

The Various Roles of Primary School Teachers in Motivating Maasai Female Students to Learn in Kenya

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Achieving universal primary education, regardless of gender, remains a key goal in the global arena. The international community has taken stride in accomplishing this aim, one of which is giving emphasis to increased access to girls' education. At times, the effort lacked paying proper attention to various influencing cultural contexts in more specific settings. Numerous studies have already presented school-aged children who were out of school, exploring the causes of being excluded from school. Still, most of these studies failed to grasp the female students' desire to learn and attend school, i.e. learning motivation. This is further associated with the current arguments on issues of low learning achievement and education quality.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Maasai female students are motivated to learn in Kenyan primary schools, focusing on how teachers influence their motivation. The study was conducted in two primary schools located in a Maasai community at Narok County, through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Furthermore, the site is traditionally male-dominated, with female circumcision and early marriage still partly practiced.

Several Maasai female students are actively attending school at present. However, they are plagued with emotional distress. Their newly-generated values from school, coupled with information they come across through media, frequently conflicted with the traditional values they gained from their parents. The conflicting emotions they experienced could be caused by polarizing states of: (1) being modern or traditional, (2) being a child or an adult, and (3) following their teachers or parents. These seemed to be apparent only among girls, since once a female student chooses to be traditional, it becomes difficult for her to revert to a modern stance. On the other hand, a male student could easily shift back and forth between the traditional and modern.

Teachers play significant and varying roles on Maasai female students' motivation to learn. These could be categorized as: (1) to encourage and expect, (2) to serve as role models, (3) to supervise in the absence of parents, and (4) to take over parental tasks at school. Beyond the classroom, teachers have played an important role in dealing with the conflicting feelings among Maasai female students. By going to school, they allow themselves to opportunities towards obtaining a 'better life' in the future. Teachers and mothers also recognize that schooling is the best possible way to its actualization. Teachers are not only educators bound within the classroom, they are also individuals the students rely on in the community.