enough to accurately reflect the effects of cultural practices that hinder the education of female students in the catchment area. Subsequently, the transferability of the study was produced per aspect of the study context so that the results could reasonably be applied to other institutions. To more directly address the issue of reliability, the processes within the study were detailed, allowing future researchers to repeat the work, but not necessarily to come up with the same results. Finally, the researcher took steps to express that the results of the study have the quality of being compared objectively and not based on their own assumptions to ensure the conformability of the study. Qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions were thematically coded to facilitate storytelling. Researchers analyzed the data by re-reading and logically reviewing them to familiarize herself with them before delving into them. Then, the data were collected through group discussions, open interviews, open questionnaires and were coded and labelled. Then, margins were created to classify the data. Furthermore, it was possible to identify and visualize the themes generated by recurring themes, languages, opinions, which were made up of multiple codes. Finally, researchers defined the themes by keeping in mind the objective of the study.

4. Findings

The effects of cultural practices hindering Maasai girls' access to formal education

Educated woman are disobedient to their husbands

Findings showed that educating girls in pastoral society are disobedient to their husbands. This notion makes parents to deny their daughters the right to access secondary education. Furthermore, results revealed that even community leaders from traditional rural societies believe that when a woman becomes educated, she develops disrespectful behaviour and no longer accepts male supremacy. It was found that parents strongly do not have faith in the concept of girls' education as well as women empowerment; thus, many parents opt to send their sons to school than girls. During focus group discussion, participants commented:

Maasai community does not believe in educating girls, in most of the cases, our parents believe that when we are educated, we shall get married to Swahili people and abandon our traditions. They also assume that to educate a girl means to encourage the disrespectful conduct before husbands when we get married. Girls, on the basis of our traditions, are groomed to be obedient and submissive to men; so, educating them means violation of that cultural norm."

However, one of the interviewees had a different view in the interview session; she said:

"In Maasai culture, to spend wealthy for educating a girl is considered as loss of funds; this is because after she gets married, parents are not expected to benefit from their daughters. The family of her husband will be the beneficiary."

The community under this study believe that sending a girl to school is harmful because after getting education, she has high chances of running away from home once she is married. Furthermore, even when a certain parent knows the importance of sending a girl to school, the traditions affect him/her and end up being uncertain whether to send the daughter to formal education or not.

Female genital mutilation

The findings revealed that female genital mutilation is a strong cultural practice despite its negative impacts. It symbolizes all conducts, which encompass either partial or total removal of the external female genital organs for non-biological motives. The findings show that traditional practitioners, mostly in rural areas, who are called 'ENGAKITONI' normally remove private parts of women to avoid the betrayal behaviour when they get married. The central idea behind female genital mutilation is to control bodily stimulation of girls so that they become satisfied with their husbands. One of respondents that:

"Girls suffer from severe pain, bleeding, shock, urine retention and bacterial infection; they also experience open wounds in the genital part, frequent bladder, urinary tract infections infertility and child delivery-related contradictions. It appears that girls who succeed to escape FGM suffer from isolation and shame from their peers who have been mutilated. This makes some girls run away from their homes because they feel being insulted; ultimately, they fail to access education."

It was further found that girls who are not mutilated are isolated and become forbidden to cook for in-laws; they cannot get married and, sometimes, can be divorced. The effect of isolation of a girl practiced in education contributes to absenteeism from school, which later affects academic development because of the long-time the girl is kept away from school for mutilation. Female genital mutilation practice obliges girls to stay out of school either temporarily or permanently, and those who disagree to undertake female genital mutilation become despised in the community. Female genital mutilation obstructs many girls from accessing formal education because of the results of the practice such as pain, bleeding and isolation. This, consequently, leads to psychological suffering and reduces girls' morale to education. In the interview session, one of the informants commented that:

"Female Genital Mutilation is a crucial conduct in Maasai community. Community members believe that when a girl is mutilated will be able to control her body stimulation and be faithful in marriage in such a way that she will become satisfied with her husband."

Another respondent, during focus group discussion, one of the respondents said that:

"Our fellow girls are, sometimes, promised for marriage then taken out of school to keep their protection and to prepare themselves for genital mutilation event."

Results of the study present that rural families hide their daughter for the purpose of preparing them for female genital mutilation. There is a high sense of privacy with immediate effect before and/or after girls' first menstruation formalities. Some women are being mutilated after they get married, especially when they encounter difficulties related to conceiving children and repeated miscarriages. This is because the in-laws feel guilty that the wife is labeled responsible for that unfriendly product; thus, contributing to female students' failure to access secondary school education.

Spouse selection and bride price paying

The findings of this study show that parents select spouses and persuade their daughters to get married to men who are wealthier enough in terms of cattle. The moment a girl gets married to a rich man, parents earn enough bride price and become rich. Daughters are raised up for specified roles such as child realign at home and domestic responsibilities. This is to make them become aware of their position in the society. Many parents observed that early marriage is a preferred solution in order to control premarital sex. Findings from respondents show that girls in the community, under this study, have no mandate to decide on sexual and/or relationship matters concerning them; instead, parents have that power to decide on their behalf. In case the girl is enrolled in school, the pressure from family and her peers for marriage would raise the chances of failure to access in her studies. It was also noted that parents force girls against their consent to marry men who are too old. Girls who refuse such marriage arrangements are physically abused or verbally abused from their families. This makes them lose their right to access education and chase some girls out of their homes.

One of the respondents said that:

"The traditional duties and roles of male and female children in the family differ. Parents have the mandate to allow the pre-born girl child to be proposed by a man in the compromise of cattle. This contradicts her future education prosperity when she reaches school age".

Furthermore, a participant from focus group discussion remarked that:

"A substantive number of girls forced into marriages by dowry end up in divorce and separation; this happens when a girl realizes that she is not ready to continue performing marital responsibilities with a man who is not of her choice."

It was further noted that girls who were forced into early marriages end up going through domestic gender-based violence, oral abuse, physical attack and rape from their husbands and/or in-laws. This makes many of them be left to care for their children without any financial support from either the former husband or in-law's family. It can, consequently, be claimed that teenage marriage weakens girls' chances to possess means of production and this leads to underdevelopment in the community at large.

Polygamy as a hindrance to girl students' access to formal education

The study also found that the Maasai men, traditionally, have a tendency of marrying more than one wife. This increases the number of children who are born from a family with many wives which seem to be a burden to the father. In addition, the number of children exceed the income power of the family, and girls become disadvantaged of that situation. Parents' demand for the education of their daughters in polygamy family is low, reflecting both cultural norms and girls' work in and around home context.

In the open-ended questionnaire, a respondent said:

"Female children are prepared to spend much of their time to perform more of household duties in serving a huge polygamy family before going to and after coming from schools. The household daily tasks which are traditionally individualized to female children have been poorly recognized in the expense of education access."

During interview, one of the interviewees argued that:

“The Maasai men get married to a big number of wives who bring a big number of children, as the result. At last, they fail to handle them, and they opt not to allow the female to access formal education/to go to school.”

In Focus group discussion, one of the participants commented that:

“The Maasai parents force the female children to get married to the old men who have other women; as a result, they used in serving the big families with many wives and a big number of children.”

The information aired out by the respondents denotes that girls in the family where a father has many wives are at a disadvantaged position in many spheres of life, including education compared to their counterparts (boys). Girls are obliged to do domestic chores and farm activities before going and after coming back from school. This makes girls lack sufficient time to concentrate on education accessibility to secondary school.

Male preference hampers girls' access to formal education

The study found that parents prefer boys to girls in Maasai community. It seems that, right from infancy stage, parents prioritize boys to many opportunities compared to girls. This traditional norm makes boys to enjoy and utilize golden opportunities which are found in the family. Investigational evidence suggests that parents' sensitivity about males is affected by the unwelcome beliefs about female sex. It is not surprising that a girl child is told to do more household chores than her brother simply because she is a girl. This makes girls concentrate on home duties in the face of school related tasks. The findings from the respondents indicate that many girls in the community, under this research study, occupy a wide-range of home tasks, while their brothers access school. These data seem to contend that where family income is inadequate, families have a tendency to prioritize on educating boys, recognizing them as future heads of family unlike girls who are considered as caretakers of the children and other relatives at home. This culture seems not to be desirable especially in this new era of right to education for all. It can, for that reason, be concluded that certain communities still hold on their traditional beliefs where boys are preferred to girls; and that the boy child gets more favours in the community than the girl child. In this era of digital and massive awareness, this type of traditional belief seems to be outdated and it should, therefore, be driven out of the mind of the people through educational awareness campaign. During interview, an informant uttered:

“Traditionally, our community groom boys to be leaders and successors of the families; as people who will take over the family and clan responsibilities in the future.”

In the Interview, another interviewee pointed out:

“Parents are reluctant to invest in education for girls as they fear that we will get pregnant and / or marry men from Swahili community; hence, abandon the Maasai traditions. They, thus, see it as wastage of resources.”

In a focus group discussion, one of the participants claimed that:

“Some parents engage in corruption with the respective school leaders in order for their daughters to de-registered from school. This is due to the fact that they don't see the benefit for their daughters to be educated.”

The views articulated by the respondent observe that parents do not care about the schooling of their daughters because they do not appreciate the importance of education to their girl children. This makes them to allocate domestic responsibilities to girls and hinder their access

and achievement in education. It can, thus, be claimed that once girls gain access to schools, the journey to school may also be unsafe since many girls experience harassment and physical attacks especially in the remote parts of rural areas.

Measures to Mitigate the Effects of Cultural Practices Hindering Maasai Female Students' Access to Formal Education

Educating Parents on Girls' Education

Findings from the study indicate that all respondents who participated in this study highlighted on the strength of parents and guardians' education about the benefit of educating girls. Efforts to change attitudes of parents regarding the significance of education to girls, education should be provided among the members of the community. The study further points out that parents are encouraged to spend money for their daughters' education; that means community members have changed to the extent that many of them are now sending their daughters to school; hence, raising awareness upon the value and advantage of girls' education. It appears that keeping young girls in school pulls down their vulnerability to unwanted behaviours; and, thus, lifting them up to greater independence in life.

One of the respondents had the following to say:

“Previously, parents were prohibiting their daughters to attend to school as they saw no value in it. But, nowadays, things have changed, many parents from our community are aware of the benefits of sending their daughters to school.”

Another interviewee claimed that:

“The parents should be assisted to value their daughters' health and refrain from the tendency of forcing them to get marriage early. The result of forced marriage is failure to give birth due to early pregnancy.”

It was noted that the unfriendly traditional norms should be eradicated from the community, furthermore, community members' attitudes are gradually changing especially in the Maasai locality of Mvomero district, where most of the women and girls suffered from illiteracy. The society is getting liberated to the extent that several indigenous cultural conducts which impede girls' education are being uprooted. This enhances positive opportunity of female students towards access to formal education.

Creating Gender Equality Awareness through Education System

This is about making people wide-awake regarding the parity for both sexes to access education. This can enhance empowerment to women by putting emphasis on a bottom-up method to raise the protection measures towards women's dignity. When both genders are treated with balance, the emancipation of women from the nails of men is likely to take place. This will, as a result, increase the number of female students dueing the enrolment and continuing stages.

In the interview session, an informant pinpointed that:

“There is a need for the community to be made aware of the importance of education for both male and female students. Girls should not be subjected to early marriage at their tender ages.”

During the interview session, the interviewee had this state:

“The key element to empower women especially in education career is by addressing the cultural barriers which make them be treated as less knowledgeable human beings.”

The current study noted that girls who are affected by conventional norms have now been exposed to educational programs in order to deal with the unwanted effects of their community culture. It was revealed that, when the community expose girls to equal chance of education, their value and confidence will rise to the extent that they manage the cultural challenges on their pathway to education. This agrees with, the current study which was set to highlight the role of society in alleviating the socio-cultural practices that hinder female students from completing their primary education.

Putting Emphasis on Government Policy

The findings of this study show that communities have several cultural practices such as FGM, which are harmful to girls. So, intervention from the government is important. Analysis of the barriers and inequalities faced by girls and women inside and outside the school in most of the downgraded communities is important to government agencies. It emerged from this study that there are local administrative by-laws in the community which intervene some cultural conducts. This is made with the purpose of safeguarding girl students on their way to access their education. Governments are required to fit in a gender-viewing platform in their state policy decisions, legislation and development plans. This is done in order to ease negative traditions and guarantee the overall welfare of women.

Furthermore, the results show that social and cultural policy are fundamental in building socio-cultural practices for women's privilege towards enjoying their human rights. Thus, central and local government must have a duty to organize and formulate policies in order to continue raising community awareness on the importance of investing in girls' education. Different media such as radio, magazines and televisions can be used to speed up the spread of awareness to citizens on girls' well-being. It can, therefore, be claimed that government, non-governmental organizations and the community should co-operate to dishearten the various out dated traditional practices that hamper female students from accessing formal education.

During the interview, one of the informants commented that:

“The government and the community, through a council of elders, have tried to help girls who are deprived of education by punishing the persons who cause such obstruction. This is done through fining and sentencing them; then, taking the girl back to school.”

To punish people who obstruct girl students' education efforts and allow girls to return to school can be considered as a remedy towards the education dreams for girls.

One of the interviewees stated that:

“The whole society and local government should have a strong strategy of punishing and sentencing those people who obstruct girls to access education.”

This denotes the willpower of the government of Tanzania to assist girls who are denied the right to education under some circumstances. This will create a room for girls to access secondary education.

Enacting Favourable Programs on Gender Equality Especially in Education Sector

The society needs to enact strong actions for girls' education to narrow the room for a girl not to complete her education. Girls, in the community under this study, come across too many barriers on their way to education because of the absence of strong and working actions. Such a situation widens the chance for girls' failure to access formal education. It appears that favourable decisions to emphasize on gender parity on education can serve as a solution to allow many girls to complete their education.

In the interview session, an interviewee articulated:

“The educated Maasai girls need to be favoured in various chances such as employment opportunities and participating in making decision in various contexts as a way to motivate their parents”.

Another informant in the interview said that:

“There should be conducive areas in schools such as enough dormitories to allow Maasai students avoid walking long distance and stay away from their parents to prevent temptation of being forced to be married early.”

The findings aired out by the respondents reveal that, apart from the achievement in the enrolment phase of primary education, communities have made various decisions such as fines to persons who obstruct girls from education. Such provisions help to minimize the tendency of girls waiting far behind boys in education. Thus, it encourages female students to access their formal education.

Designing the Curriculum that Consider the Girls’ Interests to Learn

Curriculum is the totality of learning experiences a learner encounters in the learning journey. It was discovered in this study that there is a need for a planned course of study in the education system within which various interests of girls are included. In Maasai community currently, there are some local provisions like punishment and fines to those who obstruct girls from education. This calls to mind the motivation to girls towards accessing education. Strong and working curriculum policies help to lessen the notion that women are less knowledgeable compared to men. It appears that educational officers regularly tell girl students their rights and the way they can be free from male disagreeable behaviours. This makes to school on-going girls become provoked to learn.

School academic clubs can be defined as the entities which aim at bringing to mind the sense of awareness and idea sharing among club members on academic matters. The government and non-governmental organizations should co-operate with schools to launch students’ academic clubs, which, in turn, will be used as a platform for them to share and air out their issues on academic deeds. This can also be esteemed through creating media clubs, which would run campaigns to discourage cultural practices that hamper girl students from accessing formal education. Again, it was advised that some positive cultural practices should be included in school programs to motivate girls’ education as well as Maasai parents

The observation of respondents indicates that the community runs various arrangements towards raising awareness about the advantage of girls to participate in different platforms for their success in education. It was revealed from this study that, in certain secondary schools, there are students’ academic clubs which run several academic activities with the target of inspiring girls to learn.

In one of the interview schedules, an interviewee pointed out that:

“Schools should initiate students’ clubs that will help students to participate, share ideas and encourage academic work.”

In the interview session, one of the informants articulated that:

“Schools should organize awareness clubs which consist of female teachers, female students and counsellors at school level. The clubs should be able to organize discussions and awareness programs on the importance of education to female students.”

The views stated by the above respondents indicate that, in the communities, there must be various equipment within the school compound and outside, which are meant to support girls to learn and succeed at school. It can be claimed that counselling and guiding services which are being given to students at school are not effective enough due to the reason that some

students come across problems whose impact is great. So, to devote on ascertaining students' awareness, clubs are considered to add value and efforts towards helping female students to access their education with much concentration to secondary schools. It can, therefore, be abridged that children who have been affected by several traditional conducts are, nowadays, not restrained in dim rooms; instead, they are exposed to educational programs in order to assist them to contain and challenge the cultural discomfort upon them. This concurs with the current study's call for gender parity in formal education access.

Providing Leadership Skills to Girls as from within the Family

It was found from this study that some families have discarded the unwanted beliefs that women are not skilled enough to lead. Communities are required to build capacities to girls about leadership and other decision-making matters. Factors that tip to the advancement of girl leaders consist of mentoring, keeping fit, development, vocation, planning, personal features and hard work.

During interview, the interviewee pinpointed that:

“Women are able to produce useful top management if, at all, the working environments are empty of cultural hindrance and threats. Certain families are able to make improvement that makes the situation helpful to girls.”

Another interviewee added that:

“Women need to be valued and should be given priority and be elected in various chances of leadership; they also need to be included in making decision from the family stage to the countrywide.”

Data produced by respondents denote that these inspirations enable women to take up the top leadership titles, roles, let others know and hearten their hard work. Leadership progress is a practical approach in enabling women towards the appropriate governance experience. This lets them take part in decision-making policies. It is important to give girls training opportunities from families so that they fit into their future roles as leaders and decision makers. It can, consequently, be concluded that girls need to develop good intra-personal and interpersonal skills. This helps them to know different ways of cooperating with others to avoid being overconfident in their claim for gender fairness. This will persuade others to communicate their ideas and sensations freely without feeling shy. It will also promote female students' efforts to study and enable them to manage socio-cultural impediments, hence, become able to access education.

5. Discussion

Effect of Cultural Practices hindering Maasai Girls' Formal Education

The Maasai community sees no advantage in educating girls. Most parents in the community believe that if a girl goes to school, she will develop disobedient behaviour towards her husband. Garforth (2017) argues that community leaders in traditional rural societies believe that when a girl becomes educated, she develops disrespectful behaviour and no longer accepts male authority. It seems that the Maasai community of Mvomero district has less faith in the concept of education for girls as girls are prepared for conjugal duties based on traditions and not formal education. The results show that some parents prefer not to send their daughters to school because they see no profit in it. This encourages most parents to send their boys to school rather than girls. The findings also show that family income is no longer sufficient; parents tend to prioritize the education of boys and recognize them as future heads of household, while girls are seen as the guardians of children and other people at home. In this age of digital and mass awareness, the traditional belief of male preference seems outdated and, therefore, it needs to be banished from people's consciousness through education

campaigns. This observation is similar to the literature of Mallole and Mwakalinga (2022) in the study on the impact of socio-cultural practices preventing female students from completing their primary education in Mkalama-Singida district.

Efforts to mitigate adverse cultural practices to Maasai girls access to education

Analysis of the results show that there are local administrative ordinances in the community that influence certain cultural behaviours. The Tanzanian government has to incorporate a gender observation platform into state policy decisions, legislation and development planning. It has been advised that various media such as radio, magazines and televisions can be used to accelerate the spread of awareness among citizens about the liberation of girls in different walks of life, including education, so that they thrive in the same way as men.

In regard to liberal feminism theory, activities that can be used to counter some negative cultural practices that produce a hostile result to girls and prevent them from accessing formal education should be encouraged. This can be helpful in freeing girls from being stuck in a dark tunnel of discrimination against men in life. In addition, the government has decided that all students who dropped out of school earlier due to various factors, including pregnancy when they were in school, will be able to return to school and continue their studies after giving birth. (Report of the Minister of Education Science and Technology: Mwananchi Newspaper, Nov 25, 2021, p.6). The Tanzanian government has decided to allow girls who have been denied the right to education under certain circumstances to return to school so they can complete their education. This finding relates to the literature by Mallole and Mwakalinga (2022) who researched on the impact of socio-cultural practices that hinder the completion of primary education by female students/ Therefore, it is important that the community values education for both genders without cultural boundaries so that female students can enter formal education just like boys. In the meantime, women's liberation mechanisms should take different forms to expand their chances of accessing a range of opportunities, just as men do in society.

Analysis of research data shows that productive results can be achieved when the community takes various actions to raise awareness on the benefits of educating girls. Regular community campaigns can help to educate parents about the benefits of educating girls. Attitudes among Mvomero parishioners are changing, especially in rural areas where many women and girls suffer from illiteracy. Parents are now fully convinced regarding the benefits of educating girls. This change is crucial to facilitate female students' access to formal education. This also confirms the assumptions of the Liberal Theory of Feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1799), who argued that struggles for the liberation of women from cultural shackles would enable them to obtain equal rights, educational and employment opportunities. Women, like men, need to be educated to become moral and self-sufficient human beings. In fact, the theory of liberal feminism was introduced in Africa a tool for women to strive for equality in economic development and ingenuity. Therefore, awareness on the importance of girls' education should be raised to ensure that the inclusion of girls and other neglected groups in policy planning and strategy implementation would be significant.

The results of this study indicate that, guidance and counselling services are an important tool in restoring the souls of affected female students when offered at school in the weak. In some schools, girls face severe social and psychological situations, such as external pressures and sexual relationships, which, sometimes, lead to low academic performance and, ultimately, drop out of school. Therefore, it is suggested that there should be individual and group counselling at school to serve as a brake on the discouragement of child marriage for adolescent girls for girls to be liberated and, thus, entitled to the same educational status as boys.

Additionally, school managements should establish and provide effective guidance and counselling services to help culturally influenced female students. This can be helpful in showing the mindset of not appreciating the importance of education for girls; and, thus,

becomes an inspiration. Therefore, when guidance and counselling services are up and running in schools, they can help to strengthen the aspiration of female students to enter formal education and, thus, break free. The current study also found that there is an urgent need for girls to learn leadership skills within their families. Imparting skills and developing leadership skills can lead to healthy self-confidence in many girls. Leadership development is a hands-on approach to helping women gain appropriate leadership experience.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that there are effects of cultural practices that contribute to girls' loss of access to formal education. Therefore, it is important for the community to adopt and implement policies that value education for both genders without cultural boundaries. Although the government has banned female genital mutilation and introduced a relaxation of traditional stereotypes and male preference, these rules and/or laws do not seem overdone. Therefore, researchers concludes that it is not just about establishing order and rules in the newspapers; it is rather about enacting active and functional rules to liberate girls so that they can assert themselves in various areas of life, including education. This perspective envisions paving the way for women to seek for equal opportunities with men in various fields such as education. Women should be able to attain leadership positions in the professions, government, and cultural institutions. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the ways of mitigating cultural practices should take the form of encouraging constructive attitudes and beliefs among community members to recognize the value and benefits of girls' education as per Tanzania education policy of 2014, which addresses and removes all obstacles that hinder the opportunities for students to complete all cycles at the respective level of education. Enforcing the law to protect girl students and allowing culturally influenced students to return to school can pave the way for girl students to enter and complete their education. Girls also need to be empowered to master the holdups of their community's culture. Moreover, the effects of cultural practices that hinder the access of girl students to formal education will be reduced successfully. Thus, the potential benefits such as minimization of gender-based violence and gender balance in access to education; hence, girls would be rescued from forms of oppression. This could increase their opportunities to participate in different roles in the society just like boys. This study recommends that the government should create an appropriate setting for access to formal education in the Maasai community. Furthermore, girl students should be empowered to report the actions that happen to them. In addition, it is recommended that the government should place more emphasis on laws and procedures aimed at interfering with cultural practices that impact female students' access to formal education. Also, study recommends that the Maasai community should take precautions and punishment to those who deny girls access to formal education. Due to negative cultural practices that hinder girls from Maasai pastoralist community, further study needs to examine the role of education management in raising awareness on factors that hinder the schooling of Maasai ethnic girls; another study should assess the challenges related to the elimination of cultural practices that hinder the education of girls in the Maasai community.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no competing financial interests or known personal relationships that would influence the report presented in this article.

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