

## Perceptions and Involvement of Parents over Girls' Secondary Education in Kisarawe District – Tanzania

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### **Abstract**

The legal frameworks at national and international levels strongly emphasize the importance of education for both female and male children. The frameworks have changed gender-biased mindset over education in some societies in the world. Nevertheless, there are some societies with a negative perception of girls' education. This study examined the perception and involvement of parents over girls' secondary education in Kisarawe District. The study used a case study design and a qualitative approach. Data were collected using interviews and a questionnaire, and were analysed using thematic data analysis. Results show that parents have a positive perception of girls' secondary education. However, there is a great mismatch between such mere perception and involvement. Parents are hardly supporting female children in terms of school requirements such as transport, moral support, making follow-up on their academic progress and providing time for studies at home. It was discovered that parents' positive perception of girls' secondary education in the area is not intrinsically cherished but rather extrinsically driven by the Government's strict enforcement of laws against anyone who denies the rights of girls to access education. Hence, measures that can change the mindset of the community regarding girls' education should be undertaken along with legal frameworks for transformative results.

**Keywords:** Parents' perception, parents' involvement, girls' secondary education

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education serves as an important empowerment tool for the social, economic and political betterment of girls throughout the world (UNESCO, 2000). Given such importance, societies in the developed world have a positive perception towards education, and societies in the developing countries have either positive or negative perceptions of girls' education. Negative perceptions, in most cases, adversely affect parents'

involvement in girls' education. Lindsay and Norman (1977) define perception as the process by which organisms organize, interpret and generate meaningful experience of what surrounds them. Mackay (1987) maintains that perception and action are interdependent and inseparable. That is to say, perception is action-oriented (Drayson, 2017). However, perception does not always accurately represent the outside (Eagleman, 2011). This view is also supported by behaviourists who believe that perceptions and actions are separate as related to events (Hurley, 2001).

Communities in the European and North American countries have relatively positive perceptions of girls' education. For example, in Britain and the United States, parents' involvement in girls' education is highly influenced by the positive perception attached to girls' education (Burke, 2004). On the other hand, in some Asian countries, parents have negative perceptions over of girls' education. For example, Purewal and Hashmi (2014) found that in rural Punjab-Pakistan, about 72% of the males in their study had a negative perception of girls' education. However, a study by Mercan (2010) shows that parents in Turkey have positive perceptions of girls' education, which are linked to girls' ultimate performance in education.

Studies conducted in Ethiopia and Guinea noted that parents have a negative perception of girls' education. They view it as a waste of family resources and time, as they are very concerned with the security of their female children from teachers, classmates, and other society members (Dilli, 2006; Mendy, 2008). For instance, a study conducted by Rugasa and Taha (2015) in Southern Ethiopia showed that 52.2% of parents preferred to send their male children to school rather than female children. Moreover, 39.1% gave equal access to education for both boys and girls, and only 8.7% of parents gave first priority to girls' education. One of the reported reasons for such negative perceptions is that sending girls to school reduces labour for domestic chores and outdoor economic activities at the household level.

Somani's study in Kilomo-Zambia shows that 43 % of parents have a negative perception of girls' education as they believe that girls are prone to pregnancy and other obstacles that limit them from completing their studies (Somani, 2017). On the other hand, Dizon-Ross (2016) has established evidence that most parents in Malawi only opt to send girls whom they believe are capable of performing well in their studies, hence,

ignoring the rights of other girls who seem to be incapable of achieving academic excellence.

Tanzania's education system, as per the 2014 education policy, is 1:6:4: 2:3+, implying that it starts from nursery education, primary education, followed by secondary education (4 years O-level and 2 years A-level), and tertiary education. Secondary education is considered important because it contributes to the inputs of higher education and the labour force (HakiElimu, 2007). The Government of Tanzania has introduced different programmes to ensure education for all and improve student retention. These programmes include Secondary Education Development Plan I and II, Big Results Now, and now fee-free primary and secondary education. Apart from all these government efforts, some parents do not send their children (especially girls) to school.

Hekela's study (2014), for example, shows that most parents in Mbinga District (Tanzania) consider girls' education as an uneconomic venture, which results in unplanned pregnancies and sexually related diseases. Moreover, parents are reluctant to pay for indirect costs such as books, uniforms, and transportation, even though the Government provides free education. Because of poverty and cultural practices in many societies in Tanzania, some parents place heavy workloads on their girl children at home as they have low expectations of girls' performance in school or a chance to be employed and earn money. All these results in an increased school dropout among girls. For instance, in 2015, about 29,508 secondary school girls in Tanzania dropped out (URT, 2016).

The empirical evidences discussed suggest that there is a close relationship between the perception and involvement of parents over 'girls' education. By definition, parental involvement is an act of parents to talk to teachers, get involved in planning post-secondary activities, and monitor school work (Eagle, 1989). It can also refer to any interaction between a parent and a child or school that improves the child's development (Reynolds, 1996). Parental involvement includes assisting students in their learning, actively engaging in their child's education at school, sending and replying to home-school communications, partnering in their child's education, and being involved in decision-making by being members of various committees. Parental involvement usually takes various forms such as helping students with homework, attending school meetings, or having high expectations for students' performance and future

life in general. Stakeholders (Maynard and Howley, 1997; Jeynes, 2005) in education believe that parental involvement is necessary if girls are to succeed in their schooling.

McNeal (2001) lists four elements of parent involvement. The first element is a parent-child discussion. In this, the amount of conversation time that is spent at home discussing education issues is taken into consideration. The second element is the involvement of parents in parent-teacher organizations. This is the extent to which parents visit classrooms, speak with teachers or volunteer in school activities. The third one is monitoring, which means keeping up with the child's progress regularly. The fourth element is direct involvement, which refers to the amount of time that is spent by a parent in school activities.

Educational stakeholders agree that when parents are involved in education, their children put more effort into their studies and improve their achievement. For example, Jeynes (2005) did a meta-analysis of 41 studies and found that parental involvement had a significant relationship with the academic success of urban school students. In a similar vein, children who are encouraged and helped by their parents at home tend to exhibit growth and academic success (Maynard and Howley, 1997). Moreover, parent involvement enhances classroom learning. It contributes to the overall school community relationship and teacher efficacy. When parents attend school meetings and events regularly and get involved with their children at home, they motivate their children and instill in them feelings of greater confidence and competence. As a result, these students perform better in academics.

Most of the reviewed literature hardly links the perceptions and involvement of parents to girls' education. This study is intended to examine the link between parents' perceptions and involvement in girls' secondary education in Kisarawe. Inhabitants of Kisarawe, like other societies in coastal areas in Tanzania (such as Mtwara, Lindi and Tanga regions), pay little attention to education. The community's little concern for education and remoteness of schools pose a number of challenges to girls' education in the area.

### **Theoretical Background**

The study is guided by Epstein's (2009) model of parenting, which identifies six major types of parental involvement: Parenting (Type 1);

parenting, assisting families with basic parenting skills and encouraging home conditions to support children in the educational process, and assisting schools to understand families. Communicating (Type 2) refers to parent-initiated and school-initiated contact regarding school programmes and student progress. Volunteering (Type 3) includes providing parents and students with opportunities at school events or other community events related to education. Learning at Home (Type 4) requires parents to provide a good home learning environment for doing homework and extracurricular learning activities. Decision-making (Type 5) refers to families participating in school decision-making and may also participate in school committees. Collaborating with the Community (Type 6) refers to coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school to support learning.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research used a case study design in its intention to obtain in-depth information from Kisarawe District as the study area. Kisarawe was chosen because it is among the coastal areas that pay little attention to education. In addition, Kisarawe is covered by forests and highlands, resulting in a low and scattered population, coupled with few governments secondary schools (only 15), which are also scattered.

The study employed a mixed methods approach, and data were collected using semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. A questionnaire was used so as to supplement the qualitative data collection tool(s). A total of 285 respondents were involved in the study: 100 parents, 5 Heads of schools, 5 Village Executive Officers, and 2 Community Development Officers who participated in the interview. These respondents were obtained through purposive sampling. Female students (173) were obtained through convenience sampling, and they participated in filling out the questionnaire. Female students were studied from five secondary schools located in five villages; 28 from Janguo Secondary School, 56 from Kibuta Secondary School, 23 from Maneromango Secondary School, 21 from Gongoni Secondary School and 45 from Masaki Secondary School. Data from the interview were thematically organized and analysed, while questionnaire data were processed using SPSS version 16.

**Table 1**  
*Composition of Respondents and Data Collection Tools Used*

S/N	Category of Respondents	Projected Number	Actual Number	Data Collection Tool
1	Female-Students	180	173	Questionnaire
2	Parents	100	100	Structured interview
3	Heads of Secondary Schools	5	5	Semi-structured interview
4	Village Executive Officers	5	5	Semi-structured interview
5	Community Development Officers	3	2	Semi-structured interview
<b>Total</b>		<b>293</b>	<b>285</b>	

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Parents' Perception of Girls' Education**

In the context of Tanzania, parents and the community in general have different perceptions of girls' secondary education. Some of them have a positive perception, as they believe that both girls and boys should get equal access to secondary education. On the other hand, some parents are against girls' secondary education due to several reasons, including challenges faced by girls such as sexual relationships with boys and pregnancy, which can drop them out of school. Other parents refute girls' education on the basis that they expect little or no financial/material returns from the schooled girls, particularly after being employed and getting married.

Findings of this study have established evidence that about 100 (100%) of interviewed parents have positive perceptions towards girls' secondary education. They commented that they take both male and female education seriously. They had the view that when girls are educated, they will help their families later when they get employment. They also explained that girls' education is important for the betterment of girls themselves, as asserted by a parent from Kibuta village:

“...education will enable my daughter to get employment and be able to get better life to be manifested with her ability to meet well her requirements as well as our requirements. Therefore, as parents, we do whatever we can to meet our daughter's schooling requirements...” [29 November, 2017]

The study went further in investigating the reasons why most parents in the area have such a positive perception of girls' secondary education. In an interview with the Headmasters, Village Executive Officers (VEOs), and Community Development Officers, it was revealed that parents' decision to send their children to school and positive expression over girls' secondary education is largely influenced by the Government's strict enforcement of rules and laws pertaining to girls' education. In fact, the Headmaster of Janguo Secondary School had this to say:

“...there is an increased reporting and registration of form one female students who join secondary school for the first time after passing standard seven final examinations. Correspondingly, there is a considerable high retention rate of the enrolled female students manifested with high net intake ratio of students who complete O-level education since parents fears the government punishments for either failure of standard seven passed pupils to join secondary school or truancy and drop out of female students due to marriage and other reasons...” [20 November, 2017]

Similarly, the Village Executive Officers, in collaboration with teachers, have often been tracing truants and female students who have dropped out for reasons other than illness. For instance, at Msanga, two parents were caught and executed under the law for the dropout of their daughters due to marriage. This was revealed in an interview with the Village Executive Officer of Msanga. Furthermore, according to Masaki's Community Development Officer, three pregnant cases were reported and executed before the law.

“...We have a sort of network with the heads of schools and local government officers in tracking marriage and pregnancy cases among schooling girls and execute parents who either force or allow their daughters to be married. Similarly, in collaboration with the heads of schools, we used to identify pregnant girls. For instance, following our recent follow up at Masaki Secondary school, we were able to know that three girls were impregnated and we still make follow up to identify men who committed that illegal and immoral behaviours for execution before the law...” [1<sup>st</sup> December, 2017]

Hence, legal frameworks that the Government sets compel parents and guardians to allow their daughters to access education. This was also revealed in a study by Temba *et al.* (2013) that the positive perception of the Maasai (at Monduli District-Tanzania) over girls' education is 80 percent influenced by the Government's legal frameworks.

However, the study's examination of parents' involvement in girls' education revealed a mismatch between parents' positive perception of girls' secondary school education and their level of involvement in supporting it. Basically, parents' positive perception of girls' education is rhetoric as it is only expressed extrinsically through speaking rather than practice. Their level of involvement is explained below.

### **Parents' Communication with the School Management on Girls' Progress**

In an interview with heads of schools, it was revealed that about 84% of parents do not make follow-up at school. Therefore, these parents can hardly know the attendance, discipline status, and academic performance of their children. One of the pieces of evidence of evidence in this case is hereby drawn from the headmaster of Masaki Secondary School:

“...I have never seen any parent or guardian coming to school for academic follow-up of his/her children here at school. You can at least see some of parents coming to school solely upon called by the discipline master or class teacher for disciplinary issues of their children. This gives me feedback at glance that they are less concerned with education affairs of their respective children...” [2 December, 2017]

Learning from the quotation above, the situation implies that parents, to a greater extent, do not value the education of their female children. That is why they do not make any follow-up unless they receive a special call from teachers or when called by a Village Executive Officer to discuss disciplinary issues of their children. According to Epstein's Model for Parental Involvement, in terms of communication, she insisted that parents need to communicate with schools on the progress of their children as well as general school programmes. This creates a two-way communication channel between school and home by involving parents in school matters. 'Parents' communication with the school will also help parents to understand school policies, get feedback on the behaviour and attendance of their children, and other aspects related to student conduct. Studies on parents' perception and involvement suggest that there is a positive correlation between parents' involvement in academic affairs and students' performance (Marzano, 2003). Precisely, when parents are aware of their children's progress, they will be able to identify the problems their children face and find appropriate solutions. However, with these results, it is obvious that girls are not getting appropriate assistance from their parents in matters related to their schooling.

## Parents' Moral Support to Schooling Girls

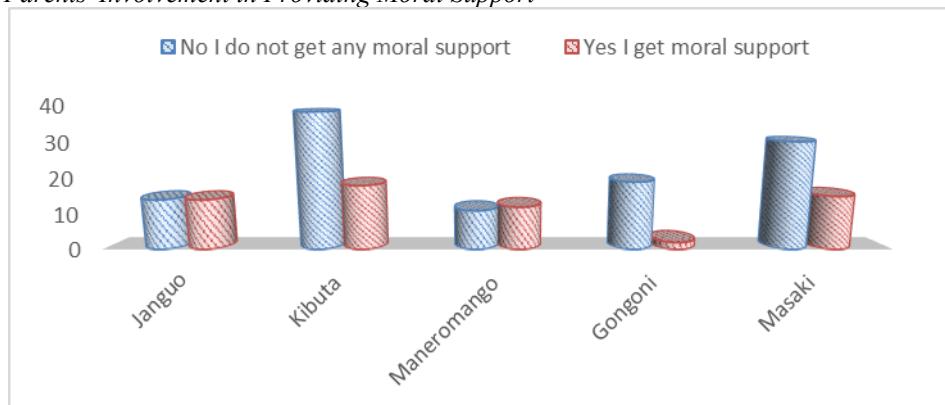
With regard to moral support, 65% of parents do not provide moral support (such as encouragement and insistence on pursuing education and exposure to important role models in education), which can foster a learning curiosity in their schooling girls. As education is offered free, the Government expects parents to play their part by encouraging their daughters to work hard. However, this is not the case in Kisarawe, as parents view education as a burden. Only 35% of parents take time to communicate with their daughters on school matters. This was reported in the questionnaire that was distributed to secondary school girls in the selected schools. The findings are summarised in the table below:

**Table 1**  
*Parents' Involvement in Providing Moral Support*

School	No, I do not get any moral support	Yes, I get moral support
Janguo	14	14
Kibuta	38	18
Maneromango	11	12
Gongoni	19	02
Masaki	30	15
Total	112 (65%)	61 (35%)

Source: Field work (2017)

**Figure 1**  
*Parents' Involvement in Providing Moral Support*



Relating these findings to Epstein's model, parents need to help their children set goals and develop strategies to achieve them. Parents should, for instance, provide students with moral and material rewards that will serve as catalysts for them to achieve their goals. The relationship between parents' moral support and student outcomes other than

achievement is not extensively researched. However, few studies suggest that there is a correlation between parents' moral support and students' attitudes towards schooling and social behaviour (Cotton and Wiklund, 1989).

### **Parents' Provision of Time for Studies at Home**

In creating a good learning environment, parents are responsible for providing their daughters with time to do their homework and other schoolwork at home. During the study, researchers wanted to know if female students in Kisarawe have sufficient time for studies at home. In this respect, 61% of consulted girls reported that their parents do not give them time for studies at home. These girls are being involved in household chores such as fetching water and cooking, as it was widely reported in the questionnaire answered by schooling girls, as shown below:

**Table 2**  
*Provision of Time for Revision*

School	No, I am not given time to study	Yes, I am given time to study
Janguo	11	17
Kibuta	54	02
Maneromango	18	05
Gongoni	05	16
Masaki	17	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>105 (61%)</b>	<b>68 (39%)</b>

**Source:** Field work (2017)

When female students were asked to tick activities, they do at home after class hours and during weekends (note: they were allowed to tick multiple choices), responses were as follows:

**Table 3**  
*Domestic works that involve girls*

School	Cooking	Fetch water	Collect firewood	Doing small business	Domestic cleanliness	Others
Janguo	10	9	6	5	7	2
Kibuta	45	50	6	10	51	9
Maneromango	2	11	0	3	12	0
Gongoni	3	2	1	3	4	0
Masaki	8	2	3	12	14	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>68 (65%)</b>	<b>74 (70%)</b>	<b>16 (15%)</b>	<b>33 (31%)</b>	<b>88 (84%)</b>	<b>18 (17%)</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork (2017)

The findings show that most students are not given time to study at home, and the problem is comparatively severe at Kibuta Secondary School. With reference to Epstein's model of parental involvement, parents need to create a good learning environment for their children. For example, they should give their children time to do homework as well as time for revision. This is not the case in Kisarawe, where girls claim to be loaded with domestic work and lack time to study. Parents are supposed to reduce domestic work for their children (especially girls) and, if possible, give them time for refreshment. This observation is concurrent with Rwegasira (2017), who witnessed that the majority of female students at Kishapu District were heavily involved in home-based activities to the extent that they did not have time to revise what they were taught at school. Lack of time to revise the contents taught at school may have a negative impact on secondary schoolgirls' education, especially on their performance. Many girls walk long distances when fetching water, which results in tiredness and hence loss of concentration when they engage in school activities. At the same time, their counterpart (boys) is left out doing school activities. The situation forces girls to drop out of studies and those who remain tend to have poor performance.

### **Provision of Transport to and from School**

Most of the students walk long distances to school. However, only 10% of them are being supported with transport. About 90% are not supported with transport services such as bicycles or transportation, even though they live far from school. This was reported through a questionnaire by schoolgirls as presented below:

**Table 4**  
*Provision of Transport*

School	I am not supported with transport	I am supported with transport
Janguo	25	03
Kibuta	50	06
Maneromango	21	02
Gongoni	17	04
Masaki	42	03
<b>Total</b>	<b>155 (90%)</b>	<b>18 (10%)</b>

Source: Filed work (2017)

In an interview with parents, they were asked how they help their daughters get to school easily. These parents responded that they do not

have money to assist their daughters with transport fare daily as they have many children to attend. The Village Executive Officers, Heads of schools and the Community Development Officer had the following to say related to this matter and the nature of Kisarawe District.

Girls are traveling a total of 10 kilometres everyday as they go to school and come back home (the Village Executive Officer-Msanga village [22 November, 2017]

The village is far from school and students live far away from here, about 7 kilometres and most of them do not have bicycles, the situation is so challenging to girls as they arrive home late, tired and at the same time they are given other domestic works to do (the headmaster- Masaki Secondary School [5 December, 2017]

Students have to travel around the highlands which surround us and the school is located far away from the settlement (the Community Development Officer- Masaki village [4 December 2017]

The fact that schools are located far away from students' residences and the lack of transport facilities may affect female students in different ways. For example, low concentration in teaching sessions due to tiredness, hunger (as a lot of calories are consumed for walking long distances), which can also be coupled with sleepiness and eventually poor academic performance. Apart from that, long walking distance highly exposes girls to snares of boys (men) who can use such a loophole to entice them into sexual activities of that always have an adverse impact to their studies. These findings are related to Rwegasira (2017), who observed that secondary school girls in Kishapu who walk very long distances to school have poor academic performance.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of the study provide evidence that there is a mismatch between perceptions and involvement in girls' secondary education among parents and guardians in Kisarawe District. The positive perceptions of parents of girls' secondary education have not been translated into practices to enhance the academic performance of female students. In fact, these positive perceptions of girls' secondary education among parents in the area are mainly due to the Government's strict enforcement of laws as enforced by different authorities. On the other hand, some parents use economic hardship as the umbrella to camouflage their failure or reluctance in undertaking some other crucial roles for academic

betterment of their children which actually do not involve financial capabilities as one can also consider the fact that the Government largely covers some costs in secondary education. Lack of parents' involvement adversely affect girls' education. In the course of finding out solution, the following are recommended.

- i) Government's enforcement of laws pertaining to girls' education among societies need to be undertaken along with the efforts of changing mind set of people so that the importance of education can be instilled into their minds and be intrinsically and sustainably translated into practices.
- ii) Material-based support for schooling girls should be associated with provision of moral support which can positively reinforce such female students.
- iii) Hostels should be built especially for female-students whose residences are far away from school.
- iv) Campaigns should be undertaken to awaken consciousness among schooling girls about the importance of education and the urgency of refraining from doing sexual activities and other risking behaviours to their academic endeavours.
- v) The Government in collaboration with other stakeholders should continue to combat gender inequality in provision of education.
- vi) A forum should be prepared in order to expose female students and parents with successful role model women who can inculcate learning curiosity among schooling girls and challenge perceptions and practices of parents over girls' education.
- vii) Knowledge and skills on income generating activities should be imparted to the community so as to increase their capabilities to support schooling girls.

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