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FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of Educational Planning is focused on planning issues of educational qualities at K-12 and higher education levels. A variety of planning interests in educational qualities are covered. In the first article, the focus is on the qualities of education services provided by Saudi universities as perceived by the university students. The second and the third articles deal with the qualities of education among minority students. In the second article, the author explored cultural practices impeding girls' secondary education in Malawi. The third article is a report on sharing teachers' perspectives of their experiences in working with minority parents to improve the academic performance of the minority students in Hong Kong.

In the first article, Fatemah A. Alhazmi evaluated the perceptions of quality of service in a higher education setting from the perspective of students studying at King Khalid University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A modified service quality (SERVQUAL) instrument was used to measure five constructs: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The research also assessed possible connections between the participants' responses and key demographic variables.

The paper by Esther Mkamanga, Ken Kaziputa Ndala and Antony Chigeda investigated the underlining cultural factors impeding girls' secondary education in Malawi. The study employed a mixed methods research design with Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Findings indicated that key social-cultural factors affecting girls' education in Malawi include girls' initiation ceremonies, unplanned pregnancies, early marriages and poverty.

In his article about the Southeastern Asian minorities in Hong Kong, Dr. Tak C. Chan examined the qualities of education received by these minority students in special minority schools. The author solicited data through interviewing with teachers to investigate how they worked with the minority parents who could help with their children at home. Results of data analysis indicated that teachers perceived minority parents not contributing enough to helping their children's study. Teachers indicated that they were willing to work with minority parents to get them involved in education.

These selected articles have explored the themes of planning for quality educational services from the perspectives of teachers, parents and students in their respective fields. The underlining factors involved in providing and/or lacking quality services were investigated. Educational planners could take advantage of these reported experiences to learn how the qualities of educational services can be improved in their organizations.

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SAUDI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEIs), consider the customer experience an intrinsic component of their strategic plans, decision-making processes, and development. In higher education (HE) contexts, students are customers and demand high service quality. This article evaluates the perception of quality of service (QoS) in a HE setting from the perspective of students studying at King Khalid University (KKU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). A modified service quality (SERVQUAL) instrument measures five constructs: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The research also assesses possible connections between the participants' responses and key demographic variables. Permission was granted to distribute 500 questionnaires to students from the selected college. Of these, 350 questionnaires were returned, and 298 were deemed useful. The data assessing perceptions of QoS was analyzed using SPSS, a t-test, and a cutoff point (3.4). The table of variance analysis and ETA square identified relationships between participants' answers and the demographic variables. Evaluation of all services was lower than predicted. The highest rated construct was assurance with mean (3.0116), responsiveness with mean (2.8465), tangibles with mean (2.7843), reliability with mean (2.6914), and empathy with mean (2.5558). There were statistically significant differences in the students' evaluations of the first dimension (tangibles) associated with gender difference, with average evaluation by male students being (2.9532), and average evaluation by female students (2.6685); otherwise, demographic characteristics showed no statistically significant influence on students' evaluations.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education (HE) is a rapidly expanding service industry exposed to globalization processes (O'Neil & Plamer, 2004; Van Dammer, 2001). HE is typically delivered at universities, academies, colleges, seminaries, and institutes of technology, and is vital to a nation's individual, social, and economic development (Mukhtar et al., 2015). The purpose of HE traditionally was to advance knowledge and foster development, and promote creativity, scientific inquiry and innovation (Escotet, 2012). Additionally, Fortino (2012) described the preparation of students' minds a primary objective of HE.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The Role of Higher Education

Although historically HE sought to address the fluctuating needs and operational challenges in society, today financial realities and changing demographics drive the services available on modern campuses. Consequently, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly interested in identifying and fulfilling students' expectations by measuring perceptions of quality of service (QoS) (DeShields Jr, 2005). Undoubtedly, successful completion and enhancement of students' educational journeys are central concerns. HEIs need to develop proactively to understand the constituents of student satisfaction in a competitive environment (Yusoff et al., 2015).

Definition of Service

Defining services can be complex, and therefore, before attempting to measure QoS it is crucial to determine whether what is being delivered is a process or an act. Services can also be value-creating activities offered to customers and simultaneously consumed and produced (Sapri et al., 2009). According to Lovelock (1980, 1983) these services can be grouped into three categories. First, services concerned with people-processing requiring customers' presence, such as healthcare. Second, services of possession-processing that include duties performed on physical objects without customer intervention, such as auto repair. Third, information-based services, which create value relating to data, such as banking services. Parasuraman et al. (1986) observes that services are distinguished by four unique characteristics, namely, intangibles, damage, indivisibility and changeability.

According to Loony et al. (2016), services are activities or processes characterized by impalpability and concurrency. Concurrency means completion of the service requires a service provider and a customer, both playing an active role. The diverse meanings accorded to service result in varying evaluations of QoS, even within the same organization (Berry et al., 1985). Thus, Johns (1999) suggested service context be carefully illustrated.

Higher Education as a Service

Herein, it is vital to remember that HEIs are both service organizations and educational ones. Within the university environment, the fulfilment of customer expectations has rarely been explicitly specified as an aim (Navarro et al., 2005). Students, university employees, families, and society as a whole can all be reasonably considered the university's customers. Today's HEIs are progressively viewing HE as a business-like service industry, and Oldfield and Baron (2000), argue that HE can be seen as a "pure" service (p. 86) and for Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001), educational services "come within the field of services marketing" (p. 332).

The measurement of QoS in HE is increasingly of great importance (Abdullah, 2006) to improve customer satisfaction, stimulate intention to return and encourage recommendations (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005). According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001), the promotion of educational services "fall[s] into the field of service marketing" (p. 332)." Moreover, QoS cannot be measured without bias (Patterson & Johnson, 1993). Universities are recognizing the need to adopt technologies to measure QoS. HEIs require a variety of information detailing the quality of their different academic and administrative services, so as to be able to prioritize resource allocation, and effectively promote marketing and promotion plans. This can include canvassing students (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2003; Hill, 1995; Lee & Tay, 2008) and researchers have questioned students systematically and rigorously to determine their satisfaction with the academic and administrative services provided to them. QoS is the main determinant of marketing strategies' effectiveness in the context of HEIs. Indeed, perceived QoS can create favorable or unfavorable attitudes among students with regard to institutions (as found by Zeithaml et al. (1996) when analyzing service influences) and may also affect Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOM marketing).

To evaluate the quality of education, student satisfaction has been used frequently to assess institutions' ability to meet strategic needs (Cheng, 1990). Brown and Mazarol (2009) observed that if students view a university positively, then they are likely to be satisfied with the institution, and thus their level of loyalty will be high. Moreover, retention is related to perseverance, and so Demaris and Kritsonis (2008) hypothesized that students' overall satisfaction would result in their

returning to the same college. Nevertheless, Oldfield and Barron (2000) emphasize the "tendency to view QoS in higher education from an organizational perspective" (p. 86) at the expense of students' feedback.

Undoubtedly, determining students' opinions should ultimately have a positive impact on QoS delivery. Rowley (1997) determined four major reasons for gathering student feedback: (1) to provide verifiable evidence students have an opportunity to comment on their courses, and use this information to make improvements; (2) to encourage students to reflect as they learn; (3) to allow institutions to set standards and provide indicators to bolster the university's reputation in the market; and (4) give students an opportunity to express their satisfaction or otherwise.

Student's notes and comments can be pivotal in enhancing the quality of teaching in HEIs (Leckey & Neill, 2001). According to Harvey (2003), student feedback can be defined as:

Students' expressed opinions about the service they receive as students. This may include perceptions about learning and instruction, learning support facilities (such as libraries, computing facilities), the learning settings (lecture halls, laboratories, social spaces and university campuses), support facilities (dining rooms, student residency, health facilities, student services) and the external aspects of being a student (such as financial affairs and infrastructure of transportation). (p. 3)

Universities mainly collect information in two forms; internal information as guidance for improvements, and external information for prospective students and other stakeholders, including accountability and compliance requirements.

Students' perceptions can vary and be collected relative to different aspects of the HE setting, with data most commonly collected via a feedback survey. This differs from other professional services in terms of methods. Education services play a pivotal role in student life, and students require enormous motivation and should be of sufficient intellectual quality to benefit from HE. This makes QoS a complex, multifarious concept in this context, resulting in a challenge determining quality definitively (Harvey & Green, 1993). Consequently, there is no consensus regarding "the most appropriate manner to define and measure QoS" (Clewes, 2003, p. 71). All stakeholders in HE (e.g., students, government and professional agencies) have their own unique viewpoints and expectations.

Measurements of Quality of Service
To ensure QoS requires improvement, it needs to be evaluated and measured. Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined QoS as a "global judgment or attitude pertaining to general excellence or service superiority" (p. 15) and envisioned customer's evaluation of overall service quality by applying Oliver's (1980) disconfirmation model to evaluate the gap between expectations and perceptions (Gap Model). Moreover, they proposed total QoS for each case be determined by a measurement scale called SERVQUAL utilizing five general dimensions: (1) tangibles - the physical surroundings represented by things (for example, interior design) and subjects (for example, employee appearance); (2) reliability - the ability of the service provider to provide accurate and reliable services; (3) responsiveness - the company's willingness to help its customers by providing fast and effective service performance; (4) assurance - various features that provide confidence to customers (such as knowledge of specific customer service; polite and trustworthy behavior from

employees); and (5) empathy – the service the company is prepared to render for each customer along with personal service (Oliveira & Ferreira, 2009; Yeo, 2009).

SERVQUAL has become a widely used QoS measurement scale since its development but its reliability across different domains is subject to controversy. When measuring QoS in HE, it is important to study the meaning of QoS in context. Currently there is no consensus regarding "the best way to determine and measure quality of service" (Clewes, 2003, p. 71). Every stakeholder in HE (e.g., students, government, and professional agencies) holds a different viewpoint regarding quality based on their individual needs. This paper focuses on representing the experiences and recommendations of a single group; students.

Some previous studies (Banwet & Datta, 2003; Galloway, 1998) have examined students' perceptions of quality and level of satisfaction using SERVQUAL framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988). However, SERVQUAL has been widely criticized because it only asks for perceptions of performance relative to a range of service aspects (in addition to importance), and therefore fails to capture data relating to expectations. Proposing an alternative to SERVQAL, Douglas et al. (2006) developed a "service product package" method to review student satisfaction in HE, addressing 12 dimensions: professionalism and comfort level in the environment, student assessments and learning experiences, the classroom environment, and the lectures and tutorials that facilitate goods, textbooks, tuition fees, student support facilities, business procedures, relationship with faculty, knowledge, response from faculty, employee assistance, feedback, and class sizes (p. 54). These dimensions are arranged according to four variables: physical goods, facilitating goods, implicit services, and express service. The Service Product Package method is more comprehensive than SERVQUAL (Jurkowitsch et al., 2006).

Research on QoS in Higher Education

A review of research reveals educational institutions globally have collected students' opinions to improve QoS. Reports on the economic profile of HEIs in the UK discovered that although the primary mission of HEIs is teaching and research, they collect 25% of revenue from additional sources, such as catering and conference fees (Galloway, 1998)

Galloway (1998) also reported that college management directly affects students and their perceptions of the quality of the entire institution. Employees also directly influence faculty members and technicians, with key predictors of perceived quality for students found to be having a professional appearance. Employees were smartly attired, and never too busy to offer help. Moreover, business hours were considered appropriate.

Despite differences across the European education system, levels of satisfaction among students have remained fairly stable. Communication with fellow students, course content, learning equipment, library storage, teaching quality, and teaching and learning materials are the factors most likely to influence satisfaction among students (García-Aracil, 2009). In Finland, research and education facilities, and fundamental university activities have a greater impact on overall student and employee satisfaction levels than supportive facilities (Kärnä & Julin, 2015).

In the Spanish university system, faculty, teaching methods, and course management have a major impact on levels of student satisfaction (Navarro et al., 2005), with some being affected by the university's public image (Palacio et al., 2002). The effect of a university's public image can be

either direct or indirect (Alvis & Raposo, 2006; Weerasinghe & Dedunu, 2017). In the Norwegian university system, the institution's reputation, the attractiveness of the host university city and the quality of the facility strongly affect levels of satisfaction among students (Hanssen & Solvoll, 2015).

The evidence suggests students' educational achievement is heavily based on the physical school facility available to them, its age, condition and the design of the school. School facilities are instrumental in supporting instruction and formulating students' learning processes both inside and outside the school environment. School buildings and infrastructure designed to support efficient teaching and learning require considerable investment of public funds, and careful development and maintenance by administrators.

According to Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013), in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there is a remarkable correlation between levels of student satisfaction and the quality of lecturers, the availability of resources and the efficient use of technology. In the Palestinian university system, academic program content greatly influenced students' level of satisfaction (Kanan & Baker, 2006).

According to Cook's (1997) study conducted with a group of 182 students in the field of nursing at a UK university, students perceive the following factors to be effective quality drivers: a) faculty member related factors, b) study factors (library and private study facilities, computer access, favorable study environments), c) general well-being factors, d) practice factors, and e) extra-curricular activity factors. He concluded the most important factor affecting perceptions of service concern interactions between faculty members and students, and not how administrative staff communicate with students and teachers. Berger and Milem (1999) investigated aspects affecting the survival of undergraduates at a private institution in the Netherlands using a sample consisting of 718 students. They focused specifically on the social and academic inclusion of students, and concluded that students who had a more successful integration process were influenced by their home background (factors that the institution cannot control sufficiently).

Elsewhere, Brenders et al. (1999) conducted a study at an Australian university employing a focus group methodology with 145 undergraduate students. They concluded that bureaucratic issues and miscommunication can adversely affect students' beliefs about the quality of services. Tan and Kek (2004) proposed examining the overall satisfaction of students attending the engineering colleges of two universities in Singapore. A questionnaire was created using the SERVQUAL tool, and 958 usable returns were received (497 from University A and 461 from University B). The findings revealed that students at both universities expected a higher level of service regarding the availability of channels through which to transfer their ideas to management, and the willingness of universities to consider their views (communication problems). In Brazil, Walter (2006) identified key factors associated with student loyalty and satisfaction at a business program at the Catholic University of Paraná. Their study identified a number of uncontrollable variables affecting levels of satisfaction, such as students' and families' economic level, and associated social status. Mostafa (2007) presented a technical study based on a sample of 508 students at four private universities in Egypt, using the SERVQUAL instrument and an Importance of Performance (IP) analysis to measure QoS. His methodology focused heavily on student perceptions, including a factor analysis. He concluded that the requirements of the five dimensions set out in the SERVQUAL tool had not been achieved. However, he obtained three factors or dimensions of quality: (1) actual, service-oriented procedures associated with student registration, payment of fees, and registration, (2) university

employees directing services toward the student body, and (3) physical evidence concerning the importance of the physical service environment.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Studies on assessing the quality of services offered by higher education institutes are scarce, particularly in developing countries. This study will contribute to the available data by addressing the topic in the context of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It is the first of such study to be conducted at the King Khalid University. It used an instrument similar to studies conducted by Mostafa (2007) to address the issue of service quality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are students' perceptions of QoS based on a modified service quality (SERVQUAL) instrument measuring five constructs: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy?

- Is there is any relationship between the students' perceptions and their demographic variables?

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: KING KHALID UNIVERSITY (KKU)

The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education has established new universities to meet the high demand for HE. Among these new HEIs is KKU, which is located in Abha city, one of the most beautiful cities in KSA. The city of Abha is surrounded by fertile plains, mountains, and valleys, has a temperate climate, experiences torrential rainfall, and is surrounded by thick forests, which attract tourists every summer. KKU was founded by merging two previously established ancient university campuses, and offers a number of different majors across various colleges. (Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The university itself is considered a charming and comfortable environment for researchers and students alike. It has a major impact on the local community, and also plays a role in education more generally within the city (Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, 2019). Before 2000, graduate programs were not offered at KKU, but now several colleges offer programs, including the College of Education, College of Sharia, and the College of Arts. KKU is recognized as an innovative academic institution relative to other Saudi universities and is active in both postgraduate studies and research. In 2002, the number of undergraduates and graduate students reached 13,055, with the ratio of teachers to students being 1:29 (Al-Hamid et al., 2002).

KKU has fifteen colleges, with six research centers and three academic societies. Similar to other Saudi universities, KKU is managed by a chancellor, a vice-chancellor and an additional vice-chancellor for graduate studies and research. There are also several supporting deanships, including one for educational affairs and one for scientific research (Ministry of Education, 2020). The university's strategy, vision and mission include the pursuit of excellence in the field of knowledge and research, supported by use of advanced learning technologies and contributing to a more effective and competitive society. The university's objectives in terms of quality seek to benefit all stakeholders including taking a role in the international research arena

The Saudi government is aiming to develop new ways to finance HE by giving universities and other HEIs the opportunity to conduct paid scientific studies and consult with other Saudi

agencies. Almost 25% of external funding goes directly to the HEI concerned. Donations and gifts from individuals and organizations are welcome, assuming their motives do not contradict the university's mission and objectives (Ministry of Education, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research methodology adopted here is quantitative, based on numerical data derived from closed- and open-ended questionnaires. Questionnaires kind of method is appropriate for researchers who want to obtain reliable data on a large scale in a systematic way (Gay, 1992). According to Peil et al. (1982), there is a greater likelihood of obtaining a higher response rate when questionnaires are distributed in person.

Research Participants

The research sample comprises students studying at one college at KKU, located in the southern region of Saudi Arabia. Students were selected using a suitable non-probability sampling method (Aaker et al., 1995). The administration at the university reviewed the purpose of the study, and after permission was obtained 500 questionnaires were distributed to the students at the college. Of these, 350 questionnaires were returned, 298 of which were deemed usable.

Research Instrument

Research questionnaires were created using Google Forms and distributed via WhatsApp. The questionnaire includes two sections. Section I collects demographics such as gender, age, year of education, and level of education. Section II is the SERVQUAL survey tool. The original SERVQUAL tool was designed to evaluate organizations and companies in the services domain (Aghamolaei & Zare, 2008; Parasuraman et al., 1988). However, the version used incorporated changes proposed by Aghamolaei and Zare (2008) to fit the academic environment. The questionnaire consists of 39 elements, representing five dimensions of QoS, namely tangibles (5 elements), reliability (5 elements), responsiveness (3 elements), assurance (4 elements), and empathy (4 elements). A 5-point Likert type scale was used, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The SERVQUAL instrument was reviewed with a pilot sample of 50 respondents.

In addition, the measurements of accuracy (Alpha Cronbach) and level of total correlation of the groups measured covered the descriptive statistics and included the mathematical average for each term and its skewness, and coefficient curl. It also uses graphs to show distribution of the sample. The statistical tools used were divided into: Measurement of Reliability (Alpha Cronbach), Consistency and correlation level of terminology, Central tendency (Frequency, percentage, average and standard deviation), Correlation and One way ANOVA.

The reliability variable is defined as the result when dividing true variance against that obtained. If the true variance equals the obtained variance, the result = 1. Whenever the value of alpha is close to 1, the value of the reliability coefficient is high and the questionnaires are considered accurate. To measure the accuracy of each instrument against the total, the correlation level for each item is measured against the total for all terminologies. This is a measurement of instrument accuracy. Terminologies for all items were accurate in their measurement of the field of study, and the Byron Correlation values fell within 0.01. This indicates an accuracy level of 99%. Such a strong correlation level is expressed as (* *) in the analysis (SPSS).

The questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Arabic for respondents in Saudi Arabia. In order to pilot the questionnaire, it was distributed to four Saudi PhD students in education, two PhD students in management and two bachelor's degree students. The aim of piloting the questionnaire was to test how respondents understood it. After piloting, some changes were suggested and modifications made.

Data Analysis

To achieve the research objectives, the researcher employed statistical methods: Analysis of Variance and T-test for one sample, with a mid-point of 3.4 to determine perceptions of QoS based on the modified SERVQUAL instrument in reference to five constructs: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. A table of variance analysis and the ETA square were performed to establish possible relationships between participants' answers and demographic variables.

FINDINGS

The student perceptions of the quality of services offered by the university were analyzed by using one sample t-test with 3.4 as the mid-point for comparison. The results of the analyses show that the perceptions for all the surveyed services to be lower than anticipated as the experimental average for all items was below the established cutoff point (3.4) and the differences reported were statistically significant. I have been selecting this method (cutoff point) depending on many considerations, i.e all participant are belong to one population, so all of them have subjugated to the same five constructs. And the placement of the cutoff at extreme values reduces the power to detect the possible relationships. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. One-sample statistics for perceptions of QoS

Items	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Modern and up to date equipment	258	2.90	1.247	.078			
Visual appeal of physical facilities	258	2.34	1.308	.081	-13.052-	257	.000
Neat and well-dressed staff	258	2.72	1.265	.079	-8.571-	257	.000
Visual appeal of materials	258	2.49	1.309	.082	-11.185-	257	.000
Convenient operating hours	258	2.76	1.300	.081	-7.861-	257	.000
Staff are disciplined	258	2.98	1.317	.082	-5.067-	257	.000
Visually attractive and comfortable physical facilities	258	2.55	1.320	.082	-10.292-	257	.000
Good directional signs	258	3.07	1.368	.085	-3.878-	257	.000
Convenience of university location for you	258	3.26	1.631	.102	-1.382-	257	.168
Well-developed infrastructure (including Wi-Fi)	258	2.49	1.456	.091	-10.017-	257	.000
Adequate seating arrangement	258	2.32	1.398	.087	-12.438-	257	.000
Well air-conditioned environment	258	3.22	1.458	.091	-1.973-	257	.050

Items	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Clean looking environment	258	3.49	1.306	.081	1.087	257	.278
Good services at the library	258	3.11	1.354	.084	-3.458-	257	.001
Enough private desks	258	2.21	1.420	.088	-13.514-	257	.000
Staff respond promptly to students	258	2.67	1.328	.083	-8.825-	257	.000
Staff always help students	258	2.83	1.289	.080	-7.157-	257	.000
Staff respond promptly to queries	258	2.81	1.321	.082	-7.221-	257	.000
Speed and ease of admissions (procedures)	258	2.93	1.382	.086	-5.460-	257	.000
Faculty members work well to improve performance	258	3.00	1.314	.082	-4.888-	257	.000
Students trust staff	258	2.61	1.281	.080	-9.927-	257	.000
Students feel safe when receiving services	258	2.98	1.329	.083	-5.022-	257	.000
Staff are courteous to students	258	3.06	1.272	.079	-4.315-	257	.000
Professors have the knowledge to answer students' questions	258	3.27	1.304	.081	-1.585-	257	.114
Employees have the knowledge to answer students' questions	258	3.05	1.259	.078	-4.412-	257	.000
Employees are polite to students	258	3.09	1.287	.080	-3.831-	257	.000
Providing services as promised	258	2.87	1.330	.083	-6.374-	257	.000
Sincere interest of personnel in solving problems	258	2.83	1.250	.078	-7.279-	257	.000
Carrying out services right first time	258	2.69	1.388	.086	-8.217-	257	.000
Providing services at appointment time	258	2.74	1.309	.081	-8.145-	257	.000
Stating when services will be performed	258	2.78	1.330	.083	-7.501-	257	.000
Commitment to providing healthy and varied food choices	258	2.34	1.390	.087	-12.195-	257	.000
Sincere interest in solving student problems at the university	258	2.53	1.318	.082	-10.593-	257	.000
Persistence in performing services correctly	258	2.74	1.252	.078	-8.411-	257	.000
Give individual attention	258	2.38	1.291	.080	-12.738-	257	.000
Dealing with students with care and diligence	258	2.58	1.205	.075	-10.967-	257	.000
Supporting students with their talents and interests	258	2.83	1.377	.086	-6.702-	257	.000

Items	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Understanding the specific needs of students	258	2.49	1.264	.079	-11.537-	257	.000
Offering comfortable and fitting schedules for students	258	2.51	1.439	.090	-9.957-	257	.000
Tangibles	258	2.7943	.97099	.06045	-10.019-	257	.000
Responsiveness	258	2.8465	1.13522	.07068	-7.831-	257	.000
Assurance	258	3.0116	1.08356	.06746	-5.757-	257	.000
Reliability	258	2.6914	1.10914	.06905	-10.262-	257	.000
Empathy	258	2.5558	1.13374	.07058	-11.960-	257	.000
Total	258	2.7827	.94782	.05901	-10.460-	257	.000

The values of the quality of services were rank-ordered in each of the five service dimensions as perceived by the students. In light of the arithmetic means, the degree of student perceptions are presented in the following by each dimension, tangible, responsiveness, assurance, reliability and empathy.

As a result of the data analysis, the findings indicated that the student perceptions of the tangible items offered at the university were lower than expected. The highest ranked item was "Clean look environment" and the lowest ranked item was "Private Desks". (See Table 2.)

Table 2. The order of tangible items in light of the arithmetic mean

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Clean looking environment	258	3.49	1.306
Convenience of university location for you	258	3.26	1.631
Well air-conditioned environment	258	3.22	1.458
Good services at the library	258	3.11	1.354
Clear directional signs	258	3.07	1.368
Staff are disciplined	258	2.98	1.317
Modern and up to date equipment	258	2.9	1.247
Convenient operating hours	258	2.76	1.3
Neat and well-dressed staff	258	2.72	1.265
Visually attractive and comfortable physical facilities	258	2.55	1.32
Visual appeal of materials	258	2.49	1.309
Well-developed infrastructure (including Wi-Fi)	258	2.49	1.456
Visual appeal of physical facilities	258	2.34	1.308
Adequate seating arrangement	258	2.32	1.398
Enough private desks	258	2.21	1.42

Students' perceptions of the responsiveness at the university was analyzed and the items in this dimension were rank-ordered from "Faculty members work well to improve performance" on top and "Staff give prompt service to students" at the bottom. All the items in this responsiveness dimension were perceived by students to be below anticipation. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. The order of responsiveness items in light of the arithmetic mean

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Faculty members work well to improve performance	258	3	1.314
Speed and ease of admissions (procedures)	258	2.93	1.382
Staff always help students	258	2.83	1.289
Staff respond promptly to queries	258	2.81	1.321
Staff give prompt service to students	258	2.67	1.328

Students' perceptions of the assurance of university service quality were also below the expected level. The top-ranking item was "Professors have the knowledge to answer students' questions" and the low-ranking item was "Students trust staff." (See Table 4.)

Table 4. The order of assurance items in light of the arithmetic mean

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Professors have the knowledge to answer students' questions	258	3.27	1.304
Employees to polite with students	258	3.09	1.287
Staff are courteous to students	258	3.06	1.272
Employees have the knowledge to answer students' questions	258	3.05	1.259
Students feel safe when receiving services	258	2.98	1.329
Students trust staff	258	2.61	1.281

Moreover, students' perception of the reliability of university service quality was also below the expected level. "Providing service as promised" was on top of all the items and "Commitment to providing healthy and varied food." was ranked the lowest. (See Table 5.)

Table 5. The order of reliability items in light of the arithmetic mean

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Providing service as promised	258	2.87	1.33
Sincere interest of personnel in solving problems	258	2.83	1.25
Telling when services will be performed	258	2.78	1.33
Providing services at appointment times	258	2.74	1.309
Persistence in performing services correctly	258	2.74	1.252
Carrying out services right first time	258	2.69	1.388
Sincere interest in solving student problems at the university	258	2.53	1.318
Commitment to providing healthy and varied food	258	2.34	1.39

Students' perception of the empathy of university service quality was also below the expected level. "Supporting students with their talents and interests" was ranked the top. " Give individual attention" was ranked at the bottom. (See Table 6.)

Table 6. The order of empathy items in light of the arithmetic mean

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Supporting students with their talents and interests	258	2.83	1.377
Dealing with students with care and diligence	258	2.58	1.205
Offering comfortable and fitting schedules for students	258	2.51	1.439
Understanding the specific needs of students	258	2.49	1.264
Give individual attention	258	2.38	1.291

All the five dimensions of service quality were rank-ordered with the highest rated dimension as assurance with a mean of (3.0116), followed by responsiveness with a mean of (2.8465), tangibles with a mean of (2.7843), reliability with a mean of (2.6914), and then empathy with a mean of (2.5558). (See Table 7.)

Table 7. The order of dimensions in consideration of the arithmetic mean

Constructs	Mean
Assurance	3.0116
Responsiveness	2.8465
Tangibles	2.7943
Reliability	2.6914
Empathy	2.5558

The average of each dimension, Tangibles Responsiveness Assurance Reliability and Empathy was analyzed by gender, age and education level of the students. The results shown in the table of variance analysis and the ETA square analysis were collated to establish any relationships between the participants' perceptions and their demographic variables.

Students' perception data by gender and by dimension were analyzed by descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations. Results of data analysis depict that the presence of statistically significant differences in the degree of student perceptions for the first dimension (Tangibles) were associated with gender difference. The average male perception of "Tangles" was 2.9532, and the average "Tangibles" perception of female students was 2.6685. Additionally, it reveals that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in the degree of students' perceptions for the dimensions of Responsiveness, Assurance, Reliability and Empathy. (See Tables 8 and 9.)

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for constructs in light of gender

Gender		Tangibles	Responsiveness	Assurance	Reliability	Empathy
Male	Mean	2.9532	2.8667	3.1360	2.8344	2.6351
	N	114	114	114	114	114
	SD	.99793	1.17697	1.05725	1.12340	1.13831
Female	Mean	2.6685	2.8306	2.9132	2.5781	2.4931
	N	144	144	144	144	144
	SD	.93350	1.10493	1.09760	1.08831	1.13011
Total	Mean	2.7943	2.8465	3.0116	2.6914	2.5558
	N	258	258	258	258	258
	SD	.97099	1.13522	1.08356	1.10914	1.13374

Table 9. The results of ANOVA table for constructs in light of gender

Variables	Source of variance		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangibles * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	5.157	1	5.157	5.567	.019
	Within Groups		237.146	256	.926	.926	
	Total		242.303	257			
Responsiveness * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	.083	1	.083	.064	.800
	Within Groups		331.119	256	1.293	1.293	
	Total		331.202	257			
Assurance * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.158	1	3.158	2.707	.101
	Within Groups		298.585	256	1.166	1.166	
	Total		301.743	257			
Reliability * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	4.180	1	4.180	3.430	.065
	Within Groups		311.980	256	1.219	1.219	
	Total		316.160	257			
Empathy * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.284	1	1.284	.999	.319
	Within Groups		329.053	256	1.285	1.285	
	Total		330.336	257			
Total * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.057	1	3.057	3.435	.065
	Within Groups		227.824	256	.890	.890	
	Total		230.881	257			

The association between the dimensions of students' perceptions of services at the university and the gender of the students was measured by using ETA Square. Results of the analysis showed that the associations of all the perception dimensions and student gender were weak. (The levels of ETA square are determined as 0.02 weak, 0.05 medium, 0.15 high). (See Table 10.)

Table 10. Measures of association by dimension and by student gender

Variables * Gender	Eta	Eta Squared
Tangibles * Gender	.146	.021
Responsiveness * Gender	.016	.000
Assurance * Gender	.102	.010
Reliability * Gender	.115	.013
Empathy * Gender	.062	.004
Total * Gender	.115	.013

The association between the students' perceptions of services at the university and student age was also measured. Results of the analysis showed that the associations were weak among all the perception dimensions and student age with ETA square less than 0.02. (See Table 11.)

Table 11. Measures of association by dimension and by student age

	Eta	Eta Squared
Tangibles * Age	.072	.005
Responsiveness * Age	.084	.007
Assurance * Age	.074	.006
Reliability * Age	.076	.006
Empathy * Age	.092	.008
Total * Age	.065	.004

The association between the dimensions of students' perceptions of services at the university and students' years of education was also measured by using ETA Square. Results of the analysis showed that all the associations were weak with ETA square values less than 0.02. (See Table 12.)

The associations of the dimensions of students' perceptions of university service quality and student education level were measured. Results of the analysis showed that all the associations were weak with ETA squares less than 0.02. (See Table 13.)

The descriptive statistics and ANOVA results for all the dimensions by education level, age, and year of education showed no statistically significant differences in the student demographic variables. Therefore, the tables showing these calculations have not been included in the paper.

Table 12. Measures of association by dimension and by student year of education

	Eta	Eta Squared
Tangibles * Year of Education	.073	.005
Responsiveness * Year of Education	.089	.008
Assurance * Year of Education	.091	.008
Reliability * Year of Education	.097	.009
Empathy * Year of Education	.160	.026
Total * Year of Education	.100	.010

Table 13. Measures of Association

	Eta	Eta Squared
Tangibles * Education_level	.054	.003
Responsiveness * Education_level	.123	.015
Assurance * Education_level	.151	.023
Reliability * Education_level	.149	.022
Empathy * Education_level	.152	.023
Total * Education_level	.125	.016

Summary of Findings

The overall students' perceptions of service quality at the university were as follows: The highest rated dimension was assurance with a mean of 3.0116, then responsiveness with a mean of 2.8465, tangibles with a mean of 2.7843, reliability with a mean of 2.6914, and empathy with a mean of 2.5558. Statistically significant differences emerged in the degree of the students' perceptions for the first dimension (tangibles) due to gender difference, and the differences present favored males, with the average perception of male students being 2.9532, and that of female students, 2.6685. There were no statistically significant differences in the degree of students' perceptions of the remaining dimensions. The association between the dimensions for students' perceptions of services at the university with the gender of student is weak. No statistically significant differences were found in relation to age. The association between the dimensions of student's perceptions of services at the university and the age of the students proved to be weak. There were no statistically significant differences in the degree of the students' perceptions of all the dimensions in light of year of education. The association between the dimensions of students' perceptions of services at the university and year of education was weak. There were no statistically significant differences in the degree of students' perceptions for all the dimensions in light of the students' education level. Meanwhile, the association between the dimensions of students' perceptions of services at the university and education level was also weak.

DISCUSSION

In HE settings, students are the principal customers and recipients of university services. Thus, to ensure their continued viability, universities need to attract their patronage and retain it by ascertaining students' perceptions of QoS and the factors that inform them. This article measured the perception of QoS in HE from the perspective of students studying at a college at KKU in KSA, allowing for the possibility of confounding factors arising from demographic characteristics.

Levels of satisfaction among students remained relatively comparable. Communication with fellow students, course content, learning equipment, library storage, teaching quality and teaching/learning materials all had considerable influence on students' levels of satisfaction (García-Aracil, 2009). Similarly, in Finland, research and education facilities, and basic university activities greatly influenced students' and employees' satisfaction levels overall; more so than supportive facilities did (Kärnä & Julin, 2015).

According to Cook's (1997) study, the most representative factor affecting the perception of services was interaction between faculty and students. The findings of this study are different. Only 14% of the students were concerned about this aspect of faculty and student interaction. They were requesting an opportunity to express their opinions and complaints.

This research further found statistically significant differences in the degree of students' perceptions for the first dimension (tangibles) arising from gender differences. Gender differences in students' perceptions were not reported elsewhere in the literature.

IMPLICATIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING

The study also found the association between the dimensions of students' perceptions of services at the university and their education level was weak. This suggests the university needs to carefully prepare a strategic plan to improve all the academic related services at the university. The highest rated construct is assurance, with a mean of (3.0116), which could be associated with the university's vision and mission to attain a regional and global leadership role, achieving excellence in the field of knowledge and research, and contributing to a more effective and competitive society.

KKU's mission is to provide high-quality education and innovative research within the academic environment, to provide valuable and useful services to society, and apply the most advanced technologies associated with knowledge. All these aims are difficult to achieve in an environment with low QoS. It is hoped that this study will attract the attention of future researchers' thinking on the issue of QoS, and its relationship to student achievements at KKU and other Saudi universities. It is vital to conduct further research to ensure that increases in budgets are directed towards achieving improvements in those areas that influence perceptions of QoS and student loyalty the most. Superior QoS can inform a university's reputation and add to its appeal for students. Ideally, KKU is positioned geographically to attract students. However, the evidence presented here illustrates that changes to its service delivery are imperative if it is to enhance its reputation as a new university in KSA.

CONCLUSION

The researcher believes the topic service quality in HE directly informs students' satisfaction, achievements and the entire educational process. Thus, it is hoped the Ministry of Education will benefit from the results and recommendations made by this study and strive to provide the highest quality services to the students. In addition, this research offers a launch point from which to investigate the importance of high-quality services in HE in depth, to compare them

with HE systems in developed countries. It may also serve as a guide to future researchers wishing to conduct similar studies elsewhere in KSA. Despite the research strengths, the present study is limited in terms of generalizability, although it is anticipated that similar characteristics would be observed in other Saudi universities. Finally, in conclusion, this researcher hopes the questions addressed here will encourage others to investigate service quality in Saudi HEI settings.

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EXPLORING CULTURAL PRACTICES IMPEDING GIRLS' SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MALAWI: THE CASE OF LILONGWE RURAL WEST EDUCATION DISTRICT (LRWED)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate underlining cultural factors impeding girls' secondary education in Lilongwe Rural West Education Division (LRWED) of Malawi. Underperformance of girls in comparison to boys in their education persists. Hence the need to explore the underpinning social-cultural factors is there. The study employed a mixed methods research design. Using a multi-stage sampling approach, a sample of 295 respondents was selected from five cluster leader government secondary schools in LRWED comprising of headteachers, teachers, Form 4 female students, and parents. Data were generated through survey questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Findings indicated that key social-cultural factors affecting girls' education in LRWED include girls' initiation ceremonies, unplanned pregnancies, early marriages and poverty. Initiation ceremonies were found to contribute to early sex experimentation that undermined girls' continued interest and persistence in education through poor retention, repetition, and subsequent dropout. The findings further revealed that the absence of sex education in the schools' curriculum is the lead cause of parental dependence on local initiation ceremonies. This implies that the incorporation of cultural and sex education in schools' curricula or programs could help curb parental dependence on initiation ceremonies for girls' sex education and the challenges of early marriages and school dropout influenced by social-cultural factors.

INTRODUCTION

Girls' education has been on both global and national agendas for some time and yet the inequalities in terms of access, retention, achievement, and accomplishment persist (MoEST, 2014a; Robertson, Cassity & Kunkwezu, 2017). According to the World Bank (2009), education for girls is one of the pathways to promoting social and economic development. Therefore, increasing the level of girls' education in a country has a favorable impact on economic growth (World Bank, 2004).

Over the past three decades, the enhancement of girls' education has been shaped by several key human rights declarations and conventions and feminist theories (Agassi, 1989; Akkerman & Stuurman, 1998; Ferguson, 1985, Lorber, 2010; UN, 1948; UN,1962; UN,1966; UN,1979; UN, 2010; UNESCO, 2003). Many countries incorporate these human rights and feminist perspectives into their national goals for implementation (UN, 2015). Despite all these efforts, we still live in a world where education is characterized by extensive gender inequalities (Herz & Spurling, 2004). For example, the World Bank reports that there is a lack of progress in positive indicators on decreasing the gender gap in basic education. It is estimated that 481 million women 15 years and older lack basic literacy skills and that 64 percent of the total number are illiterate, a percentage virtually unchanged since 1990 (World Bank, 2015). Cultural practices are considered key impediments to girls' education (Chimombo, 2000 et. al; Hyde & Kadzamira, 1994; Kadzamira & Chibwana, 2000). The focus of this study, therefore, was to re-examine underlining cultural factors impeding girls' education in order to provide a more detailed account. The study adopted the 'child rights-based approach' (CRBA) as a framework of normative concepts, according to international human rights instruments (Das, 2010).

The focus on girls' education is due to persistent gender inequalities in the education sector in Malawi which threatens the country's development ambitions. Around 4.6 million people are illiterate, with approximately 50% of these within the productive age group of 15 – 60. The literacy rate for men is 81% in comparison to women at 68% (Malawi Government, 2014). Girls are particularly under-represented at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

About 43 % of the secondary school population is girls, and women constitute less than 30 % of tertiary education enrollment. More girls are prone to grade repetition and school dropout. The most commonly reported reason for girls and boys dropping out of school in the 2018 Malawi Government's Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) survey collected by heads of schools was family responsibilities followed by lack of interest. According to literature, pregnancy is one of the major reasons that contributes to girls dropping out of school in Malawi and this perpetuates poverty. Unfortunately, reproductive health is inadequately taught in Malawi's schools and does not teach young people to make well-informed choices before becoming sexually active (Gondwe, 2016). While gender parity seems to have been achieved in the lower primary grades, that is, Standards One to Four, the parity cases rapidly drop from Standard Five to Standard Eight, the last primary school grade (MOEST, 2014b). The pattern is the same for secondary education. This calls for a more nuanced understanding of the cultural factors contributing to this challenge.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate underlining sociocultural factors that affect girls' participation in secondary education in Lilongwe Rural West Education District. The research questions for the study are:
1. What are girls' beliefs about secondary education in LRWED?
2. What underpinning sociocultural factors affect the participation of girls in secondary education in LRWED?
3. What other cultural-related factors affect girls' participation in secondary education in LRWED?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

It is critical to first understand the approaches being advanced in the promotion of girls' education as this lays the basis for understanding the findings of this study. Literature on how girls' education is promoted is vast and complex. To a greater extent, it revolves around human rights and feminist perspectives. The feminists continue analyzing the challenges girls face in education to establish the root causes of their subordination and specifically, how cultural practices contribute to tMany feminist scholars have attempted to classify feminism itself in order to understand the underpinning causes of women's oppression (Agassi, 1989; Akkerman & Stuurman, 1998; Effiong & Inyang, 2020; Ferguson, 1985; Lorber, 2010). This article focuses on how cultural factors subjugate girls in their participation in education. Cultural practices and traditions, particularly in African countries, are mentioned as being among the factors that contribute to the subordination of a girl and impede her education (Effiong & Inyang, 2020).

Apart from the feminist theories, the human rights approach has also been championed the promotion of girls' education (Effiong & Inyang, 2020). Critics of the human rights approach, however, contend that two aspects that continue subordinating women stand out and these are (a) androcentric and (b) the public and private split that are embedded in patriarchy. They believe these aspects were at play when the first human rights declaration was made in 1948 and that the 'speakers' at such conferences were men and men continue dominating. Androcentric refers to the degree to which a society is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered (Johnson, 1997). This is indeed the position in most African countries where men dominate. However, women play a great role in educating girls on cultural practices than men.

In terms of the public and private spheres of human rights, it is a considered view that the public sphere is controlled by governments that are also androcentric and the public sphere regulates human rights (Parisi, 2017). With the low participation of girls in education, it is fair to conclude that governments are struggling to enforce human rights declarations to enhance education for girls. The private sphere suggests that men are in control of the private lives of the family, including women and children (Charlesworth, 1995), an idea we partially subscribe to. We believe that women control their families, particularly the girl child. We contend that men are not in full control of the private sphere.

The United Nations human rights conventions and declarations task members declare to remove discrimination in the education system which guarantees women and girls a right to education. They also emphasize children's right to education and compulsory basic education for all. Malawi subscribes to all these conventions in addition to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 11 (UN, 1989) which requires State parties to take special measures to ensure equal access to education for girls and introduce the readmission agenda for girls. There is also the African Youth Charter (AYC) Article 13 (UN, 2006) which further places emphasis on girls' readmission and cultural appropriateness to sexuality education. Subscribing to these global policies shows Malawi's long commitment and compliance to promoting girls' education among others yet participation of girls is still not satisfactory. As part of complying efforts with these global goals, Malawi has domesticated these global policies in its education policy and planning strategies to promote girls' education. The policies provide a common vision for girls' education, addressing issues that cause the girls not to effectively participate in schooling and also providing a framework of action that ensures full participation of stakeholders (MOEST, 2014a).

The reason women support cultural practices can be understood within the theory of cultural feminism Pearson, (1995 as cited in Effiong and Inyang, 2020). Cultural feminism places more emphasis on the positive qualities associated with women's roles. It is concerned with the issue of how much women are alike and different. Pearson (1995 as cited in Effiong and Inyang, 2020) further notes that cultural feminism is concerned with gender differences or similarities across some cultural settings. We find this to be a very critical ideology that can influence girls' behavior. Parents, as custodians of cultural values, lead in providing what is considered good behavior for their girl children. It is common in African culture, like Malawi, to see girls very close to their mothers than to their fathers. It has been customary to see mothers inviting counselors to initiate secret knowledge to their girls that the mothers would like their children to know. Women are therefore at the center of girls' initiation ceremonies and the expectation is that the girls are initiated to good behavior and knowledge that is expected of a woman to be.

Interestingly, the cultural relativist position on human rights allows women to select what human rights to follow and some that are followed are detrimental to the education of girls. Mayer (1995) notes that the universal position is that human rights are inalienable and held by all members of the "human family," whereas the cultural relativist position argues that "members of one society may not legitimately condemn the practices of societies with different traditions" (p. 176). This might therefore position women in a dilemma of whether to follow individual rights or group rights. Parisi (2017) observes that women may agree with the right of their cultural group to practice their culture while at the same time disagreeing with how these cultural practices affect their autonomy and agency. These could be the underlining principles that allow women to encourage girls to participate in cultural practices that are detrimental to their education. Such women adopt a cultural relativist position.

Sociocultural Factors Inhibiting Girls' Participation in Education

Malawi, like many African countries, has several socio-cultural factors that impede girls' education. Initiation ceremonies, early and forced marriages, and pregnancies are mentioned as key factors inhibiting girls' education. UNICEF (2005) discovered that a wide array of negative and harmful practices often masked as 'culture' affects the participation of girls in schools. These become the basis of social norms, practices, and rules which in turn inform masculine and feminine identities. These identities and ideologies are defended as traditional and are immutable (Plan International, 2012). We recognize that studies have identified these as key challenges to girls' education (Chimombo, 2000; Geiger, 2002; Hyde & Kadzamira, 1994; Kadzamira & Chibwana, 2000; Kapakasa, 1992; MoEST, 2014b; Plan International, 2012; Samati, 2013) and our quest is to find out whether these also contribute to low participation of girls in LRWED and attempt to find the underlining factors. We worry that the human rights approach advocated by the UN which governments continue to subscribe to in fighting for the eradication of these harmful practices bears minimal achievement, at least, in the least Developed Countries (LDC) like Malawi.

Theoretical Framework: A Child Rights-Based Approach (Crba) To Girls' Education

The study adopted the 'Child Rights-Based' Approach (CRBA) as a framework of normative concepts, according to international human rights instruments, with a special focus on the protection and promotion of human rights entitlements. The CRBA finds a strong basis in international human rights instruments, including the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child which has provisions on education *(Article. 28),* non-discrimination *(Article. 2),* development to a

child's fullest potential *(Article. 6),* participation *(Article. 12)* and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child *(Articles. 11, 15, 21, 24)* (UN, 1989). According to Das (2010), the rights-based approach necessitates a commitment to recognize and respect the human rights of children while they are in school which will contribute to increased retention rates making the process of education empowering, participatory, transparent, and accountable. It entails making education accessible for every girl and boy. It provides an environment in which all can learn effectively regardless of location and economic or social status.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study adopted a pragmatic worldview that allows the use of a mixed-methods approach to inquiry to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). According to Morgan (2007) pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data generation and analysis which this study adopted. Elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches were combined for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007).

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in the Lilongwe Rural West Education Division (LRWED) in Lilongwe district. The division has 37 public secondary schools, each having about ten feeder primary schools in the district. A multistage sampling method was used. First, purposive sampling was used to pick LRWED out of the 6 education divisions in Malawi namely Northern Education Division (NED), Central East Education Division (CEED), Central West Education Division (CWED), Shire Highlands Education Division (SHED), South East Education Division (SEED) South West Education Division (SWED) and Lilongwe Rural West Education Division (LRWED) itself.

LRWED is in a geographically rural setting where secondary schools enroll many students from feeder primary schools within the rural catchment areas. Girls' participation in this area is in the lowest quantile (MOEST, 2015) which may well represent diverse practices that impinge on girls' right to education resulting in low participation. According to Creswell (2009), in purposive sampling, the researcher selects particular elements in the research that will be representative or informative about the topic under study.

The selection of the schools was convenient and purposeful. At this stage, 5 public schools were selected. First, the schools had to be cluster leader schools because they are better equipped and well organized, making them capable of having up-to-date information to help address the research questions accessible and would also present a diverse setting. Thereafter, a sample of 145 participants composed of 5 headteachers, 40 teachers, 60 parents and 40 Form 4 female students were conveniently and purposefully sampled to participate in the study in order to generate qualitative data using Focus Group Discussions (FGD) guidelines with specific groups of participants. These homogeneous samples helped to generate in-depth information about each subgroup. This is because FGD typically involves bringing together people of similar backgrounds and experiences to participate in a group interview. The selection was governed by the need to capture information on factors that impinge on girls' education. Accordingly, headteachers as education custodians, were

key informants since they were information-rich and would provide the required information on girls' education as well as the challenges affecting their participation which would ably answer the research questions. Teachers were selected since they were well informed and had lots of experience to do with girls' education being education custodians. All parent participants selected had wards from the school registers in the 5 public schools. Finally, Form 4 female students were selected because they would be informative about the topic under study by sharing their lived experiences throughout the four years in their different schools. In the five schools, Form Teachers picked 10 girls with proven proficiency in the English language purposely, with the assumption that they would understand the research questions and answer them accordingly.

Finally, 295 participants: 110 Form 4 female students, 90 parents and 95 teachers were selected purposefully and conveniently to generate quantitative data using questionnaires with the assumption that they were "information rich" and would warrant the most diverse group of participants with similar characteristics. (See Table 1.)

Participants	Type of Participation	Total Participants
5 Key informants (Headteachers)	Interviews (qualitative)	5
50 Teachers (10 from each school)	Questionnaire (quantitative)	50
40 Teachers (8 from each school)	Focused Group Discussion (Qualitative)	40
50 Female students (10 from each school)	Questionnaires (Quantitative)	50
60 Female students (12 from each school)	Focused Group Discussion (Qualitative)	60
50 Parents (10 from each school)	Questionnaire (quantitative)	50
40 Parents (8 from each school)	Focused Group Discussion (Qualitative)	40
Total		295

Table 1   Total Participants: Composition and Research Participation

Data Generation Procedures

In this study, participants were allowed to share their experiences about what inhibits the participation of girls in secondary schools through the use of key informant interviews, survey questionnaires, and FGDs. These tools were selected because they provided quantitative data as well as qualitative data that reflected the actual feelings of the respondents, through the stories and opinions captured directly from the participants themselves. Questionnaires comprising both open-ended questions and closed questions to obtain numerical data as well as qualitative data were used. FGD guidelines assisted participants to generate qualitative data for the study to inform possible reasons that contributed to girls' low participation in education. To determine the effectiveness and

validity of the questionnaires, a pilot test of the questionnaire and FGD was carried out at one of the schools not included in the sample in LRWED. Collected data were used to modify and improve the research tools before actual administration to the sampled population.

Data Analysis

All the data generated from the field were cleaned to identify items that were wrongly responded to, spelling mistakes in the responses, and any blank spaces left unfilled by the respondents. Quantitative data on enrolments, dropout rates, and performance were tabulated to give indications of the trends and impact of the impingements on girls' participation in education. This was done through descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) generated using SPSS. Qualitative data were coded and common issues emerging from the data were clustered. Vignettes emerging from FGDs were identified to support the themes relating to the conceptual framework to provide an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The existence of good documentatio

In line with Corbin & Strauss (1990), the first step was open coding the data, an analytic process by which concepts were identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. Individual observations, sentences, ideas, and events were given names and then regrouped into sub-categories which in turn were grouped as categories. The next step was to regroup and link categories to each other in a rational manner. Finally, selectively code-selected a core category and related it to other categories. Findings from questionnaires and FGDs were triangulated and compared with what was in the available literature to find the real cause of the problem. This helped to eliminate bias and detect errors or anomalies in discoveries.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This section presents the findings in line with the research questions. The findings fall into three main categories: girls' beliefs about secondary education, underpinning cultural factors that affect girls' education, and other factors affecting girls' education as perceived by parents and teachers.

Girls' Beliefs about Secondary Education in LRWED

The first facet of the study attempted to find out girls' beliefs about secondary education. Ideas were sought from female Form 4 students through FGDs. Results from girls' FGDs revealed that girls held positive beliefs about secondary education. According to Form 4 students, secondary education is a critical stage in life when education foundations are established. It is a time when one decides what they want to be in the future, a time to make the right career choices. One girl explained;

> As a student, one has dreams and ambitions. In primary school, I used to go to school blindly, but now my eyes are open. I know that secondary education is a guide to one's future career which when lost is very difficult to retrieve. So, I work hard to realize that dream. (FGD1-Form 4 Female students 11/11/ 2015)

Generally, in line with the Sentiments in the excerpt above, girls held positive beliefs about secondary education. They argued that it helped them to pursue their goals in life, without which it would be impossible. The study shows that girls are ambitious to become nurses, teachers and medical doctors, regardless of the narrow range of career preferences in this rural setting, a common scenario in most rural areas. The lack of range in career preferences could be attributed to a lack of

role models for the girls. On the other hand, only a small percentage of their mothers work outside the home.

Despite many of the girls generally holding a positive view about secondary education, results from girls' FGDs also revealed that some of the girls held negative beliefs about secondary education. Participants explained that some girls failed to participate fully in education due to challenges they face in life including love affairs, lack of school needs, long distance to school, and peer pressure. Sometimes girls make wrong choices due to problems they face in life. Essentially, choices can destroy their future prospects in the absence of proper guidance and counseling. According to the girls, concentrating in class sometimes became a problem. One girl elaborated on the challenge:

I do not want to embarrass myself in front of my boyfriend after giving a wrong answer. Besides, boys mock us when we get a question wrong calling us all sorts of names capitalizing on our academic weaknesses and appearance calling us 'nkhwangwa' meaning ax, a word for a girl without good looks. That makes us feel bad and we stop raising our hands in class (FGD1-Form 4 Female students – 11/11/ 2015)

Such sentiments revealed that female students felt culturally out of place as they failed to compete with boys or defend themselves when boys attack them. This is a sign that school-based gender-based violence exists in LRWED, a scenario that calls for immediate action. While education requires a competitive and aggressive spirit for one to excel, most girls lacked this spirit since culture has taught them to be loyal always these patriarchal societies like LRWED which hinders their education participation.

Key Sociocultural Factors Affecting Girls' Education

This section of the paper addresses the second research objective to re-examine which sociocultural factors affected the participation of girls in education and identify the underpinning problems. Findings highlighted that key factors impeding the promotion of girls' education include initiation ceremonies for girls, early or forced marriages, and pregnancies.

Girls' Initiation Ceremonies

First of all, a question was raised to find out how cultural practices and norms impact girls' participation in secondary school education. Figure 1 presents responses from teachers.

Figure 1 shows that the highest proportion of teachers, 100% in Day schools, indicated that initiation ceremonies affected girls' education negatively. Fifty percent (50%) of the teachers in Boarding schools also thought that Chinamwali initiation ceremonies affected girls' education negatively and 42% percent of the teachers indicated that early/forced marriages left a negative effect on girls' education and 8% held other views. From these findings, it may be concluded that generally, the view is that initiation ceremonies have had a huge impact on girls' education in Day secondary schools than in boarding schools, seconded by early or forced marriages in LRWED. The effect of Chinamwali initiation ceremonies is lesser in boarding schools in the presence of boarding facilities.
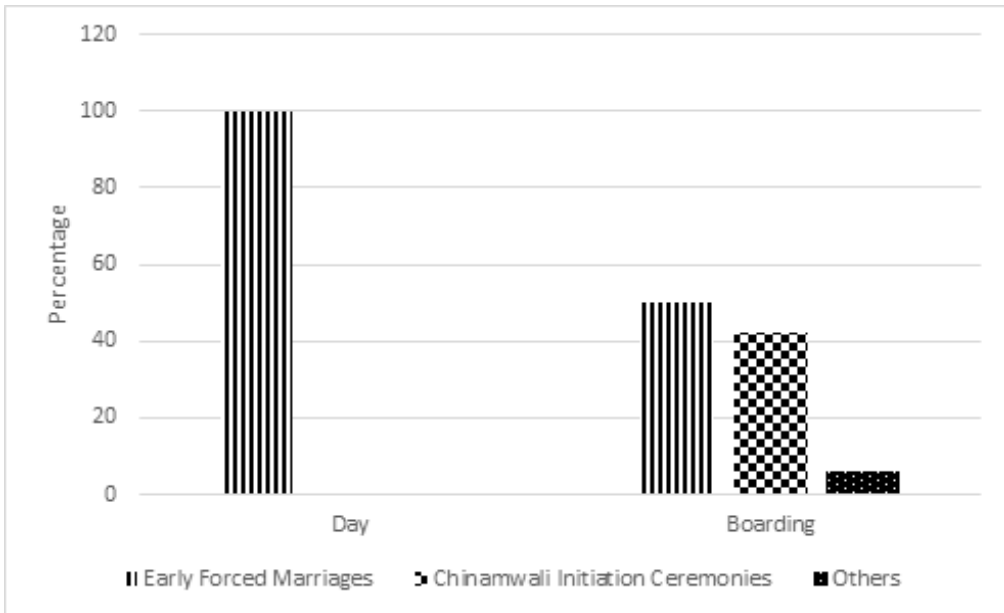
Figure 1: Harmful practices and norms affecting girls' education participation as perceived by teachers

To understand better how girls' initiation ceremonies affect girls' education, the study also explored the dynamics engaged in these practices using FGDs to understand the root causes of the problem. Findings from parent FGDs revealed that there are four types of girls' initiation ceremonies and these are: River initiation, Festive initiation, Indoor initiation, and Christian initiation. According to the parents, the type of initiation a girl attends has the biggest impact on her education.

According to the parents interviewed, River initiations take place as soon as a girl becomes of age where girls are initiated sexually. Girls are mainly provided with adult skills on how to please husbands in bed now that they are old enough. These ceremonies are conducted at the river site where initiates come in groups or individually. The initiates are taught the rules of the game, that is, sex, and go into swearing. The culture of swearing runs so deep in scope that similes are used to describe sexual organs by likening them to different objects to which recruits are told to attach sexual meanings.

These descriptions decorate and celebrate sex beautifully for the young girls making it inevitable for them to experiment once they go out of the camp as one parent articulated:

> *Swearing is their core value. It shows that you are now an expert in the field. Girls are shown graphic scenes of sex displayed by adults. They are given a concoction to make them feel high and fearless for any sexual assignment regardless of the age of the male client.* (FGD3- Parents -12/11/15)

The excerpts above illustrate the poor practices that are taken as acceptable in the community but are detrimental to girls' education. Parents elaborated that most girls who went through this type

of initiation rarely remained in school because they were ready to practice what they were taught. According to girls, their counterparts still did it because it is taken as an elevation in status so most girls proudly do it to avoid being laughed at by their peers. Uninitiated girls are called 'Okontho', in vernacular meaning 'those who do not know.' Therefore, better ways of counseling girls need to be explored to help them remain in school.

Festive initiation ceremonies, according to parents, are conducted once in a while, especially during festive times to remember a dead chief, a village elder, or during the installation of a new chief. Initiates usually camp at a graveyard which is the masquerade headquarters/camp. Parents added that at these festivities, girls are captured with or without parental or personal consent just to spice up the occasion. Initiates are counseled in the same way as their counterparts at the river initiation ceremonies emphasizing sex and swearing.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that festive initiation also brought about some form of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Men use girls as objects to please their selfish appetites. One teacher lamented as follows:

> It was in 2014 when a very smart Form 2 girl was caught by a masquerade on her way from school. She was detained for 3 days at the graveyard, gang-raped, and initiated by force. The initiation is the raping itself. Since then, her performance took a downward spiral and she soon disappeared from my classroom and never came back. Other rumors had it that she had fallen pregnant. It was later discovered that she got married. Nobody followed up on her. (FGD2-Teachers -16/11/15)

According to teacher FGD participants, when a masquerade dancer chases and overpowers a girl, she is detained in the graveyard and kept there for days or even a week. While there, she is initiated by being gang-raped and is taught how to swear and read masquerade signs to subscribe to their belief which is called buying the way. Thus, once she goes through this she becomes one of them and is never chased again.

Indoor initiation, according to parents, takes place within the confinements of a house. It is mostly preferred by parents, who dislike river initiations, but the type of counseling provided is the same except for the setting. Girls remain in the house for a whole week without going out; going through all rituals like their friends at the river site.

According to the parents FGD participants, the final type of initiation called Christian initiation was influenced by secular initiations. In the first place, converted parents did not want their daughters to undergo secular initiation which violated their newly found Christian beliefs. In this type of initiation, girls are counseled separately from boys. Initiates are normally taught life skills that help as they grow up. They do not highlight sexual skills like in secular initiation ceremonies. This is done before their baptism in the church. They usually take 2 or 3 days at a church camp.   One parent shared her own experience:

> I also went through Christian initiation. There is no swearing and no stupid things passed to children, only precepts from the Bible. They encourage good behavior, personal care, a life of prayer, and sexual purity. They warned us that if we play with boys, menstruation will cease and the tummy will swell and we will eventually die, giving us misleading information on pregnancy. (FGD 3- Parents -18/11/15)

The commonly held view in parents' FGDs was that sexual initiation practices are detrimental to girls' education because elders tend to go too deep in scope when advising tender boys and girls without considering their age which systematically discourages them from exercising their right to education and rather they start valuing sex more than education.

Early Marriages and Forced Marriages

The study also sought to find out if parents force their girls into marriage in LRWED. Parents' responses are shown in Figure 2 below.
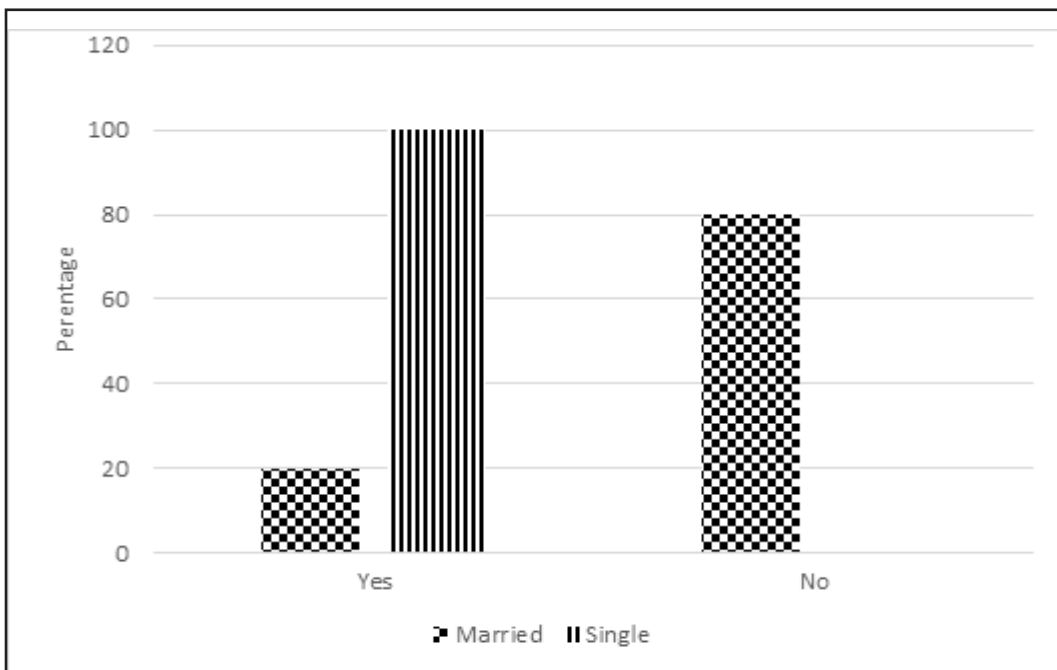
Figure 2: Response on whether parents force girls into marriage

In Figure 2 findings show that single mothers had the highest score of 100% as being those that usually send their daughters up for marriage. However, unlike single mothers, 80% of the married women indicated that they do not give their daughters into marriage. This probably means the single mothers face several challenges and may give away their daughters in anticipation of support from the girl when she is married. The married women, after experiencing marital challenges probably discouraged their girls from rushing into marriage. In addition to the above findings, it was also stated that some parents force girls into marriages due to illiteracy. A female participant explained more about this:

> *Most people who give their daughters away are illiterate. They haven't been to school and they don't know its importance. Their parents taught them that when a girl-child is mature, she must get married. To them, it is no big deal to marry off a daughter. Instances of giving*

in girls as young as 10 as payments for village bank loans to creditors are common today.
Very few parents seem to know the importance of education. (FGD3 -Parents–16/11-/15)

The excerpt is a true revelation of the huge problems girls go through in LRWED which means that more policies to help girls remain in school are needed.

Other Reasons Girls Dropout of School

Another question was asked to teachers to find out why girls drop out of secondary school. Teacher responses are given in Figure 3.
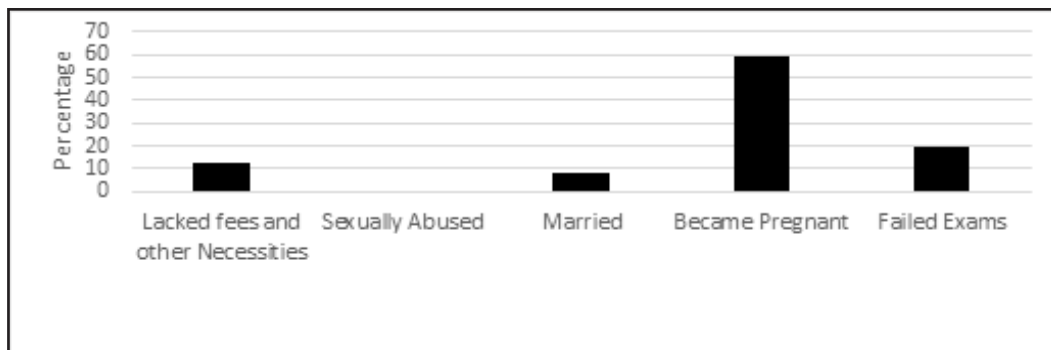
Figure 3: Boarding School Teachers' perspectives on the reasons girls drop out of school

As shown in Figure 3, pregnancy is the key factor affecting girls' education (57% in the sampled schools). Other factors impacting girls drop out of school include exam failure (21%), lack of school fees and other personal effects (14%), marriage (7%) and sexual abuse (0%). This means that pregnancy is the major cause of girls' dropout. However, the situation has changed over the years since no incident of sexual abuse was reported in the area, which is commendable.

Another question was posed to parents to find out other factors affecting girls' participation in education in the selected schools. Figure 4 below shows their responses.

Figure 4, indicates that poverty is a major factor affecting girls' participation in school at 100% for separated parents and 57% for single parents and 62% for married parents. Other factors mentioned were business activities, farming activities, and the closeness of schools to markets.

Figure 4: Parents' perspectives on factors affecting participation of girls in education

Similarly, findings from FGDs agreed with the girls' responses. The girls explained that most of them come from very poor families and are easily lured into love relat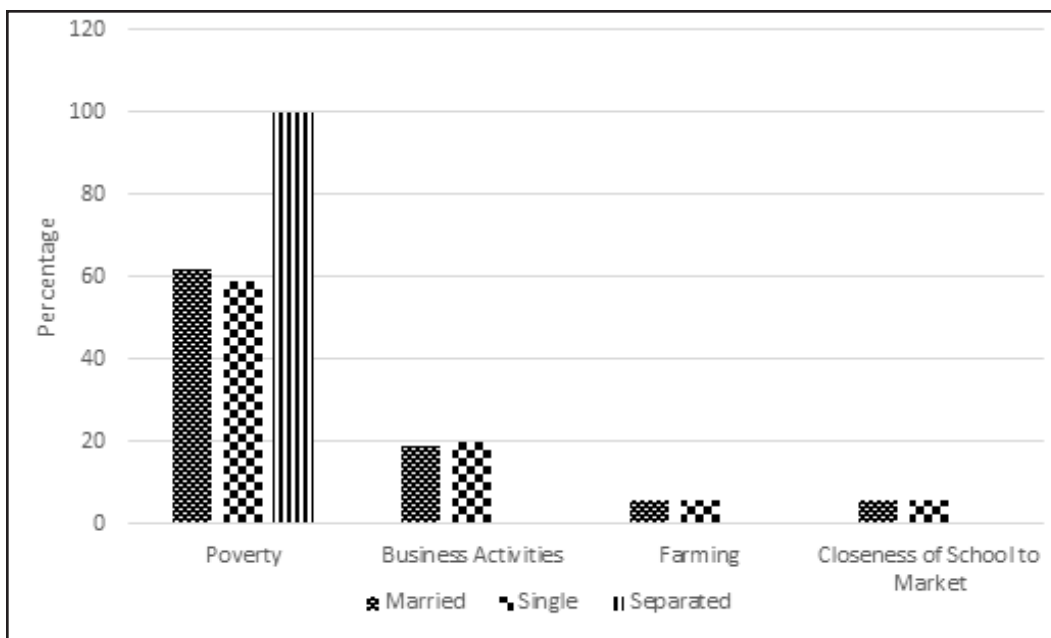ionships to get assistance from the males. For example, road contractors with money were a big asset to most girls. These men offered to do anything for these girls even paying their school fees. However, these relationships do not fully address their problems as they ended up landing into complex problems including pregnancies and sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs). When asked why this is the case when MoEST provides bursaries for needy students, the girls explained the limitations when it comes to bursaries:

> *Very few people qualify for bursaries due to conditions attached. One might have parents who are peasant farmers, but MoEST wants only orphans. For example, some of our friends left. They failed to pay school fees and find other educational and personal needs because their parents are very poor. It is not easy because things are very expensive these days.* (FGD2 – Form 4 female students -11/11/15)

According to teachers, girls became easy prey for men who flash money at them in exchange for sex, decisions they later regret. One teacher participant at a boarding secondary school articulated this well:

> *Between girls and boys, girls frequently get excuses to leave the campus to meet their sugar daddies and they don't feel obligated to follow school rules. Others are encouraged by their families to leave school dormitories and rent cheap, but dilapidated accommodation with no security. Understandably K725, 000.00 ($54) school fees per term were too much*

for very poor families. But some girls took advantage of this and decided to live in rented houses where they were free to see men who gave them money to make ends meet. (FGD2-Teachers -12/11/15)

Evidently, when girls are desperate for money, they do anything which affects their performance. They also easily drop out of school because of its delayed returns.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed at exploring underlining cultural factors impeding girls' education in LRWED. On the premise of the literature reviewed, many girls experience difficulties to access, participating and completing their secondary education. Therefore, the study sought to establish the level of interest students have in education in LRWED, and thereafter determine the cultural and other factors affecting girls' education. The findings revealed four key issues which will be the focus of discussion in this section.

To begin with, findings revealed that a greater proportion of girls have a positive mind about secondary education and believe that education can help them in dealing with a myriad of challenges they face. The girls believe they can achieve their aspirations in life through education. This implies that many girls in LRWED schools would complete their education if provided with a conducive environment and protection. This aligns with the aspirations of the UN articulated in the declarations and conventions to protect and help girls achieve their educational goals. Through the Child Rights-Based Approach to girls' education, girls therefore ought to be empowered to participate fully in education. Despite the positive view towards education among girls, the revelation that some girls still do not consider education as an instrument that can help deal with their problems and rather opt for marriage needs to be taken seriously. As will be discussed later, the cultural relativist position encourages embracing cultural practices (Parisi, 2017) hence this could be a cultural effect.

Furthermore, the study's findings agree with other studies (Chimombo, 2000; Hyde & Kadzamira, 1994; Msamati, 2013; Plant International, 2012) that cultural practices hinder girls' education. Even in LRWED, initiation ceremonies and early marriages remain key factors that hinder girls' education. Furthermore, poverty and illiteracy of parents are also mentioned as underlining factors that influence girls to turn to early marriages and pregnancies. Parents tend to focus on resources (money) they could get from marrying off their girl child to pay their debts and single mothers are at the forefront of this practice. A study by Plan Malawi in 2012, also established that generally in Malawi parents run away from their responsibility by marrying off children without considering their age. The same study elaborated that some parents marry off young girls to pay off village loans and society watches. Muyengwa (2014) also found that early marriages affected education as young girls continued to suffer from emotional, physical, and psychological abuse which can be classified as statutory rape. Early marriages lead to increased vulnerability with the added responsibility of looking after the family. Most parents also took marriage as a norm without considering the age of the girl. The practice of parents forcing girls into marriage as in the context of this study also signifies that women take it as a norm. This aligns with the cultural feminism perspective which emphasizes the roles that women play in society. Hence, a girls' marriage in this case is a norm that is highly valued. Such acceptances unnecessarily stand in the way of girls' education. This shows that the child rights-based approach to the promotion of girls' education

which aims at assisting girls to develop their full potential and participate in education freely is still far from attainment (Das, 2010; UN, 1989).

The evidence from this study illustrates that initiation ceremonies and early marriages are inextricably related in that the former could fuel the latter. As can be observed from the deep narratives on the type of knowledge transmitted in the initiation ceremonies, such knowledge can encourage premarital sexual activities that can end up in early marriages. Pregnancies leading to early marriages could be the consequences of the knowledge that is provided in the initiation ceremonies. Girls that are forced to 'swear' that they are now grown up to have sex with any man and taught how to please men in bed are enticed to have sex instead of concentrating on their education. Girls cannot participate fully in their educational endeavors in such an environment. The practice is harmful in that it negatively affects the lives of girls and is at odds with the universal declaration against harmful social and cultural practices that impede the best interests of a child. Save the Children (2005) argued that cultural norms, beliefs, and practices constrain girls' education; especially in developing countries since societies value tradition which constrain girls from making their own decisions and expressing their own opinions, affecting girls' participation in education in the long term. The girls in this current study could not express themselves but were forced to believe in society's norms. Thus, these cultural practices as observed by Davison & Kanyuka (1990) only prepare girls to be good housekeepers and mothers and do not guide them in future career prospects which is retrogressive.

Therefore, the cultural relativist approach to human rights could be playing out itself here where we see women leading the initiation ceremonies and selecting what type of human rights to follow. They are not paying attention to human rights that advance girls' education by choosing to practice initiation ceremonies that might harm girls and deter them from education (Paris, 2017). Probably women counselors in LRWED do not believe or fully understand that human rights are inalienable and this is impeding girls' education. As the findings of this study indicate, illiteracy could also be fueling the neglect of children's human rights by women. In fact, the practice might be rooted to an extent because some girls sometimes feel elevated in status after initiation as this is the perception promoted by the women. Girls may want to align themselves with the perception shared by the majority of women in line with their culture and probably feel satisfied as evidenced by a few girls who indicated that they do not find education to be effective.

The study also revealed that there is a knowledge gap existing between sex education being provided to the girls in government schools to that being provided to girls in the initiation ceremonies. Probably the government curriculum on sex education is lacking some information that the women counselors find important. As noted in the views of the participants of the study, some suggested that the counselors should also emphasize the importance of education in the advice given to girls in initiation camps to help girls remain in school. This demonstrates a disjuncture in the knowledge being provided in government schools and initiation ceremonies. LRWED secondary school girls would be in dilemma as to what type of knowledge to subscribe to. They will have to be convinced of the benefits of sex education provided by the government likewise that provided in the initiation ceremony and let them make an informed decision.

Finally, the findings in this study suggest that although appropriate laws exist, they are both non-consequential and ineffective as they seem not to adequately guard or deter children from early

marriages. It is also apparent that children do not obtain the required protection given the fact that some of their parents push for early marriages to acquire wealth. Such a view is also supported by the literature (Malawi Human Rights Commission, 2007; UNICEF 2005). The government together with the parents has the responsibility of protecting a girl child through the implementation of these policies. The Malawi Education Act, Malawi National Education Policy, and the National Education Sector Investment Plan are among key policy documents outlining key actions to be carried out in enhancing girls' education. The human rights declaration and conventions ought to be taken to the private sphere of family life, sensitizing girls on their rights to meet their aspirations.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION FOR PLANNERS

The aim of the study was to explore underlining cultural factors impeding girls' education in LRWED. The persisting inequality between girls and boys in access and advancement in their secondary education prompted this study. While the available literature indicates sociocultural factors as key factors that impede girls' education and this study sought to re-examine in more depth whether this applies to LRWED specifically. The study improved understanding of the underlining cultural factors impeding the participation of girls in education. In line with the study's first objectives, findings revealed that girls are zealous about education in LRWED and this implies that providing good conditions and protection for the girls would help them attain their goals. Thus, enabling girls to fully participate in their education is investing in their future progress and better standards of their life with multiplier effects.

Cultural practices like initiation ceremonies continue to be the main impediment to girls' education. The deep narratives on how knowledge is transmitted in the initiation ceremonies expose a gap in knowledge between what public schools provide in terms of sex education versus the sex education the girls acquire through the initiation ceremonies. The knowledge provided in the initiation ceremonies while helpful in some sense, also promotes premarital sex thereby hindering girls' participation in education. Given the difficult circumstances girls face as manifested in the study findings, it is not surprising to see girls' education participation in the study area falls in the lower quantile. If girls could be assisted to exercise their educational rights advanced by Child Rights Approach, they would reap the benefits of secondary education and their ambitions would come to pass. Low girls' participation in secondary education in LRWED can therefore be attributed to underpinning initiation conversations that include the required knowledge as perceived by the parents.

This study's findings have implications in terms of informing gender mainstreaming of educational policy and planning provisions that will improve girls' secondary education participation in the study area. This understanding would be used as a benchmark from which to start new actions to remove the specific underpinning cultural practices by engaging all stakeholders at the family, community, and school levels. Only when societies learn to appreciate girls' educational rights, and what sexual knowledge to be provided to girls would it help girls to participate fully in secondary education just like boys. Therefore, we expect the outcomes of this study to encourage educational planners to help families, communities, and schools to prioritize girls' education.

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HELPING MINORITY PARENTS IN EDUCATING THEIR CHILDREN: PERSPECTIVES OF HONG KONG TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to solicit teachers' perceptions of helping minority parents in educating their children. When teachers have a positive perception of minority parent involvement, they are more willing to take initiative toward helping the minority parents. A quantitative approach was taken in this study with the use of a researcher developed instrument. All the 30 teachers of a minority school in Hong Kong participated in the study. Results of data analysis indicated that teachers perceived minority parents not contributing enough to helping their children's study. Teachers indicated that they were willing to work with minority parents to get them involved in education However, the teachers admitted that they need to do more on their parts too.

INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong, formerly a British colony, is now a Special Administrative Region of China. It has a current population of 7.5 million consisting mostly of Chinese from the Province of Guangdong. Out of the entire population, 300,000 are Muslims who establish themselves as a unique minority group in Hong Kong. They consist of various nationalities of southeast Asia. About 20,000 of the Muslim families in Hong Kong are 'local boy' families, Muslims of mixed Chinese and South Asian ancestry descended from early Muslim South Asian immigrants. In the new millennium, the largest number of Muslims in the territory are Indonesians in which most of them are female foreign domestic workers. Hong Kong has currently about 30 Islamic schools, scattered around Kowloon and New Territories. The development of these schools has been remarkably fast because of the rapid population growth and the special religious, social and educational needs of the minority students. Some of the affordable minority parents would prefer to send their children to special schools for minority children even though they are qualified for free public schooling.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Minority Parent Involvement

Lasky and Karge (2011) found that minority parents placed a high value on education, yet this might not be enough to generate meaningful parental involvement. Chen (2020) claimed that "parents of minority are less likely to be involved in their children's education than parents of non-disadvantaged children. If they receive adequate training and encouragement, however, [they] can be just as effective as other parents in contributing to their children's academic success."

Florida State Department of Education (1988) conducted a study to examine ways for increasing the involvement of minority parents in educating their exceptional children. The report was focused on parents of exceptional children from low socioeconomic families. The parental involvement issues identified involved questions of policy, resources, commitment, and implementation. The department recommended drastic measures to address the needs for more adequate policy and coordinated services, more adequate funding, more effective use of training materials, and greater sensitivity and understanding of culturally diverse families.

In a literature review, Kim (2009) reported findings on the school barriers that prevent minority parents' participation in their children's school in the United States. The school barriers were

identified as: (a) teachers' perception about the efficacy of minority parents, (b) teachers' perception concerning the capacity of minority parents, (c) teachers' beliefs in the effectiveness of parental involvement and developmental philosophy, (d) teachers' self-efficacy in teaching effectiveness, (e) school friendliness and positive communication, (f) diversity of parental involvement programs, (g) school policies, and (h) school leadership. Minority parents may also have long work hours, hold multiple jobs, and have other family responsibilities that conflict with school or meeting hours (Christianakis, 2011; Cooper & Christie, 2005). According to Turney and Kao (2009) the barriers for minority parents to school involvement were the length of time they stay in the United States and their English language ability.

Sattler (2014), referring to the 2012 U.S. National Center for Education survey of parents' involvement in their children's education, reported that black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and "other, non-Hispanic" students were more likely than white students to do homework outside of school. Black parents are more likely than whites to have a designated space in the home for children doing homework. Seventy-one percent of African-American and 69 percent of Latino families compared to 65 percent of white families checked on their children's homework assignments. White, black, Latino, Asian, and "other, non-Hispanic" parents attended regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences at comparable rates (77, 76, 73, 72, and 78 percent respectively). However, according to Christianakis (2011), parental involvement in schools that have a large minority student body is lower than it is in predominately White, non-Hispanic, middle-class schools, where parents tend to be more actively engaged in school activities.

Chee and Ullah (2020) studied the home-based parental involvement amongst Pakistani families in Hong Kong. Data were drawn from home visits and semi-structured interviews amongst Pakistani parents and children in Hong Kong. Results of the study show that the involvement of these parents only seems less visible because it is largely based at home rather than in schools. The minority parental involvement was influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors separating school from home and setting expectations for children according to the parents' own experiences.

Cooper et al. (2010) claimed that a leadership plan for minority parental involvement must be built around the theory of community practice. This practice comes out of social theories that describe learning as a participatory process of a community in which minority parents, teachers, administrators, and students work together to engage in meaningful actions to create a social environment for learning. Student learning can be enhanced through sharing and communication among the shareholders. Minority parents could play an important role in curriculum development and implementation (Leddy, 2018).

Teachers' Perspectives of Parent Involvement
Ho and Cherny (2018) analyzed data from the U.S. Education Longitudinal Study of 2002. They found that teachers were less likely to perceive minority immigrant parents as involved as native-born White parents after parents' self-reported involvement was accounted for. Also, teachers viewed themselves as the lead and main figures in young minority students' learning process whereas they regarded the parents only as one of the factors that assist the children in learning.

The study of Kalayci and Ergül (2020) was aimed at exploring English language teachers' perceptions about the role of parental involvement in the children's English language learning process. The results of the study showed that the teachers did not use any specific strategy to foster parental involvement even though they were aware of the significance of parental involvement.

Herman and Reinke (2017) declared that, for children with academic and behavioral problems, teacher perceptions of involvement was essential to minimize their negative outcomes. In a group randomized trial, they examined the effects of the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management program (IY TCM) on teacher perceptions of contact and comfort with parents. The findings of the study indicated that teacher training could alter teacher perceptions of parent involvement patterns.

Kenner (2018) sought to learn how teachers perceived the influence of parental involvement on the academic success and IEP goal progress for students with disabilities. The survey revealed that special education teachers compared with regular classroom teachers perceived parental involvement to have a greater impact on the special education referral process and academic progress of students with educational disabilities

Gilbert (2017) examined the perceptions of teachers and parents and factors that developed and maintained parental involvement among middle and high school parents. The results of data analysis showed that teachers' perceptions toward parental involvement impacted parents' willingness to be actively involved in school activities. He also found that teacher professional development could improve teachers' sense of self-efficacy regarding appropriate interactions with parents.

Bartolome, Mamat and Masnan (2020) studied the kindergarten teachers' perspectives of parental involvement in Philippines. Results revealed that teachers felt positive about home-school communication, collective in-school engagement, support of structural at-home learning. These results can be used as an input in promoting to encompass the contribution of teachers in planning, developing, and evaluating parental involvement programs.

Lattimore (2013) studied the relationship between parent involvement and teacher attitudes toward such involvement. Results of this study indicated a statistically significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of parental involvement and their teaching practices to encourage and increase parental involvement. This study contributed to positive social change in the area of parent-teacher partnerships. The outcomes have shown that professional development is needed on ways to work efficiently with all parents to increase student academic achievement.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Epstein (2002) identified six types of parental involvement in educating their children: (1) parenting knowledge and skills; (2) communicating between home and school; (3) volunteering at school and in the community;(4) supporting student learning at home; (5) involvement in decision making and advocacy; (6) collaborating with the community. These types of parental involvement have provided schools with a clear path to proceed with the advancement of school and family collaboration. This study is intended to examine teachers' perceptions of minority parental involvement in education. Epstein's six types of parental involvement serve as a framework of the areas in this study that teachers would perceive as minority parental involvement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Major Research Question: How do teachers involve minority parents in educating their children?
Sub-Research Questions:
1. How do teachers define parental involvement at home and in school?
2. How do teachers perceive school support of minority parental involvement?

3. What are the teachers' self-perceptions of their willingness and effectiveness in working with minority children and parents?
4. How do teachers perceive the minority parents' background and efficacy in educational involvement?
5. What strategies do teachers employ in helping minority students and promoting parental involvement?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A review of current literature shows that there is an abundant volume of manuscripts and studies on parental involvement in school activities and its impact on children learning. However, studies on minority parental involvement in education especially through teachers' perceptions has not been thoroughly studied. Therefore, this study is intended to call the attention of educators to the challenges these minority children are facing in their learning processes and how teachers could help these minority children learn through involving their parents. Additionally, this study is a needed piece of research to enrich the scarcity of studies on teachers' perception of minority parent involvement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is quantitative in nature with a survey design approach. "A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population…." (Creswell, 2009). Information is collected from a group of people in order to describe some aspects or characteristics (such as abilities, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and/or knowledge) of the population…...." (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). This study took a minority school as a case by surveying all the teachers in the school to solicit their perceptions of minority parental involvement and the education of their children. The survey research design fits the purpose of the study.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in an Islamic primary school in Hong Kong. The school has a student body of approximately 350 from Kindergarten to Grade 6. Ninety percent of the students are minority students from South Asia, 10% are Chinese students. Among the Chinese students, about half of them are local residents from Hong Kong and the other half are cross-border students from Guangdong Province, China. The minority students' families are from Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, and India. English is the official language of instruction at school. English language and Chinese language are mandatory courses for students to take. Chinese students speak Cantonese and/or Mandarin at home while minority students speak English, Vietnamese, Laos and other native languages at home. In all the student families, at least one or both parents are English speaking. The school curriculum is classified by academic discipline: English Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies, Physical Education, Art and Music. All courses are mandatory. All the 30 teachers are fully certified with bachelor degrees in their respective teaching fields. They are all local Chinese teachers. A few of them have Islamic religion. All the fathers in the families work. Many mothers stay at home as housewives. Some mothers choose to work part-time. Most of the minority families are Islamic by religion. A few of them are Christians. Among the Chinese students, religion in the family varies from Buddhism, Christianity to no religion. About 42.1% of the students reported belonged to single parent families and 20.3% were from low-income

class. Some parents (about 20%) sent their children to attend at least one prep-schools (private tutoring, cram school or school-after-school) in addition to their regular school hours.

Participants

All the thirty teachers of the school agreed to participate in the study by responding to the teacher perception of parental involvement survey. Most of the teachers (73.1%) held a Bachelor Degree. About half of the teachers (50%) had 11-20 years of teaching experiences. Most of them (46.3%) had taught in their current grade level for 6 – 10 years and 57.7% of them had 6 – 10 years of experience in teaching minority students. Their class size ranged from 24 to 27 minority students.

Research Instrument

The instrument in this study was researcher constructed since no existing instrument could collect the data needed to achieve the purpose of the research. The instrument consists of three major parts. Part 1 is intended to solicit participating teachers' demographic information. Part 2 was designed to seek teachers' perceptions on parental involvement issues: teacher efficacy, administrative support, teacher willingness, parent efficacy, family background, and teacher strategies. A five-point Likert scale was used for teachers' responses to 50 items. Part 3 was designed with open-ended questions to solicit additional facts and teacher understanding of parental involvement. The instrument was reviewed by five teachers of minority students in another school to verify its validity. The teachers' comments and recommendations were mostly related to the use of proper language. They were well received and taken to modify the instrument. The 50 Likert scale items were reduced to 43 items as recommended. The modified instrument was pilot tested for reliability with 12 teachers of minority students in another school. Cronbach Alpha was used to test all the 43 Likert scale items for internal consistency. The test yielded an overall Alpha of 0.87 with section alphas of 0.84 (teacher efficacy), 0.89 (administrative support), 0.90 (teacher willingness), 0.86 (parent efficacy), 0.85 (family background) and 0.89 (teacher strategies). Results of the Alpha testing indicate that this revised instrument is reliable and acceptable in collecting data for this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

After the research proposal with the modified research instrument was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the researcher's university, the research instrument and the research participation consent form were distributed with the help of the school principal to each of the 30 teachers of the school requesting them for participation in the study. All 30 teachers agreed to participate in the study and returned the completed instrument in two weeks. All the quantitative data were input into SPSS Version 27 program for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics of means, standard deviations and percentages were used for data analysis by section of the research instrument. Qualitative data as answers to the open-ended questions were compiled, coded and examined for emerging themes.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are reported in the order of the research sub-questions in the following:

How do teachers define parental involvement at home and in school?

The teachers perceived that when parents were involved in their children's learning at home and in school, they were engaged in the following activities:
- Provide books and materials for children to go to school (agreed by 19 teachers).

- Send children to school on time (agreed by 19 teachers).
- Teach moral values and family values (agreed by 20 teachers).
- Help their children with homework (agreed by 21 teachers).
- Communicate with teachers about problems/achievement of their children (agreed by 20 teachers).

How do teachers perceive school support of minority parental involvement?

All the teachers' responses of the survey items in the Administrator Support section of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. In a 5-point Likert Scale, an overall mean of 3.859 was calculated. The items receiving the highest rating were "Administrators are fair with minority students and families" (M=4.039), "School provides culturally diverse materials for learning." (M=4.00), and "Administrators care about minority students and families." (M=4.00). The item receiving the lowest rating was "School provides teacher training opportunities to work with minority students and their families." (M=3.50). All the items in this section received above average ratings indicating that the teachers perceived strong administrative support of minority parental involvement. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics – Teacher Perception of Administrative Support

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I can talk to administrators about minority student Issues.	30	3.00	5.00	3.769	.652
Administrators are trying hard to involve minority parents in school activities.	30	2.00	5.00	3.846	.785
School provides teacher training opportunities to work with minority students and their families.	30	2.00	5.00	3.500	.648
School provides culturally diverse materials for learning.	30	3.00	5.00	4.000	.632
Administrators are fair with minority students and families.	30	3.00	5.00	4.039	.528
Administrators care about minority students and families	30	3.00	5.00	4.000	.490
Overall Average	30			3.859	

What are the teachers' self-perceptions of their willingness and effectiveness in working with minority children and parents?

All the teachers' responses of the survey items in the Teacher Willingness and Teacher Efficacy sections of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. In a 5-point Likert Scale, an overall mean of 3.952 was calculated in the Teacher Willingness section. The items receiving the highest rating were "I treat minority students equally." (M=4.423), "I learn to get to know minority cultures." (M=4.077), "I encourage my students to share their culture and background in class." (M=4.077), and "I am willing to help minority children to improve their grades." (M=4.192). The item receiving the lowest rating was "I feel minority parents are interested in knowing me." (M=3.50). All the items in the Teacher Willingness section received above average ratings indicating that the teachers perceived themselves to be very willing in working with minority children and their parents. (See Table 2.)

All the teachers' responses of the survey items in the Teacher Efficacy section of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. In a 5-point Likert Scale, an overall mean of 3.764 was calculated in the Teacher Efficacy section. The items receiving the highest rating were "Parent involvement can help minority students achieve." (M=4.231), "I am motivated to meet the needs of minority students." (M=4.115), and "I plan my lessons so minority students can understand." (M=4.115). The item receiving the lowest rating was "I can help disadvantaged minority students." (M=3.50). All the items in the Teacher Efficacy section received above average ratings indicating that the teachers perceived themselves to be very confident in working with minority children and their parents. (See Table 3.)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Teacher Willingness

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I learn to get to know minority cultures.	30	2.00	5.00	4.077	.744
I encourage my students to share their culture and background in class.	30	3.00	5.00	4.077	.628
I treat minority students equally.	30	3.00	5.00	4.423	.578
I am willing to help minority students to improve their grades.	30	3.00	5.00	4.192	.634
I feel comfortable talking with minority parents about their children.	30	2.00	5.00	3.883	.711
I feel minority parents are interested in knowing me.	30	1.00	5.00	3.500	.860
I ask minority parents about their children.	30	3.00	5.00	4.000	.693
I explain written documents to minority parents.	30	1.00	5.00	3.462	.905
Overall Average	30			3.952	

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics – Teacher Efficacy

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I am motivated to meet the needs of minority students.	30	3.00	5.00	4.115	.431
I have adequate skills to meet the needs of minority students.	30	3.00	5.00	3.731	.604
I can work with minority parents on parenting and child rearing practices.	30	2.00	5.00	3.539	.706
I can effectively impact minority student achievement.	30	3.00	5.00	3.654	.629
I plan my lessons so minority students can understand.	30	3.00	5.00	4.115	.588
I can help disadvantaged minority students.	30	3.00	4.00	3.500	.510
I provide opportunities for parents to help their children's homework.	30	1.00	5.00	3.231	.863
Parent involvement can help minority students achieve.	30	3.00	5.00	4.231	.815
Overall Average	30			3.764	

How do teachers perceive the minority parents' background and efficacy in educational involvement?

All the teachers' responses of the survey items in the Parent Background section of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. In a 5-point Likert Scale, an overall mean of 3.169 was calculated in the Parent Background section. The items receiving the highest rating was "The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background" (M=3.731). The item receiving the lowest rating was "Minority parents and I share the same educational goals of the children." (M=2.882). All the items in the Parent Background section received only average ratings indicating that the teachers perceived that the minority parents did not substantially contribute to their children's learning. (See Table 4.)

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics – Teacher Perception of Parent Background

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Minority parents value their children's education.	30	1.00	5.00	3.115	.993
Minority parents are involved in their children's home education.	30	1.00	5.00	2.923	.796
The amount a student can learn is primarily related to the family background.	30	1.00	5.00	3.731	.962
Minority parents and I share the same educational goals of the children.	30	2.00	4.00	2.885	.711
Families of minority students support teachers' efforts.	30	1.00	5.00	3.192	.849
Overall Average	30			3.169	

All the teachers' responses of the survey items in the Parent Efficacy section of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. In a 5-point Likert Scale, an overall mean of 3.385 was calculated in the Parent Efficacy section. The items receiving the highest rating were "Most minority parents cannot effectively teach their children." (M=3.808) and "Minority parents do not have time to work with their children on homework assignments." (M=3.423). The item receiving the lowest rating was "Minority parents want more information about the school curriculum." (M=2.923). All the items in the Parent Efficacy section received from average to above average ratings indicating that the teachers perceived that most minority parents were not prepared or did not have time to help their children learn. However, they were ready to work with teachers in helping their children. (See Table 5.)

What strategies do teachers employ in helping minority students and promoting parental involvement?

All the teachers' responses of the survey items in the Teacher Strategies section of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. In a 5-point Likert Scale, an overall mean of 3.427 was calculated in the Teacher Strategies section. The item receiving the highest rating was "I contact minority parents to inform them of students' behavior problems." (M=3.923). The item receiving the lowest rating was "I use minority parents as school volunteers/classroom helpers" (M=2.651). Most of the items in the Teacher Strategies section received above average ratings indicating that the teachers perceived that they were enthusiastic in laying out different strategies in helping minority children and their parents. (See Table 6.)

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics – Teacher Perception of Parent Efficacy

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I encourage parents to work with their children in their native languages.	30	1.00	5.00	3.269	.962
Most minority parents cannot effectively teach their children.	30	2.00	5.00	3.808	.895
Minority parents do not have time to work with their children on homework assignments.	30	1.00	5.00	3.423	.987
Parents want more information about the school curriculum.	30	1.00	5.00	2.923	.977
I help minority parents decide on the educational goals for their children.	30	2.00	5.00	3.500	.648
Minority parents do not interrupt my instructions to their children.	30	1.00	5.00	3.385	852
Overall Average	30			3.385	

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics – Teacher Strategies

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I can train minority parents to serve as representatives in decision-making bodies.	30	1.00	5.00	3.154	.925
I contact minority parents to know about student accomplishments.	30	3.00	5.00	3.615	.571
I contact minority parents to inform them of students' academic performance throughout school year.	30	2.00	5.00	3.500	.707
I contact minority parents to inform them of their children's behavioral problems.	30	3.00	5.00	3.923	.628
I provide minority parents with information on the grade program requirements.	30	1.00	5.00	3.577	.857
I provide make-up work for minority students returning from absences.	30	1.00	5.00	3.615	.804
I provide students with homework they can do with their families.	30	2.00	5.00	3.539	.811
I provide information parents can use to talk to students about the importance of schooling.	30	1.00	5.00	3.423	.945
I use minority parents as school volunteers/classroom helpers.	30	1.00	5.00	2.654	.892
I inform minority parents of health and social service programs at school and/or in communities.	30	1.00	5.00	3.270	.827
Overall Average	30			3.427	

Results of data analysis also indicate that the teachers believed in the benefits of home visits to minority families in understanding the family culture, background and expectation of their children. However, only about half of the participating teachers admitted that they were only able to make one to five home visits last year and the other half of the teachers did not make any home visit last year at all.

Additional Findings from Open-ended Questions

Teachers' responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed by foci and themes. Results of the data analysis yielded major significant themes in the following:

Teachers' perceptions of home visits

All the teachers perceived teacher home visits to families of minority students were beneficial to teacher-parent relationship. They agreed on the benefits of home visits as

- understanding children's background,
- understanding children's family culture,
- understanding how much the families value their children's education,
- understanding what the families want from teachers and school, and
- understanding what the families expect of their children.

Teachers' perception of parental responses to school activities

The teachers indicated that almost all the minority parents attended scheduled parent-teacher conferences and about 50% of them volunteered themselves to help with school committees and school events. Additionally, in every class, there was an average of 5 to 10 parents who were ready to help teachers in class activities. The teachers reported that approximately ten parents in each class were capable of helping their children with homework, but only three to four of them actually did it.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are significant. In addition to confirming some of the results of previous studies, this study has explored interesting new grounds worthy of special attention. These findings could serve as the basis for planning of strategies to get minority parents involved in their children's education.

The teachers in this study perceived that what the minority students learn was related to their family background. The finding suggests that minority students with a disadvantaged background and limited resources are negatively affected in their academic learning. The study by Chee and Ullah (2020) also reflected that minority parental involvement was influenced by family socio-economic and cultural factors separating school from home and setting expectations for children according to the parents' own experiences.

Results of this study show that most of the minority parents were perceived by the teachers to be either not knowledgeable or not have the time to work with their children on homework assignments. The findings of Kim's study (2009) also reflect similar points. Kim reported on the school barriers that prevent minority parents' participation in their children's school in the United States. These barriers include teachers' perception about the efficacy of minority parents and teachers' perception concerning the capacity of minority parents.

Data analysis of this study indicates that teachers perceived many minority parents to be very helpful in participating in school activities. Most of them attended parent-teacher meetings to discuss their children's learning and behavior in school and at home. Sattler's study (2014) in the United States also claimed that minority parents were as active as White parents in getting involved with school functions. However, the finding of this study is contrary to that of Chen's study (2020) and Ho and Cherng's study (2018) which disclosed that parents of minority were less likely to be involved in their children's education than parents of non-disadvantaged children.

Teachers perceived that getting the minority parents involved in their children's education would certainly help their children's learning (Bartolome, Mamat & Masnan, 2020; Ho & Cherny, 2018; Kalayci & Ergül, 2020;). However, the teachers in these studies did not use any specific strategy to foster parental involvement even though they were aware of the significance of parental involvement. Data analysis of this study has certainly yielded similar results. Teachers in this study perceived themselves to be very positive in minority parents participating in school activities but they also admitted that they did not do enough to promote minority parent involvement including home visits. Gilbert (2017), Herman and Reinke (2017) and Lattimore (2013) also found that teacher training workshops offered by the school or the school district could help teachers change their attitudes and behaviors toward minority parent involvement. The findings of this study yielded similar results.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIELD PRACTICES

With reference to the findings of this study, recommendations are made for practitioners to act at both the school and district levels. Teachers recognize the significance of minority parent involvement but did not actively participate in getting minority parents involved. It is probably because they do not know enough of the minority culture to properly work with the minority parents. It is recommended that training sessions be conducted to prepare teachers to learn the minority cultures and to initiate strategies to work with minority parents. At the same time, workshops need to be organized for parents to attend so that they can learn the significance of involvement in their children's study. The parents need to acknowledge their role as heads of their families to encourage and support their children to learn. Additionally, special class sessions need to be planned and delivered to students with the purpose of helping them understand how they can work with their parents at home in completing their learning assignments. While school administrators and teachers need to learn the minority cultures to help the minority children learn, minority parents also need to learn the culture of the society they are living in for the children's development in the future. Cooper et al. (2010) claimed that a leadership plan for minority parental involvement must be built around the theory of community practice. This makes sense. This practice describes learning as a participatory process of a community in which minority parents, teachers, administrators, and students work together to engage in meaningful actions to create a social environment for student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Much has been written about the significance of parental involvement in the education of their children. Some studies have been focused on parental involvement in minority families with confirmation of positive impact on student learning. Future studies need to be focused on how teachers could help minority parents to learn how to help their children learn. Emphasis needs to be placed on the strategies parents could employ in helping with their children and how they could work with teachers for the academic improvement of their children.

In the employment of methodology, future studies on minority parental involvement need to be broadened in the data collection from participants to cover wider geographical areas and different school levels. Additionally, an examination of the parents' perspective is important in understanding what they feel about participation in school activities.

CONCLUSION

Research has continuously claimed that minority parental involvement with education would help the minority children learn. Teachers' perception studies have also documented that teachers recognized the importance of involving minority parents who could help their children to complete their home assignments. However, teachers did openly confess that they did not do enough to promote the minority parent involvement. Teachers have expressed their willingness to work with minority parents to get involved in education. They need to be supported with all the resources and strategies through workshops conducted by the school or the district office so that they can perceive themselves confidently to be capable of initiating the call for minority parent involvement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

The findings of this study have indicated that teachers perceived the minority parents' value on education of their children. This is an important mindset of the teachers in planning to help minority parents and their children. Educational planners could also learn from the findings of this study that the involvement of minority parents does not only cover participation in school activities. Helping minority parents how to help their children in the completion of their home assignments is also important in the children's learning process.

Another aspect of the findings of this study that relates to educational planning is the recognition of community effort in helping the children. Schools need to consider planning for a student learning community to include the stakeholders: teachers, school administrators, school curriculum planners, students and parents. Together we can plan for the best that benefits the minority children.

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