
Context Matters

— RESEARCH GRANTS —

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Investigating Girls' Literacy Practices In and Out of School in Rural Tanzania

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Note: The research project was published in *Education Inquiry* (Volume 13, Issue 3, 2022), a peer reviewed, open access journal that provides high quality research in the field of education. The article can be accessed [here](#). The complete report is also available on the CODE website.

Abstract

Globally, girls and women lag behind in accessing education opportunities. As a result, two-thirds of the 750 million illiterates in the world in 2016 were women. Of all this global illiterate population, 27% resided in sub-Saharan Africa, in which two-thirds are women. In Tanzania, for example, only 6.3% of in-school girls can read and write at the required grade level. Evidence from research demonstrates the importance of language and literacy learning for the empowerment of women and girls. This is achieved when emphasis is placed not only on literacy as the ability to read, write and decode meaning, but also on literacy practices that have the potential to empower girls.

Guided by the Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST), which insists on culturally, respectful and safe research with Indigenous people, this study sought to generate new knowledge that will lead to initiatives that improve literacy practices for girls in and out of school in rural Tanzania. The research took place in Choma village in the Igunga District of Tabora region, Tanzania. Participants for this research were in-school girls, out-of-school girls, teachers, one head teacher, a Ward Education Officer, parents, and religious, traditional and village leaders.



A map of Tanzania showing the research site

The project adopted a qualitative research approach to generate and analyse data. The findings show that both in- and out-of-school girls had access to a variety of print materials, and used print more than any other literacy materials.

Except for storytelling, drama and songs, in- and out-of-school girls never reported engaging with traditional literacy materials like poems, folklore, proverbs and metaphors, music, dance, legends, myths, or rituals. This suggests that traditional literacy practices are underutilized resources in the community, which could be used to strengthen girls' literacy learning. The findings also indicate that girls' literacy practices at the family and community are hindered by prevalent patriarchal attitudes and by heavy household chore burdens. While at the school level, challenges facing girls' education and literacy practices in particular are many, including the language of instruction, biased teachers, girls' negative attitude towards education, and a shortage of teaching and learning materials including an absence of a school library.

This study therefore recommends the following for the consideration of governmental actors and policymakers, national and international civil society organizations involved in literacy, education and girls' empowerment work in Tanzania, and other stakeholders interested in the empowerment of girls such as local education authorities, parents associations, communication associations, and international organizations among others:

1. Support teachers through workshops to make more use of a greater variety of reading materials available to girls in their teaching, both print and digital.
2. Provide resources and learning opportunities for parents that support them to increase the availability of a variety of literacy tools (both traditional and modern) at home and engage their children in the use of such resources.

3. Work with religious and local leaders to promote girls' education and literacy practices in particular through activities that empower these individuals to conduct community awareness campaigns locally. Because these leaders are respected in the village, their involvement can help reduce negative attitudes among community members about girls' education.
4. Encourage schools to establish extra-curricular reading clubs and activities like reading contests for girls to create a safe social space or environment in which to discuss, share experiences, and acquire various literacy skills.

Researchers' Biographies



Daniel Sidney Fussy is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE) – a Constituent College of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He holds a PhD in Education from the University of Glasgow, UK.

Dr. Fussy currently serves as the Coordinator of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), at MUCE, where he supervises the development of research agendas and projects, dissemination of research outputs in both national and international outlets, and the application of research-based knowledge in teaching and learning. Daniel's research interest – of which he has widely published – centered on learning development in higher education, higher education research and development, research culture and researcher development, comparative education, and teacher professionalism.



Hassan Iddy Hassan is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE), Iringa, Tanzania. He holds a PhD in Education from the University of New Castle, Australia. Apart from his core functions of teaching, research and public service, Hassan also serves as the Deputy Coordinator of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) housed in the Faculty of Education at MUCE.

His research interests focus on gender and education, equity in education, indigenous education, Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST), international and comparative education, primary and secondary education research, qualitative research methods, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Education for All (EFA) agenda. He has vast experience in research and has published widely in international referred journals. His scholarly works have centered on the notion of education as a basic human right and ensuring that the most vulnerable people can access and participate in quality education. His current research article with the title '*Changing perceptions of the value of girls' secondary education among the parents in rural Tanzania*' was published by Routledge in October 2021.