



Factors Hindering Maasai Girls Transition from Secondary to Higher Education: A Case of Monduli District in Arusha -Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigated factors hindering Maasai girl's transition from secondary school to higher education. The study adopted a mixed research approach with a convergent parallel design. One hundred and thirty six respondents, selected through both purposive and simple random sampling approaches were involved. These included 21 Secondary school teachers, 102 students, 5 Maasai parents and 5 Maasai girls, who had completed their secondary education. Additionally, one District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO) and two Heads of schools were involved. Semi-structured interviews and open ended questionnaires were used for data collection. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to ensure validity and reliability of research instruments. Qualitative data was analysed narratively while quantitative data was analysed descriptively using statistical Software Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. 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. Additionally, Maasai girls should also be encouraged and supported to pursue higher education as a means of empowering, nurturing and giving them more voice which they need in demanding for their rights and resisting the out-dated and oppressive cultural practices which hinder them from realizing their potentials and advancing economically.

Keywords: Higher education, Institutions, Gender preferences, Forced marriage and marginalization, Discriminative practices

How to cite this work (APA):

Zakayo, F. & Lekule, C. (2022). Factors Hindering Maasai Girls Transition from Secondary to Higher Education: A Case of Monduli District in Arusha –Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 6(2), 119 – 130.

1. Introduction

Formal education, which is a universal human right, is also a sure means for promoting equitable socioeconomic and cultural development, as well as advancing human dignity. Therefore, the more a person advances in education, the more he/she benefits from its fruits. Based on this standpoint, transitioning from secondary to higher

education is of paramount importance to Maasai girls just as it is for boys. From this observation, it can rightly be argued that higher education, which is normally acquired after secondary education level, is crucial because by its very nature, it has the power to add values to those who acquire it. Higher education also, is capable of raising the status of those who acquire it in such a way that they are empowered to contribute to the raising of family income and wellbeing. Women who get the chance to

pursue higher education successfully, they are expected to acquire fundamental knowledge and skills, which they require for their social transformation, self-confidence and for advancing their status in the family life and the society at large. It is also true that women with higher education are more likely to advance in innovative and critical thinking, which is important in understanding their rights and fulfilling their duties more effectively and efficiently. Higher education is also a source of enlightenment and a means for acquiring better career opportunities, which if achieved will reduce dependability (Hazra, 2017). Additionally, by acquiring higher education, women will develop leadership skills which are necessary for coping with life challenges effectively (Hazra, 2017).

Despite the significance of higher education, women from more traditional communities like the Maasai, have been historically left behind, which is the result of discriminative practices and some outdated cultural belief and practices. Such practices can be traced back to the year 1377 when women were considered as the root of all evils and weapons of the devil and the disruption of the old law (Itati, 2006). Due to this situation, various strategic efforts to end such oppressive practices and beliefs have been taken at different times and levels in the history of the modern society. Among the efforts is the Feminist movement, which started in United State of America in the 1800s demanding for equal rights between men and women. The movement spread to Europe and later to Latin America and the rest of the world. It was after this movement that women started slowly to make their way to universities where some went as far as gaining doctorate degrees. Another effort that was made to increase the number of women in higher education was the Affirmative Action, which was introduced in North America in the early 1960s. The purpose of Affirmative Action was to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against marginalized groups like the ethnic minorities and women. Other efforts that have been done to increase the number of girls in higher education include the introduction of Education for All, Universal Primary Education, and Free education to name but only a few.

Tanzania, like many other countries across the globe, is not exempted from the challenge of gender parity in education, especially in higher education. Likewise, not far from other nations, strategic efforts have been made, including the introduction of the Affirmative Action was embedded in the Musoma Resolution of 1974 that resulted into increase in the number of females at the University of Dar es Salaam (Lihamba et al., 2006). Other efforts include but not limited to; Universal Primary Education Programme and the introduction of free education system in 2015. Despite all these efforts which are made as a means to achieve access to education at all levels and for all, to date, Tanzania is still experiencing the underrepresentation of female students in higher learning institutions. The situation is worse for

some communities including the Maasai community. The reason for such disparities is according to Temba et al., (2013), the persistence of male dominance in all spheres of life. In other words, girls and women are still discriminated and marginalized in terms of opportunities to acquire social services, including access to higher education. As a result, the majority of them have persistently remained voiceless and unable to demand for their social human rights, including the right to marry when they wish and to a person of their choice. It has also remained difficulty for the Maasai girls to realize their potentials, the fact which forces them to engage in low-class jobs which are often very demanding and yet unrewarded. Consequently, Maasai women and girls continue to live in dire poverty and in a social-economical status of life which is daunting and unacceptable.

It is likely that based on the nature of higher education, those who pursue it, have a better chance of realizing their potentials, develop their innovative skills and acquire advanced knowledge, which is necessary for their wellbeing and for the good of the nation. As found out by several studies, Tanzania has been very successful in achieving basic education, but the gap still exists at higher education levels (Raymond, 2020; Temba et al., 2013; Lekambai & Eulalei, 2013). Raymond (2020) study further revealed that gender disparity in terms of transition to higher education among the Maasai community is still devastating. It is from this background that this study sought to establish factors that are contributing to this situation and how they can be eradicated.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In conducting this study, which sought to establish possible factors contributing to low transition of Maasai girls from secondary to higher education, human capital theory was adopted as a framework for making sense of the findings. According to Wuttaphan (2017), the human capital theory was first developed by Theodore W. Schultz. The theory considers education as a human capital because it becomes part of the person who receives it and it is an integral part of a person in that it cannot be bought or sold or treated as property under one's institution (Wuttaphan, 2017). Additionally, according to this theory educational institutions are considered as industries where individuals are nurtured, empowered and molded as knowledgeable and skillful asserts, who can be used in the labor market. For this reason, the time which individuals or governments dedicate to education, as well as resources which are allocated to education, should be considered as an investment, and thus human capital earns a return (Diagne & Diene, 2014).

Furthermore, human capital theory views education as an instrument of socioeconomic growth and an engine for development (Gillie, 2015). It also views education as fundamental in advancing the capacity and productivity of the people Lonescu & Jaba, 2013). That is, the more one advances in one's academic career, the more productivity increases. It is for this reason that this theory was applied in the attempt to understand how Maasai people view the importance of education for their girls, particularly the need for transitioning from secondary school to higher education, where they are expected to channel their potentials and nurture their innovative skills, which are necessary for their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their immediate communities. Lonescu, Lonescu and Jaba (2013), add that human capital theory focuses on education returns, as it is expected to increase workers' productivity and value. In other words, proponents of this theory believe that individuals who invest their energy, time and money in education do so with the expectation of securing better jobs and enhancing lifetime earnings. For this reason, using this theory as a framework for understanding the findings from this study was appropriate because it enabled researchers to make sense of the views of respondents, on how they regard the significance of educating girls.

In Wuttaphan (2017), education is viewed as something that is capable of building human capital capacity in the sense that; it creates an asset in form of skills and knowledge which a learner accumulates. Such asserts are later on expected to give back to the society as they engage in the labor market to earn livelihood and raise awareness among members of the community. Based on this standpoint, resources in terms of time and finances allocated in education can be considered as an investment to earn a return (Diagne & Diene, 2014). Hence, through education women are empowered to become more proactive, to take control over their lives, and broaden the range of the available options (Loanescu & Jaba, 2013). In other words, proponents of this theory believe that individuals who invest their energy, time, and money in education expect lifetime earnings. Borrowing from the mindset of human capital, was significantly helpful in making sense of the research findings and posing a challenge to the Maasai community and other marginalized groups to consider investing more in supporting and promoting girls transition from secondary to higher education. Failure to advance into higher education is detrimental to the society as it hinders the increase of human capital the fact which reduces production and the speed of economic development.

2.2 Forced Marriage as Hindrance to Maasai Girls' Transition to Higher Education

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, marriage is a consensual and contractual

relationship which is formed between a man and a woman intending to spend their lives together as spouses (Harvey & Myers, 2011). Also, as stipulated in the Tanzanian Act of Marriage, part II section 9, "marriage is a voluntary union of a man and a woman, intended to last for their joint lives" (p.7). Hence, marriage, whether conducted in a traditional manner, religious or civil, is normally recognized by law as way of life which those entering into it must choose voluntarily and in full knowledge of the choice they are making. Contrary to this, marriage is termed as forced marriage. In other words, forced marriage is a marriage at any age that occurs without free will and consent of one or both spouses (Idris, 2019). This means that forced marriage has some element of coercion which renders it invalid and illegal. Forced marriages have a deleterious impact on girls' education as well as their psychological wellbeing and their health. Hence, when a girl is forced or induced to get married at an early age, the result is the failure to transition from secondary to higher education. According to Jain and Kruz (2007), in developing countries, one in seven girls marry before they turn 18, which is the accepted age for a girl to get married in most African countries. Furthermore, Mollel (2017) argues that forced marriage is one of the factors that hinder girls from acquiring advanced levels of education in many pastoralist communities. Additionally, in the pastoralist communities, including the Maasai, girls around the age of 14 years are less likely to be in school than boys and the reason behind is forced marriage (Mollel, 2017). In the same vein, Ganira, et al. (2015) argue that forced marriage affects girls' education and denies young women the right to an education that could be necessary for personal development and contribution to the future wellbeing of the family and society.

While there could be a number of factors contributing to the persistent of forced marriages in the modern age pastoralist communities, poverty, outdated beliefs and perception of parents toward girls' education, low level of parent education, traditional beliefs and practices, such as initiation ceremonies and genital mutilation are the core course (Mtey, 2017). Moreover, the study conducted in Isoko Nigeria Edewor, Aluko and Folarin (2014), parental negative attitudes toward girls' education also contributes girls drop out from school. As soon as they are no longer in school, girls get bored staying at home. The best option for them is to get married and babies so that they get busy taking care of their own family. All these situations generally affect girls more than boys, thus reducing their chances to transition from secondary to higher education, which is essential in nurturing their ability to think critically and to make better choices for their lives.

According to UNICEF (2012), there are more than 400 million women aged between 20-49 years internationally who are forced to enter into married life before their adulthood. Jain and Kurz (2007) also mention that forced marriage is not only practiced in South Asia and Sub-

Saharan Africa but also in Latin America and the Caribbean whereby 28% of girls fail to continue with studies at different levels simply because of their parents believe girls education is not a priority and so they should simply get engaged to a man and get married. A study conducted by Bhabha, Xavier and Kelly (2013) in India reports that forced marriage is one of the barriers that hinder Indian girls' access to college education from poor and uneducated families. The report further indicates that 51% of Indian girls are married before the age of 20 years. The practice highly affects their time in schooling and the figure tends to rise in rural areas for up to 61%. Likewise, in a study conducted in Ethiopia, Jones et al. (2014) found out that girls from poor and marginalized communities tend to drop out of school to get married before the age of 18 years. The age of 18 in most cases is the age at which they are expected to be graduating from high school and are expected to transition to higher education. For this reason, school dropout is also among the factors that contribute to low transition from secondary to higher education. Dropping out of school for the purpose of getting married even if under the age of 18 seem to be regarded as something normal among some communities. In a study which was conducted among the Matema and Dembashi societies, the findings indicated that girl-child school dropout among the two communities for the purpose of getting married to an older man was a natural thing that a girl could easily do (Jones et al., 2014). He shows that the said communities are yet to realize the significance of educating their girls.

In another study which was conducted in Kenya by Ganira et al., (2015), established that early forced marriages among pastoralist communities was one of the factors that contributed significantly girls who drop out of school despite the many efforts made by the Kenyan government to provide girls access to education at various levels including higher education. The study noted that some Kenyan parents were opting for easier pathways for acquiring wealth by surrendering their daughters to marriages. Due to this problem in some communities, especially the pastoralists and those living in deep rural villages, have a significant number of girls who fail to complete their primary education. For example, in a study conducted in Narok Kenya, the findings indicate that one of the factors hindering girls' transition from primary to secondary education in the area is an early marriage which is caused by the negative perception of parents toward girls' education (Odhiambo, et al., 2016). According to Odhiambo and others, such parents tend to consider formal education as being less relevant for their daughters who ought to move out to a husband's family for the purpose of begetting children and build up their own family. This can be concluded that such families do not see the values of educating girls. Furthermore, a survey conducted by Joy for Children in Uganda (2014), found out that 15% of girls are dropping out of school to get married in exchange for goats in

some communities such those located in Kabarore, Kabrero, Kateebua and Karangula. In these communities, girls were found to be missing out the opportunity for transitioning from the lower levels of education to higher.

In the recent years, several studies have been conducted both in Tanzania and Kenya where the Maasai communities are located. The studies focused mainly on finding out about the Maasai girls' access and transition from primary to secondary education. The studies generally found out that the transition rates were not as high as was expected. Among the factors contributing to such low rates were mainly social-cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and initiation to adulthood which also leads to forced early marriages. The studies further established that many Maasai girls drop out from school for the sake of establishing a family with an older man who in most cases is not of their own choice (Rotich 2014; Temba 2013; Olekambaini 2013; Partisau 2017; Raymond 2020). Indoctrination of Maasai girls about their social-cultural values also contributes to their tendency to easily give in and accept to terminate their education and enter into a marriage commitment at an early age than expected. Due to indoctrination, girls have automatically become captives not only of their own culture but also of themselves.

2.3 Parental Gender Preference and Girls' Transition to Higher Education

Gender preference refers to the perception of gender roles such as gender-related tasks and power distributions (Vandevijver, 2008). These perceptions are based on social roles performed by men and women. In most African societies, particularly those in the underdeveloped rural areas, women are responsible for home chores such as child-rearing, fetching water and firewood. Men are more concerned with financial support within the family, often viewed as bread winners. The nature of the roles distinguishes the importance of one gender over the other. As such, women's roles are often viewed as inferior compared to that of men. For this reason, when it comes as to who should be given a priority in education, male child is obviously seen as a priority for a family. According to Mikkola and Miles (2007), child preference between a boy and a girl starts from a birth. Boy child is also preferred to a girl child not only because they are expected to become a source of income but also because they are expected to inherit the family. It is therefore obvious that no parent would prefer a child who is going to inherit the family to remain back ward and uneducated. In addition, a study conducted in Bangladesh by Sarker et al., (2017), indicates that after birth, a girl child is viewed as a burden to the parent's household whereas a boy child is regarded as an asset. This is because in pastoralist societies, boy children are expected to provide security to the family and society. A study conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean by Efevbera and Bhabha (2020), revealed that girls spend

more than 3 to 8 hours a day performing home chores like cooking, washing, cleaning, fetching water and careering of members of households from which a boy child is free. This tends to take away girls' school concentration hence resulting to poor academic performance.

A study conducted by Quadir, Khan, Medhin and Prince (2011) in Punjab Pakistan, showed that gender preference between a boy and a girl child contributed to gender disparity in education. It revealed that 25% of girls compared to 49% of boys, have completed primary school in Urban Punjab. One of the reasons of not sending girls to school is a negative perception of parents towards their daughters that girls are born just to be married. Also a study conducted by Edewor, Aluko and Folarin (2014), revealed that in Nigeria's Isoko society, boys are valued more than girls. This is due to the fact that boys retain the family name, stays permanently near the family residence and provide security to the family. Due to these roles, boys are more advantaged in the Isoko community compared to girls in the area of education. Girls tend to be removed from school at puberty time for fear of they might get into a relationship and become pregnant while still with parents. To avoid this from happening, marriage is normally organized for girls at a young age while boys are encourage to pursue further education so that they can in the future secure a job through which they can support their families financially which is contrary to girls who will eventually move to another family for marriage.

Historically, the Maasai society is a male-dominated. Traditional elders and family leaders are all men. Maasai women and girls have no voice even to make their own decision concerning their well-being and education. This is because of gender preference. Most of the Maasai parents, especially the less educated, prefer their sons to their daughters. According to Heather (2009), the fact that the Maasai people belong to a male-dominated society it is obvious that women are marginalized in the decision making bodies including those decision that affect their lives such as the decision to get education or to marry.. Furthermore, like in other pastoralist communities, the Maasai communities tend to regard girls as a onetime source of income. That is, when they marry they bring in a number of cows to the family other than that, there is very little interest in girls to invest on girls. Instead of providing opportunity for formal education, the traditional Maasai family prefer teaching their daughters how to carryout domestic chores such as; raring cattle, taking care of children and the elders. Moreover, in the Maasai community, culture and norms favour boys over girls not only in leadership but also in education because they think boys have more likelihood to contribute to the family wellbeing than do girls (Olekambai, 2013). Moreover, where resources are limited, parents choose to educate boys over girls. Many Maasai parents refuse to pay school fees to their daughters so that they can drop out of school (Partsau,

2017). Girls are the ones assigned household chores, taking care of the family, milking cows, fetching water and firewood, while men only decide for the family, and these heavy works affect girls' concentration at school.

3. Methodology

This paper originates from a dissertation which was submitted to St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) as a pre-requisite for the award of the Degree of Master of Education Management and Planning. The purpose of the study was to assess factors hindering Maasai girls' transition from secondary to higher education in Monduli district, Arusha region-Tanzania. To achieve this purpose, a mixed research approach and a convergent parallel design were employed. The use of this approach allowed the use of different methods of data collection which enabled the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem. The sample size of this study was 136, it included the following categories of respondents; 1 District Secondary Educational Officer (DSEO), 2 heads of schools, 21 secondary school teachers' 102 Maasai girl students, 5 Maasai parents and 5 Maasai girls who had completed their ordinary level secondary education. The respondents were selected using both random and purposive sampling techniques. Data was collected through closed and open ended questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews. To ensure validity and reliability of questionnaires, Cronbach alpha was used. The coefficient of the variables was 0.8, which indicated that questionnaires were valid and reliable. To ensure trustworthiness of qualitative data, triangulation of data from different sources, as well as member checking was utilized. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of a Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, while qualitative data was analyzed narratively.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Forced Marriage: A hindrance of Maasai Girls Transition from Secondary to Higher Education

This study, which sought to find out factors influencing Maasai girls' transition from secondary to Higher Education, established that in Monduli District, Arusha region, which is predominantly Maasai, forced marriage is one of the underlining factors that contribute to low number of girls transitioning from secondary to Higher education. In a list of questionnaires which solicited the views of 102 Maasai girl students and 21secondary school teachers, the results indicate that the majority of girls end their education at either primary or at the ordinary level secondary school for the purpose of getting married. Others forced to drop out from school

for the purpose of getting married as directed by their parents. Table one below presents the views of both Maasai girls and Maasai teachers who were asked to agree or disagree on whether from their experience

forced marriage was one of the key factors affecting Maasai girls' transition from secondary to higher education.

Table 1: Forced Marriage hinders Maasai Girls transition to Higher Education (N= 123)

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Students		
Agree	93	91.2
Disagree	9	8.9
Teachers		
Agree	73	90.4
Disagree	2	9.5

Source: Field Data, 2021

As shown on table 1, the findings indicate that 91.2 percent of the students agree that forced marriage is one of the factors hindering Maasai girls' transition from secondary to Higher Education. On the contrary, among the participating students 8.9 percent would not agree to the notion that marriage prevented Maasai girls from pursuing Higher Education. Like the majority of students, teachers who participated in the study, 90.4 percent were of the view that forced marriage is one of the major factors hindering Maasai girls' transition from secondary to Higher Education, while only 9.5 percent of teachers disagreed. In order to improve trustworthiness of the findings, an in-depth face to face interview was conducted involving two heads of school, 1 DSEO, 5 Maasai parents, and 5 Maasai girls' graduates. All of them, at different points, expressed that forced marriage among the Maasai community is still highly practiced and so it remains one of the core factors hindering most girls from transitioning from secondary to Higher Education. The majority of these, particularly teachers and those in leadership expressed their concern on how forced marriage was affecting both social and economic wellbeing of the Maasai community. Speaking of this, one of the heads of the school noted this;

It is unfortunate that our Maasai girls are still very far behind when it comes to Higher Education. We need to do more in creating awareness concerning Maasai girl's education because a number of Maasai parents send their daughters to primary and ordinary level secondary schools, simply to obey government orders. Most of them are not ready to give up some of social cultural practices that oppress girls and women. These include; forced marriage, female genital

mutilation, and early marriages. Many Maasai parents receive dowry long before girls complete their primary or secondary education. Having received the dowry, parents are automatically obliged to send their daughters to the man who has already paid to marry the girls whether she agrees or not.

Not far from this, the second head of school who participated in the interview had this to say;

It is true that forced marriage is one of the factors that hinder Maasai girls from transitioning to higher education. It is unfortunate that some of the girls have been long brainwashed by their cultural practices. As a result, they cooperate ignorantly with their parents to enter into a marriage at an early age and without even considering other options for their lives. Parents therefore use the ignorance of their daughters to send them to marriage life soon after either primary or secondary education. What is worse is that, they force them to move to the man before the national examination results are released. This way even if they pass their form IV national examinations, they will not have the option to reverse but to stay in their marriage life.

While school leaders and teachers were open about the issue of forced marriage among Maasai community, parents were found to be reserved and not willing to share the practice of forced marriage. For the Maasai girls and young women who are victims of forced marriage, they were courageous and eloquent about the matter. Speaking of her personal experience, one of the

Maasai girls who had completed her primary education and was soon after forced into marriage life had this to share:

When I was young, I was circumcised and when I completed standard seven I was forced to get married. I became pregnant and failed to proceed with education which I had always longed for. Since marriage at that age was not my choice, I was never happy and so I made up my mind to run away. Since then, I have not seen that man again. Neither he nor my parents know my whereabouts. I do not wish to go back because I have a great desire to have a better life.

From this finding, it is evident that Maasai girls are aware about being disadvantaged by their own cultural practices, including forced marriage and genital mutilation which hinder them from advancing in education. Maasai girls are also aware that education is the epicenter of a better future and yet, such practices do not seem to come to an end. As a result of this, some girls find their only option is either to abide by their cultural practices or else to flee away from their parents' home. This situation is probably as a result of pre-conceived expectations which do not favour Maasai girls. These findings relate well with the findings from previous studies. For example, Mollel (2017), in a study conducted in Tanzania it was observed that most girls from pastoralist societies are less expected to be at school when they are at the age of 14 years because this is the age they are likely to get married. Similarly, in a study carried out by Raymond (2020), findings indicated that among Maasai community, when girls spend many years at school, they are negatively influenced and the likelihood that such girls become good wives is low. Similarly, Swai (2019), whose study investigated the perceptions of the value of formal education among pastoralist communities, noted that Maasai people "believed that sending their children to school would expose them to behaviours, which would distort the Maasai pastoralist culture" (p. 218). Furthermore, in another study which was conducted by Woldesenbet (2015), the findings indicated that some Maasai girls had positive attitudes towards formal education and they were striving to get it. On the contrary, the study found out that the majority of the parents and elders had a negative a stance towards educating their girls. Based on such negative view, it is likely that girls are forced to marry at an early age as a strategy of protecting them from being influenced by formal education. Hence, it is no wonder that as found by this study, the number of Maasai girls transitioning from secondary to Higher Education is obviously low due to the impact of forced marriage.

Furthermore, the findings show that forced marriages among Maasai communities is as a result of some external environments, including limited resources and abject poverty, which force parents to easily give up their girls in order to secure a number of cows as a source of income. Other parents also opt to educate the boy child rather than a girl child because they believe that girls are born to be married and so they do not belong to the family where they are born. In other words, girls are viewed as temporal members of their immediate family where they were born and so getting them engaged in home activities is a proper way which will also save the money for educating the boy child. The study also found out Maasai girls were getting married before the age of 18 following the pressure from their parents, a fact which, according to UNFPA (2007), is unacceptable. Moreover, when participants were further asked for possible reasons that make Maasai parents to surrender their daughters to marriage at an early age, instead of allowing them to continue with their studies, a number of them pointed out various reasons which include; illiteracy, economic setbacks, and resistance to give up to their traditional beliefs, values and practices, most of which are oppressive and detrimental to the girl child wellbeing. Speaking of this situation one of the teachers who participated in this study argued:

According to the Maasai traditions, a girl child is considered as a temporal source of income to the family, she brings in a number of cows before she moves to her new family. In some cases, the girls that get the chance to advance to secondary education are often persuaded to get married immediately after they complete their primary education and those who seem to have outgrown physically are encouraged to run away from school. For this reason forced marriage is obviously one of the factors that hinder Maasai girls' transition to higher education.

Based on this argument and another from a study sponsored by UNICEF (2012), Maasai girls, like other girls from similar pastoralist communities, forced marriage and school dropout, as well as other cultural practices that lead to early marriage, are the main obstacles to girls' transition from secondary to higher education. This situation is detrimental to the wellbeing of the society because it sidelines a number of young women who, if given the chance to acquire higher education, they would be nurtured to become more effective human resources for the wellbeing of the society. For this reason, intentional efforts should be

made to ensure quality higher education for Maasai girls as this will empower them to become more productive for their own wellbeing and for the wellbeing of their society and the nation in general. It is probably from this standpoint that the District Secondary Education Officers (DSEO) who participated in this study, expressed their concern by underlining the need for the government to continue enforcing and educating Maasai parents and traditional leaders on the importance of educating the girl child. Parents and society in general should cooperate in promoting and reinforcing girl-child education from the lowest to the highest levels. Unless this is done, the returns of formal education will not be realized because, as argued by Lonescu & Jaba (2013), the more a person advances in education, the more skills are developed, a fact which contributes to higher returns of education which in turn increases workers' productivity and value. The opposite is also true. This is to say that, the more an individual invests more time, money and energy in pursuing education, the more likely they are in securing better jobs and so enhancing lifetime earnings. With this argument, the study is of the view that Maasai communities should come out of their cultures, which continue to hold them captives, and start to invest more on educating their children equitably.

In line with the DSEO views, the study found out that Maasai parents do not see the importance of educating a girl child because they have realized that basic education that is emphasized by the government does not bring any impact to their society. This has also been mentioned by a study conducted in Narok-Kenya by Odhiambo, et al., (2016). They noted that the Maasai in Narok forced their daughters into marriage because they did not see the impacts of basic education. Therefore, for Maasai society to realize the importance of higher education, Maasai girls must be encouraged to reach higher education where they will develop skills and acquire professionalism. Hazra (2017) observed that it is through higher education that women get an opportunity to participate in social and economic development activities that can help them raise

their status and contribute to improving the economic status of their immediate families, their communities, and the nation and beyond. For this reason, promoting Maasai girls' transition into higher education should be considered as a matter of urgency and a prerequisite for equitable and sustainable social-economic development.

4.2. Parental Gender Preference: A hindrance to Maasai Girls' Transition to Higher Education

The study further sought to find out the influence of gender preference on Maasai girls transition from secondary education to higher education. In order to get reliable information, both teachers and students were involved in this inquiry. The respondents were first asked to explain their understanding about the concept of gender preference. In summary, both the students and teachers had a clear understanding of the issue of gender preference. The majority referred to it as a situation one gender within the family is given more priority than the other in terms of performing tasks within the family and distribution of basic needs. They further explained that gender preference among Maasai community is often observed when parents are living in dare poverty and have to make a choice as to which child should be sent to school and who remains. Other occasions is when children return from school, boys are often left to do their assignments while girls are called to the kitchen to carry out the roles of cooking and cleaning while the boy child is given time to relax or doing things of his own choice. To confirm if gender preference was an issue of concern among the Maasai community, respondents were asked to agree or disagree about the practice of gender preference among the Maasai community. The findings are as shown on table 2 below.

Table 2: Respondents' perception on parents' gender preference

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Teachers		
Yes	14	66.7
No	7	33.3
Students		
Yes	91	89.2
No	11	10.8

Source: Field Data, 2021

As shown on table 2, the majority of teachers 66.7 percent who participated in this study indicated that gender preference is an issue among the Maasai parents, while 33.3 percent objected to the idea. Likewise, the

majority of Maasai students 89.2 percent agreed that gender preference was an issue of concern that affects girls while 10.8 percent would not agree. The disparity between those who agreed and those who did not is

significant from both sources of data. It is also true that from the data which was gathered through individual face to face interviews from Maasai parents, the majority of them were of the view that preferring boy child to girl child is something obvious and unavoidable. Indicators of the existence of this situation includes matters related to; property ownership, decision making, and leadership position and education where girls are often sidelined. In relation to education, Maasai parents said that they give priority to educating boys simply because they believe that by educating a girl child, you are investing in another person's family while by educating a boy you are investing in your own family. It is from this background that most Maasai parents, especially from the rural communities who are less enlightened, prefer educating the boy child. The parents were also of the view that the boy child is preferred because he is expected to retain the family name and the return of his education will benefit the family. Emphasizing on this point, one of the Maasai parents said:

In the Maasai community, a boy child is more valued than girl child because he is the one who is expected to bring security to the family and society. This is why when a woman gives birth to a boy there is more rejoicing and celebration than when a girl is born.

These findings are consistent with those found by a study conducted by Mikkola and Miles (2007) who noted high gender preferences among most pastoralist societies where girls would not be allowed to hold any leadership position community, to own property or to make serious decision not even those affecting their own lives including choosing their life partners. In relation to this situation, in another study which was recently conducted in Bangladesh, the findings indicated that gender preference was heartbreaking as a girl child was considered as a misfortune and a burden to the parents' while boys are regarded as a (Chowdhury, 2017).

Based on the results, it is evident that the manner in which parents treat girls contributes to the hindering of Maasai girls from transitioning from secondary to higher education. Based on the findings, Maasai girls have got a passion to bring positive change in their community. They believe that it is only through education where Maasai parents could learn how to value Maasai girls and provide equal opportunity as to the boy child.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The findings from this study have clearly indicated that, despite the many efforts made by both the government and private sector in ensuring women's liberation from

oppressive cultural practices, Maasai girls have not been fully liberated. While some Maasai girls and women have been indoctrinated to believe steadfastly on their cultural practices and support them, others are struggling for the freedom and opportunity to pursue higher education through which they would potentially acquire advanced knowledge and develop skills necessary for the realization of their potentials and life goals. Forced marriage, gender preference and genital mutilation are still prevalent among rural Maasai communities, the fact which, according to the findings, have continually remained a hindrance to Maasai girls' transition from secondary to higher education. Although it would be unfair to overlook other aspects that hinder Maasai girls' transition from secondary to higher education, including abject poverty and ignorance, it is fair to conclude that cultural relativism is unavoidable and so it plays a key role in the perpetuation of the problem of Maasai girls' education. This conclusion entails that the way of living of any community is influenced by traditional practices and customs which are difficult to easily abandon. As found by this study, both male and female play some key roles in perpetuating the early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation and gender preference which equally hinder girls' transition to higher education. Like other traditional communities, especially the pastoralists, traditional practices and cultures are normally rooted deeply in their hearts despite their gender or consequences, the fact which makes it difficult to easily eradicate. Hence, it is fair to conclude that, unless male and female, old and young members of the Maasai communities are converted and liberated from these cultural practices which though outdated and oppressive, they still hold to them, increasing the number of Maasai girls who transition from secondary to higher education will continue to remain a conundrum.

5.2 Recommendations

This study which sought to establish factors hindering Maasai girls transition from secondary to higher education, has confirmed that despite the remarkable achievement in ensuring Maasai girls access to both primary and secondary education, transition to higher education has persistently remained low due to outdated and oppressive cultural practices including forced marriage, parental preferences of boy-child in terms of education, genital mutilation and negative perception about the value of the girl child in the given family. Based on these findings the study recommends the following actions to be taken by government leaders, non-governmental organization and educators as a means of ensuring an increase of Maasai girls' transition from secondary to higher education.

1. Since the government of Tanzania, particularly the ministry of education, non-governmental organizations and educational practitioners should adopt similar strategic efforts that were used in

enforcing implementation of compulsory basic education among the Maasai communities in ensuring an increase of girls' transition from secondary to higher education.

2. Since Maasai parents and elders, play key roles in facilitating factors that hinder girls' transition from secondary to higher education; they should be educated on the importance of giving the freedom and more chance for their girls to pursue higher education. This could be done through seminars and awareness workshops. Through such education, they will learn about the advantages and the short and long term disadvantages of upholding to traditional practices which hinder their daughters from pursuing higher education which is the means of creating more innovative human resources which is urgently needed for sustainable socio-economic development of their society and beyond.
3. Some Maasai girls, including some of those who participated in this study, appear to have been indoctrinated by their parents and elders. As a result, they promote the cultural practices that hinder their chances to transition to higher education. They also seem to have little knowledge about the world outside their own traditional practices which they

embrace. To overcome this situation, they should be assisted through awareness programs about higher education and its significance to their lives. Through seminars and workshops, they should be encouraged to speak up against oppressive practices that hinder them from advancing in their education and realizing their potentials through which they can become effective contributing members to the wellbeing of their immediate communities and beyond.

4. Since the problem of Maasai girls' transition from secondary to higher education emanates from cultural practices and customs, to solve it, all the custodians and decision makers including; the elected Maasai elders, spiritual leaders and local government leaders are to be actively engaged in a discussion and finding out the way forward.
5. Special consideration should be given to Maasai girls in the distribution of loans and employment after their studies so that other Maasai girls can get role models who they can admire and imitate by taking their studies more seriously and transition to higher education.

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