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Maasai students' encounter with formal education: Their experiences with and perceptions of schooling processes in Monduli, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Employing an ethnographic research design, this study examined the Maasai students' experiences with and their perceptions of formal schooling processes in Monduli, Tanzania. The study drew on classroom observations, interviews with four (4) heads of schools, and focus groups with 31 teachers and 70 students. The results demonstrated the predominance of teacher-centred and rote-learning approaches, as well as poor interactions between students and teachers in the classrooms. Equally, the results revealed not only tough and challenging school experiences for the Maasai students due to the lack of support from parents, long walking distances, and the absence of mid-day meals but also strong cultural tensions caused by difficulties in reconciling the requirements of the traditional life with those of the formal schooling. Alongside fundamental reforms in educational policies and practices, the findings suggest the need for school-based professional development programmes, which can sensitise teachers working in Maasailand to culturally responsive curricula and learner-centred pedagogies for the Maasai students in the classroom contexts.

1. Introduction

The global Education for All (EFA) movement, which started in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand and reaffirmed by the Dakar Framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] in 2000, committed the world community to achieving universal access to basic quality education 'for every child, youth, and adult in every society' by 2015 (World Conference on Education for All [WCEFA] 1990; World Education Forum [WEF] 2000). During this period, policy debates and discourses within the EFA movement and MDGs regime articulated an increasing concern over reaching the marginalised, including nomads and pastoralists who remained excluded from formal education (Dyer 2001, 2013). The latest estimates by Carr-Hill (2012), for instance, disclosed that about 21.8 million pastoralist children were out of school worldwide by 2012, whereby about 4.3 million of whom were "missing children" uncounted in Education for All (EFA) estimates of out-of-school children. However, those EFA statistics overlook the differences, which exist between and within nations as data from individual countries may paint quite a different picture that differs from global figures (Pesambili 2020b).

In attempts to include the pastoralists in education, various initiatives, including mobile schools, alternative basic education [ABE], boarding schools, and open and distance learning [ODL] have been implemented in various countries (Krätli 2000; Krätli and Dyer 2009; Pesambili 2020b). While substantial progress has been made globally, recent reports indicate that education provision among the pastoralists is still problematic due to contextual issues such as students' mobility, remoteness of the areas, scattered populations, and harsh environmental conditions in their areas (Krätli 2000; Krätli and Dyer 2009). There are also challenges within the education system itself such as dilapidated buildings, inappropriate school curricula, and inadequate facilities (Ruto et al., 2009; Hartwig 2013). Lastly, there are problems, which are linked to pastoralists themselves such as cultural conservatism, poverty, illiteracy, and a child labour economy (Krätli 2000; Carr-Hill and Peart 2005; Pesambili 2020b).

However, while the world has already moved towards 2030 sustainable development goals [SDGs] agenda with a shared global vision for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all (cf. Pesambili 2020b), it is becoming increasingly evident that providing education that meets the basic learning needs of pastoralists and their

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children remain an unresolved challenge. This is mainly because policy discourses during the EFA and MDGs era focused much on increasing access to education among the pastoralists as opposed to the relevance of education (Aikman 2011; Tikly and Barrett 2011). According to Dyer (2016), though access is important, concerns about it have eclipsed attention to learning needs and to the pressing issue of how formal education intersects with and supports pastoralists' livelihoods. This implies that retaining pastoralist children in formal schools has been difficult due to irrelevant school curricula that fail to meet both their learning needs as well as their socio-cultural and economic necessities (Aikman 2011; Ngugi 2017). Consequently, there is still a low rate of academic success among the pastoralist children, which is largely associated with the discontinuity between their home and school cultures (Krätli 2000; Dyer 2016; Ngugi 2017).

Though several studies have been conducted on formal education among the pastoralists, most of them have largely focused on gender issues, access, dropout, and performance of their children in formal schooling (cf. Hodgson 1995; Bishop 2007; Bingham 2011; Raymond 2015), while overlooking other key issues such as the schooling processes and students' experiences in schools. As Aikman (2011) argues, while these issues are important, a failure to pay attention to the learning needs and students' experiences squeezes out space for serious considerations of the processes of formal education in local schools found in pastoralist areas. So far, little is known about the Maasai students' experiences with and their perceptions of the schooling processes in Maasailand. This study, therefore, sets out to fill this gap in the literature by examining the Maasai students' experiences with and their perceptions of the processes of formal education in the school contexts in Monduli District, Tanzania.

Consequently, this study seeks to address two research questions as follows:

(1) How does the teaching and learning process take place in Maasailand formal schools?
(2) What are the Maasai students' experiences with and their perceptions of formal education in local schools?

2. Theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical roots of this research are underpinned by drawing together *postcolonial theory* and Nancy Fraser's *social justice* framework. Firstly, postcolonial theory has been used to examine critically how Western theories have dealt with alternative voices and different ways of knowing (Said 1978; Mapara 2009). For that matter, the theory was useful for this study since it rejects the hegemony of Western knowledge and calls for the deconstruction and hybridisation of knowledge universalism (Bhabha 1995; Shizha 2006). The study also employed the postcolonial theory to accord agency to the Maasai students by presenting them as subjects of history and not as subaltern subjects who cannot speak (Spivak 1995). Through a postcolonial lens, this study has analysed the experiences and views of the Maasai students against hegemonic discourses that have undermined them in Tanzania's education system (Pesambili 2020a, 2020b).

Secondly, this research uses Nancy Fraser's three dimensions of social justice to inform the extent to which social injustices contribute to the marginalisation of the traditional Maasai knowledge in the education system. The first dimension comprises redistribution, which deals with equity in the distribution of resources and wealth (Gewirtz 2006). In education, redistribution is to do more with equal access to educational resources such as teachers and textbooks to all categories of people in society (Tikly and Barrett 2011; Cazden 2012). The second dimension contains recognitional justice, which is concerned with identity and cultural recognition (Fraser 1995, 2000, 2009). In education, recognitional justice recognises schooling practices that draw on different worldviews and knowledges outside the formal education system (Aikman 2011). As the third dimension, participatory justice in education involves the rights of individuals/groups to have their voices heard in debates about social injustice and to actively participate in decision-making (Tikly and Barrett 2011).

3. Methods and materials

3.1. Data collection

We employed an ethnographic research design, which informed all research procedures and methods for data collection, as well as data analysis techniques (Pesambili 2020a). The choice of ethnography as a research design for this research was necessitated by the need to explore participants in the field using data collection methods that capture their social meanings and ordinary activities in their natural settings (Brewer 2000; Delamont 2002; Pesambili 2020a). As such, ethnography is appropriate not only for allowing multiple understandings of reality and alternative interpretations of data but also for knowing the worldviews and ways of life of actual people in their everyday lived experiences (Crang and Cook 2007; Fetterman 2010). Likewise, through multiple methods of data, ethnography offers a qualitative approach with the potential to yield detailed explanations of different social phenomena (Reeves et al. 2013).

We used various methods to generate data for this study, including carrying out classroom observations in focus schools where we interacted with teachers and students inside and outside the classrooms (Woods 2005; Pesambili 2020a). This method allowed us to capture systematically participants' social meanings, ordinary activities, and realities of formal education as exhibited by both teachers and students in schools (Brewer 2000; Delamont 2002; Pesambili 2020a). Moreover, we conducted ethnographic interviews with four (4) heads/deputy heads of schools and focus groups with 31 primary and secondary school teachers to elicit data about their teaching and working experiences in Maasailand. We used both semi-structured and unstructured approaches involving a one-to-one interview with open-ended questions so as to allow the participants to voice their experiences without any constraints (Creswell 2012; Pesambili 2020b). Lastly, we conducted focus groups with 70 male and female students to elicit data about their experiences with and their perceptions of formal education. Focus groups provided forums for discussing the plurality of experiences and conflicting views that the participants hold among themselves (Crang and Cook 2007; Pesambili 2020b).

3.2. Study area, sample, and sampling procedures

Our fieldwork, which took place between October 2014 and May 2015, was conducted in Monduli District located in the north-eastern part of Tanzania (Pesambili 2020b). Monduli was chosen as an area of study because the district constitutes the majority of the Maasai pastoralists (80%) that are highly disadvantaged in formal education than other ethnic groups in the country (FitzGerald 2008; Tanzania Education Network [TEN] 2009; Raymond 2015). Since it was not possible to visit all schools in Monduli, we purposely selected three primary schools and one secondary school as focus schools. The primary schools included the day schools anonymously labelled as A and B, one-day and boarding primary school labelled as C, as well as one secondary school labelled as D. The total number of students at each focus school is indicated in Table 1 below:

The total sample consisted of 105 research participants, including four (4) heads/deputy heads of schools (three males and one female), 27 teachers (17 male and 10 females), as well as 70 Maasai students (35 boys and 35 girls). Given that, we had approval letters from the relevant authorities, we recruited all research participants using heads of schools who acted as gatekeepers in schools. Besides assisting us in recruiting teachers and students, the heads of schools also accorded us with a necessary support for accomplishing our research, including allowing us to

Table 1
Students' enrolment trend in four focus schools by 2015

Name of School	Number of Students		
	Boys	Girls	Total
School A	337	253	590
School B	246	174	420
School C	1041	579	1620
School D	239	99	338
Grand Total	**1863**	**1105**	**2968**

visit classes and any other school facilities, buildings, and places which were relevant to our research project.

Correspondingly, we used various sampling techniques to select participants for this research. Firstly, a *criterion purposive sampling*, which involves searching for cases or individuals that meet a certain criterion (Patton 1990; Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle 2010) was employed to select heads of schools and teachers for both interviews and focus groups respectively because we believed that they were knowledgeable enough about specific issues related to the topic under investigation (Pesambili 2020a, 2020b). We also used a *purposeful random sampling* to pick up some research participants from a large population of students in the focus schools (Patton 1990; Creswell 2012; Pesambili 2020a, 2020b). As Ary's et al. (2010) argue, purposeful random sampling is used to increase the credibility of results when a potential purposeful sample is too large as it was the case for students who took part in this study.

4. Data analysis

Besides using a thematic analysis approach, the data analysis itself did not follow rigid processes, but was guided by certain steps, rules, and procedures, which according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), help to establish shared ground rules for reporting the results, drawing conclusions, and verifying their rigour. Therefore, in this study, managing and analysing fieldwork data involved various stages as follows:

Firstly, we transcribed verbatim all tape-recorded data from ethnographic interviews and focus groups with the participants in the field (Pesambili 2020a, 2020b). After that, we translated all transcribed data verbatim from Kiswahili to English since most data were recorded in Kiswahili while the research report was to be written in English. Secondly, we did what Ary et al. (2010) call 'immersing in the data' by reading and re-reading the transcribed and translated texts as well as handwritten observational notes from journals so that we could become more familiar with and obtain a general sense of raw data from the fieldwork. The process of data immersion went hand in hand with highlighting the texts that contained some key themes as well as writing notes, memos, and summaries (cf. Pesambili 2020a, 2020b).

Thirdly, we coded field data to retrieve meaningful materials and analysable chunks of data. Considering that no computer program can analyse data for a researcher (Creswell 2012), we applied both hand-coding and the NVivo 11 software to develop codes based on the underlying concepts, main ideas in research questions, and other research themes identified when reading through the raw data. While coding, we searched for various patterns of ideas repeated in various situations and with various participants, by comparing and contrasting them to create categories and identify major themes from the data (Crang and Cook 2007). In the fourth stage, we conducted what Fife (2005) calls 'the analysis of analysis', by putting together the already analysed bits of information to create sub-themes, which were used alongside major themes in the research report (cf. Pesambili 2020a, 2020b). Lastly, when reporting the results, not only did we build directly out of the analysed research materials, but also we offered personal reflections as revealed from field data and in the light of past studies and available literature in the field (See also Pesambili 2020a, 2020b).

5. Ethical considerations

Besides obtaining research approvals from the University of Sussex in the UK and the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (our institutions), we also obtained research permits from local government authorities in Monduli District. Moreover, we obtained permission from heads of schools to hold interviews and focus groups with participants in their respective schools. Likewise, we sought informed consent directly from the participants so that that they could volunteer to take part in ethnographic interviews and focus groups. Lastly, we undertook all necessary measures to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, including anonymising schools and research participants' names during the research process, data analysis, and report writing (cf. Pesambili 2020a, 2020b).

6. Results

The findings are organised into two parts. The first part looks at the schooling practices and processes in the classroom settings, whereas the second part explores the Maasai students' experiences with formal education in the school contexts.

7. Processes of formal schooling in Maasailand schools

Two aspects of the schooling processes were observed in this study as discussed below:

7.1. Teaching and learning process in the classroom contexts

This research has revealed that teachers in Maasailand largely apply teacher-centred approaches when delivering lessons in the classrooms. This is opposed not only to the learner-centred method of teaching/learning, which is prescribed by the competence-based curriculum in Tanzania but also used by the Maasai in their traditional education. When asked why they preferred the teacher-centred approach to the learner-centred method as prescribed in the curriculum, teachers commented that:

> Some classes contain many pupils in such a way that it is impossible to apply any other approach rather than the teacher-centred approach. When a class is large, it becomes hard to apply the learner-centred approach because you can spend all 80-minutes-period without reaching far in terms of the school syllabus (A group discussion with teachers, Group D, Engaruka, Monduli, 03/03/2015).

> We have a limited amount of time to teach our pupils per year. We are obliged to follow the teacher-centred approach, so we finish our syllabus on time (A focus group with teachers, Group A, School A, Monduli, 27/10/2014).

The participants' remarks above indicate that due to both large class size and limited amount of time to finish the prescribed curriculum, teachers in Maasailand are obliged to apply the teacher-centred approach to impart knowledge to their students.

Besides applying teacher-centred teaching approaches, it was also observed that most teachers in Maasailand were not utilising cultural resources from the local environments when delivering their lessons to the students. While conducting research at School D, for instance, I attended a Biology lesson on Growth in Flowering Plants as a subtopic (Pesambili 2020a). Considering the plentiful flowering plants outside of the school surroundings, I expected that students would go outside of the classroom and learn practically how to identify the flowering plants as part of the school syllabus (Pesambili, 2020a). However, this hope could not be met as teachers upheld that,

> We fail to engage our students with practical activities in their local environments because we have limited time. Also, carrying out practical activities outside would weaken our ability to complete the

school syllabuses on time (A focus group discussion with teachers, Group A, School D, Monduli, 04/02/2015).

As the above excerpt shows, teachers in Maasailand are unable to localise their teaching since large class sizes are likely to make practical works outside the classrooms difficult and labour intensive for them (Barrett 2005; Wedgwood 2007). However, this practice raises a key question about the hegemonic discourse of Western knowledge embedded in Tanzania's curriculum (Pesambili 2020a), which not only almost makes no mention of indigenous knowledge but also does not provide any pedagogic space for it.

On the other hand, classroom observations in focus schools revealed that rote-learning characterises the learning approach used by the Maasai pupils as they are required to memorise what a teacher has instructed them. According to the students,

> If you do not copy the notes written by the teacher on the chalkboard, you cannot pass an assignment, test or examination. We usually write notes in our exercise books so that we cram and memorise them in the classroom (A group discussion with the Maasai boys, Group C, School B, Monduli, 26/01/2015).

> When a teacher provides an assignment and a student writes something contrary to what they teach, they punish him/her. Thus, we must read the notes and memorise them so we perform well (A group discussion with the Maasai girls, Group A, School A, Monduli, 29/10/2014).

As shown in the quotes above, rote-learning seems to be a dominant learning approach used by the Maasai students use in their efforts to recite verbatim teachers' materials and later reproduce them when attempting tests and examinations. These results are in keeping with Wedgwood's (2007) study in Tanzania, which showed that students' learning in most schools was dominated by rote memorisation of phrases that were valued for themselves rather than for the meaning that they imparted.

Consequently, when joining formal schools, the Maasai children are regarded as 'tabula rasa' with no prior knowledge about their sociocultural, spiritual, and physical world. Thus, after joining schools, the Maasai children are encouraged to leave aside all forms of knowledge and skills learnt in their community since teachers consider them as irrelevant for their schooling. This is especially true because in the views of teachers,

> The Maasai are still poor because they own large herds of cattle, but they cannot sell them to improve their living. This is due to the lack of formal education that would enlighten and make them see the world differently (A focus group with teachers, Group B, School B, Monduli, 09/02/2015).

As a quote above shows, most non-Maasai teachers working in Maasailand identify themselves with dominant and modern Tanzania's culture, while the Maasai and their children are viewed as traditional, primitive, and inferior. For this reason, some teachers believe that the Maasai community needs modernisation and development, a process that entails adopting the values and ways of life of the mainstream population. Teachers' beliefs are consistent with London's (2002) argument that the school is used to produce knowledge forms, culture, and norms that reinforce cultural imperialism and the ideological hegemony of dominant groups among the Maasai pastoralists.

7.2. Student-teacher relationship and interaction in the classroom contexts

Classroom observations revealed that the interaction between students and teachers in schools was authoritative since the latter exerted strict control over the former in the classrooms. It was observed, for instance, teachers in Maasailand schools apply various strategies such as carrying sticks as a way of intimidating students and maintaining discipline and order in the classrooms. Some teachers in the focus schools believe that,

> Maasai students are cruel and stubborn especially when they get circumcised. Without beating them, it is hard to control them in the classroom (A focus group with teachers, Group D, School C, Monduli, 05/03/2015).

> As teachers, we are obliged to apply canes to make Maasai pupils attentive and disciplined in the classroom. You know, if you are not strict you can find that you are teaching in the classroom, while pupils are murmuring or making noises (A group discussion with teachers, Group C, School B, Monduli, 13/02/2015).

Although teachers believed that carrying sticks in the classrooms helped to maintain discipline and make students attentive, classroom observations provided a different picture, which proved that the interaction between them in Maasailand schools was rigid, unfriendly, and unwelcome for students' learning. As a consequence, carrying sticks as a form of threats in the focus schools makes the Maasai pupils more passive in the classroom contexts without interacting freely and collaboratively with their teachers. While in the focus groups, for instance, the Maasai pupils remarked,

> We are afraid of some teachers who like to beat us in the classroom. When a teacher asks a question, and you fail to answer it, he/she rebukes or beats you. That makes us scared, timid, and nervous when answering questions (A focus group with the Maasai school girls, Group C, School B, Monduli, 19/01/2015).

> Some teachers come into the classroom with sticks and long rulers. When the teachers ask a question and students answer incorrectly, he/she hits you with a stick or a ruler (A focus groups with Maasai boys, Group E, School C, 04/03/2015).

As the quotes above show, besides creating an unfriendly learning environment, the continued use of corporal punishment in Tanzania defends the point from postcolonial scholars that schools in ex-colonial countries continue to mirror the colonial characteristics as extremely authoritarian, coercive, unwelcoming, and violent institutions (Molteno et al. 2000; Harber 2004, 2008). This is mainly the case because, in the classroom characterised by threats and intimidations, the degree of freedom through which the students can respond to and initiate talks in the classroom is limited.

Furthermore, poor interaction between teachers and students in the classrooms was caused by the languages of instruction used in schools as discussed below:

For the primary level pupils, Kiswahili which is used as a medium of instruction is too hard to understand when they enrol in the formal schooling. This observation was also captured in the remarks by Maasai pupils:

> When we join primary school, we do not know Kiswahili at all. We get much trouble since we cannot speak Kiswahili. We learn to speak Kiswahili after joining schools (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group D, School B, 22/01/2015).

> Kiswahili is very difficult because the language is quite different from our mother tongue. That is why we have trouble once we join formal schools (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group A, School A, 28/10/2014).

The students' remarks echo those of teachers who pointed out that,

> Since the Maasai children spend much time using *Maa* in their community, it makes them incompetent in Kiswahili. This challenge not only makes it hard for non-Maasai teachers to teach them but also reduces their participation in classroom lessons (A focus group with teachers, Group A, School A, 27/10/2014).

In an attempt to tackle the problem of communication with the Maasai pupils in schools, teachers' main strategy has involved excluding the *Maa* language from both the schooling processes and the classroom discourse. This is done through punishing all pupils that speak the Maa language as opposed to Kiswahili in the classrooms and school compounds. Nevertheless, the exclusion of a *Maa* from the school system, as de Sousa Santos (2004) argues, shows not only how the Kiswahili hegemony dominates the formal schooling processes in Tanzania but also how the dominant language discredits all other forms of language discourses that inform counter-hegemonic practices.

For the secondary level students, English was viewed as the hardest subject, which makes their experiences in the school more challenging. Classroom observations and focus groups with students indicated that besides limiting their active interaction in the classrooms, English makes the Maasai students fail both to understand the lessons and to perform well in tests and examinations. When asked about English as the language of instruction in secondary schools, the Maasai students remarked:

> English is the biggest headache for most of us. We do not know what to say but rest assured, English is an unspeakable horror. A teacher may deliver a lesson very well, but we fail to catch on due to English (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group A, School D, Monduli, 28/01/2015).

> Using English as a medium of instruction in school makes us fail to perform well our tests and examinations. This is because we do not get well most of the subjects taught by teachers in the classroom. But when a teacher mixes English and Kiswahili during the lesson, it becomes much better for most of us (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group B, School D, Monduli, 23/01/2014).

As the excerpts above show, it was surprising to see that most students were pleased with teachers' use of codeswitching between English and Kiswahili because this helped them to understand the lessons better. This is because codeswitching between English and Kiswahili increased greater students' interaction and co-operation in the learning process (Wedgwood, 2007). This suggests that using English as a language of instruction not mastered well by students in school not only limits spaces for thinking in their own language but also for their active participation in the classroom lessons.

8. Maasai students' experiences with formal education in school contexts

This second part of the article illuminates key themes covering various aspects of Maasai students' experiences with formal education in schools as discussed below:

8.1. School life as tough and challenging

The Maasai students highlighted the lack of parents' support, long walking distance, and the lack of school meals as impacting negatively on their schooling experiences.

Concerning the lack of parents' support, the Maasai students reported that life experiences in the formal schools were difficult because their parents were not ready to provide them with basic school needs. In their own words, the students voiced that:

> When we ask money for contributing to the school mid-day meals or for buying stationeries, our fathers say they do not have money. So, once we lack the basic school needs, our life in school becomes tough (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group A, School C, 29/10/2015).

> We experience tough and hard life in school since we lack the support from our parents. At times, we struggle to find some money for buying basic needs of the school (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group B, School A, 28/10/2015).

As shown in the quotes above, the Maasai pupils experience a tough life in formal schools because of lacking both moral and material support from their parents. The reasons for the Maasai parents' unwillingness to support the education of their children are complex ones involving various underlying dynamics underpinned by both socio-cultural and economic forces within and outside their society as one student stated,

> My dad refused to finance my secondary education because many parents are desperate in that the Maasai boys who attend schools do not pass their exams. Rather, they return home as idlers who contribute nothing in herding (A focus group discussion with the Maasai boys, School D, Monduli, 30/01/2015).

The student's remark above offers a possible explanation for the Maasai's reluctance to support the education of their children since they lack confidence in formal schooling with its ability to offer valued knowledge and skills that can allow them to undertake various roles in the community (Kaunga 2005). This is mainly because currently, formal education lacks the necessary flexibility to accommodate pastoralist children and allow them to contribute their labour for their household's survival without combining an uninterrupted school attendance with mobile pastoralism (Dyer 2013; Raymond 2015).

Similarly, teachers highlighted the lack of community's support as the 'greatest barrier' hampering the academic progress in local schools as most Maasai parents could not accept to buy school items for their children. While in the focus schools, for example, I observed many Maasai pupils wearing dirty and worn out school uniforms and shoes. When asked about this problem, teachers remarked that:

> Although the Maasai own large herds of cattle, educating their children is a daunting task since parents are not ready to sell cattle for providing pupils with basic school needs like school uniforms and stationeries (A focus group with teachers, Group A, School A, Monduli, 27/10/2014).

The remarks above agree with Bishop's (2007) study in Engare Naibor, Monduli, which observed that most Maasai parents were unwilling to sell the livestock so as to pay for school expenses for their children. This is especially true for some Maasai parents who perceive formal schooling as a 'means to life', and not as 'life itself', meaning that when there is little prospect for viable economic returns and employment opportunities for their children, they are unlikely to send them to school (Pesambili 2020b).

Secondly, the Maasai students identified a long distance that they must walk to and from school every day as another worry that made their life experiences in the formal schools tough and challenging. The research participants reported that some pupils ought to walk on foot between one to three hours to reach the school every day. Regarding this issue, the Maasai students specified that:

> We usually walk long distances on dangerous routes and vulnerable environment. We, who come from distant places, occasionally meet wild animals like lions and leopards while along the way to school (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group D, School B, 29/01/2015).

> Some of us coming from distant places are obliged to walk many hours to reach the school (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group B, School A, 29/10/2014).

Students' remarks concerning the long-distance and dangerous environment were supported by teachers during the focus group, in which they said:

> We have huge problems of long-distance and the vulnerable environments in Eluwai as many places abound with wild animals (A focus group with teachers, Group D, School C, Monduli, 05/03/2015).

As shown in the quotation above, many participants highlighted long distance to and from school as a hindrance to students' punctuality and regular attendance to schools. According to Sifuna (2005), long dis-

tances to and from school coupled with high insecurity is a major hindrance to participation in formal education, especially for the Maasai girls, something which makes many parents reluctant to allow them to go to school. Alongside the vulnerabilities, long distances might also present severe risks to safety and sexual attacks on young girls in pastoral communities (Krätli 2000; Oxfam 2005).

Thirdly, concerning the school meals, most students in Schools A and B were worried about the lack of midday meals since this affected much their academic progress in schools. The students' remarks are worthy of quoting,

> No meal is provided at our school. We, who come from distant places, usually stay in the school for several hours without eating anything. Thus, this situation makes our life in school tough and painful (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group C, School B, 19/01/2015).

> Currently, no food is provided at this school. We, who come from distant places suffer much as we stay the whole day studying without putting anything in our mouths (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group A, School A, 28/10/2015).

Additionally, while in the fieldwork in Monduli, I observed many students from distant places remaining in school during the mid-day break to wait for the afternoon classes, which normally begin at 2:30 P.M. It is promising to compare these results with the evidence from Carr-Hill and Peart (2005) study, which reported that most pastoralist children in East and Horn of Africa walk long distances and arrive at schools without eating anything in the morning. This has far-reaching repercussions on the Maasai students' studies given that staying in schools without meals contributes to the short-term hunger, with detrimental effects to their concentration on studies, students' health, and academic performance in schools (Krätli 2000; Carr-Hill and Peart, 2005).

The students' views were further shared by teachers who reported that the World Food Programme (WFP) used to finance meals for their students in the previous years, but the programme ended in 2014. Though it was later decided that the cost of food had to be borne by parents, the supply of meals in schools has been difficult because:

> The Maasai parents dislike contributing food for their children in school. They want the school to cultivate crops and feed them, so they stop raising some contributions (A personal interview with the Head of School, School A, 27/10/2014).

As the quote above shows, the lack of school meals affects students' school attendance negatively since schools that provide meals are reported to be successful in increasing school attendance (Krätli 2000). However, the success vanishes as soon as the meal provision is interrupted, thereby making some parents withdraw their children from school (Carr-Hill and Peart 2005). Given a positive influence of the school-feeding on students' health, attendance, and performance, and given the long distances that the Maasai children walk to and remain in school without eating, much has to be done by authorities to ensure a proper supply of foods to meet the children's dietary needs.

8.2. A school institution as a site of cultural tensions

A cultural tension facing the Maasai students in the school emanates from the need to fulfil simultaneously the requirements and expectations of the traditional life in their home and those of the school life. The cultural tensions that the Maasai students experience in schools manifested themselves in different ways:

For the Maasai boys, traditional training requires them to attend the grazing field regularly as a part of learning and fulfilling the needs of the family and communal labour. At the same time, they should go to school every day and do all assignments given by teachers. In the focus group, the Maasai boys remarked:

> At times, we wake up early in the morning so we go to school, but our fathers order us to go to herding, and not to school. This makes us unable to attend school (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group D, School B, 29/01/2015).

> Our parents believe that we should look after cattle in the grazing fields, and not attending school. Several times, we are faced with a dilemma because we need to do both going to school and herding the livestock concurrently (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group B, School A, Monduli, 28/10/2014).

As shown in the quotes above, the need to fulfil both the home/community and school requirements makes the Maasai boys nervous as it becomes hard to decline their parents' requests, while also they face another difficult moment from teachers because of their non-attendance to school and failure to carry out school tasks.

Similarly, for the Maasai boys, our study identified another pressure caused by the need to comply with the moranhood ethos for morans, while at the same time, they are required to abide by the principles and ethos of the formal schools, which conflict largely with the traditional ones. According to the Maasai boys,

> When we enter moranhood, others no longer like to attend school. They are thrilled to be with their age-mates all the time, going to the bush, driving livestock to distant places, and eating meat in the bush (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group C, School B, Monduli, 26/01/2015).

> In our community, we tend to be free as elders allow us to do most things ourselves without any strict control. But when we come to school, things are quite difficult as we are put under the control of teachers (A group discussion with the Maasai boys, Group E, School C, 04/03/2015).

As the excerpts above show, after circumcision, a tension emerges among the Maasai boys due to the change of attitude towards schooling, which in turn lowers down their morale of studying. This is partly because they become firmly attached to the traditional rituals, mores, and customs they learn in their community. As a result, most non-native teachers get difficulties in disciplining the morans in accordance with the school rules and regulations since they are not easily amenable to their wishes. In the views of teachers,

> Morans prefer to govern themselves and do not want to be under the control of teachers. Due to this, morans see female teachers as nothing who cannot teach them anything (A group discussion with teachers, Group A, School B, 27/10/2014).

> We are obliged to put ourselves on a different face to control them. This is because once they undergo circumcision, the Maasai boys become more rude and stubborn (A group discussion with teachers, Group A, School A, 27/10/2014).

Teachers' remarks above agree with Ronoh's (2010) study, which showed that after circumcision, most Maasai boys preferred joining the moranhood system to school because they did not want to be taught and punished by non-Maasai and female teachers. This suggests that while the Maasai boys would prefer to exercise some sort of self-autonomy and freedom, teachers in Maasailand want to exercise their authority over them. This tendency defends the postcolonial scholars' viewpoint that in most ex-colonies the school is an authoritarian and violent institution that controls students for the benefits of the powerful school authorities (London 2002; Harber 2004, 2008).

Like boys, the Maasai girls are required to fulfil the requirements of the day-to-day household and community tasks as a part of learning and socialisation process, while also satisfying the needs of the formal schooling. The Maasai girls stated that,

> Other days, we wake up early in the morning and prepare ourselves ready for going to school. Then, our parents order us not to attend and we remain home to assist our mums with domestic chores be-

Table 2
Pupils' enrolment trend at primary school B by 2015

Grade	Boys	Girls	Total
I	26	36	62
II	38	33	71
III	43	31	74
IV	34	24	58
V	32	20	52
VI	37	17	54
VII	36	13	49
Grand Total	**246**	**174**	**420**

cause they cannot perform them alone (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group C, School B, 19/01/2015).

If we attend school on the weekdays, we usually assist our mothers with domestic activities in the evening. After getting back home, we assist our mothers in cooking, milking cows, and cleaning the dishes (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group B, School A, 29/10/2014).

As shown above, balancing between the home and school-related activities is a daunting task for the Maasai girls that find themselves failing to do their school tasks because of domestic chores they are engaged with at home. Apart from being occupied with the home workload, the Maasai girls also fail to attend school regularly. Previous studies in Maasailand reported similar results, which demonstrated that high demands for domestic labour contributes greatly to irregular school attendance, school dropout, and poor performance among the Maasai girls in schools (Oxfam 2005; Raymond 2015).

Similarly, the Maasai girls experience early and forced marriage, which remains an unresolved issue in Maasai society. Table 2 below provides a vivid picture of how early marriage is a severe problem in Monduli. As Table 2 shows, there is a notable decrease in the number of girls from the lower classes to upper classes since their number in Grades V, VI and VII is lower as compared to Grade I, II, III, and IV.

The decrease in the number of girls in the upper classes as shown in Table 2 implies that unlike their counterparts' boys, the completion rate for the Maasai girls is low because after reaching upper grades, they are likely to drop out of school and get married earlier. Commenting on their experiences with early marriages, the Maasai girls said:

In Maasailand, when a girl begins school, she is already provided with a spouse in the village. Now, once she goes back to the village, her fiancé persuades her to leave school and get married (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group B, School D, Monduli, 30/01/2015).

Some of our parents do not like to educate girls but to marry us even before we complete school so they receive the bride-price. If you reject to marry a husband chosen by your parents, they beat or chase you from home (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group E, School C, 06/03/2015).

Besides accumulating more wealth through marrying their daughters, sending girls to school and particularly beyond the primary level is not seen as a good investment for the Maasai parents since they believe that their daughters are expected to move with the benefits to a different household after marriage (Krätli 2000). As such, the Maasai parents are obliged to arrange the marriage of their girls at a young age in exchange for cattle to counter the spoiling effect of formal education (Raymond, 2015).

Finally, the fieldwork data revealed the existence of a strong cultural tension related to the traditional gender construction between the Maasai boys and girls, which affected their interaction in schools. For the Maasai boys, for example, once they undergo circumcision, they must avoid eating food before women/girls and can neither be punished by women nor be punished in front of women and girls. However, while in schools, both boys and girls are treated in the same way without any distinctions. This situation seems to worry the Maasai boys in schools who noted that,

In our society, once we get circumcised, we become adults. But here in school, teachers treat us like children without any respect. As morans, we do not like to be beaten arbitrarily while girls are witnessing (A focus group with Maasai boys, Group D, School B, Monduli, 29/01/2015).

We have no problem concerning studying with girls. But what troubles us in school is the way teachers treat both boys and girls in the same category. This is quite different from how we get treated in our families and community (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group B, School D, Monduli, 23/01/2015).

Consequently, due to an excessive use of corporal punishments by teachers in Maasailand schools, the Maasai boys regarded a school as a place where fears, intimidations, and sufferings are exercised and propagated, instead of students' autonomy and freedom. As a response to this experience, the Maasai students noted:

When a pupil commits a minor mistake, teachers strike him a countless number of strokes. We feel that corporal punishment is not a proper way of disciplining pupils, but inflicting unnecessary pains and suffering on them (A focus group with the Maasai boys, Group C, School C, 21/11/2014).

As shown in the excerpt above, cultural tensions in schools occur because of the variations in administering punishments and treating the Maasai students without considering their sexes and age as practised in their community. Although previous studies among the Maasai (cf. Archambault, 2009) indicated that most parents and teachers in Maasailand supported the use of corporal punishments to discipline students in schools, our results have confirmed that the practice itself is disliked by and unpopular with the Maasai students. This defends the point from the social justice theory that administering corporal punishments at odds with traditional practices implies the misrecognition of educational processes (Tikly and Barrett 2011), which, in turn, contributes to students' absenteeism and dropping out of school (Harber 2004).

For the Maasai girls, their experience about gender relations in schools differed from that of their counterpart boys. Some Maasai girls opined that their traditional construction of gender relations prevented them from actively taking part in the classroom lessons, debates, and discussions. According to the Maasai girls,

At times, we feel fearful of interacting with boys in the classroom because our culture prevents us from doing certain things before them. So, a teacher can ask you a question, but you feel shy to answer it in the presence of boys (A focus group with the Maasai girls, Group D, School B, Monduli, 19/01/2015).

Due to our culture, mixing boys and girls in group discussions is quite difficult because women are discouraged to talk in the presence of men. That is why even when we are in the classroom, we are afraid of talking and interacting more freely with boys (A focus group with Maasai girls, Group B, School A, 29/10/2014).

Classroom observations conducted in the focus schools revealed a similar trend as the Maasai boys tended to be more active in the classroom lessons, while most girls tended to be nervous, shy, and fearful. This distinction was also observed in the way both boys and girls preferred to sit with individuals of the same sex on desks in the classroom. Outside the classroom too, it was observed that both boys and girls socialised in separate groups as they do at home and in their community, with each group being more affiliated to the same sex. The Maasai boys who have undergone circumcision in the upper classes, for instance, were observed being socially affiliated to those boys who belonged to their age groups. In a similar vein, the Maasai girls in upper classes so-

cialised more with their age-mates as opposed to young girls in the lower classes among their schooling peers.

9. Discussion

This study demonstrated that current teaching and learning strategies in Maasailand support top-down, authoritarian, and anti-democratic approaches reinforcing memorisation, reception, and passive learning among the Maasai learners. It is encouraging to compare these results with other previous studies in developing countries, which revealed an overwhelming use of teacher-centred approach characterised by recitation mode and interrogation of the pupils' knowledge and understanding in large class sizes (Barrett 2005; Pontefract and Hardman 2005; Wedgwood 2007). In that regard, teacher-centred approaches as used by teachers in Maasailand schools do not conform to the widely accepted culturally relevant and social constructivist pedagogies, which are credited with fostering students' higher-level cognitive skills, deep understanding, and discovery learning (Pontefract and Hardman 2005; Byrd 2016). Similarly, recent research into culturally relevant and social constructivist pedagogies shows that learning cannot be effective unless instructional approaches reflect student-teacher dialogues that deconstruct hegemonic structures in schools (Phillips and Bhavnagri 2002; Byrd 2016).

Moreover, the study revealed the existence of poor interaction between the Maasai students and teachers, attributed mainly to the authoritarian nature of teachers and the languages of instruction. In keeping with previous studies (see, for example, Harber, 2004, 2008), the results showed that the authoritarian nature of the Maasailand schools characterised by frequent intimidations, coercions, and corporal punishments from teachers not only created hostile learning environments for students but also limited their freedom to participate actively in the teaching-learning process. Equally, regarding the problem of languages of instruction, these results corroborate previous studies, which revealed that students' poor understanding of the languages of instruction in Tanzania's secondary schools contributed immensely both to their low involvement in classroom lessons and to their overall poor performance in examinations (Brock-Utne 2007; Wedgwood 2007; Hartwig 2013). As such, besides creating the unfavourable learning environments for students, authoritarian practices and languages of instruction policy in Tanzania, as Wedgwood (2007) argues, are directly antithetical to the participatory methodology as they reduce students' confidence to participate in classroom discussions. As advocated by social justice theorists, for learning to be effective, it is imperative for teachers to foster democratic principles in classrooms and to use a language in which learners are proficient (Tikly and Barrett 2011).

Likewise, the findings highlighted the Maasai students' experiences in school as tough and challenging not only because of lacking support for their basic school needs from their parents but also because of lacking midday meals in schools and the long distance they walk to and from school every day. Possible reasons for the Maasai parents' reluctance to support the education of their children lie not only in the unpredictable outcomes resulting from investing in education but also the volatile nature of formal education in guaranteeing future employment opportunities for the school graduates. As Carr-Hill and Peart (2005) argue, investing in education for pastoralists represents a livelihoods' diversification strategy designed to strengthen the household economy within the context of a continuing engagement with pastoralism. This implies that the Maasai pastoralists are unconvinced to invest in formal education for their children because they see it as an uneconomically viable investment.

Lastly, the results showed that the Maasai students' experiences in schools are encumbered by strong cultural tensions, which make them face difficulties in reconciling the requirements and expectations of the traditional life in their community with those of the formal schools. Labour requirements in the pastoral economy, notably livestock herding for boys and domestic chores for girls tended to contribute enormously to this cultural tension because both traditional and formal education compete for the same learners that need to undergo training in both systems of education. This suggests that the cultural tension facing the Maasai students in schools is rooted in the traditional education system through which the mastery of subjects requires their constant experiential learning and active participation through regular interaction with the home, community, and bush environments. Contrary to popular narratives in the academic circles, which consider a labour necessity among the pastoralists as 'child labour' (cf. Krätli 2000; Carr-Hill and Peart 2005), our results have offered a different outlook, which considers it as a fundamental part of 'participatory education' in the traditional learning systems.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this study have wider implications for practice, policy and research as highlighted below:

First, the findings suggest the need of adopting educational policies and practices, which might support the school-based professional development programmes for teachers working in Maasailand to sensitise them not only on how to apply the culturally responsive methods in their teaching but also to understand various cultural traditions that underpin traditional education practices in the Maasai community. As the research findings have shown, creating policies and practices that build on Maasai culture and their traditional knowledge is crucial to their success and sustainability. Second, the results hold implications for the necessity of reforming the current educational policies and practices with regards to the languages of instruction and the school curriculum, with the aim of incorporating local languages and designing a culturally responsive curriculum, which can cater for the Maasai's immediate needs, local realities, and livelihoods. This in turn, resonates with the recognitional dimension of social justice theory that requires the inclusion in the school curriculum of the histories, knowledge, cultures, and languages of the marginalised groups (Aikman 2011; Tikly and Barrett 2011).

Lastly, though we do not conclude our article by advocating for reforms in policies and practices as a panacea to all educational problems in Maasailand, yet, we believe these research findings will have major implications for improving the processes of formal schooling in Maasailand. However, further research needs to be carried out to investigate how teachers working in Maasailand can apply indigenous knowledge, traditional teaching methods, and local languages to complement their teaching processes in the classroom contexts and the extent to which such approaches might be effective.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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