

## Research Article

# EXPLORING MAASAI PARENTS' EXPERIENCES ON FORMAL EDUCATION IN LONGIDO AND MONDULI DISTRICTS-TANZANIA

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents a qualitative study that explores the experiences of Maasai parents regarding formal education and how these experiences influence their involvement in the education of their children in Longido and Monduli districts. The study utilizes a phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of Maasai parents in relation to formal education. The research sample consists of 72 parents selected through purposive sampling and 10 traditional leaders selected through snowball sampling. The data collection methods involve focused group discussions with six members per group, conducted in both districts, and interviews with traditional leaders. The collected data are transcribed, analysed for emerging themes, and presented with supporting verbatim quotations. The findings of the study reveal that Maasai parents hold mixed perceptions of formal education. While some parents view formal education as an investment, many perceive it as a threat to Maasai culture and tradition. Negative impacts of formal education on Maasai youth are attributed to factors such as a lack of respect, inappropriate dressing, selfishness, and the use of Swahili among educated Maasai youth. Based on these findings, the study concludes that the experiences of Maasai parents with formal education have a negative effect on their engagement in the delivery of formal education. As recommendations, the study suggests that the government should develop educational plans that address the specific needs of indigenous communities like the Maasai. Additionally, both governmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to conduct campaigns aimed at raising awareness among Maasai parents about the value of formal education, with the goal of improving their involvement in the education of their children.

**Keywords:** Maasai Parents, Formal Education, Experience, Tradition, Culture.

### INTRODUCTION

Educators widely recognize parental engagement and participation as crucial factors for the academic success of students in schools. Many studies have shown that when parents actively support their children's learning, engage in discussions about school matters, read together, and place importance on education, it has a significantly positive impact on their children's academic development (Tan *et al.*, 2020; Thomas *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, educators, school boards, and politicians consistently emphasize the importance of parental involvement in their children's day-to-day progress, regular school attendance, and participation in parent-teacher conferences. This collective belief stems from the understanding that when parents take a genuine interest in their children's education, it positively influences their academic performance (Simui, 2020; Montes and Montes, 2020). Educators widely recognize parental engagement and participation as crucial factors for the academic success of students in schools. Many studies have shown that when parents actively support their children's learning, engage in discussions about school matters, read together, and place importance on education, it has a significantly positive impact on their children's academic development (Tan *et al.*, 2020; Thomas *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, educators, school boards, and politicians consistently emphasize the importance of parental involvement in their children's day-to-day progress, regular school attendance, and participation in parent-teacher conferences. This collective belief stems from the understanding that when parents take a genuine interest in their children's education, it positively influences their academic performance (Simui, 2020; Montes and Montes, 2020).

Tanzania, a multicultural country with over 130 ethnic groups (Lauwo, 2020), strives to ensure equitable access to education for all cultural communities. Among these diverse groups, the Maasai community stands out, as it presents a range of perspectives on education, creating a topic of discussion among scholars (Pesambili, 2020). Scholars, like Bhowmick (2021), emphasize the reciprocal relationship between culture and education, where culture influences education and education, in turn, shapes the culture of a particular place. This dynamic has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the challenges faced in advancing education on the continent (Bisong and Ekanem, 2020). It is widely acknowledged that the successful implementation of education programs heavily relies on the attitudes of students and the community toward education (Szumski *et al.*, 2020).

In Tanzania, the government recognizes the importance of addressing cultural diversity while ensuring equal access to education for all. However, within the Maasai community, varying perspectives on education exist, with both positive and negative views. This diversity of viewpoints contributes to ongoing discussions among researchers and scholars. The reciprocal relationship between culture and education is a vital aspect to consider, as cultural influences can shape educational practices, while education can, in turn, impact and transform cultural norms and values. The Maasai community in Tanzania is renowned for its strong cultural heritage, characterized by a consistent language and cultural practices shared among similar communities (Kagunze, 2016). Traditionally, the Maasai have relied on their own methods of educating the youth, employing an age set system that has endured since the colonial era. Indigenous knowledge is transmitted through traditional practices, including rituals such as Murranism and female genital mutilation. However, the coexistence of formal education and traditional knowledge has created cultural tensions and gaps (Pesambili, 2021).

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One notable challenge is the influence of the Maasai Murran system, which negatively impacts youth school attendance, leading some to completely abandon formal education (Ronoh *et al.*, 2010). During traditional teachings, certain elders assert that formal education is inherently detrimental and should be avoided (Pesambili, 2021). These cultural factors can significantly affect the participation of the Maasai community in the delivery and quality of formal education provided in schools located within Maasai communities.

The presence of conflicting views on formal education and the persistence of traditional practices pose challenges to the integration of formal education systems within Maasai communities. The tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing formal education can affect the level of community engagement and the educational outcomes of Maasai students. It is crucial to address these cultural factors and bridge the gap between formal education and traditional knowledge to ensure the active participation and success of the Maasai community in the formal education system. Before the introduction of Western education in Tanzania in the late 19th century, pre-colonial education in Tanzania emphasized the value of Maasai culture, which was transmitted through inheritance and passed down from one generation to another. This form of education was a lifelong process (Kagunze, 2016). However, with the arrival of colonial powers, namely Germany and Britain, formal education was introduced with the aim of societal stratification. Access to education was determined by factors such as race, socio-economic status, and the educational needs of that time (Kagunze, 2016). Due to the mobile nature of the Maasai lifestyle, formal education did not receive much attention.

In general, education provision in pastoralist areas of Africa has been historically neglected since the introduction of Western education in the mid-19th century (Bishop, 2007). Until the 1940s, Maasai communities had limited opportunities for formal education, especially when compared to other ethnic groups. The provision of education was scarce, and access to formal schooling was extremely limited for the Maasai during this period.

Furthermore, the involvement of the community in the provision of education is widely recognized as a crucial factor for the success of educational institutions (Tadle-Zaragosa and Sonsona, 2021). Research suggests a strong relationship between parental involvement in school-related matters and students' achievement of educational goals (Senin and Halim, 2021). When the community actively engages in education, students are more likely to perform well in both internal and external examinations, while the opposite holds true when community involvement is lacking (Okemwa *et al.*, 2020; Emmanuel and Andala, 2021). Therefore, it is important to foster academic success and social cohesion within schools (Rodriguez-Oramas *et al.*, 2021). Insufficient parental involvement in the education sector has been linked to poor academic performance among students (Nyangarika and Kapinga, 2020).

Additionally, the education levels among Maasai communities in Kenya and Tanzania remain significantly lower than the national average (Nkedianye *et al.*, 2020). While several studies have been conducted on this issue, there is limited literature available on the level of Maasai community involvement in the provision of education. Thus, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring and examining the extent of community involvement in the education sector.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND CONTEXT

Formal education attainment in Maasai communities still falls considerably below desired levels. Analysis of national form four

examination results spanning four years (2015-2018) reveals a persistently low performance, with over 66% of students scoring between division four and zero (NECTA, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018). Despite the Tanzanian government's concerted efforts, facilitated by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, to ensure the provision of quality education to all citizens, the average academic performance among Maasai communities remains below the national average (Nkedianye *et al.*, 2020; Kimaro, 2021). Available literature suggested a reciprocal relationship between culture and education, wherein culture influences education and, in turn, education influences the culture of a given location (Bhowmick, 2021). Researchers have reported both positive and negative perceptions of formal education within the Maasai community (Pesambili, Bisong and Ekanem, 2020).

Due to the significant influence of culture on educational attainments, it is crucial for educational interventions to consider cultural aspects to ensure effective implementation. In the case of Maasai communities, the delivery of formal education has been impacted by the mismatch between Western culture, supported by formal education, and indigenous Maasai culture (Pesambili and Novelli, 2021; Raymond, 2021; Pesambili, 2021; Mtey, 2021). While existing literature highlights the influence of Maasai culture on formal education, little attention has been given to the engagement of Maasai parents in the provision of formal education. Consequently, this study aimed to address this research gap by assessing the experiences and engagement of Maasai parents in public secondary schools within the Monduli and Longido districts.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

**This study was guided by the question:**

What experiences do Maasai parents have on secondary education?

### Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in the Scaffolding theory developed by Vygotsky (1962). The term Scaffolding refers to support provided to learners to accomplish tasks which they could not have managed on their own. According to the theory, cognitive development of children depends on supportive interaction with others. The theory therefore calls for the creation of positive environment which could be supportive for children to learn effectively. Based on the assumptions of the theory, learners need to be supported in the teaching and learning process. The support is not limited to the classroom teaching but extends to the community from which learners come. The community should support learners by providing the required teaching and learning resources which could aid the learning process. While at homes, parents need to support their children with home assignments. This calls for parents to have a good understanding of educational issues happening in the schools. Moreover, parents should create suitable environments for their children to study at their homes. This can be done by letting children prepare their study schedules or preparing such timetables for them and ensuring that the study time is adhered to effectively.

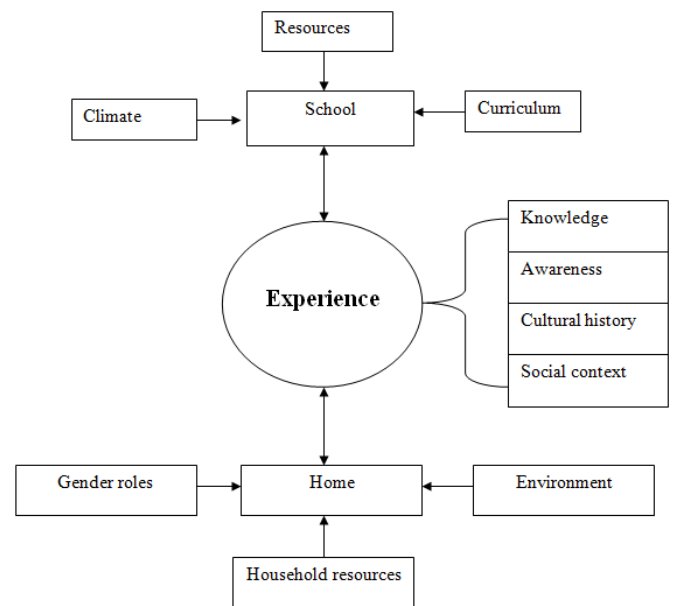
The theory also calls for a cultural transformation by creating a supportive culture to the provision of education. The community needs to have positive attitudes towards formal education and should aspire for each child to get quality education. The society needs to have an effective way of supporting provision of education. Such support should be well planned and implemented. Providing relevant support to learners makes them able to manage even the tasks which could have been problematic to them. Looking at the Maasai communities which are largely composed of pastoralists, formal education may be a challenge as youth may be left with domestic

activities like taking care of the herds and other domestic chores. Additionally, parents may be too much focused on increasing the number of livestock and overlooking the aspect of education. In such circumstances, the provision of education may be negatively affected. In the current study, the researcher conducted an analysis on the experience of Maasai parents and how they engage their children in secondary school education. The theory recognizes the importance of supporting learners for them to learn effectively. The theory shows how support from teachers, parents and peers can lead to improved students' learning and therefore enhance their academic achievement. Moreover, the theory was easy to apply in the sense that a researcher could observe different activities being carried out in the communities and assess whether such activities support the provision of formal education. Additionally, the theory provides basis for evaluating the quality of interaction between the students, teachers and the society. Bruner and other proponents of the theory believed that for students to learn effectively they need an active support from the teachers and the society. Since teachers have been trained on how to provide support, in the current study the theory helped the researcher to look at the second stakeholder (the society) and determine how the Maasai community is engaged in the provision of formal education. The weakness of the scaffolding theory often highlights the importance of individualized support and one-on-one interaction between a more knowledgeable other and the learner. This focus on individual scaffolding may not fully capture the complexities and dynamics of group learning or classroom settings, where multiple learners and varying levels of scaffolding may be present. Limited Consideration of Cultural and Contextual Factors: The scaffolding theory may not adequately account for the influence of cultural and contextual factors on the effectiveness of scaffolding. Different cultures and contexts may have unique educational practices, values, and social dynamics that can significantly impact the implementation and outcomes of scaffolding strategies.

It is important to note that these weaknesses do not invalidate the scaffolding theory in this study but rather highlight areas where further research and refinement may be needed to enhance its application in education contexts. Therefore, in the current study, the researcher assessed how the Maasai parents' support the provision of formal education specifically by supplying teaching and learning resources, making follow-ups on children's education and creating positive environment in which children can effectively perform educational tasks while at home.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework serves as a visual representation depicting the interrelationships among variables under investigation. In the current study, the variables of interest revolve around parents' experiences with formal education and their engagement in the provision of education. Figure 1 provides a graphical depiction of these variables, highlighting their connections within the research context. Figure 1 illustrates a reciprocal relationship between parents' experiences with formal education and their engagement in meeting the educational needs of their children. The diagram highlights the influential role of the home environment, encompassing household resources and gender roles, in shaping parents' experiences. Simultaneously, the school environment, encompassing the curriculum, available resources, and the overall learning climate, also influences parents' experiences with formal education. Both the home and school environments impact the Maasai parents' experiences, particularly in terms of their knowledge and awareness of formal education. Additionally, cultural history and social context play significant roles in determining the experiences and level of engagement of Maasai parents in the realm of formal education.



Source: Researcher, (2022)

Figure 1 shows that there is a reciprocal relationship between parents' experiences on formal education and their participation in the provision of formal education needs. According to the figure, home environment, including household resources and gender roles shape the parents' experience and at the same time school environment. Moreover, school curriculum, resources and the learning climate may shape the experiences of parents on formal education. Both the school and home environment affect the experience of Maasai parents on formal education in terms of knowledge and awareness of that education. Cultural history and social context also determines Maasai Parents' experiences and engagement in formal education

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Pesambili (2020) conducted a qualitative study to explore perspectives of pastoral communities in Monduli district about formal education. Through interview schedules and focused group discussion guides the study found out existence of both positive and negative perceptions on formal education. While other members of the community considered formal education to be useful, some elders viewed it as dangerous and totally evil. The study by Pesambili indicated existence of mixed perceptions of the Maasai community towards formal education. However, it did not establish how such perceptions affected delivery of formal education among Maasai communities. Therefore, in the current study the researcher assessed perceptions of the Maasai communities towards formal education and then determined how the perceptions contribute to delivery of formal education in the Maasai communities.

Another study in Tanzanian context was conducted by Raymond (2021) who carried out an ethnographic study to explore girls' participation in formal education among the Maasai pastoralists. The study found out that there were both supporting and opposing views among the study participants regarding girls' education in the Maasai communities. For the case of Maasai girls, they were found to value formal education despite the fact that they were prevented by either home or school environments. The study by Raymond has shown existence of supporting and opposing views concerning formal education. However, it has not indicated whether supporting or opposing views affects delivery of formal education in the Maasai communities. Moreover, the study by Raymond indicated home and school factors that limit girl's participation in formal education.

However, the link between the Maasai culture and beliefs on the delivery of education was not well addressed. Therefore, the current study concentrated on how the Maasai culture affects the perceptions of the community towards formal education and how such perceptions affect the delivery of formal education.

Again, another study in Tanzania conducted by Mtey (2020) investigated women's perceptions and contribution to girls' education among pastoral communities. This was a qualitative research which made use of a case study design. The study found out that women have positive perceptions towards girl's education. The study by Mtey has shown that women within the Maasai communities have positive perception, and they value formal education of their daughters. However, according to the culture among most of the Maasai communities, the participation of women in decision making is too minimal. Therefore, their perceptions towards formal education may not have significant contribution on girls' education. Therefore, in order to effectively determine the influence of Maasai community perceptions on formal education, the current study involved both male and female parents. Male parents were involved since they are responsible to decide on most of the family related matters, including education for the children.

Pesambili and Novelli (2021) conducted an ethnographic study to explore Maasai students' encounter with formal education in Monduli district, Tanzania. The study also found out existence of mixed perceptions of the community towards formal education. Some parents were found to value formal education while others believed that their children should look after cattle in grazing fields rather than attending schools. The presence of mixed views on education among the Maasai communities calls for further studies to find out whether these perceptions affect the delivering of formal education among these societies. Within the same context, Ferstad (2018) examined the perceptions of Maasai rural groups on secondary school education. The study found out that most of the Maasai had negative perceptions on formal education as many felt that formal education does more harm than good to their communities. . However, there was a gradual change of perceptions to the community from negative to positive. These findings suggest that though Maasai communities still have negative perceptions towards formal education, there is a hope that they may change such perceptions in the coming days. Therefore, it was important for a study to be conducted to determine whether the positive change of attitudes of Maasai communities towards formal education has a positive impact on the delivery of such kind of education within the Maasai communities by taking Monduli and Longido districts as the study areas. Generally, literature on experience of Maasai and other pastoralist communities about formal education has shown the existence of mixed views. Some community members consider formal education as important tool for their development while other members see it as a threat to their culture. However, there is no adequate information on how such views affect the delivery of formal education in Maasai communities. Therefore, in trying to fill the gap, the current study was conducted to assess the engagement of Maasai community in the delivery of secondary education in Longido and Monduli districts whereby the guiding research question focused on how the perceptions of Maasai communities affect the delivery of formal education.

## METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study that adopted a phenomenological design. A phenomenological study aims to describe the meaning of lived experiences related to a concept or phenomenon for multiple individuals (Creswell and Poth, 2007). The study focused on Maasai parents and traditional leaders in the districts of Longido and Monduli, whose children were either attending school, had completed school,

or had not received formal education. Quota sampling was employed to select 72 Maasai parents for participation in the study, while snowball sampling was used to select 10 traditional leaders. The selection of parents was deliberate and based on the existing age-set groups within the Maasai communities. Three villages from each district were sampled. Data collection involved the use of focus group discussions and interviews as research instruments. In each village, the participants were divided into two groups based on gender (male and female), with each group having participants. Separating the groups was important, as Maasai cultural norms restrict females from speaking in the presence of males (husbands, fathers, and brothers). This separation allowed female parents to freely express their views. A trained moderator facilitated the discussions, while the researcher recorded the participants' perspectives on their experiences with formal education. Since the researcher is also a Maasai speaker, the discussions were conducted in the Maasai language.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the collected data. The recorded discussions were transcribed with the assistance of a research assistant. The researcher compared their transcripts with those of the research assistant to ensure consistency of information, thereby enhancing validity and reliability. The transcripts were then translated into English by experts in the English language and translating software. The researcher familiarized themselves with the transcripts by reading them multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the parents' intentions. Emerging themes were generated from the information within the transcripts. The data from the transcripts were subsequently coded according to the established themes. The presentation of data was supported by verbatim quotations.

## FINDINGS

During the focus group discussions and interviews with Maasai parents and traditional leaders, a range of views on formal education emerged. These views encompassed both positive and negative perspectives, which were further categorized to generate themes reflecting the participants' opinions.

### Positive Experiences of Maasai Parents on Formal Education

Regarding positive views, several themes emerged during the discussions, highlighting the potential benefits of formal education for the Maasai community. These themes encompassed improving literacy, fostering community development, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing intercommunity interactions.

#### Improving Literacy

During the focused group discussion, Maasai parents expressed the significance of formal education in improving the literacy levels within their community. The participants acknowledged that the literacy level among the Maasai community was comparatively low in comparison to other communities. Participant "F" from the male group in village one shared his perspective, stating:

Maasai have received education which is the most important thing and we did not have a culture of sending children to school. Most of the Maasai here are illiterate, I myself do not know how to read or write, and I do not even speak Swahili. Most of us have seen now as a good thing, sending children to school to be able to read and write. I have sent all my children to school so that they can be educated (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022) (Researcher's Translation)



The level of formal education among the Maasai community was also reported to be low by participant "A" from the male group in village one who said:

First, many tribes were afraid about the Maasai but now they are no longer afraid because they have discovered that we are uneducated. For example, if you go through many means of transport, it is very rare to find a Maasai driver. If you go to many police stations or in the army, it is very rare to find a Maasai. If you go to many offices, it is very rare to find a Maasai person (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022) (Researcher's Translation)

The recognition of formal education as essential reflects its potential to address the low level of literacy within the Maasai community. These findings align with similar observations made in pastoralist communities in Kenya and Ghana, where children often had responsibilities to tend to domesticated animals instead of attending school (Ghanney, 2018; Andiema, 2021). The low literacy rate among Maasai parents in the Longido and Monduli districts may serve as a motivating factor for them to prioritize their children's education and literacy by sending them to school. The limited access to education and lower literacy levels observed in the Maasai community are consistent with the challenges faced by other pastoralist communities. In these communities, the traditional livelihoods and responsibilities assigned to children often prioritize animal husbandry and other household duties over formal education. As a result, many children do not have the opportunity to develop basic literacy skills.

The recognition of the low literacy rate among Maasai parents serves as a motivating factor for them to seek educational opportunities for their children. By sending their children to school, they hope to break the cycle of limited literacy and provide them with the chance to acquire essential education and literacy skills. Education is seen as a pathway towards empowerment, expanded opportunities, and improved socio-economic conditions for both the individuals and the community as a whole. Some participants emphasized the importance of formal education as it provides them with knowledge and skills across various domains. For example, participant "C" from the male group in village two stated: "I believe formal education is essential because it equips us with knowledge and skills in various areas."

Moreover, formal education was regarded as essential by some participants due to its ability to equip individuals with knowledge and skills across various domains. Participant "C" from the male group in village two expressed this sentiment, stating:

I also see that education gives people a lot of light, for example about understanding this Kiswahili language as the major language of communication has enabled people to travel without any problems in this country and this is the result of education (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022) (Researcher's Translation).

Similarly, participant "D" from the female group in village two emphasized the importance of education, highlighting its role in facilitating communication and expanding knowledge on various aspects. She stated:

For me this education is a very good thing in our traditions and customs. Now Maasai can read and write, mothers are taking children to the hospital, can even speak Kiswahili and communicate with different people through Kiswahili. Through this education, we Maasai have been able to find our people who are also teachers and have been a great help to our community in guiding them to know what to do to make our brothers successful in education. Also, this Swahili language has brought a lot of knowledge to the Maasai community and

all this is because of education (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022) (Researcher's Translation).

The above argument was supported by traditional leader who said:

"In the past, our children were like dumb people, they did not know anything at all, but now this education has opened their understanding. A child who studies gets a great understanding. Education has come to erase ignorance in our Maasai society (Traditional leader 1, Monduli, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2022). (Researcher's Translation)

The responses from these participants highlight the perceived importance of formal education within the Maasai community, particularly in terms of literacy and effective communication, specifically using the Swahili language when interacting with non-Maasai individuals. A study conducted by Pesambili and Novelli (2021) revealed a low level of awareness of the Swahili language among the Maasai communities. Therefore, formal education is seen as a significant motivator for enhancing the community's understanding of the language. Participant "E" from the male group in village three expressed this sentiment, stating, "I think education is a very good thing. First of all, even here, I can't even ask for drinking water in Swahili." This statement exemplifies the perception that formal education plays a vital role in equipping individuals with the ability to read, write, and effectively communicate in the national language of Tanzania, which is Swahili.

Furthermore, a traditional leader emphasized the benefits of formal education, stating,

"This education helps a lot in solving many challenges faced by the Maasai society and also improves the living conditions of families. There were poor families, but after sending their children to school, they became a great asset to their families" (Traditional leader 4, Monduli, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2022).

### Education for Socialization

Another significant theme that emerged regarding the positive experiences of Maasai parents with formal education is education for socialization. Several participants emphasized that formal education plays a crucial role in enabling them to interact and collaborate with individuals from other tribes and countries.

In the focus group discussion, participant "A" from the male group in village five highlighted the importance of formal education in this context, stating:

In my opinion, I think education is a very good thing no matter how good the traditions and customs are. Then even the environment changes us to conform to it through education. So life changes should change this Maasai tradition to go and mix with other tribes to cope with the current world system. So our boys must go to other places like cities or even other countries to learn how to make a living and also see different ways of life. But in order for them to mix themselves (interact), they must also know their languages and this is only possible if they have studied and received enough education to enable and succeed in their later life (14<sup>th</sup>, April, 2022). (Researcher's Translation)

This argument is supported by one traditional leader who stated: "But I see that education has brought people together. Today there is no violence; people live together because of this education (Traditional leader 1, Monduli, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2022) This argument of facilitating socialization is supported by Bishop, (2007) who said that "Many Maasai who formed relationships with non-Maasai whilst at school

subsequently maintained these links. Those Maasai who went to school not only formed relationships with non-Maasai whilst at school, they were also more able and confident in making such links afterwards”

Another participant argued that about formal education:

It makes people socialize with many people and be able to travel to distant regions. Right now, my sons are in Dar es Salaam and others are in Mwanza. I have never been there but because of this formal education they have been able to go there (Traditional leader 1, Monduli, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2022)

The responses from these participants highlight that education is perceived as a powerful agent of socialization within the Maasai community. By engaging in formal education, Maasai individuals are able to interact with people from other tribes and gain proficiency in various aspects of society

Another example highlighting the importance of formal education was shared by participant "B" from the female group in village one, who expressed, "We love education so that the Maasai may also be successful. For example, if they succeed like our late Sokoine, is there any problem?" This statement indicates that education is now perceived as a key factor for success among Maasai individuals.

Responses from this participant demonstrate that formal education is increasingly recognized as the primary reason for success within the Maasai community. Participant "A" from the male group in village five further emphasized this notion, stating, "Believe me or not, education has brought great benefits to our nation in adapting to the changing nature of the environment, lifestyle, and needs of the times. Let us love education." This participant's viewpoint highlights that formal education is viewed as an essential tool for the community to adapt to the ever-changing environment. Education equips individuals with knowledge and skills that serve as crucial stepping stones towards their independence (Jónsdóttir, 2021).

## EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

During focused group discussion, participants revealed that education has played a great role to the Maasai community as it improves their employability in the labour market. For instance participant "C" from the male group in village one said:

...educating a child will benefit him/her personally because he/she will be able to know what is good and what is bad and it will also be beneficial for himself/herself and to the family. Education he/she receives will help himself/herself because he/she will be able to find employment, and serve the people he will lead whether he/she is going to be a leader or a teacher (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).(Researcher's Translation

This argument is supported by one traditional leader who said:

This formal education helps those who successfully study and get jobs to get ability to help their families and relatives. So, this education is very useful for those who got it (Traditional leader 9, Longido, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

Again another participant added:

A child who studies up to the college will be in a better position to get a good job. Even if he/she has completed Form Four he/she will be able to become a village or ward executive officer and more self-employed. Even in their home, they will have gained fruit through the child who studied in the family. Moreover, he/she will be very knowledgeable because he/she

can guide himself/herself wherever he/she wants to go. He/she will also be able to know the law in different languages and he/she will have a lot of skills in helping people (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

This participant also showed the disadvantages of not being educated as echoed here:

...but for the one who has not received a formal education he/she will not be able to find employment anywhere, nor know the various laws or even literacy even if he/she has innate intelligence or sufficient skills he/she must have a school education...(12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

This argument is supported by one traditional leader who said:

Have you seen this house out here, my daughter built it for me and I have sent her to school? My daughter is a government primary school teacher. Formal education is very beneficial to all children. She is the one who takes care of me while I am here. It is really very beneficial (Traditional leader 7, Longido, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2022)

This observation highlights the significant importance of formal education in modern times, where school education plays a crucial role in determining an individual's employability in various settings. Sadly, members of the Maasai community often face neglect in formal job employment due to a lack of formal education. Participant "A" emphasized the importance of formal education for all community members, recognizing that it is a key factor in addressing this issue.

This perspective is further supported by the findings of Melubo and Carr (2019), who observed that the lack of formal education is one of the contributing factors to unemployment among Maasai youth. This was exemplified by participant "A" from the male group in village one, who stated, "We are unemployed because we are not educated."

Additionally, children who receive formal education have better employment prospects and are able to support their parents, as observed by Gimbo *et al.*, (2015), who analyzed the factors influencing Maasai parents' decision to send their children to school. Therefore, education is viewed as a vital tool for securing employment opportunities. Participants in the study also recognized education as an alternative investment to traditional animal keeping, as it equips individuals with skills to earn a livelihood beyond relying solely on livestock. Participant "F" from the male group in village three expressed this perspective, stating: "Education enables a person to acquire skills that can help them make a living, even if they are employed anywhere. So, education is a good thing." This response indicates that some members of the Maasai community perceive the value of education based on the positive outcomes they have witnessed. It aligns with the findings of Gimbo *et al.*, (2015), who revealed that Maasai parents have expectations of tangible benefits from their children's education, viewing it as an investment.

The recognition of education as an investment reflects a growing understanding within the Maasai community of the potential advantages that education can bring. With education, individuals acquire valuable skills that can enhance their employability and open up opportunities for income generation beyond traditional occupations like livestock keeping.

This argument is supported by one traditional leader who said "But there are those few who manage to finish their studies and get good jobs who become a great help in their families" (Traditional leader 2, Monduli, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2022)

The response from this participant suggests that formal education is now providing increased life opportunities for the Maasai community,

surpassing the traditional reliance on large herds of animals as the sole indicator of wealth and investment. Presently, some Maasai parents have recognized the importance of educating their children as an alternative to solely relying on animal husbandry. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective put forward by Kisuda (2017), who asserts that education is the most valuable inheritance as it enhances critical thinking and empowers individuals to navigate their environment. To underscore the significance of investing in education, participant "A" from the male group in village one expressed: "As Maasai, our main occupation is cattle keeping, but we sell our cows at home to support our children's education. We sell these cows to the point where our sheds are empty." These responses indicate that some Maasai parents consider formal education to be of great importance to the extent that they are willing to sell their cattle in order to provide education for their children.

### **Negative Experiences on Formal Education/Negative Impacts of Formal Education**

During the focus group discussions and interviews, Maasai parents and traditional leaders shared negative experiences related to formal education. Several themes emerged in this regard, including the destruction of Maasai culture, perceived selfishness, family abandonment, abandonment of livestock, and disrespect towards elders.

#### **Education Destroys the Maasai Culture**

Although education is perceived as highly important for the overall development of the community, the Maasai parents who took part in the focus group discussion expressed various concerns about formal education and its potential impact on Maasai cultural practices. They viewed formal education as a threat to their culture. Participant "C" from the male group in village one highlighted this concern, stating: "To some extent, education has destroyed Maasai traditions and customs, especially among those Maasai children who have received an education. The educated individuals are abandoning our traditions and customs, particularly in terms of traditional Maasai clothing." These responses indicate that formal education is seen as a partial threat to certain cultural practices within the Maasai community. These findings align with the observations made in Monduli district by Pesambili (2020; 2021), where some Maasai elders considered formal education to be entirely detrimental as it erodes their culture. Such experiences may contribute to the limited engagement of parents in the promotion of formal education.

Some Maasai parents perceive formal education as a threat to their culture, particularly in terms of social interaction and dressing. This sentiment was emphasized by participant "D" from the male group in village one, who stated:

...though education is good, there are things that have been brought to our Maasai society. For example, it was not common for a Maasai woman to pass in front of people while wearing pants or shorts, even sitting outside and drinking alcohol...But such things are common today because of what you call education...(12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

Also, one traditional leader added:

A Maasai child who has not gone to school loves livestock and is known to the herd and also loves his traditions and customs, but a child who went to school does not like all these traditions at all. He becomes a wanderer in the city and in the areas of many big cities (Traditional leader 8, Longido, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

Furthermore, participant "C" from the same village and group expressed that formal education has had a transformative effect on the way Maasai people dress. They stated, "Formal education has destroyed our culture and tradition, as educated children have abandoned traditional clothing and now wear pants below their buttocks. We believe that this change is solely due to formal education." This response suggests that some members within the Maasai community attribute various cultural malpractices to formal education. It is important to note that this response indicates a perspective held by certain individuals in the Maasai community, who perceive formal education as the primary catalyst for the observed shifts in cultural practices. Their viewpoint implies a belief that formal education is responsible for the abandonment of traditional clothing and the adoption of what they consider to be inappropriate dress styles.

...that is why this time dressing is different because they pretend to wear decent clothes but not. That is why even in your homes you see the appropriate attire is completely inconsistent with our traditions and customs and if you warn the children about the attire they will go to the government offices to complain that fathers oppress them(12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

Again, another traditional leader added:

If we continue to hold and embrace this formal education, we will later on come to completely erase these traditions of ours because they are completely mismatched. The problem is that many people who are educated come to despise some of the practices of our traditions. They prefer not to develop them but rather abandon them completely, or make them the last. For example, they ban our rituals of female circumcision performing our traditional worship, many of our traditional dances, many of our traditional medicines and our foods, our family rituals such as marriage, and the way of living together (Traditional leader 4, Monduli, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

The response from this participant indicates that the changes observed in the style of dress among members of the Maasai community can be attributed to formal education. Participant "E" from the female group in village one emphasized this point, stating that educated female children have adopted a dress code that is considered immoral in the Maasai society. They are perceived as lacking discipline, and it is seen as a shame. Participant "C" from the same group and village added to this, mentioning that when these educated individuals return home, they wear pants that are deemed embarrassing, no longer adhering to the long and respectable Maasai clothing tradition in front of their parents. These responses highlight the concerns held by some Maasai parents who fear sending their children to school due to the belief that formal education will lead their children to deviate from traditional Maasai dress customs. The apprehension is rooted in the belief that education may influence their children to dress in a manner that contradicts Maasai traditions.

#### **Marriage issues-parent role versus children independence**

During the field work, one of the controversial issues observed in the Maasai community was girls' education. This topic generated extensive discussions, primarily from a negative perspective regarding formal education for girls. The concerns revolved around the potential conflict between formal education for girls or Maasai women and the traditional practices associated with marriage, dowry payment, and the limited awareness of the importance of girls' education. Maasai parents held a range of mixed feelings towards girls' education, with a significant level of skepticism prevailing in

Longido and Monduli districts. The implications of formal education experiences on girls' education, as perceived by Maasai parents, are deeply ingrained in the customs and norms of the Maasai society, which have been upheld for centuries. Embracing change in this regard is a complex and challenging task, requiring considerable time and generational shifts before the Maasai community can fully trust and voluntarily accept girls' education. Despite incremental changes taking place, the introduction of formal education for Maasai girls faced significant opposition from the majority of participants, as voiced by one of them:

...One thing about Maasai girls was that in the past our elders could arrange the marriages for their daughters; when to be married, who would marry them, and how much cattle they could receive as dowry payment. But for now girls are in schools...when they finish their studies they no longer want the men who were sought for them by their fathers. Now this tradition is deliberately replaced by schooling. We surely do not want but we have nothing to do. (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

This argument is supported by one traditional leader who said: Many Maasai parents do not like to educate female children because it is a capital for them as they can easily be used as a source of income for the family as they get married (Traditional leader 5, Monduli, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

The implication here is that Maasai parents still face significant challenges in supporting their daughters' formal education. According to Maasai tradition, girls are primarily prepared for marriage through the exchange of properties, such as cattle. In some families, having a daughter is considered a source of income and can potentially increase family wealth. Consequently, formal education brings conflicts among parents, family members, and relatives within the Maasai community. Providing formal education for girls is often perceived as a waste of time and resources.

This sentiment is supported by Olekambaine's findings (2013), which highlight that Maasai women are often married at an early age, with dowries received even before seeking consent from the girl to be married. The prevalence of early marriage practices negatively impacts the involvement of female children in formal education.

According to Kisuda's study (2017), the culture of nomadic communities often encourages early marriages for various reasons. Early marriage is considered a source of pride for both the daughter's and husband's families, and it helps increase the manpower within the community. As a result, many pastoralist communities do not prioritize formal education, as it conflicts with their interests, particularly concerning marriage and girls' education. Parents perceive formal education as a threat to their traditional practices and the pursuit of happiness within cultural aspects. This sentiment is further supported by Participant "D," who stated:

We love formal education for the girl child but we still have a little doubt about them because if they just become successful, it is easy to forget them especially if they marry a man from other tribes. They will no longer be able to help us, because they completely turn away from their parents and siblings (15<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

The above argument is supported by one traditional leader who said:

This formal education gives us a big problem for a girl child. It has a very big problem. Look, I send her to school, I sell my livestock, I paid for her studies until she finished her studies, and then later she came to despise me by bringing me a man

from another tribe against our Maasai traditions (Traditional leader 1, Monduli, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

### Formal Education on the Neglect of Local Livestock Economy

Livestock keeping is the fundamental pillar of the Maasai economy, passed down from one generation to another. The Maasai people have gained worldwide recognition as a cattle-focused community. Cattle hold immense significance in their lives, as they are integral to their rituals and ceremonies. The completion of these rituals and ceremonies often requires the slaughtering or offering of cattle, symbolizing the essence of their existence. For the Maasai, livestock represents life itself, as they believe that a meaningful life is inconceivable without cattle. This sentiment is reflected in the words of participant "A":

This is against our traditions and customs and that is a result of education. Even now cows can be lost in the afternoon and no one among the young people (Maasai Moran) can go to find them, instead they go for watching TV, football games on TV, playing pool table, gambling, and playing cards. So, our traditions and customs are lost (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

This argument is supported by another traditional leader who said:

In the same way, this formal education is seriously destroying our traditions such as our nomadic livestock keeping, traditional dances, our moral taboos and behaviour. You will not find someone to do this again because people have their formal education and they will be going to build their modern houses. After getting jobs, they will no longer have time to worry about livestock or traditional matters. You should also know that the essence of tradition for the Maasai is cattle. So, if the cattle are lost, the tradition is also completely lost (Traditional leader 6, Longido, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

This serves as evidence of the negative impact of formal education on the traditional economy of livestock keeping. Upon receiving an education, young individuals tend to shift their focus away from livestock keeping and redirect their attention towards other business ventures. Such a shift in priorities is perceived by parents as a threat to the continuity of this vital activity. Kagunze (2016) echoes this sentiment who noted that: *enrolling children in schools is considered to be some kind of robbery of the labour force, which they need in herding their livestock and hunting*. The Maasai community perceives formal education as a hindrance to their livestock keeping activities, which demand a continuous labour force throughout the year. These activities require the presence of well-grown and energetic young individuals to tend to the animals and ensure proper grazing. The situation becomes particularly challenging during the dry season, spanning from August to November, when the Maasai community faces the most difficult period of the year. During this time, pastures are scarce, and water sources are limited. It often necessitates long walks to obtain water, leading to conflicts with local farmers and even the desperate measure of relocating animals to National Parks or other reserved forest areas to save them from severe drought.

During this critical period, a tug of war arises between parents and school administrations, as some parents opt to remove their children from school to assist with livestock keeping. However, teachers advocate for the children's presence in school to attend classes. Consequently, schools are seen as factors that disrupt the daily routines of livestock keeping activities, alienate Maasai youth from their traditional beliefs, and separate them from other Maasai individuals engaged in traditional livestock keeping. One participant expressed this sentiment:



...you find a well-educated and graduated Maasai boy, even if he is unemployed, he cannot return home and develop his father's property which is livestock and he does not take into account that his success in acquiring that education was due to the livestock that were sold by his parents.(15th April 2022)

Formal education can be paradoxical as it simultaneously facilitates individual growth while also contributing to the stratification between educated and uneducated members of society. This is achieved through the valuation of specific cultural forms, knowledge, skills, styles, work, and ideologies over others (Bourdieu, 1984; Demereth, 2000; Kipnis, 2011; Levinson and Holland, 1996; Morarji, 2014; Unterhalter and Walker, 2007; Willis, 1977).

Furthermore, informants have raised concerns about the behaviour of young Maasai individuals soon after graduating from formal education. They note that these graduates often neglect certain traditional activities, including livestock keeping and other cultural practices. This observation was highlighted by participant "D," who stated: *And for the boys; formal education does not help anything. They do not even use it to improve their livestock production or teach their parents or siblings about good husbandry.* (13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

In the aforementioned scenario, Maasai parents perceive formal education as a catalyst for creating social classes within their community. The educated individuals form their own distinct class and express disdain towards those who have not received formal education. This disdain extends to various aspects of life, including cultural practices, marriage customs, traditional economic activities - notably livestock keeping, dress style, and even the choice of friends. Consequently, this division leads to misunderstandings and animosity between the educated and non-educated members of the Maasai community, as emphasized by participant "A". *... yes it makes us suspicious that those who have received formal education see those who have not received it like sheep led by a goat when going to search for pasture.* (12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

This perspective highlights the common perception among many Maasai parents regarding educated young men. They often view educated individuals as exhibiting arrogance and a sense of superiority, believing that they possess extensive knowledge compared to those who have not received formal education. As a result, non-educated youth may feel inferior in their presence and hesitate to engage with them in various aspects of life. This dichotomy between being livestock keepers and pursuing formal education creates a perceived divide, where the two paths are seen as separate and distinct from each other. For the Maasai parents, these things cannot co-work without causing conflict of interest as one of the participant say:

Our formal education does not develop practical skills for those who went through it. It does not improve or give students life skills. Even in our Maasai tribe, this classroom education does not develop most of the skills like improving our natural pastoralism apart from the student gaining just literacy skills in school that does not reflect a reality of life struggle (13th April, 2022).

The Maasai community places significant value on their livestock, as their entire way of life revolves around it. Livestock plays a crucial role in their livelihood and sustenance. Therefore, any form of education that is esteemed by the Maasai community must be one that prepares the youth to be more proficient in livestock management. This includes skills such as herding and caring for cattle, identifying missing livestock based on skin colour, and utilizing branding tattoos for identification purposes (Ronoh, 2010).

From the perspective of Maasai parents, they believe that education disrupts the acquisition and development of these essential skills in their children. They are concerned that excessive time spent in schools detracts from the practical knowledge and expertise needed for effective livestock management. The parents perceive that education diverts their children's focus away from these critical skills, potentially diminishing their ability to contribute to the family's livelihood and the overall well-being of the community.

## CONCLUSION

Formal education, in general, was introduced to many countries as a part of imperialist domination, with the intention of exerting control over people's economic, political, and cultural lives through schooling, among other means. Knowledge was employed as a tool to reinforce the power of the dominant class. Consequently, Maasai cultural practices, including moranism, girl marriage, traditional economy, and other community rituals, perceive formal education as a disruptive force that jeopardizes their long-established cultural traditions. The Maasai community is grappling with external pressures to abandon these practices, and the increasing number of Maasai children and youth attending formal education at all levels intensifies the perceived threat. Furthermore, some Maasai parents view formal education as a contradictory element in relation to their cultural heritage and traditional practices. They see it as a paradox that influences their societal destiny. As a result, the Maasai community holds uncertain perceptions regarding the future of formal education. It will require a significant amount of time for them to reconcile with this type of education, as it poses a substantial challenge to the preservation of their deeply rooted culture and traditions.

## Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study recommends that both the government and non-governmental organizations initiate campaigns to raise awareness among Maasai parents about the significance of formal education. These campaigns aim to enhance parental involvement in the education of their children. Additionally, the study suggests that aspects of formal education should incorporate elements of cultural education practiced in Maasai societies. This approach would enable Maasai youth to better adapt to their home environments. One proposed strategy is the implementation of a provincial education system tailored to address the unique needs and challenges of specific provinces. This approach would ensure that the content taught in schools aligns with the challenges faced in those particular areas, thus promoting relevance and effectiveness.

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