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HOW CULTURAL VALUES CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT: A CASE OF NJOMBE REGION, TANZANIA

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between cultural values and student performance in the school setting. It addresses how cultural values shape students' academic achievements and overall educational success. While previous research has explored the role of cultural values in education, there has been limited analysis of their direct effect on student performance in specific contexts, such as Njombe. This research implemented behaviourism theory and adopted a mixed-method case study approach. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews with 42 individuals, including students, teachers, and educational administrators from public or governmental schools in the Njombe region, southern Tanzania. The findings indicate that cultural values substantially impact student's academic success, with most participants acknowledging this influence. However, perceptions vary, revealing challenges and opportunities in integrating cultural factors into education. The insights provided by this study underscore the importance of incorporating cultural considerations into educational practices and interventions to enhance student achievement.

Keywords: cultural values, student performance, school context, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Education is a cornerstone of societal progress, and comprehending the cultural factors shaping educational processes and student success is crucial for developing effective educational strategies (Swargiary 2024). In Tanzania's Njombe Region, cultural values profoundly influence student's academic experiences and outcomes. This study investigates how specific cultural values and practices in this region contribute to student's learning achievements, offering insights that can guide educational policies and practices (Clinciu 2023). Cultural values are the collective principles and beliefs that society considers significant, influencing individual behaviour and societal systems, including education (Martin and Lembo 2020). These values manifest in tangible and intangible forms, such as knowledge, art, traditions, and spiritual practices, shaping how communities perceive and approach education (Brown 2020). This study examines cultural values through key entities, including language, educational attitudes, family and community engagement, social norms, gender roles, religious and moral beliefs, economic factors, aspirations, and health practices, all contributing to student performance in diverse educational contexts.

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes. Early instruction in a familiar language, such as Swahili in the Tanzanian context, significantly enhances comprehension and retention, reducing cognitive barriers for students (Nwokike and Nwadike 2023; Anisah 2023). A smooth transition to a second language further mitigates disruptions to learning and improves academic performance (Whiteley 2023). Communication skills rooted in cultural contexts also contribute to literacy development and overall academic success, highlighting the critical connection between language, culture, and education (Purcell-Gates 2020).

Cultural values regarding education, such as the belief that academic success leads to improved opportunities, significantly impact student's motivation and engagement. In many communities, emphasizing hard work and perseverance over innate intelligence fosters resilience and academic success, with students encouraged to overcome challenges through sustained effort (Raju 2024; Zhang et al. 2021). These cultural attitudes toward education shape students' approach to learning, motivating them to prioritize their studies and persist through difficulties.

Moreover, family and community engagement are other critical factors influencing student performance. Active parental support, high expectations, and involvement in school activities can significantly enhance student's academic achievements (Vaughn 2023). Similarly, community-driven initiatives, such as tutoring programs and school improvement projects, provide valuable support and create conducive learning environments (Amtu et al. 2020; DeNisi and Smith 2024). By promoting parental involvement and community collaboration, education systems can strengthen student outcomes, particularly in regions where these values are strongly embedded in the local culture.

Other cultural values, social norms, including collaborative learning practices and discipline, foster a positive and engaging educational environment. In many cultures, norms surrounding teamwork, respect for teachers, and shared responsibilities within the classroom create a sense of cohesion that supports student engagement (Aierbe-Barandiaran et al. 2023). Disciplinary measures, when aligned with cultural expectations, also contribute to maintaining order and motivating students to adhere to academic standards, further enhancing educational outcomes (Ho 2020).

Gender roles also play a crucial role in shaping educational opportunities and outcomes. Promoting gender equity and supporting girls' education can lead to more balanced academic achievements and a more inclusive learning environment (Fernández et al. 2021). Cultures that actively challenge traditional gender norms while encouraging equal educational opportunities for all pave the way for greater gender parity in academic performance. Role models from diverse genders also inspire students, broadening their aspirations and helping dismantle barriers to success (Bingham et al. 2023).

Religious and moral values instill virtues such as honesty, integrity, and diligence, which positively influence students' behaviour and attitudes in school. These values contribute to forming a supportive educational atmosphere where students are motivated to succeed for academic purposes and as a means of upholding moral and ethical standards (Gomez 2024). By integrating religious and moral teachings into educational practices, schools can cultivate environments that encourage personal growth alongside academic achievement.

Economic access to educational resources and the aspirations embedded in cultural values play a significant role in shaping student outcomes. Societies that promote social mobility through education provide opportunities for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to excel academically (Torche 2021). Furthermore, cultural expectations related to aspirations and future goals inspire students to set ambitious academic targets, fostering perseverance and commitment to education (Khan 2024; Reyes and Norman 2021). These aspirations, often tied to the belief that education is

a pathway to success, motivate students to strive for excellence, even in the face of challenges.

Lastly, health and well-being, influenced by cultural practices related to nutrition, mental wellness, and lifestyle, are also critical to academic success. Cultural practices prioritizing balanced nutrition and mental health contribute to student's overall capacity to learn and perform academically (Raju 2024). A supportive environment that values physical and mental well-being ensures that students are better prepared to succeed academically. This study explores the crucial cultural components contributing to student performance in the Njombe Region.

Several studies have explored the influence of cultural values on student achievement, particularly the role of leadership, community engagement, and cultural homogeneity. Dumay (2009) studied the impact of school organizational culture on student outcomes in Belgium's Francophone community. His quantitative approach, using self-reported questionnaires from students and teachers across 52 schools, found that cultural homogeneity positively influenced leadership practices, such as transformative leadership and collaborative decision-making among teachers. However, cultural homogeneity had no moderating effect on the relationship between cultural values and student success, with differences emerging in schools of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Dumay's study emphasizes the importance of context-specific approaches to creating effective school cultures that enhance student achievement (Dumay 2009). Similarly, Bourdieu (2018), Daing and Mustapha (2023) investigated the influence of Tanzanian cultural values on academic motivation and achievement. Using a mixed-methods approach, Bourdieu's study revealed a strong positive relationship between Tanzanian cultural norms, which place high value on education, and student's academic motivation. Focus groups, interviews with students, teachers, and community members, and surveys measuring academic performance highlighted the importance of integrating cultural values into educational practices to enhance student success (Bourdieu 2018). Both studies underscore the need to consider local cultural contexts in shaping educational practices, but Dumay's focus on leadership contrasts with Bourdieu's emphasis on community engagement and academic motivation.

The role of language in shaping cultural identity and its influence on educational outcomes has been a significant focus in recent research. Rutalemwa (2018) examined the function of Swahili as a medium of instruction in Tanzanian schools, using qualitative methods such as interviews and document analysis. The study emphasized how language policies impact students' learning experiences and academic success, especially concerning cultural identity (Rutalemwa 2018). Rutalemwa's findings suggest that language policies must align with cultural values to support student achievement. Similarly, Shevchenko (2023) explored the influence of language-in-education (LIE) policies on student performance in Tanzania, Nigeria, and Mozambique. Using a comparative framework, Shevchenko argued that using native languages in primary and secondary education and preserving linguistic diversity is crucial for improving academic outcomes (Shevchenko 2023). Both studies highlight the complex relationship between language policies, cultural identity, and educational achievement, but Shevchenko's broader comparative approach contrasts with Rutalemwa's focus on Tanzanian schools, emphasizing the need for more localized language-in-education strategies.

Parental and community involvement in education has also been identified as a critical factor for enhancing student performance. Govorova et al. (2020) explored how school interventions in 35 OECD countries affect student well-being and academic achievement, emphasizing the importance of socio-emotional education (Govorova et al. 2020). Their study, based on data from the 2015 PISA survey, stressed the need for robust frameworks that integrate well-being into the educational process alongside academic achievement. Emmanuel (n.d.) focused on the extent of parental involvement in primary education in Dodoma Municipality, Tanzania. Through semi-structured

interviews and observations, Emmanuel identified varying levels of parental engagement, from minimal to active participation, and discussed the factors influencing these levels. The study highlighted the crucial role of parental involvement in improving student learning outcomes, particularly in primary education (Emmanuel 2021). Both studies emphasize the importance of community engagement, but Govorova et al.'s research spans multiple countries, while Emmanuel's study focuses specifically on Tanzania, providing deeper insights into local educational practices.

The impact of traditional cultural beliefs on gender equity in education has been explored in the context of Tanzanian schools. Mwalongo (2018) studied how cultural beliefs and ceremonies in the Njombe region, particularly among the Bena tribe, affect girl's access to secondary education. The research, conducted through interviews with students and parents, revealed that traditional beliefs often restricted girls' access to education, reinforcing the notion that girls' primary responsibilities lie within the household. Mwalongo's findings suggest the need for culturally sensitive campaigns to promote gender equality in education and improve girl's access to schooling (Mwalongo 2018). This study aligns with broader discussions of gender roles in education, highlighting the role of cultural attitudes in shaping educational opportunities for girls.

The current literature offers valuable insights into the relationship between cultural values and educational outcomes. Despite these contributions, a detailed understanding of how cultural values directly influence student performance in the specific context of Tanzanian schools, particularly in the Njombe region, remains insufficiently explored. Although the studies provide general insights into cultural influences, there is a need for targeted research that considers the unique cultural, socioeconomic, and educational dynamics of this region. This gap necessitates research that specifically investigates the extent to which cultural values impact student performance in the school context of the Njombe region.

This study applied behaviorism theory, which emphasizes the influence of external stimuli and reinforcement on behavior. In the context of education, behaviorism provides a lens to analyze how cultural values shape student engagement, participation, and academic achievement. By observing measurable aspects such as classroom behavior and performance (Demartini 2014), this approach highlights the role of cultural norms and values as external stimuli that condition student responses. Using positive reinforcement and operant conditioning in culturally sensitive ways demonstrates how integrating cultural values can motivate students and foster success (Skinner 1963). This is particularly relevant in regions like Njombe, where diverse cultural dynamics significantly influence educational processes. This framework highlights how these interconnected cultural values shape educational processes and outcomes. Understanding these dynamics allows for the development of strategies that integrate cultural contexts into teaching methodologies, classroom management, and curriculum design, ultimately enhancing student learning and engagement (Yazici 2024). By investigating these elements, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultural values shape educational processes and outcomes in regions such as Njombe.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. A mixed-methods design was selected because it comprehensively explains how cultural factors influence education, combining numerical analysis with qualitative insights into individual experiences (Creswell and Clark 2018). The qualitative component focused on capturing nuanced perspectives through interviews, while the quantitative component analyzed trends and patterns via surveys, ensuring a holistic approach to the research objectives.

The data for this study were derived from students, teachers, and educational authorities in public schools located in the Njombe region, southern Tanzania. This area

was chosen due to its high level of intercultural interaction, making it representative of Tanzanian schools in diverse environments. The research involved 42 participants from three public secondary schools. These schools were selected based on their accessibility, diversity, and enrollment size, ensuring a robust representation of the educational dynamics in the region. The participant sample consisted of 30 students (10 from each school), 9 teachers (3 from each school), and 3 educational administrators (1 from each school).

Furthermore, two primary data collection methods were used for this study. First, structured questionnaires were distributed to all 42 participants. All participants responded, including all 30 students, 9 teachers, and 3 educational administrators. The questionnaires gathered quantitative data on participant's opinions, attitudes, and demographic details concerning cultural values and their educational impact. Second is interviews, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of the participants. Interview participants were 12 individuals, including 6 teachers (2 from each school), 3 administrators (1 from each school), and 3 students (1 from each school). The interviews explored personal experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of cultural influences on educational outcomes. This approach provided in-depth qualitative insights (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). The schools and participants were selected using purposive and simple random sampling. Simple random sampling ensured that every respondent had an equal chance of being included in the study, enhancing representativeness. The use of purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives critical to understanding the research problem (Nyimbili and Nyimbili 2024).

To analyze the data, two analytical methods were employed. First is thematic analysis, where qualitative data, including interview transcripts and focus group discussions, were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and categories. This approach enabled a systematic exploration of how cultural beliefs, community norms, and family dynamics shape educational experiences in Njombe. The second analytical method is descriptive statistics, where quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed. This involved calculating means, frequencies, and percentages to summarize responses, clearly and concisely representing participant's views and attitudes regarding cultural influences on education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the study was to examine how cultural values influence student performance in classroom settings and propose potential solutions to challenges arising from the intersection of education and culture. A total of 42 participants from Mount Livingstone Secondary School, Chief Kidulile Secondary School, and Jumbe Mungoli Secondary School took part in the study, providing data through interviews and questionnaires. The study focused on understanding the impact of cultural values on secondary school student's performance. Out of the 42 respondents, data were collected from 30 students, 9 teachers, and 3 school administrators. Respondents were selected primarily based on gender distribution, ensuring a diverse representation across the participating schools.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Name of Schools	Respondents						Total
	Students		Teachers		Head of Schools		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Chief Kidulile	5	5	2	1	1	-	14
Jumbe Mungoli	5	5	2	1	1	-	14
Mt. Livingstone	5	5	1	2	1	-	14
Total	15	15	5	4	3		42

The data for the study were gathered from a sample of 42 respondents, as indicated in the *Table 1* above. All anticipated study participants, including teachers, students, and school administrators, actively contributed their opinions on the impact of cultural values on student performance in secondary school contexts. Each school contributed equally to the total sample, ensuring a balanced representation of perspectives. This study's initial goal was to accomplish this. The researcher set out to evaluate how cultural beliefs and the obstacles they present affect students' academic achievement. When asked if they believed that culture had an impact on kids' academic performance, respondents had to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed. The results are displayed as follows.

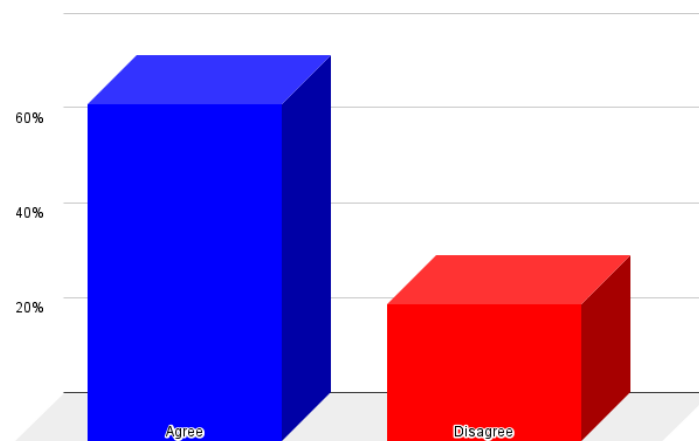


Figure 1: Responses of the Respondents

According to the results, 12 respondents, or 29%, disputed that there are not enough influences between culture and education in their area, whereas 30 respondents, or 71%, agreed. This demonstrates culture's significant impact on pupils' academic achievement in Tanzania's Njombe region.

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of how cultural values significantly impact student academic performance in secondary schools within Tanzania's Njombe region. Several key findings emerge through an in-depth analysis of data collected from a diverse group of 42 participants across Mount Livingstone, Chief Kidulile, and Jumbe Mungoli Secondary Schools. The research reveals that cultural values are pivotal in shaping students' academic achievements, a perspective supported by 71% of respondents. These values encompass traditions, beliefs, societal expectations, and community norms, all of which profoundly influence student's engagement and success in their educational endeavors. For example, the belief in the importance of hard work and perseverance in Njombe is deeply rooted in local traditions.

Many respondents emphasized that cultural attitudes toward education in the region prioritize effort over innate intelligence, positively influencing student achievement.

For instance, community norms encourage students to view challenges as opportunities for growth, leading to greater resilience and determination in their academic pursuits. This traditional belief system encourages students to persist despite obstacles, such as limited resources or challenging school environments, fostering an academic culture of persistence and continuous learning. This underscores the imperative for educational institutions to integrate cultural sensitivity into their practices to enhance student learning and well-being. While most respondents acknowledged the influence of culture, 21% expressed reservations about the adequacy of cultural influences in shaping educational practices. This diversity of viewpoints underscores the nuanced nature of cultural beliefs within the educational community. It offers valuable insights into the potential challenges that educators and policymakers may face when implementing culturally responsive strategies.

Additionally, the study highlighted both challenges and opportunities in aligning cultural values with educational settings. One of the challenges identified was the potential conflict between traditional practices and modern educational methods. However, the research also uncovered opportunities to leverage cultural diversity to improve educational outcomes. By embracing cultural richness through inclusive curricula, culturally relevant teaching methods, and community engagement, schools can create environments that enhance student motivation, engagement, and academic success.

Based on these findings, the study suggests that educators and policymakers adopt proactive approaches that respect and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives. This includes developing curriculum content that reflects local cultural contexts, training teachers in culturally responsive teaching methods, and involving families and communities in enhancing student learning. These strategies promote equity and inclusivity and empower students to thrive in culturally diverse societies. The study also recommends that future research delve deeper into specific cultural dimensions and their direct impacts on student learning outcomes. Researchers can provide nuanced insights that inform targeted interventions and policies to improve educational equity and quality by exploring factors such as language use, traditional knowledge systems, and community values.

The majority of respondents (71%) acknowledged the profound impact of cultural values on student performance, highlighting the importance of traditions, beliefs, societal expectations, and community norms in shaping educational experiences. These results align with previous research, demonstrating that cultural values significantly affect student engagement, motivation, and academic success (Bingham et al. 2023). The findings in this study suggest that cultural factors, such as respect for education, familial expectations, and community involvement, play a vital role in fostering a positive academic environment. In particular, cultural attitudes prioritizing education as a means of social mobility can inspire students to perform better and overcome educational barriers (Khan 2024; Reyes and Norman 2021).

While the majority of respondents recognized the positive impact of cultural values, 21% expressed skepticism regarding the adequacy of these influences. This divergence highlights the complexity of the relationship between culture and education, suggesting that cultural influences may not always align with modern educational methods or expectations. This minority viewpoint emphasizes educators' potential challenges when trying to balance traditional cultural practices with contemporary teaching techniques. Some educators and administrators may find it challenging to navigate these tensions, particularly in communities where modern education systems are perceived as being at odds with traditional values (Torche 2021; Whiteley, 2023). These findings underscore the need for ongoing dialogue between educational stakeholders to reconcile these differences and create a more inclusive teaching approach that respects modern and traditional cultural values.

Behaviorism emphasizes the role of external stimuli and reinforcement in shaping behavior (Skinner 1963). In the Njombe region, cultural values act as key stimuli influencing student behavior and academic performance. Values such as respect for teachers, family involvement, and community support align with behaviorist principles by reinforcing positive academic behaviors. For example, recognition from families and local communities for academic achievements serves as positive reinforcement, motivating students to perform well. Operant conditioning also plays a role, as culturally relevant teaching methods, like group learning and traditional storytelling, condition students to associate education with success. However, a potential challenge arises when traditional practices conflict with modern educational methods, which may hinder student engagement. To maximize academic success, educators in Njombe must integrate cultural values with contemporary teaching strategies, ensuring both cultural relevance and academic effectiveness.

This study identified several challenges in aligning cultural values with educational practices, particularly the potential conflict between traditional practices and contemporary teaching methods. These conflicts are not unique to Tanzania but are observed in many multicultural educational settings around the world (Amtu et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2021). However, the research also highlighted significant opportunities for leveraging cultural diversity to improve educational outcomes. By integrating culturally relevant teaching methods, promoting inclusive curricula, and fostering strong community involvement, schools can create environments that enhance student engagement and motivation. These findings are consistent with research by Zhao et al. (2024), who argue that culturally responsive teaching practices not only improve academic performance but also support student's social and emotional development. Educators who embrace cultural diversity can create more meaningful and motivating learning experiences, which in turn can lead to higher student success.

The findings of this study suggest several recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance educational outcomes by incorporating cultural values (Gray 2021). First, schools should develop curricula that reflect local cultural contexts, ensuring that students can see their cultural heritage represented in their learning materials. This can help foster a sense of pride and identity, essential for student motivation and success (Raju 2024). Additionally, teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching, equipping educators with the tools to adapt their methods to the diverse needs of their students (Vaughn 2023). Schools should also work closely with families and communities to create a supportive learning environment beyond the classroom (Bingham et al. 2023). By involving families in the educational process, schools can reinforce the importance of education and ensure that students receive consistent support both at school and at home.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how cultural values impact student performance in the school context of Tanzania's Njombe Region. The research uncovers several important insights. Firstly, cultural values play a significant role in shaping students' academic success, with 71% of respondents confirming this influence. Elements such as language, traditions, societal expectations, and community norms are crucial in shaping students' educational experiences. Secondly, there is a variation in perceptions among respondents, with 29% questioning the extent of cultural influence, indicating the complexity of cultural dynamics in education. Thirdly, integrating cultural values into educational settings presents both challenges and opportunities. Traditional practices sometimes conflict with modern methods, but embracing cultural diversity can enhance student engagement and achievement.

These findings clearly show that cultural values profoundly affect educational processes and student performance in the Njombe Region. The positive impact of culturally relevant education highlights the need for schools to adopt culturally sensitive

practices. However, the varied perceptions suggest that not all stakeholders experience cultural influences uniformly, indicating the need for a more nuanced approach. The challenges of integrating cultural values, such as potential conflicts with modern practices and resource limitations, require careful management. Nonetheless, the potential benefits of leveraging cultural diversity to improve education are significant.

Several actions and further research directions are recommended to address these findings effectively. Firstly, educational policymakers and practitioners should incorporate culturally responsive teaching methods and curricula that reflect local cultural contexts. Training programs for teachers on culturally sensitive pedagogy can better equip them to support diverse student needs. Secondly, increasing community and parental involvement in schools can provide additional support and resources, creating a more supportive learning environment. Schools should engage in initiatives that promote community participation, such as tutoring programs and school improvement projects.

Additionally, further research should explore specific cultural dimensions and their direct impacts on student learning outcomes, investigating factors such as language use, traditional knowledge systems, and community values. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how cultural influences evolve and affect long-term educational outcomes. By implementing these recommendations, educational stakeholders can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that respect and utilize the cultural richness of the Njombe Region, ultimately enhancing student performance and overall educational quality.

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