

From Meaning-Making to Life Sustaining: A Narrative Ethnography of Students' Out-of-school Daily Practices

By

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B.A. Education., University of Dar es Salaam, 2013

M. A. Education., University of Dar es Salaam, 2018

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/ Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱ SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Students' out-of-school daily practices play a central role in shaping their lives, yet literacy-centred frameworks often marginalize them. This study examines how such practices relate to academic learning and personal development in a rural secondary school in Ukerewe District, Tanzania. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, I conducted a narrative ethnography with 10 participants: four students, four parents, and two teachers. Data were generated through ethnographic conversations, focus group discussions, and participant observation, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. I used the multiliteracies framework to examine students' meaning-making and identity construction across modes and cultural contexts. Throughout the study, I worked within the Heshima framework, an ethical Afrocentric approach to engaging with Black people and people of African descent. Findings show that students participate in diverse everyday practices, including household and economic work, academic activities, and the arts. Schools privilege school-based academic practices, such as remedial classes and private tutoring, while often overlooking the educational significance of farming, animal care, and domestic work, despite the ways these practices sustain students' participation in schooling. Although this hierarchy is partly shaped by pressures associated with high-stakes examinations, I argue that it also reflects limited theoretical attention to how students' out-of-school daily practices sustain schooling. While the multiliteracies framework explains meaning-making across modes and contexts through design, representation, and identity, my analysis suggests that it offers less conceptual space for understanding how life-sustaining practices enable participation in schooling. I therefore propose Life-Sustaining Practices (LSP) as a framework for understanding how practices grounded in survival, care, and reciprocity sustain schooling while also giving rise to meaning-making and design.

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List of Abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CBC	Competency-Based Curriculum
CBT	Competency-Based Teaching
ESR	Education for Self-Reliance
LSP	Life Sustaining Practice
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TIE	Tanzanian Institute of Education
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge various people whose support made this research journey possible. My sincere gratitude goes to the four students and their parents, as well as two teachers, who shared their stories about various out-of-school daily practices within their contexts. Your invaluable insights enabled this research to make a meaningful contribution to the field of literacy and education.

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Kathy Sanford, for the guidance and unwavering support. Your door was always open to my visits, questions, and discussions, and it was through these conversations that I came to realize how my own experiences were a valuable source for this research. Your honest welcome and continued mentorship from the moment I entered the University of Victoria have helped me reach this point in my academic journey. I am forever indebted to your guidance, which has helped shape me into a more well-rounded researcher.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Doris Kakuru and Dr. Tanya Manning-Lewis. Dr. Kakuru, thank you for standing by me every time I sought your guidance. Dr. Manning-Lewis, thank you for your unconditional support. Together, you have been a remarkable team, providing invaluable guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback that made this research journey possible.

I am sincerely thankful my parents and family members for thriving in Tanzania while I was away in Canada. Your resilience and prayers inspired me to persevere even during challenging times. I am particularly grateful to Dar es Salaam University College of Education for providing the financial support that enabled me to enroll in the doctoral program at the University of Victoria.

Dedication

For my parents, whose guidance and the values and responsibilities learned in our household helped shape who I am.

And for my siblings, with whom I shared everyday work and experiences that fostered a powerful sense of survival, care, and belonging.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore how multiliteracies are enacted in diverse contexts, particularly in rural Tanzanian communities, and to examine the disconnect between their formal learning and the learning they engage in outside formal schooling. Overall, in this research, I draw on the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), and the competency-based teaching paradigm as conceptualized in Tanzania (Tanzania Institute of Education, 2007) to advance two important arguments.

First, I argue that authentic learning that connects students' classroom learning with their everyday lives, as envisioned by the Tanzanian competency-based curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023), can only be achieved if classroom learning recognizes what students do in their daily out-of-school practices. Daily out-of-school practices, as used in this study, refer to activities that students engage in at home or in their communities after school, including on weekends and holidays. In this, my research has found how some 21st-century and other academic skills that schools seek to develop through classroom learning are being cultivated by students in their rural contexts daily through these practices.

Second, I show the inadequacy of a multiliteracies framework in understanding some human practices. While a multiliteracies framework construes literacy as a social practice and a matter of self-identities in which students are “designers of (their own) social futures” (New London Group, 1996, p. 89), my research shows that what some students do outside school is not just preparation for the future, but an important part of their current lives. This challenges the analytical priority given to meaning-making and design within multiliteracies. While these concepts help explain how students construct

meaning through everyday practices, they offer less conceptual space for understanding practices that students undertake primarily to sustain family life and enable their participation in schooling.

The multiliteracies framework, first described by the New London Group (1996), plays a significant role in expanding literacy as a human practice that goes beyond the reading and writing of print text. The New London Group scholars argued that, in the modern world where communication is no longer limited to print, literacy encompasses multimodal meaning-making (images, gestures, digital tools), social and cultural communication, and the design and transformation of meaning in everyday life. These scholars proposed an approach to literacy education, which they called the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). The pedagogy of multiliteracies includes four principles, also known as “knowledge processes” or “things you (as a learner) do to know”: experiencing/situated practices, conceptualizing/overt instruction, analyzing/critical framing, and applying/transformed practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, pp. 83-88). These scholars emphasize that these processes are not linear. However, taken together these knowledge processes operationalize learning as a semiotic cycle in which knowledge is understood as moving across representational process.

The core assumption of the multiliteracies framework is that literacy, as a human practice, can be understood as a process of meaning-making or semiotic activity across modes and contexts (Kress, 2014; New London Group, 1996). The problem with this assumption is that, in practice, everyday routine, work, social interactions, and play are analyzed primarily as opportunities for literacy development, that is, as a meaning-making effort or as a process of designing a certain future. In this sense, the framework privileges the semiotic dimension of human practice, treating practices as valuable primarily insofar as they contribute to representation and meaning making. I push back

against this semiotic dominance over human practices by showing that some students' out-of-school daily practices, usually perceived as 'literacy', serve purposes beyond meaning-making, as students engage in them to support life purposes and community continuity. I argue that while the multiliteracies framework illuminates the multimodal and socially situated meaning-making embedded in many of students' out-of-school practices, it remains analytically insufficient to capture students' practices that are primarily organized around survival, care, and relational responsibility.

I propose a theory of Life-Sustaining Practices (LSP). This is a synthesis rather than a replacement theory. It brings together some perspectives from social reproduction theory (Baker & Cairns, 2021), practice theory (Rouse, 2007), and decolonial theory (Mignolo, 2007; Sanford et al., 2024) to understand students' out-of-school practices that are primarily mediated by life-sustaining purposes, while meaning-making and designing future identities come as secondary. In other words, LSP does not replace meaning-making; it explains the material and relational conditions that make certain forms of meaning-making necessary and possible.

The multiliteracies framework explains how students create meaning and identities through multimodal practices, while LSP explains how these practices contribute to survival, care, and social responsibility, including enabling participation in schooling itself. Thus, I advocate combining these two frameworks to offer a clearer understanding of students' out-of-school lives by linking meaning-making to the material conditions that shape it. In this sense, I align with scholars such as Sanford et al. (2024), who work within the multiliteracies perspective, while also recognizing that local communities in their respective contexts engage in practices that serve life-sustaining purposes beyond meaning-making, which deserve recognition and respect.

Why students and their daily out-of-school daily practices?

This study is informed by my childhood and youth experiences, which I now recognize as a rich tapestry of learning opportunities, sustained effort, and curiosity. As a young boy, I spent most of my daytime combining schoolwork with numerous out-of-school activities. My siblings and I were directly engaged in several activities, always working alongside our parents. I remember spending my out-of-school time tending our crops and livestock, making charcoal, and caring for my younger siblings. In my spare time, I had my own out-of-school schedule, playing various games with peers, making and repairing simple fishing nets, and engaging in self-initiated fishing.

As I reflect on this experience, I am aware of the tensions regarding whether children should work alongside schooling. This tension is evident in international policy contexts that view work as incompatible with schooling, as in Article 32 of the United Nations' (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Under Article 32, the UN calls for all State Parties to protect children from “any work that interferes with the children’s education and their holistic growth” (p. 13, emphasis added). The UNCRC seems to take a protective stance against children’s engagement in work. This stance has been reinforced by subsequent research (e.g., Hamenoo et al., 2018; Le & Homel, 2015; Lee et al., 2021) reporting children’s engagement in work as a barrier to their schooling. These studies show that children’s engagement in work affects their health and overall personal growth, thereby interfering with their learning at school. Also, it is shown that by working, children are engaging in “hidden forms of child labour” (e.g., Webbink et al., 2012, p. 640). This is a critical tension. However, while the UNCRC focuses on protecting children from exploitative labour, which I strongly acknowledge is a global concern, including in Africa, where children have been reported to work under exploitative conditions (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Tshabangu, 2018), it leaves limited room

to examine forms of children's work that may contribute to learning and sustain family and community life.

Nevertheless, in another international policy context, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990), through Article 31, states that, considering children's varying capacities, "every child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society" (p. 23). This framing not only acknowledges children's roles in family and community life but also allows us to examine their everyday practices beyond a protection-only perspective. Research on children's participation in family and community responsibilities (eg., Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Masabo, 2016; 2021), affirms that children can integrate work and schooling.

The tension between these two policy frameworks is that the UNCRC protects children's schooling from work, while the ACRWC recognizes children's responsibilities within family and community life, which may include doing work. Such tension is reinforced by the fact that each stance is supported by research evidence. Amid this tension, I reflect on my own experience and situate my understanding of childhood within its cultural construction, while also recognizing children's evolving capacities. Varadan (2019) conceptualizes evolving capacities as a dynamic process of maturation and learning through which children gradually develop the skills and understanding needed to exercise their own rights. Articles 5 and 14(2) of the UNCRC initially indicated that children exercise these capacities under parental direction (United Nations, 1989). In the view of UNCRC, children's autonomy is not detached from parental control but develops progressively under such control. However, Varadan (2019) argues that the concept has evolved to recognize that children become increasingly able to exercise their rights autonomously as they mature. This means that while protecting children from harmful labour remains important, it is equally important to provide opportunities for children to

exercise and develop their evolving capacities. Research likewise suggests that children's evolving capacities should be recognized and integrated into classroom practices (e.g., Bjorklund, 2022; Ruscoe et al., 2025). If schools are to recognize these capacities meaningfully, such recognition should extend beyond school-based measures of achievement, such as test scores, to include capacities developed in children's everyday lives, including skills acquired through household responsibilities.

Along the same lines, Abebe (2019) advocates understanding children's evolving capacities and overall agency as operating on a continuum of dependence and interdependence, shaped by their interactions with their socio-cultural contexts. As Abebe notes, children can act, but their actions are shaped by the limits and conditions they live in. To understand them, according to Abebe, we must look at both their daily lives and the wider social systems around them.

Reflection on my childhood experience, activities such as farming, household responsibilities, and animal care were not experienced solely as child labour, but part of a continuum of participation that contributed to both my development and my family's survival. This experience has also been reflected in several studies across Tanzania (e.g., Ayo, 2022; Masabo, 2016, 2021). This continuum is not fixed, and it may become strained when children's responsibilities are intensified, externally imposed, or begin to interfere with schooling, highlighting how the boundaries between participation and exploitation are socially negotiated in context (Abebe, 2019). This reflection suggests the need to further examine how children's engagement in out-of-school practices can generate skills and knowledge that may enrich their learning in school and their personal growth.

The reason I recall these childhood experiences is that I learned some of my most valuable lessons outside the classroom. Helping my father with charcoal making, for

instance, taught me basic entrepreneurial skills, perseverance, and adaptability. Farming practices fostered discipline and time-management, which supported my focus in school. Taking care of my siblings developed my sense of care, compassion, and social responsibility. Today, I understand these experiences to have shaped my identity as a resourceful and responsible educational actor, capable of serving as a caregiver and steward of the environment.

These experiences should not be read as uniformly positive; as discussed earlier, they are part of a continuum in which participation may support development under certain conditions but become burdensome or constraining under others (Abebe, 2019; Tshabangu, 2018). Put differently, it is important to understand “under what specific conditions children thrive or struggle” (Howery et al., 2025, p. 255). Reflecting on my childhood, I recognize how out-of-school practices have shaped my learning at school and my sense of identity today. I share this account to highlight that children (students in this study) learn in multiple ways beyond school through the practices they engage in, yet such learning is rarely recognised within formal schooling (Eshach, 2007; Pugh & Bergin, 2005).

The connections between home and school routines are often overlooked in traditional educational practices and research (Yelland et al., 2023). In this context, such traditional practices reflect a reductionist orientation, often associated with dominant Euro-Western educational traditions, that separates classroom experiences from their broader social and cultural contexts (Bleazby, 2013). I concur with scholars (e.g., Bleazby, 2013, 2015; Urrieta, 2004) who convincingly show that educational curricula based on traditional practices often focus on abstract ideas that are seen as universal, but they do not always connect with students’ real-life experiences.

One danger of schooling practices that are detached from students' everyday experiences is that formal schooling may privilege the institutionally valued literacy practices, thereby marginalizing other forms of knowing and positioning schooling as a colonizing project (Baidoo-Anu & DeLuca, 2023; Freire, 1970; Tusasiirwe, 2024). Colonizing project in this sense means having educational practices that reinforce unequal hierarchies of knowledge in schooling. In my view, this kind of hierarchy can further contribute to socio-economic inequalities by limiting access to job opportunities for individuals whose literacy practices are not validated by the school system. Educational curricula organized around this inequality logic tend to erase diverse voices, limiting their capacity to challenge inequalities reproduced in schooling and in their everyday lives (Bonney & Shad, 2025). This logic is evident in contemporary education systems, in which standardized national curricula seek to achieve predetermined benchmarks through uniform high-stakes assessment (Ball, 2026). According to Ball, the dominance of standardization compels students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to conform to a single model of educational practice. Ball notes that this conformity comes at the cost of suppressing critical thinking and creativity. I further argue that it also privileges formal schooling as the dominant legitimate form of learning, marginalizing other ways of knowing and learning. Consequently, learning that occurs outside school is often regarded as contributing little to either academic achievement or the development of valuable life skills.

My experiences of primary and secondary schooling were characterized by a struggle to merge academic (school-based) and home-based practices. One significant impact was a shift in attitudes toward school literacy practices and my engagement in household responsibilities. My family and I came to view schooling as more important

than non-academic tasks at home. I felt this way because my parents gave me less housework so I could spend more time reading and studying.

My siblings, who had not yet reached the secondary school level, were the ones doing these family-organized activities: farming, animal care, making charcoal, and caring for our younger siblings. It was implicitly clear from my family's perspective that academic practices carried more weight than household tasks at home, as far as my academic career was concerned. It was a serious 'alienation'. However, the most paradoxical reality was that I depended heavily on the money earned from these family activities to meet my financial needs at school. To me, this was a paradox of its kind in that I was being trained to devalue the household economic activities upon which I depended to survive in what I was being taught to value most, school.

In my first teaching experience as a secondary school English literature teacher, I had many opportunities to interact with students during literature lessons, debating sessions, and both informal and formal conversations. As a literature teacher, I had a passion for helping students studying English literature develop reading habits. I assumed that having the habit of reading would enhance students' academic achievement. However, I was disappointed that students showed no interest in reading any texts other than the books they expected would help them pass exams. This made me reflect on students' learning goals and how classroom practices in Tanzania are overly academic-centric, with each teacher's central goal being to enable learners to pass the colonial national standardized exams. By colonial national standardized exams, I mean high-stakes testing that narrows students' holistic learning to scores and grades from 'A' to 'F' (Schneider & Hutt, 2014). Through informal conversations, many students pointed out several out-of-school daily activities they considered worthwhile to do at home, in addition to reading notes for their school subjects given by their teachers. This made me

look back at my experience of combining school and household responsibilities as a secondary school student, and I realized that my participation in various activities at home had significantly contributed to my academic success and to how I identify myself today.

When I joined the University of Dar es Salaam as an instructor in English literature pedagogy, my interest in exploring this matter deepened. As a university instructor, I have experienced the implementation of course outlines with little consideration of preservice teachers' out-of-school daily practices. There is limited research on how well the Tanzanian teacher education system and in-service teacher programs prepare both preservice and in-service teachers to develop the capacity to utilize students' out-of-school daily practices across levels of schooling. This lack could be one of the rarely explored reasons for the limited effectiveness of learning in the competency-based curriculum in the Tanzanian context. I envision my study offering theoretical insights into implementing the Tanzanian competency-based curriculum, which, in turn, can enhance classroom learning practices that value students' daily life experiences.

During my doctoral studies at the University of Victoria, I attended a course that blended classroom discussions with Google Classroom. On this digital platform, my classmates and I shared weekly written reflections and personal narratives. Google Classroom served as an additional communication tool that enhanced our engagement with the course content. In my view, this reflects the multiliteracies framework's emphasis on meaning-making through multiple modes of communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005; Karkar Esperat, 2024; New London Group, 1996). At the same time, my study shows that such forms of engagement do not capture all aspects of students' lives, particularly practices organized around survival and care, which require a different analytical lens.

Research question, purpose and sub-research questions

Educators and researcher develop research questions in different ways; one common approach is by reflecting on personal experiences and specific existing social phenomena (Bryman, 2016). My personal story highlights the significance of out-of-school practices in rural African contexts. It raises important questions about the relationship between out-of-school daily practices and students' classroom learning outcomes. In other words, it brings us to what Green & Luke (2006) describe as a central question in education: what counts as learning and where it happens.

The purpose of this study was therefore to examine how educators can not only bring students' out-of-school daily practices into the classroom to create meaningful learning experiences but also value those practices to help students succeed academically, connect with who they are, and support their present and the futures they imagine for themselves. This study aimed to expand the concept of literacy to encompass not only traditional reading and writing but also highlight the value of practices that students engage in outside of school. My focal question was: How do students' out-of-school daily practices contribute to their learning and personal development? The sub-research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What out-of-school daily practices do students engage in within their homes or communities?
2. What value do students gain from these out-of-school daily practices?
3. How can these out-of-school daily practices be used to support students' classroom learning and personal growth?

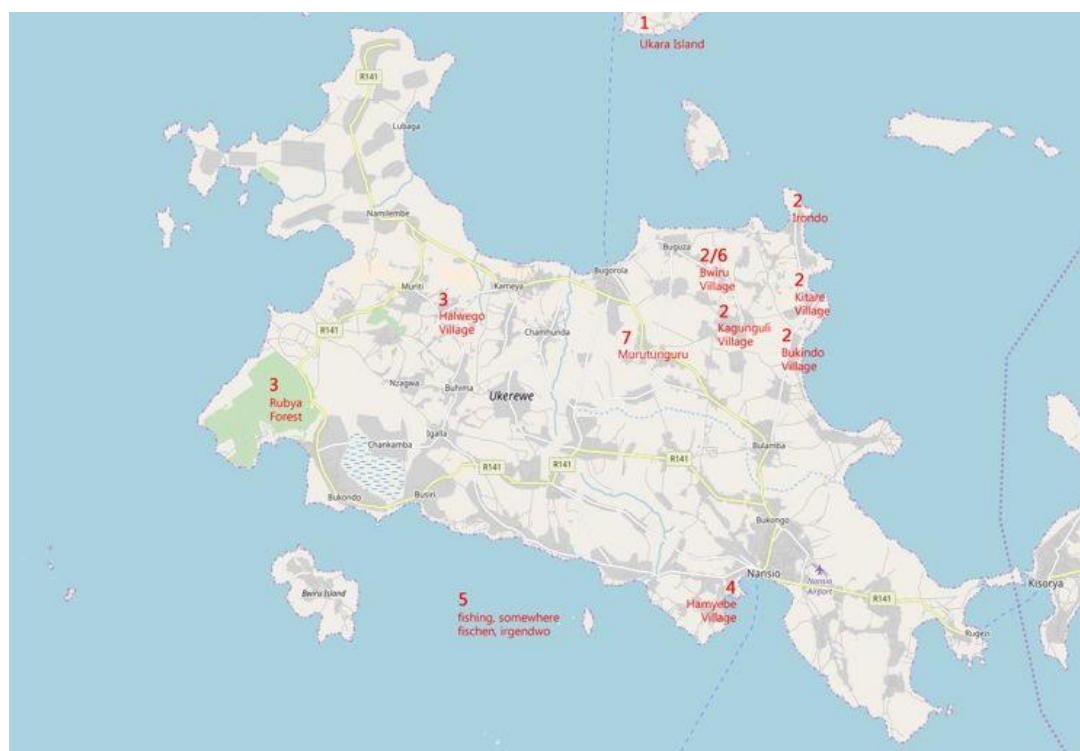
Research Context

This study was conducted in the United Republic of Tanzania. The United Republic of Tanzania was formed on April 26, 1964, following the union of two

independent countries: the Republic of Tanganyika and the People's Republic of Zanzibar. The country is in East Africa and shares borders with eight countries: Kenya and Uganda to the north, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west, and Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique to the south. The eastern coastline of Tanzania touches the Indian Ocean. Secondary education is not a union matter between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which means that each country remains with complete autonomy over its educational policies and curricula. Where Tanzania is mentioned in this document, it specifically refers to Tanganyika (Mainland Tanzania), hence the educational practices being discussed here should be understood as not including those in Zanzibar.

Figure 1

Map of Ukerewe Island



(Source: Google images <https://tinyurl.com/ycxrjbkh>)

The current structure of the education system in Tanzania is 1+6+4+2(1+) +3(+)
(Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). This denotes one compulsory year of pre-primary school, six years of primary education, four years of

ordinary secondary education, two years of advanced secondary education or a minimum year of vocational education for students who take the vocational path after ordinary secondary, and a minimum of three years of tertiary and/or higher education. Kiswahili is both the national language and a language of instruction from pre-primary school to standard six of primary education. English is used as the language of instruction from lower secondary to tertiary levels of schooling. Tanzania's secondary education curriculum is designed to embrace competency-based teaching practices. This is a learner-centred approach in which students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes through active learning, enabling them to apply what they learn in real-life situations and to prepare for further education, self-employment, or work (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023; Tanzania Institute of Education, 2007).

As this study drew on my childhood and youth experiences, it was conducted in the place where I was born, in Ukerewe District, Mwanza Region, on the northern Mainland of Tanzania. Ukerewe is one of the eight districts of the Mwanza region and is the largest island in Lake Victoria. It is 45km from Mwanza City and covers an area of 530 square km (200 square miles), comprising 38 islands and a population of 387,815.

The locals in Ukerewe District engage in the fisheries sector as small-scale fishers. In this way, they participate as boat owners, fish-catching crews, transporters, traders, and manufacturers of fishing gear (Mazigo, 2017). According to Mazigo, women specifically participate through a specialized fish-processing practice known as “kusombangese,” (p. 244), which means collecting, sun-drying, and packaging a type of fish called dagaa (see Figure 13). Mazigo describes the locals who engage in the fisheries sector in Ukerewe as “constrained wealth creators” (p. 240), because they work to support their households while facing systemic barriers, such as poor infrastructure and a lack of access to credit from financial institutions to upgrade their fishing production. The locals who are not

engaged in the fisheries sector engage in petty trade, small-scale animal husbandry, and subsistence farming.

Secondary school students in Ukerewe spend their school days from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. After classes, they engage in various activities at home, including homework, farming, fishing, and caring for animals. My initial assumption was that these activities provide students with practical skills that support both their schooling and their families' well-being. I entered the study area, referred to here as Nzengo village for anonymity, with this perspective, and the findings largely support this view. This assumption was anchored in my own experience growing up in the area, where my engagement in farming practices, and much more my continuous reflection on this experience, has recently helped me realize that I was not only developing agrarian skills like planting, weeding, harvesting, and preserving crops, but also contributing to my family's survival, both of which supported my schooling.

In the context of Nzengo village, and for the purposes of this research, I understand literacy as the knowledge, skills, and identities developed beyond alphabetic reading, writing, and numeracy following the multiliteracies perspective (New London Group, 1996). I also conceptualize everyday activities such as reading, writing, farming, crafting, drawing, and fishing as human practices that involve meaning-making while also sustaining survival, care, and social responsibility.

Prominent scholars such as Brandt & Clinton (2002) and Gee (2010, 2023) construe literacy as a ubiquitous force that shapes how people live, interact, and function in society. Their view of literacy is that “nearly all everyday activities in the contemporary world are mediated by literacy and that people act within a textually mediated social world” (Barton, 2001, p. 100). Their argument is that everyday life is increasingly mediated by texts, technologies, and symbolic systems (Cope & Kalantzis,

2015; New London Group, 1996). My study complicates this position by showing that in some rural home contexts, practices are first organized around survival, care, and responsibility, while literacy, textual or semiotic mediation, plays a secondary role. This means that while literacy mediates many dimensions of contemporary life (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015), it does not universally organize everyday practice, as in Nzengo village, life-sustaining needs, rather than textual mediation, remain primary.

My research aligns with previous research, which argues that students' out-of-school daily practices have educational value that can enrich classroom learning (Lim et al., 2021; Snaza, 2019). However, my research cautions that not all everyday practices are primarily oriented toward literacy (i.e., meaning-making, designing social futures and identities through engagement with various media); some exist to serve human care, survival, and responsibility, hence understanding them may require an alternative analytic lens beyond meaning-making models. Drawing on my experience, I can imagine that students' engagement in farming may foster experiential knowledge that supports formal biology learning, particularly regarding plant growth, soil conditions, and water conservation. However, in this study, such practices are understood not merely as academic resources but as life-sustaining activities central to social organization and survival.

Chapter summary

This chapter has introduced the purpose of the research. It has also outlined the context in which the study is situated, describing how my personal experiences, from childhood through my current professional engagement, provide a strong foundation for the study. In addition, the chapter has introduced the theory of life-sustaining practices, which this research offers to the survival, relational and ethical logics that mediate students' out-of-school daily practices, a theory to work alongside the multiliteracies

framework. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, presents the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, and identifies the knowledge gap that this research addresses.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework & Literature review

Overview

This chapter covers the theoretical discourses that guided this study: the competency-based teaching paradigm, the pedagogy of multiliteracies, experiential learning theory, and the theory of life sustenance practices. These four theories intersect in that they all value students' interests, allow for flexible learning practices, and provide learners with practical learning experiences relevant to the socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. They offered an appropriate lens for understanding students' out-of-school practices and their values, and how these values can be used to enhance students' academic learning and personal growth. Also, in this chapter, I review previous studies that have informed my understanding of the research topic and my research rationale.

Competency-Based Teaching Approach

Globally, the competency-based teaching approach stems from the behavioural theory and is primarily concerned with observable learning outcomes (Bloom, 1968; Ford & Meyer, 2015). What is being observed are the competences, which means “the knowledge and skills that a student is expected to have after completing a program” (Chappell et al., 2020, p. 9). Practices for assessing students' learning in a competency-based teaching environment are expected to depart from what scholars (i.e., Furuta, 2021; Sanford et al., 2023) have described as traditional teacher-led instruction and aptitude assessment. These are paper-and-pencil exams, which, nearly six decades ago, Bloom (1968), an influential figure in education, pointed out that they overlooked students' individual differences, leaving them unable to develop the required competencies. Bloom argued that aptitude tests overlooked the fact that every learner has the potential to acquire educational competency if the learning process uses diverse instructional

materials and methods to meet each learner's varying needs and learning styles and focuses on formative assessment practices.

Later developments in competency-based teaching saw scholars such as Krathwohl (2002) revising Bloom's Taxonomy, originally developed in 1956 as an educational assessment framework. As Krathwohl noted, the revised framework aimed to provide educators with a blueprint for aligning classroom content, learning activities and assessment practices with specific competencies they expected their students to achieve. This educational framework has been widely used in competency-based curriculum contexts to date. The framework guides educators in designing tasks, from simple recall to higher-order skills, that enable learners to demonstrate the mastery of what they have learned. The highest skill that educators expect the learner to demonstrate, as far as this framework is concerned, is creating, which implies the ability to design, construct, or produce an expected educational outcome (Krathwohl, 2002). It is worth noting that the designing goal sits at the heart of the multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996), one of the important theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

Today, the competency-based teaching paradigm stresses providing students with academic credentials that align with labour market demands (Moon, 2007). This has also raised the need to align competency-based learning practices with digital competencies. Additionally, there is an emphasis on personalized learning approaches in the competency-based learning environment (Anderson, 2018; Patrick et al., 2016). These scholars argue that competency-based curricula that embrace personalized learning approaches provide educational experiences aligned with individual students' needs, strengths, and interests. This stresses that in a competency-based teaching approach, a focus on students' interests is crucial. As such, prioritizing learners' agency in the learning

process is increasingly crucial within the competency-based teaching paradigm (Haring et al., 2019).

However, understanding learners' agency requires educators to view children as autonomous social actors whose life experiences are shaped by the contextual factors surrounding them (Abebe, 2019; Esser et al., 2016). As Abebe suggests, "children[students] are both dependent and independent at the same time, and their agency should only be researched in the social-cultural and political-economic contexts in which they are located" (p. 12). In other words, students' effective learning depends heavily on how educators contextualize classroom practices to the ways students construct their meanings of life within their socio-cultural contexts.

Competency-based teaching approach in Tanzanian curricular documents appeared in the early 1990s when the Tanzania Education and Training Policy (TETP) of 1995 articulated that one of the aims of secondary education was to "promote the development and *competency* in linguistic ability and effective use of communication skills in Kiswahili and in at least one foreign language" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995, p. 6). In 2005, achieving competency became the overarching mission of the secondary school curriculum following the official reform of its teaching paradigm from a content-based to a competency-based model. In this move, competence was (and remains to date) construed as "what the learner should be able to do as the outcome of teaching and learning" (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023; Tanzania Institute of Education, 2007, p. 13).

Since its introduction in 2005, competency-based teaching has become not only a buzzword but also a topic of interest among scholars in Tanzania. Unfortunately, various investigations (ie: Kigwilu & Mokoro, 2022; Komba & Mwandaji, 2015; Msamba et al., 2023; Ndomondo et al., 2022) reveal that competency-based teaching in Tanzania has

failed to enhance students' effective learning. These studies attribute this limitation to teachers' lack of both conceptual knowledge and the requisite skills to plan and teach using this approach, an unsupportive learning environment, and an overemphasis on passing national standardized examinations.

Considering the above-mentioned perceived barriers, I concur with Altinyelken's (2010) observation that many pedagogical reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa fail due to a lack of contextual relevance. Additionally, I agree with Sakata (2021), who, in investigating the use of a learner-centred principle, argues that CBT is a Western-developed concept and suggests that applying it in the Tanzanian context must consider realities such as large class sizes and limited resources. One reality in the Tanzanian CBT context is that students possess various cultural repertoires that teachers rarely draw upon to support students' effective learning (Adamson, 2024). Research on the Tanzanian context underscores that neglecting students' linguistic experiences and silencing their perspectives, which in turn, contributes to their academic failures (Adamson et al., 2024; Adamson & Brown, 2024; Qorro, 2013).

Despite these challenges, Tanzania still views the competency-based curriculum as an educational approach to achieving both personal and national goals. For instance, in its Five-Year Development Plan (2026/27-2030/31), Tanzania treats a competency-based curriculum as a strategic tool for linking the country's workforce skills to a modern, knowledge-based economy by reforming education and skills training to close workforce gaps and support innovation (National Planning Commission, 2026). This shows an emphasis in education policy to develop practical competencies that link schooling to labour market and innovation demands.

However, within this body of literature, relatively little attention has been paid to how students' everyday out-of-school activities influence their learning. Therefore,

research on how students' learning experiences of the competency-based curriculum, especially learning through the learner-centred principle in CBT, could be enhanced if classroom practices were designed around students' out-of-school literacy in rural settings was important. In this context, my research examined students' out-of-school daily practices to assess the values that support students' classroom learning and daily lives at Nzengo Secondary School, a rural secondary school in Tanzania.

Experiential Learning

To support a broader understanding of learning beyond formal schooling, Kolb (1984) developed a theory of experiential learning. Kolb's work is significantly influenced by the ideas of Dewey (1938), Lewin (1946) and Piaget (1952), whom he calls "the foremost intellectual ancestors of experimental learning theory" (p.12). Kolb (1984, p. 5) explicitly states that experiential learning theory heavily draws on Dewey's ideas that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experiences and education". Kolb goes on noting that this also aligns with Piaget's idea that "(human) intelligence is a product of (and manifests through) interaction between the person and his or her environment" (p.12, emphasis added). Also, Kolb built on Lewin's (1946) idea of action research, which Kolb perceives as situating actions into practices. Drawing on these ideas, Kolb construes learning as "a continuous process in which knowledge is created, recreated through the transformation of experience" (p.38). Kolb emphasizes that only when learning is conceived as a holistic and adaptive process can it bridge school and out-of-school life experiences. Conceived this way, the experiential learning framework serves as an appropriate lens for examining how students' out-of-school daily practices can enhance their learning of academic content.

Experiential learning is a cyclical process comprising four stages: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting (Kolb, 1984; Stock & Kolb, 2021). These authors explain

that this cycle suggests that when individuals engage deeply with their experiences, it can spark curiosity and genuine interest. Thus, the authors emphasize that the quality of the experiencing stage is vital for effective learning, as it can either enhance or impede the learning process depending on the level of engagement and reflection involved.

Alheit (1999) acknowledged the value of informal learning (such as out-of-school daily practices) in experiential learning theory but critiqued the theory for lacking clarity on how educators can integrate such experiences into contemporary educational practices, which tend to limit human life experiences to teachers' pedagogical practices. Alheit advocated for a shift from traditional educational paradigms to more flexible, learner-centred approaches that recognize the importance of informal learning and the role of civil society in shaping educational experiences. Also, Fenwick (2000) criticized experiential learning theory for failing to attend to the complexities of identity, power, and the socio-cultural contexts in which learning occurs. Fenwick suggested that understanding how learning occurs through the lens of experiential learning requires examining how individual cognitive learning intersects with broader social dynamics.

Recent developments in experiential learning theory focus on addressing social justice and equity needs for learners from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds (Gross & Rutland, 2017). As Gross and Rutland note, this is achieved by creating meaningful learning experiences that foster active engagement and critical reflection, enabling students to construct knowledge and develop a strong sense of identity. Experiential learning provides hands-on experiences that help students connect abstract concepts to real-world contexts and apply them in their own lives (Karbeyaz & Kurt, 2024). Experiential learning grounds classroom literacy practices in students' lived experiences and requires students to engage in reflective learning. This framework and competency-based teaching provided an appropriate lens for understanding students' out-

of-school daily practices, as both share an inherent advocacy for expanding the notion of literacy beyond classroom academic practices. They prioritize flexible learning practices that center students lived experiences as well as collaborative learning practices in which perspectives of other stakeholders, such as parents and the community, matter. It is also important to note that experiential learning theory and the CBT framework tend to value students' experiences when such experiences are relatable to curriculum content, leaving a theoretical gap in understanding learning experiences that students acquire through out-of-school daily practices even before such practices are qualified for classroom learning. That said, these theories also serve to ground my research problem.

The Multiliteracies Framework

The multiliteracies framework exists to critique traditional colonial notions of literacy. The key argument in a multiliteracies framework is that the traditional perspective limits literacy to a single correct way of using language, emphasizing strict rules for writing and reading fixed texts by authors considered the most significant (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). This framework provides an appropriate lens for my research, which aims to challenge educational practices in Tanzanian secondary schools that prioritize academic skills while neglecting students' out-of-school daily practices.

Multiliteracies is a concept often associated with the New London Group (NLG), but the NLG was not its founder. Basically, the NLG (1996) fused two ideas: meaning-making as a socially mediated practice, as in social semiotics (e.g., Hodge & Kress, 1988), and literacy as a social practice, as in New Literacy Studies (e.g., Street, 1993). Hodge and Kress (1988) built on the notion of human language as a social system of symbols (semiotic signs) that serve different meanings according to context, as previously articulated by Michael Halliday. To this, Hodge and Kress (1988) added that human communication is not limited to linguistic signs, as non-linguistic resources such as

images, layout, objects, and media also convey meaning. They also argued that these signs carried certain values and interests. They concluded that human meanings are shaped by social interests and power. This was followed by the idea that meaning-making was mediated through various modes, that is, multimodality (e.g., Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Modes, as used in the context of multimodality, refer to “organized sets of semiotic resources for meaning-making” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246), implying the concept of designing and redesigning in the context of meaning-making. Eventually, literacy, which had already evolved from traditional reading and writing (a decontextualized print-based practice) to becoming a social practice, was further construed as new literacies, the ability to make meaning through engaging with emerging digital environments (e.g., Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Street, 1993).

The New London Group (1996) synthesized these perspectives, suggesting the term multiliteracies to explain literacy as a socially mediated practice in which people use (multiple) modes required to make (multiple) meanings in varying contexts. This means that multiliteracies sits at the intersection of semiotic theory and literacy education. New London Group (1996) proposed a pedagogy of multiliteracies that emphasized meaning-making through design as an effective approach to literacy education.

A pedagogy of multiliteracies revolves around four key orientations, also called knowledge processes or the things one does to know: experiencing/situated practice, conceptualizing/overt instruction, analyzing/critical framing, and applying/transformed practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). According to Cope & Kalantzis, the pedagogy of multiliteracies regards learning as a process for designing social futures through doing and experiencing. The pedagogy of multiliteracies was an appropriate entry point as a suitable analytical lens to this study as it aimed to explore students’ out-of-school daily

practices. It helped to explain how students make meaning across modes and contexts, with an emphasis on design, representation, and identity.

Bauer et al. (2021) have grouped research on multiliteracies into three categories: studies on how students use multimodality to understand and share ideas; studies on how students use these tools to create projects and express their own meaning; and studies that broaden the notion of schooling by examining multiple perspectives and their various aspects. The third group of scholarship suggests that the pedagogy of multiliteracies resonated well with the principles of competency-based teaching, hence offering an appropriate analytical lens for my research to explore the implementing the secondary competency-based curriculum in rural Tanzania. The categorization by Bauer et al. (2021) leaves everyday practices primarily organized around survival and care unexamined, which this study addresses through a life-sustaining practices lens.

The Theory of Life-sustaining Practices (LSP)

In this research I propose the theory of life-sustaining practices (LSP), not as a new theory in isolation, but a synthetic analytic framework grounded in practice theory (Rouse, 2007; Schatzki, 2019), Social reproduction theory (Federici, 2019; Laslett & Brenner, 1989), and decolonial epistemologies (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000), to address the analytic limitations of literacy-centred frameworks, especially a Multiliteracies framework, in contexts where everyday life is primarily organised around survival and care.

Social practice theory. Social practice theory suggests that the best way to understand human society is not by examining its official rules or abstract ideas, but by studying what people do together in their everyday lives (Rouse, 2007). People's everyday actions reveal how society functions more than official rules or abstract ideas can. According to Rouse, people engage in a certain practice because they are mutually

accountable to one another within a shared field of “issues and stakes” (p.532). In this sense, students’ engagement in practices such as fishing and household chores is primarily for the sake of responsibilities to their own families and for survival. Such practices are likely to change over time as their purposes change. Schatzki (2019) argues that practices are not stable routines or linear sequences of behaviour; they are dynamic patterns of activity shaped by historical conditions, material resources, and social organization, through which people reproduce and transform everyday life.

Social reproductive theory. Social reproductive theory emerged from the context of the capitalist economy “to indicate the processes by which a social system reproduces itself” (Federici, 2019, p. 56). The core argument in this theory is that economic survival cannot exist without reproducing the economic care it requires, such as childcare, housekeeping, and other social support systems (Duffy, 2007; Laslett & Brenner, 1989). Social reproduction means all the work, paid or unpaid, that sustains life, supports daily living, and raises future generations (Klostermann et al., 2022). I understand that social predictive theorists challenge the notion of labour, including the idea of care as a moral good, as they see it as part of the systemic inequalities and exploitative social relations of capitalism (Farris, 2025). However, in the context of my research, I drew on the notion of care as a moral good and work as a form of resistance to capitalist inequalities, such as poverty at the family level (Backer & Cairns, 2021). Drawing on this, I reframe students’ everyday out-of-school practices, such as farming, household responsibilities, fishing, cooking, and caring for siblings, not as peripheral to learning, but as practices that sustain life through survival, care, and social obligation.

Decolonial theory. Decolonial theory is grounded in the argument that formal political decolonization did not end what Quijano (2000) calls the “coloniality of power” (p.549). Quijano uses this concept to show that, although formal colonial rule has ended,

European American ways of thinking and organizing knowledge, the economy, and society continue to shape the world. These patterns were established during colonialism and remain embedded in the global capitalist system today.

As such, the ideals of colonization continue to exist in the lives of the colonized, whereby certain ideals of the Eurocentric logic of modernity “are sold as a package trip to the promised land of happiness” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 450). The problem with the Eurocentric logic of modernity is that it creates a single narrative about how human life should progress (Andreotti et al., 2019). In education, such a single narrative is what Gee (2015) calls “the literacy myth”: that a literate person (one who can read and write) is “more intelligent, more modern, and more moral” (pp. 27-28). According to Gee, such a myth reinforces further the view that countries where most people can read and write are more advanced, more modern, and act more responsibly. As such, when educators talk about literacy, they often mean “reading and writing achievement” (Blair & Sanford, 2004, p. 452). This narrative elevates academic literacy practices and school-based experiences as the only meaningful human practices, while other non-academic practices are neglected, even when they make sense.

Scholars (Alvarez, 2016; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007) suggest practising epistemic de-colonization—a shift away from dominant Western knowledge systems toward embracing non-Western epistemologies, principles of knowledge, and ways of life. Mignolo (2007) uses the concept of “delinking” to suggest “the reverse of ‘assimilation’” (p.461). I understand the reversal of assimilation as a pushback against the universal adoption of knowledge or practices for the sake of recognition.

Decolonial theory, therefore, calls for ways of engaging with knowledge that question and move beyond these inherited structures of power (Grosfoguel, 2007). This move is only possible through what, wa Thiong’o (1986), suggests, ‘decolonizing the

mind' (p.108), implying a bold stance by the people in the (formerly) and currently (neo) colonized nations to avoid describing themselves using the logic of the colonizer's language, and use their own language instead.

I draw on these ideas to develop a theory of Life-Sustaining Practices (LSP) to extend the analysis beyond what the multiliteracies framework can fully explain. The multiliteracies framework explains how students make meaning across modes and contexts, with an emphasis on design, representation, and identity. However, my analysis shows that it is less suited to practices driven primarily by survival, care, and the sustenance of everyday life. LSP shifts the focus to the life-sustaining conditions of these practices, which often enable students' participation in schooling and meaning-making activities. As the data show, some students work to meet schooling needs, including paying for remedial classes and private tuition. In this way, LSP complements the multiliteracies framework by making these conditions visible. Together, they allow an analysis of both how meaning is made and how everyday life is sustained. This way, we understand that activities such as farming, domestic work, and income-generating labour are not peripheral to schooling; they form part of the conditions that make schooling possible.

Literature Review

Types of Students' Out-of-school Literacy practices

In examining what already exists in students' out-of-school daily practices, I construed literacy as an entry term that, in my research, referred to all activities students engage in to make sense of their academic and non-academic lives and to express their current and future identities. In this review, I explore how these literacy practices are construed and categorized in those studies. Then, I present their academic potential, and

the approaches students, parents, and teachers consider appropriate to leverage those strengths and enhance students' academic learning and personal growth.

Structured out-of-school practices. Structured out-of-school practices are activities organized by a relevant authority, such as a school, teacher, or organization outside the school, for students to complete. However, scholars using this categorization include activities such as outdoor activities (Remmen & Iversen, 2023); homework, scheduled extra-curricular activities (Chambers & Schreiber, 2004; Chan, 2016; Yelland et al., 2023). Other structured activities include after-school programs, field trips, and adventure activities (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013; Power et al., 2009; Won & Han, 2010).

I saw this categorization as puzzling, as it includes practices that take place within a school setting, which I see as contradicting the logic of 'out-of-school'. Practice practices such as extra-curricular activities or outdoor activities taking place outside the classroom building would be categorized as *out-of-class practices*. Still, this might be another source of ambiguity because, in the context of this study, I perceive *class* as a group of learners who can occupy places inside or outside the building, and even outside the school setting. Looking at the above studies, I see an obvious lack of clarity in the categorization of students' out-of-school practices by the settings in which they take place.

In some settings, students' structured out-of-school practices are referred to as after-school education (Entrich, 2014). These include private tutoring and supplementary classes to enhance students' academic performance. In China, these encompass various educational products and services provided by market entities (Liu et al., 2024). According to Liu and colleagues, a period between 2010 and 2018 saw increased investment in shadow literacy practices by many families, particularly those with high

economic status, across all educational stages in China. Overall, these studies suggest the complexity in categorizing out-of-school literacy practices.

Self-managed out-of-school practices. Self-managed out-of-school practices are activities that students engage in independently outside the school setting, such as playing sports, using the internet, reading books, and playing with friends (Won & Han, 2010). Some scholars include students doing homework in this category as part of self-managed out-of-school literacy practices (Won & Han, 2010). This may be confusing because homework, while managed outside school settings, is initiated by the school. In most educational experiences, it is teachers who direct students as to the type of homework to be done. In addition, homework may not be a fully self-managed literacy practices, especially where a learner receives support from parents or guardians in the home setting.

Academic significance of various out-of-school practices

Many studies covered in this section show students engaging in various academically significant practices outside school settings, yet educators tend to neglect these practices when designing classroom instruction. The following paragraphs briefly outline these daily practices as observed in various contexts.

Students engage in self-initiated practices based on their personal interests. Kim (2011) conducted a narrative inquiry to examine students' experiences of being in alternative schools. Alternative schools in Kim's study context were those schools or educational centres for students who have failed to succeed in the conventional formal schools. Kim notes that these schools were perceived as less appropriate for students than formal schools. Kim spent five hours each day doing participant observations and engaging in informal conversations with one student whose pseudonym is Kevin Gonzales. From Kevin's story, which the author presents as a literary story with Kevin as a protagonist, the author found that Kevin is one of those students whose talents are

overlooked by the school because of their failing grades and resistant behaviour. Consequently, as the author notes, Kevin no longer trusts schools and the whole societal system because he feels they ruined his own future. Outside of the formal educational environment, Kevin participates in a range of creative literacy practices, including writing poetry, playing music, and drawing. While these practices demonstrate Kevin's creativity, emotional expression, and his sense of agency and identity, they are not recognized in Kevin's education. This study shows a profound oversight of students' interests in schools.

Similarly, a narrative Inquiry by Murphy (2004) with five children in a Grade 5/6 classroom in Canada reported that the children engaged in numerous out-of-school literacy practices, such as sports, arts, community service, and family interactions. Murphy observed that these practices helped children to develop skills such as teamwork, creativity, and social interaction. However, as the author reports, these practices were often not fully utilized in formal classrooms. These two studies show how narrative inquiry can help to understand the depth of academic potential embedded in students' out-of-school practices.

Other students' out-of-school self-initiated practices include reading scientific books, watching science programs on television, and engaging in hobbies such as bird collecting (Lyons, 2006); nature experiences; using science kits; constructing models; and caring for farm animals (Uitto et al., 2006). According to these authors, such out-of-school practices promote students' interest in science, but teachers neither incorporate them into students' classroom lessons nor link lessons to students' daily life experiences related to these practices. The authors note that neglecting these literacy practices diminished students' interests and aspirations in science, as students felt that classroom learning experiences were disconnected from their daily out-of-school interactions.

Some practices that students engage in are those organized by class or family. These include visiting museums, field trips, aquariums, and other informal interactions (Eshach, 2007); parents and children engaging in engineering design tasks in the home environment (Kim & Simpson, 2024). The authors note that such out-of-school practices help students to learn, appreciate, and develop positive feelings toward science, but are too neglected in classroom practices. The same neglect has been observed in a scoping review of research on the Nordic context (Remmen & Iversen, 2023), which found that although the curricula recognize the value of outdoor multiliteracy practices and teachers recognize the role of these practices in enhancing student engagement and social relations, none of these practices are included in formal lessons.

Other out-of-school daily practices include participation in community programmes. A study conducted at a Finnish public middle school (Engeström & Käyhkö, 2021) found that students collaborated with teachers, local entrepreneurs, and municipal decision-makers to organize the communal fair. The study showed that by participating in this event, students developed a sense of responsibility and teamwork skills relevant beyond the classroom. However, this study also noted that teachers did not incorporate any of the students' out-of-school daily practices in classroom learning.

Some students' out-of-school daily practices involve their interactions with digital platforms. Andersson (2022) conducted an ethnography in Sweden from 2014 to 2016, involving 13- to 16-year-old teenagers who used social media, listened to music, and watched YouTube videos. As the author notes, these teenagers researched various concepts related to their classroom topics and watched YouTube tutorials and documentaries on school subjects. Similarly, a study by Li et al. (2024) observed Chinese students engaging in playing digital games, watching walkthroughs, and reading game-related materials, which helped them develop language skills. Further research (Sanford

& Merkel, 2010) highlights students' engagement with digital media, such as video games, as an important 21st – century skill through which students engage in active designing. However, both studies show that these out-of-school daily practices were not incorporated into classroom lessons because educators and institutions viewed digital tools as destructors for academic learning. In other words, these studies show how those with the power to include or exclude a student's learning experiences influence what counts in the educational setting.

Recognizing students' engagement with digital tools can help educators understand how students perceive literacy and the skills they develop. Nearly two decades ago, Sanford and Madill (2007b) highlighted that students regard digital tools as “alternative literacies” through which they define their educational success (p. 434). Sanford and Madill used this notion to account for the expertise that students had to create and play video games outside of school time. The authors showed that students often labelled as underperforming by schools still demonstrated strong literacy skills: they used technology well, worked effectively with others, and understood complex information. While digital engagement is such useful among students, in another study, Sanford and Madill (2007a) caution educators to foster critical engagement with digital tools, as students' mastery of these tools does not automatically translate into ethical use. They suggest that educators must practise “socio-critical literacy” (p.293), encouraging students to engage in conversations so that they can critically explore the assumptions shaping their designs. According to the authors, such critical engagement can enable students to use digital tools without reinforcing biases and injustices they are unconsciously unaware of. Nevertheless, I found limited research on how educators consider this.

In some contexts, such as the Gedeo district in Ethiopia, students engaged in agricultural activities as part of their out-of-school daily routines, harvesting coffee beans,

preparing seedlings for planting, and performing essential domestic chores (Abebe, 2007). According to the author, these were the core activities for both students' survival and their families' well-being. For this reason, the study reports a high rate of student dropout during the peak harvest season. This reflects the interconnectedness between students' schooling experiences and the economic realities of their households. According to Abebe, these out-of-school daily practices equipped students with vocational and socialization skills. Unfortunately, the academic potential of these daily practices on students' academic learning remains unexplored.

In another study (Abebe & Bessell, 2011), it was observed that many children in Africa and Asia combine school and work by performing agricultural tasks, domestic work, and participating in family enterprises. The authors note that while these daily practices helped children to economically support their families, they also equipped children with socialization and vocational skills. However, a study of students in grades 9 through 12 in public high schools in New York City (Rodriguez et al., 2022) identified work and family responsibilities as factors associated with absenteeism and tardiness. Students failed to balance between these out-of-school daily practices and school responsibilities. The study does not suggest how educators can incorporate students' out-of-school daily practices into their teaching to make classroom learning more relevant and engaging, to enhance retention and academic success.

Students' recreational practices have the potential to enhance classroom learning. A systematic review of the literature on childcare in Australia, Canada, Britain, and the United States (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016) indicates that out-of-school recreational activities for children aged 5–12 years, both before and after school, are crucial for supporting children's emotional, cognitive, and social development. The study shows that despite their significance; they are often viewed as separate from educational settings. In

addition, this study notes a lack of empirical evidence that directly links these recreational practices to academic achievement.

A single-case study was conducted involving in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of digital and written artifacts from Pablo, a 19-year-old in Arizona (Stewart, 2014). The study shows that Pablo engaged in various self-initiated out-of-school daily practices, such as writing poetry, language brokering (translation), reading, using technology, and activism. The study shows that teachers did not incorporate these funds of knowledge into classroom practices. According to the study, Pablo perceives his out-of-school daily practices as valuable and meaningful, yet he views school assignments as irrelevant and unengaging. As revealed in the study, Pablo describes his academic experiences as boring and feels that the school environment did not recognize or value his talents and abilities, particularly his poetry and language brokering skills.

Pablo's story resembles the study by Blair and Sanford (2004), which found that boys in Canadian elementary and middle schools resisted school literacy practices, such as completing assigned readings and writing tasks, because they felt these practices did not align with their personal preferences. As the study shows, these boys transformed these assignments by incorporating elements from their out-of-school daily practices, such as humour, action, and characters from video games and comics. They did so to make these classroom tasks more personally engaging and meaningful. This study supports the claim that meaningful educational practices in the contemporary technological era must value the multiple practices students engage in when interacting with digital media (Arnott & Yelland, 2020).

More importantly, educators still take for granted the daily practices students engage in after dropping out. Many studies (Desai et al., 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2022; Rumberger & Lim, 2008) simply highlight the out-of-school daily practices students

engage in after dropping out, but they do not recommend incorporating these activities into the school curriculum. I concur with some scholars, such as McDermott et al. (2019), that teachers can use knowledge of students' involvement in out-of-school daily practices to foster a supportive educational environment that will help prevent them from dropping out of school.

The above studies apparently show that what students do in their home, whether as hobbies or organized by the community, have academic benefits. Unfortunately, those out-of-school daily practices are consistently devalued in the academic setting. Another important finding from the above review is that little remains understood about how those out-of-school daily practices shape students' identities and help them determine their own futures. Also, in this review, I have observed that while many studies underscore the academic significance of out-of-school daily practices, some yield conflicting findings. The next section presents studies which have revealed some of the students' out-of-school activities with less academic contribution.

Out-of-school daily practices with less academic contribution

Some out-of-school daily practices that students engage in do not directly enhance their academic outcomes. A study by Chan (2016) revealed that students engaging in extracurricular activities promoted deep learning rather than rote learning, but this did not translate into improved academic outcomes. Also, Chambers and Schreiber (2004) found a mixed bag of findings. On the one hand, they observed that socializing practices such as talking on the phone or hanging out with friends contributed to reading achievement among Caucasian tenth-grade girls in the United States. On the other hand, daily practices such as watching TV were found to have no substantial contribution to students' academic achievement. These studies suffer from two limitations. First, they provide little information from students' perspectives on why such out-of-school daily practices do not

help with academic learning. Second, they are too focused on out-of-school daily practices that are academically oriented or organized around school logic, thereby suggesting that students' success is limited to academic achievement.

Some research indicates that structured out-of-school daily practices enhance students' academic outcomes, whereas self-directed practices hinder their academic progress. A study by Pensiero and Green (2017) found that practices such as teacher-led study groups enhanced students' academic achievement, whereas students' self-directed study clubs did not. Also, Won and Han (2010) found that out-of-school daily practices such as reading books and doing homework contribute to students' academic achievement, whereas watching television, playing computer games, and spending excessive time on the Internet do not. These differences suggest the need to understand what works for each student in their specific socio-cultural context. There is little understanding in these studies of how the cultural environment and students' personal academic aspirations, as well as other social aspirations, count in determining whether a certain daily practice is useful. The next part covers studies about why teachers do not incorporate students' out-of-school daily practices.

Why are students' out-of-school daily practices not utilized?

There is a lack of requisite knowledge to effectively plan and run some structured practices, such as field trips and outdoor learning. Many teachers lack adequate preparation to ensure student safety and to address potential distractions (Eshach, 2007; Remmen & Iversen, 2023). Further research (Koosimile, 2004) highlights that, even in contexts where the curriculum recognizes the integration of students' out-of-school daily practices, teachers' lack of knowledge will remain a major barrier. Teachers' lack of knowledge is also due to insufficient guidance in integrating these practices into formal literacy instruction (Harushimana, 2008); insufficient training (ÇeviK et al., 2024); and

insufficient understanding of the potential of students' out-of-school activities (Harushimana, 2008). Unfortunately, these studies do not provide information on teacher professional development programmes that can enhance teachers' capacity to integrate students' daily practices into their classrooms.

The major barriers stem from the misalignment between existing curricula and students' out-of-school daily practices. For instance, a study conducted in Finland (Engeström & Käyhkö, 2021) noted that teachers faced difficulty in “talking about money” (p. 413) because it was not prescribed in existing curricula. Overall, research (Halverson et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024; Pugh & Bergin, 2005) underscores that teachers' efforts to incorporate students' out-of-school daily practices into the classroom are constrained by existing educational frameworks and practices that cannot accommodate them. Such frameworks neglect the rich learning experiences that students acquire in their home and community settings (Braund & Reiss, 2006; Mosha, 2000). Curricular misalignment creates mixed feelings among teachers about using students' out-of-school daily practices. While some teachers incorporate these daily practices, others remain hesitant due to concerns about their appropriateness for curricular standards, control, and the potential distraction these activities might cause (Löfving et al., 2023).

Similarly, overprizing the measurable learning outcomes contests the incorporation of students' out-of-school daily practices. Most established educational frameworks are overly focused on meeting the pressures of standardized testing (Halverson et al., 2023). As a result, educators view students' out-of-school daily practices as less significant to academic learning (Halverson et al., 2024). These authors observe that the culture of valuing standardized testing outcomes leads to continued neglect of valuable insights and opportunities that students' out-of-school daily practices offer for promoting creativity and cultural relevance in education. The authors suggest a

shift towards policies that recognize the cultural and community assets that young people bring to their learning experiences. What remains unaddressed is how to improve students' achievement on rigid, high-stakes tests designed to sort and categorize them for industrial labour (Furuta, 2021; Pinto, 2016), while also valuing their out-of-school practices. In other words, how can practices that fall outside paper-and-pencil metrics be recognized as legitimate forms of learning by educators?

Some structured out-of-school practices, such as field trips and museum visits, are often not utilized due to the teacher's poor coordination with the sites. This happens when teachers have insufficient communication with museum staff (Mujtaba et al., 2018). Mujtaba and colleagues have also identified a lack of pre- and post-visit activities for teachers that connect these out-of-school practices to classroom learning as a significant reason teachers are unable to incorporate them into their lessons.

Another barrier is the negative attitude of educators and the community towards some of the students' out-of-school daily practices. This is especially true of digital daily practices. A study in China has shown that daily digital practices, such as playing digital games, watching walkthroughs, and reading game-related materials, enabled students to develop language skills and to promote their autonomy and confidence (Li et al., 2024). However, they were not used because some educators and institutions viewed them as distractions rather than as effective learning tools. Thus, there is a need to understand teachers' attitudes towards students' daily practices and how these attitudes affect the use of these activities. I wanted to examine why any out-of-school daily practice that does not directly contribute to academic achievement is considered a distraction.

Students' negative perception is another barrier. A study in the United States involving inner-city high school students from low- or moderate-income families who engaged in various out-of-school daily practices such as arts, technology, sports

instruction, and life guarding through structured apprenticeships (Halpern, 2006) show that while teachers do utilize these out-of-school practices, many students arrive with a history of negative formal learning experiences and usually struggle with motivation and engagement. Halpern notes that this leads to self-doubt and a lack of motivation in students. I find this study laying the ground for understanding students' lived experiences prior to incorporating students' out-of-school daily practices. This makes narrative inquiry into students' lives the most appropriate method for classroom teachers who intend to use the pedagogy of multiliteracies.

Lack of resources can constrain teachers' use of students' out-of-school daily practices. Research underscores that even when academics possess a high level of competency in integrating out-of-school practices, they end up underutilizing these opportunities in their teaching due to a lack of support, high costs, and planning difficulties (Aslan et al., 2023). This observation, however, was found in the structured practices. Little is understood about the informally self-managed, no-cost daily practices students engage in outside the school context.

Teachers can also lack pedagogical competencies. A study that explored the significance of pedagogical strategies that connect in-school and out-of-school daily experiences from students' perspectives (Oller et al., 2024) identified various out-of-school practices students engage in, such as music, art, sports, and community involvement, reflecting personal interests and experiences outside the classroom. The study notes that many teachers did not effectively integrate these practices due to a lack of awareness or insufficient pedagogical frameworks that promote the integration of students' out-of-school experiences into school learning. However, the study also noted that a few teachers who designed lessons linked to students' personal interests and experiences helped to promote active participation among students. This suggests that

students' out-of-school daily practices can support effective learning when properly utilized. The next section reviews teaching strategies recommended in the available studies.

Strategies to incorporate students' out-of-school activities

Welcoming Indigenous ways of learning in schools. Teachers are encouraged to utilize these out-of-school daily practices by integrating indigenous wisdom, proverbs, and stories into their teaching. According to Mosha (2000), these teaching and learning methods resonate with the ways students have been culturally nurtured to learn in their immediate families and can therefore foster a more holistic educational experience. The author suggests that using these approaches can bridge classroom practices and students' real-life experiences. Additionally, Mosha (2000) recommends consulting village elders on certain topics and inviting these elders to participate in classroom discussions. This sounds appealing, but remains problematic: why should learning remain confined to the classroom rather than allowing students to interact with elders? There is currently a lack of research on the extent to which students can improve their classroom learning through conducting projects that enable them to learn from their indigenous cultural setting.

Collaborative learning. Schools can collaborate with other institutions to explore the academic potential of students' out-of-school daily practices. According to Luehmann (2009), collaborative strategies such as facilitating discussions and encouraging students to connect their laboratory learning with their out-of-school experiences are appropriate classroom strategies. Collaborative learning projects allow students to utilize resources from their local community (Oller et al., 2024). In Luehmann's study, collaboration between teachers and university facilitators was found to help in customizing some tasks in the educational curricula to align classroom experiences, which in turn gave room for relevant students' out-of-school daily practices.

Further research underscores that collaborative learning that centres participants' narratives enable educators to reimagine what they perceive as learning and the contexts in which such learning occurs (Halverson et al., 2023). Halverson and colleagues argue convincingly that using collaborative learning is the only way to do justice to learners "whose cultural and historical knowledge has been systematically devalued" (p.383). For instance, in the context of STEM learning, engaging families and parents alongside their children in hands-on STEM projects, such as designing video games and programming mobile apps, has proved an effective strategy for integrating classroom and home experiences (Rosenberg, 2014).

Linking classroom projects with communities outside the school is another collaborative strategy. Students' engagement in trips to universities, webinars with NASA professionals, and hands-on STEM activities, such as coding and robotics, has been shown to enhance students' learning of STEM (Topal & Korkmaz, 2023). In this quasi-experimental study, students who participated in these non-formal educational activities exhibited a notable increase in their interest levels in science-related professions compared to students who only engaged in traditional curriculum activities.

While collaborative learning allows the utilization of various community resources surrounding the school (Bathgate & Silva, 2010), the major challenge is the lack of understanding of how to work collectively to maximize the perceived benefits of students' out-of-school daily practices (Çağlayan et al., 2024). Also, I look at these studies and note that most of the collaborative tasks are primarily being initiated by the teachers. Little remains addressed regarding how students' engagement with academic learning would look if teachers and parents collaborated on what learners are doing.

Inquiry-Based Learning. Inquiry-based learning encourages communication and socialization among students as they engage in their out-of-school daily practices to

develop a sense of responsibility and an understanding of their social culture (Karbeyaz & Kurt, 2024). In these approaches, teachers must act as guides and facilitators (Oktay, 2024). Some scholars (ÇeviK et al., 2024) suggest that both collaborative and project-based learning approaches can be effective ways to integrate the students' out-of-school daily practices into the classroom. Unfortunately, these studies do not demonstrate how Inquiry-Based learning can be effectively implemented in a centralized education system. Also, it remains unclear what types of inquiry-based learning can work under conditions such as large classes and limited classroom resources in Tanzanian secondary schools.

Chapter Summary and Research Gap

This review of the relevant literature has uncovered important theoretical frameworks, such as experiential learning theory, competency-based teaching, Multiliteracies, and the theory of life-sustaining practice – all of which serve as appropriate analytical lenses for understanding the research question. The review of the previous research offers insights that students engage in various out-of-school daily practices, which, in most cases, are not fully valued in the academic learning contexts. While shedding light on this, many of these studies examine students' out-of-school daily practices only through a multiliteracies framework. As a result, there exists a serious knowledge gap: all that students engage in as out-of-school daily practices is reduced to the primary functions of meaning-making or designing the future. The Multiliteracies framework explains how meaning is made through a practice, but cannot explain why a practice exists, how life is organized, or what sustains life. Instead of centring meaning and designing purposes, my research advances literacy theory by re-centring survival, care, and social reproduction as foundational organizers of human practice. This complements the meaning-making focus of multiliteracies with an ontological account of life-sustaining activity.

As a result of attempting to legitimize every human practice through the Multiliteracies – meaning-making and designing framework, a plethora of research notes that, in many contexts, students’ out-of-school daily practices are not incorporated into their classroom learning. Studies cite factors such as overreliance on traditional educational frameworks, teachers’ lack of awareness of appropriate pedagogical practices, and limited resources as barriers to such integration. Notably, reviews show a gap in designing responsive classroom learning strategies that move away from one-size-fits-all educational experiences to enable each individual learner to tap into their out-of-school daily practices.

My view on this lack of integration is that some out-of-school daily practices may not necessarily require integration into academic learning, but simply need time to exist on their own, especially if they exist primarily to serve other life purposes beyond meaning-making or semiotic design. This research aimed to identify the types of students’ out-of-school daily practices personally initiated by students and their families, according to purposes, contexts, and structures. The research then explored the academic potential of each practice. Finally, the study explored the appropriate teaching and learning strategies for integrating these daily practices, as viewed by students, teachers, and parents. Methodologically, many studies seem to utilize ethnography and narrative inquiry as separate methods. As such, there is insufficient understanding and little analysis of how these methods can complement each other.

Thus, to provide a more holistic perspective on the nuances and complexities of students’ out-of-school daily practices, this research aimed to fill this literature gap by integrating narrative inquiry and Ethnography. In Chapter 3, I present the research paradigm on which my research is anchored. I also describe the methodology I employed in conducting this research.

Chapter 3: Research Paradigm & Methodology

Overview

In this chapter, I outline my philosophical stance and the methodological plan that guided my research. In the first part, I present a research paradigm, an interpretive philosophy upon which my belief about truth was anchored. In the next part, I describe the methodological plan, a qualitative approach I used for a period of three months in undertaking this research. Also, I describe my role as the researcher within this research and how such positionality guided my selection and use of research methods.

Research Paradigm

In this research, I use the term paradigm to refer to a framework that guides assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge, the kinds of questions to explore, and how research is conducted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In other words, the research paradigm in this study concerns my own beliefs or philosophical stance about the world and whether these beliefs shape the process of conducting this study. In undertaking this research, my philosophical stance (paradigm) is that “what we take to be genuine ‘truths’ are created by our perspectives and social cultures” (Anjum & Rocca, 2024, p. 86). In other words, I believe that reality is a concept that exists only through our perceptions and interpretations. Scholars refer to this stance as a set of interpretivist and constructivist philosophical lenses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

This philosophical stance is anchored in my own experience of growing up in the village, learning various family responsibilities, such as farming and animal care, through interactions with others. Also, I grew up speaking two different languages concurrently: Kikerewe and Kijita, which are spoken on Ukerewe Island, where I was born and raised. As I used these languages, I realized that a single expression could have different meanings in different languages. This made me realize that objects can be assigned

different meanings across languages and contexts. In short, it was clear to me that “truth statements” are historically, culturally, and socially mediated (Gura, 1992, p. 17). I am an educator who believes that what counts as meaningful learning does not mean the same thing to everyone across time and space.

Holding these beliefs, I find that interpretivism resonates well with me. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) emphasize that every research inquiry has orientations (paradigms) to issues such as ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge), methodology (the research approach), and the aim of the inquiry (the goal of the research). Thus, drawing on my philosophy, I can explain my belief about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods as follows.

My Ontological stance

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of reality. As to better align this study with my interpretivist–constructivist research paradigm, I adopted a constructivist ontology, which assumes that reality is multiple, socially constructed, and understood through the meanings people assign to their lived experiences in specific contexts (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Therefore, I understand students’ out-of-school practices as having multiple meanings shaped by the contexts in which they occur. What students do outside school carries distinct values and implications within their everyday lives and can be interpreted through different lenses that reflect their varied purposes and motivations.

My Epistemological stance

Epistemology is concerned with how we know about reality. Since my ontological position is that reality exists in multiple forms and its meaning depends on the subjective interpretation of the individual and the context in which they are, I believe reality is

constructed through interactions. My ontological belief is that reality does not exist on its own – independent of its history, culture, and context. In this sense, as a researcher, I am also part of the world that I seek to understand. This is why I spent time in Nzengo village, the site of this research, seeking to understand how students' out-of-school practices were meaningful to them and to me, and how my own assumptions influenced my interpretation of those practices.

I believe that knowledge is constructed through interaction. Thus, I used research methods that allowed my interaction with participants, such as ethnographic conversations, focus groups, and participant observation. Although I employed a multiliteracies framework and the theory of life-sustaining practices as my interpretive lenses, I ensured that my interpretation of students' out-of-school daily practices was grounded in the data I collected (Collins & Stockton, 2018), rather than relying solely on these theories.

Methodology

A methodology is a logical plan of how a researcher approaches the research problem. In this research, I chose a qualitative approach because it aligns with my philosophical stance and the nature of my topic. Qualitative approach is primarily “naturalistic, interpretive, and inductive” (Mayan, 2023, p. 2); and “constructivist” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 103). It is naturalistic in that it seeks to understand phenomena as they occur in their natural contexts, including how people interact with one another and navigate their everyday lives (Mayan, 2023). It is interpretive in that it attempts to interpret meanings that people attach to their experiences and phenomena they encounter (Mayan, 2023). It is inductive in that qualitative researchers work from the data sources rather than from a pre-existing framework or a particular theory (Mayan, 2023). The focus is to make sense of life as it unfolds, hence theoretical frameworks are not used

as lenses to test the findings but as tools to “critique the complexities of social life” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 261). In other words, a researcher starts with making specific observation before establishing a general theory. It is constructivist in that it is grounded in the philosophical belief that, through interactions with their surroundings, people construct their own meaning or representations of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This orientation provided an important window for examining literacy practices as they emerged through participants’ everyday social and livelihood practices. Indeed, choosing a qualitative approach helped me achieve the goals of my research: understanding students’ out-of-school daily practices, the values and meanings these practices carried in students’ lives, and how they could be utilized to promote both students’ academic learning and personal growth.

Narrative Ethnography

I integrated Narrative Inquiry and Ethnography methods to examine students’ out-of-school daily practices, determine their academic potentials and explore appropriate strategies to integrate these multiliteracy practices into formal classroom learning.

Narrative Inquiry. Narrative inquiry is rooted in the view that “people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Since stories differ among people, even when they are talking about the same event, narrative inquiry is grounded in the epistemological tenet of constructionism, which construes meaning as co-constructed, subjective, and interpreted across multiple realities (Crotty, 1998). I chose this method because it provided me with an avenue to understand students’ out-of-school daily practices, which are often not centred on what many educators regard as genuine education. My assumption was that through these practices, students developed experiences that could help researchers and educators understand the values of these out-

of-school daily practices. In this sense, narrative inquiry was an appropriate research method because it “begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 18).

In the view of narrative inquirers, interpreting people’s narratives is the most direct way for a researcher to understand the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences and the world around them (Karpa, 2021). I listened to students’ stories about their daily out-of-school practices, the meaningful learning experiences they developed from these practices and how they thought such practices could be utilized in either schooling contexts or personal lives to shape their future. However, narrative inquiry did not serve the purpose of participant observation that I planned to conduct on the home environment to examine the extent to which such environment shape students’ out-of-school daily practices. This necessitated the use of ethnography.

Ethnography. Ethnography originated from anthropology and has been widely adopted across disciplines (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Hammersley, 2006). In this study, I construe ethnography as “a form of social and educational research that emphasizes the importance of studying first-hand what people do and say in contexts” (Hammersley, 2006, p. 4). It is an approach to studying people’s everyday lives with a particular focus on the aspects of culture (Anderson-Levitt, 2006).

In the field of education, three methods remain key to ethnography: participant observation, writing field notes and conducting interviews (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Mayan, 2023). I used ethnography in this research to understand how the culture of Nzengo village was shaping what the participants perceived as important for them (Mayan, 2023).

As observed in the literature review section, many studies on students’ out-of-school daily practices that utilized narrative inquiry have not examined how cultural

conditions shape the stories they document. I integrated narrative inquiry with ethnography in my research to examine the cultural conditions shaping students' lived accounts. In doing so, I join scholars (e.g., Andersen, 2020; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008) who have combined these two methods to create a method called narrative ethnography.

Narrative Ethnography. Narrative ethnography is an emergent method that studies narratives within their social contexts (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). As Andersen (2020) notes, narrative ethnographers “study stories in the context of their telling” (p. 300). Unlike traditional narrative inquiries and ethnography, narrative ethnography analyses the contexts, conditions, and resources of the storying process (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). This was the method I used to conduct this research. Using narrative ethnography enabled my research to produce knowledge deeply rooted in its social, cultural, and historical context. Using this method, I analyzed not only the narratives and interactions but also the conditions behind them (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). This helped in understanding participants' lived experiences and meanings that they attached to students' out-of-school daily practices and environments.

Framing my positionality

In conducting this research, I drew on a range of experiences. The first was my childhood experience. I was born and raised in Nzengo Village, the study area, which gave me the opportunity to engage in household responsibilities such as animal care, farming, and caring for my siblings alongside schooling, especially during my primary school years. The second was my experience as an educator, having engaged with Tanzania's competency-based curriculum both as a secondary school teacher between 2014 and 2016 in Njombe region and, more recently, as a teacher educator at the University of Dar es Salaam. Third, I drew on my experience as a researcher while conducting this study as a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Victoria. Thus, I was

returning to Nzengo village with a Global North bias toward conducting research that meets the university's ethical standards. Negotiating these positionalities became a focus in my research. I practised what Nencel (2014) calls "situated reflexivity" (p. 81). This means I considered the goals of my research, the context in which it is conducted, and the diverse positionalities I held as a researcher and those held by the participants (Nencel, 2014). I have explained this in detail in the next chapter on research processes. Also, I have disclosed how my positionality shaped my interactions with participants by detailing the dynamics and tensions that emerged and how I use them as analytic resources to make sense of the findings in this study.

Research participants and sampling strategy

My research involved ten participants. This number included: four students, four parents, and two teachers. The details for each individual participant, how they were sampled, and their respective genders, with which they identified, are presented in the next chapter on the research process. Morse (2020) warns that sampling in qualitative research is a complex, non-linear process that cannot be reduced to a fixed number or to a simple mimicry of previous studies. Being aware of this, I did not choose this number of participants to mimic any previous research. I rather considered the nature of my research question and its scope of inquiry (Morse, 2020).

My study aimed to gain a detailed understanding of teachers', parents', and students' perspectives on students' out-of-school daily practices while generating rich, in-depth information aligned with the research questions and available resources. While Morse (2020) warns against "tiny samples" (p.4), she acknowledges that participant variation adds necessary complexity to a study. In my research, involving teachers, parents, and children offered a multi-dimensional perspective that a larger, single-group

sample might miss. These ten participants provided sufficient information to help meet this aim.

I obtained these participants through a purposive sampling strategy. The rationale for employing purposive sampling was anchored in the need to involve participants with the appropriate information to achieve the research purpose (Campbell et al., 2020). Some scholars (e.g., Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025) propose that, since qualitative research aims for deep understanding, researchers should adopt a structured strategy rather than relying on haphazard or biased selection. In undertaking this research, I did not regard my own bias as a researcher as a threat but as an analytic resource, as in reflective thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2023). I did not follow rigid procedural rules in recruiting participants through purposive sampling. However, to enhance the rigour of my study through transparency, I have documented all procedures used in the purposive selection of students, teachers, and parents who participated in this research. Such details are covered in Chapter 4 on the research process.

Trustworthiness of the findings

I ensured the trustworthiness of the data by considering the measures employed in qualitative studies: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba, 1981). I employed several strategies to achieve each aspect of trustworthiness as described in the following sections.

Credibility

This is the extent to which the research findings can be trusted. As Lincoln & Guba (1986) clearly put it, credibility focuses on the “truth value” of the research (p. 76). This means that it is important for a researcher to employ measures that will make readers trust the findings and conclusions drawn from them. Scholars (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Rose & Johnson, 2020) suggest that credibility can be achieved through measures

such as triangulation of data collection methods, member checking, and proposed engagement in the field. In this research, I employed triangulation by combining ethnography and narrative inquiry. I also collected data from various sources, including ethnographic conversations, participant observation, and focus group discussions. These enabled my research to generate data from multiple perspectives on students' out-of-school daily practices. Furthermore, I employed member check, that is, "testing the data with members of the relevant human data source groups" (Guba, 1981, p. 80). During this process, I shared the ethnographic conversations transcripts with the participants prior to proceeding with the analysis. Also, after writing the final report, I shared the findings with participants who were willing to check again whether the interpretation accurately reflected their views. I spent three months in Nzengo village – the study area, engaging with parents, teachers, and students through ethnographic conversations, focus group discussion, and observations. I regarded this as similar to what Guba (1981) terms "prolonged engagement" (p.84), a practice where the researcher spends a considerable time in the research site. My three-month stay in Nzengo village helped in generating rich, context-grounded data that reflected participants' views and actions. A long stay in the research site enabled me to "build rapport with participants to understand their perspectives deeply" (Ahmed, 2024, p. 2).

Dependability

Dependability concerns the extent to which the research process remains stable and traceable over time. Guba (1981) calls this the "trackability" of the research process (p. 81), which I understand as providing an opportunity for other researchers to understand the process and logic followed in obtaining the results and conclusions the study claims. This can be achieved through strategies such as "audit trail detailing" (p. 686) – describing all the procedures, decisions, and reflections involved throughout the

research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 76). In this research, I have provided considerable detail on each stage of the process, starting with how my personal experience shaped my interest in framing the research question, how it influenced my engagement with participants and interpretations of the findings. Also, I have documented all the procedures I followed in selecting participants, analyzing data, including how I reflected on my positionalities at each of these stages. All these are aspects of the audit trail which allow other researchers to understand the logical flow of my research.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the effort to achieve “neutrality” (Guba, 1981, p. 76). I was aware that my research is anchored on a constructivist paradigm that views reality as “socially, politically and psychologically constructed” by people in their different contexts, leading to “multiple perspectives rather than seek a singular truth” (Patton, 2002, p. 267). This means that I actively participated in generating the data through my interaction with participants. Yet, I ensured that the findings are the result of participants’ experiences and perspectives rather than my own imagination. While I acknowledge embracing my bias, such as awareness of some cultural aspects in Nzengo village and having experience of engaging in some of the students’ out-of-school daily practices during my childhood, I used all these as an analytic resource to ground the data into their contextual relevance. Put differently, my personal experiences and awareness of the cultural aspects of Nzengo village helped enhance the confirmability of the findings rather than pose a threat to it. Furthermore, I employed “member checks” (Guba, 1981, p. 80), in which some participants reviewed the transcripts and the final research report to confirm the accuracy of the findings (Ahmed, 2024). More importantly, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process (Ahmed, 2024). This greatly aided confirmability

because I continually refined my reflections and judgments throughout the research, including observations and conversations with participants.

Transferability

Transferability addresses the extent to which the findings can be generalized or applied to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). It is “a process of abstraction used to apply information drawn from specific persons, settings, and eras to others that have not been directly studied” (Drisko, 2025, p. 103). This means that transferability focuses on how knowledge generated in one research context can be regarded as useful in another. To ensure my research meets the need for transferability, I have provided a “full description of all the contextual factors shaping my research” (Guba, 1981, p. 70, emphasis added). As shown in Chapter 4, I provide a detailed account of the sampling process to help readers gain a clear picture of how participants were recruited. Also, I have documented the dynamics I encountered during my interactions with the participants, including the methodological decisions that I made in each situation. Providing such a description adds rigour to the research (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

Ethical considerations

I employed several strategies to ensure that my research follows an ethical process. Prior to data collection, I applied for research permits to all relevant authorities. This is well “”documented in the next chapter. I ensured that my research is anchored in methods and approaches that are culturally sensitive to the research contexts (Minkler, 2005). I was aware that, when using relational research methods, such as narrative inquiry and ethnography, ethical requirements had to go beyond institutional requirements for privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent (Clandinin, 2006). Being aware of this, in addition to complying with institutional ethical standards, I familiarized myself with the

school and family norms in Nzengo village to gain approval from teachers, students, and parents prior to their participation.

Where the community's values clashed with what I, as an outsider researcher, considered good practice (Minkler, 2005), I allowed dialogue to foster a co-constructed direction for the study's progress. For instance, two parents were initially unwilling to sign the consent forms despite their readiness to participate in the research. In their view, signing was an intimidating act that made them feel they were probably entering a very serious commitment whose implications were hidden from them. We discussed together the implications of signing or not signing for both sides (participants and the researcher). Finally, they agreed to sign and remained cooperative throughout the study. Dialogue with participants was important to move the research process. For instance, during the ethnographic conversations and focus group discussion, students were more interested in understanding the researcher than in being readied to answer the researcher's questions. Negotiating these power dynamics, in which participants showed agency by not only seeking to control the ethnographic conversations process but also prioritizing their own inquiries, was unavoidable. I treated their questions with the same value as I did my own research questions. This enhanced our rapport, and students remained collaborative throughout the research. Looking back at how I negotiated several ethical concerns to fit the local setting of Nzengo village while also maintaining research ethics, I concur with Warren (2018) that some standards developed for mainstream research are inadequate for research that seeks to establish collaborative partnerships.

While it is not easy to guarantee participants that what they say during focus group discussions will remain confidential after the discussions (Mayan, 2023), I ensured participants that the information they shared would remain confidential. I made it clear to them that I would not disclose to anyone that they had participated in the study (Mayan,

2023). More importantly, I ensured that every participant understood that upholding each other's privacy is a shared responsibility. Before participating, each participant had to agree not to disclose any information about who participated or what was said during the focus group discussion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presents information on the research paradigm and the methodological aspects followed in undertaking this study. It shows that this study is anchored on an interpretivist stance, which views reality as subjective, multiple and contextual. As such, the study employed qualitative research methods, including participant observation, ethnographic conversations, and focus group discussion. The next chapter (Chapter 4) details how the research process unfolded.

Chapter 4: The research process

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine students' out-of-school practices to understand their contribution to enhancing both students' academic schooling and personal growth. In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of all activities I undertook prior to entering the field, participants' recruitment, data collection procedures, my reflexivity on how my positionality as a researcher shaped this process, challenges encountered, data analysis procedures, and reflections that shaped the direction and depth of the study. While, on the one hand, I am documenting all these processes to strengthen the transparency, credibility, and rigour of my study (Rose & Johnson, 2020; Yin, 2016), on the other hand, I show the value-laden aspects of my research. By the value-laden aspects I mean dynamics and ethical dilemmas, which necessitated negotiations and reflections in my interactions with participants, shaping the study findings.

Prior to entering the field

Several activities took place prior to my entry into the field. Before my research proposal was approved, I liaised with my supervisory committee to seek the University of Victoria's ethical approval. This process was iterative and unfolded in stages. Tasks included formulating the research, designing methods, and developing research tools, such as ethnographic conversations, focus group, and observation guides. The process functioned as a mentorship, allowing me to ask questions and seek clarification or guidance at any time from my supervisory committee. It enhanced my personal growth in research skills. It also provided an opportunity for peer debriefing (Janesick, 2007), which continued throughout all stages of the research. This process added rigour to the study.

After the research proposal was approved, the next step was to submit the application for ethical procedures. As part of the institutional requirement at the

University of Victoria, I attended and completed a course on conducting research involving human participants (*a Course on Research Ethics, CORE-2022*), for which I received a certificate to be attached to the ethical application process. Attending this course reinforced my iterative reading of the ethical procedures. This helped me maintain awareness of ethical concerns as I prepared for field entry. Both the course and the ethical application were online, allowing the principal investigator (main supervisor) and the principal applicant (student conducting the research) to track the application. This simplified communication with the approval committee because, whenever they returned the application form, the main supervisor and student were notified via email.

After the ethical approval from the University of Victoria, I further required approval to conduct research in Tanzania. This was to be approved by the University of Dar es Salaam (my employer and funder) for this PhD study. Application for ethical approval at the University of Dar es Salaam was also an online process. Approval from the University of Dar es Salaam helped introduce me to several educational hierarchies for accessing the schools. The local educational authorities at the regional and district levels were still operating on print-modes in their ethical application processes. Finally, I required participants' consent prior to their participation.

Navigating digital and analog gatekeeping in research left me with mixed reflections. On the one hand, I appreciated the speed of digital systems. At both the University of Victoria and the University of Dar es Salaam, ethical approval moved faster than I expected. I clearly saw the benefits of institutions digitalizing research: online platforms allow applicants and reviewers to work across time and location if they have internet access. I used templates that the institutions had already validated, which minimized back-and-forth inquiries. These systems tracked progress automatically. Status updates showed where an application was and who needed to act. This reduced delays

without lowering scrutiny. In this case, speed reflects coordination, not weaker review. Compared to print-based procedures, digital systems allowed me to move quickly to the next stages of my research.

On the other hand, analog procedures required me to meet gatekeepers in person, which became a key site of ethical negotiation. These encounters went beyond formal approval. For example, an educational officer in the Mwanza Region commended me for returning to conduct research in a rural area, telling me “hongera”, a Swahili word which means congratulations. This response may have several interpretations. As a Ph.D. candidate from a Global North university, I may have been perceived as bringing potential benefits to the community. If so, this creates tension because it raises expectations that I cannot easily meet through my research project. My return to my home district may also have positioned me as a collaborator in efforts to develop the local setting. I was careful not to overshadow the officer with my positionality. I asked for some advice on how to better navigate the villagers (parents). This was a strategy I used to give back my intellectual authority to the officer. Our conversation took place in Kiswahili, and I understood the officer’s appraisal, “hongera,” as signaling recognition and welcome. These interactions show that ethical approval is not only procedural; it also depends on how researchers are perceived and positioned.

At the school level, I followed paper-based approval processes. This highlights a clear divide: digital systems dominate urban institutions, while rural settings rely on in-person and document-based procedures. The analog process required repeated follow-ups, which a digital system would likely avoid. However, these interactions created space to build relationships, explain my work, and respond to local expectations. In this sense, what appears inefficient from a digital perspective also enables a form of relational ethics in analog encounters that digital systems tend to limit.

Entering the field

I conducted my research in one rural public secondary school in Ukerewe District, which I anonymize in this report as Nzengo Secondary School. Nzengo is an informal Swahili word for ‘community’, and as used here, does not refer to anything other than the place in Ukerewe where this study was conducted. Ukerewe is where I was born and raised, and where I studied my primary and lower secondary education. Thus, I was returning to this area as a researcher. Although I was not returning to the same school and I did not interact with the same teachers and students I had interacted with during my years of primary and secondary schooling, the fact that I was culturally aware of the place, still required me to constantly [re]negotiate my presence in this new role.

I introduced myself and acknowledged my familiarity with the research area. Also, I clarified that I was by this time pursuing my doctoral studies in Canada. I emphasized that my presence in Nzengo village was for research purposes. For each group of participants [parents, students, and teachers], I clarified that the purpose of my research was to learn from their perspectives and practices, not to judge them. I made myself clear to students that I was eager to learn from their perspectives, not to judge or report on their behaviours. Also, I clarified to teachers that I intended to learn from their perspectives, including by observing how they managed classroom activities, to learn from their practices, and not to evaluate how they teach. As for parents, I clarified that my interest was to learn from their perspectives, not to judge their views or their children’s schooling experiences.

I clarified that I preferred voluntary participation and assured all participants of their anonymity and my confidentiality. Also, I took time to observe the environment to examine how socio-economic activities have changed since 2007, when I left Ukerewe. Since then, I visited the place occasionally, often spending no more than two weeks

before returning to Dar es Salaam, where I work. These steps positioned me as a respectful and trustworthy researcher rather than as someone who brings assumptions based on past experiences.

Participant recruitment and selection

In achieving the purpose of this study, I required 10 participants. These included four students in their lower secondary school in the Ukerewe district, aged between 15 and 16; two classroom teachers working in the selected study area/school; and four parents to whom students' assent to participate in this research was sought. As a researcher who is aware of the gender fluidity across contexts, and embracing the Heshima framework (Kakuru, 2025), I approached how participants identified themselves with gender categories with care and respect. In this sense, the gender categories used in this study reflect participants' self-identification. I used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit these participants. The processes and details for each participant are presented as follows.

Teachers

Upon arrival at the school, I introduced myself to the school leadership and explained the purpose of my study. The school leadership provided me with access to teachers. I went to the staff room and met a group of teachers. I explained the purpose of my visit to the teachers. Teachers asked various questions regarding my study and their participation. Most of the questions raised concerned understanding the study's purpose in detail, how the information provided would be handled, and whether participation in this study would be compensated. I answered all the questions by clarifying that the purpose of my study was primarily to disseminate academic findings and that there was no financial compensation for participating. Finally, two teachers willingly agreed to

participate in this study, a business subject teacher (34-year-old) and a geography/physics teacher (37-year-old) (table 1). These teachers signed the consent form prior to any arrangement for the ethnographic conversations. Thus, the first group of participants recruited for this study was teachers. This recruitment was made through the school leadership. I have anonymized these teachers by their teaching subjects.

Table 1

Teacher participants

S/N	Name	Sex	Age (Years)
1.	Business Subject	Male	34
2.	Geography/Physics	Male	37

Students

The two teachers and I then recruited four students. These were the students whom teachers knew the types of out-of-school practices they were engaging in at home. These students were a useful group for both ethnographic conversations and focus group discussions. To protect their privacy, I told the students that I was going to present their perspectives through pseudonyms and asked for their advice whether they had pseudonyms they preferred. Drawing on our shared cultural awareness of the naming system in Ukerewe district, students and I, finally had four names identifying each student: Mazura, Nanzura, Nansato, and Masato. Involving students in the decision on what pseudonym they wish to be identified with in the research process was an ethical practice. It also reinforced what scholars (i.e., Wang et al., 2026) suggest that qualitative researchers should always allow participants to choose the names for themselves, rather than imposing pseudonyms without consulting them. In the following part, I present the characteristics of these four students, who participated in my research.

Mazura (male, 15-year-old) is a Form Three student at Nzengo Secondary School. He is the third of five children. Mazura's family keeps cattle, and their main economic activities are subsistence farming and brick making. Mazura is a Kerewe word derived from "*enzura*," meaning "*rain*." Thus, Mazura is a name given to a male child born during the peak rain season or on a day when it is raining, signifying that one will be a farmer. Also, in Kerewe culture, names are often attached to events (such as Mazura associated with rainfall) to provide a reference for the time of one's birth. We assigned the pseudonym Mazura to this student because the out-of-school practice he engages in almost every time he is at home is animal care and occasional farming. Mazura's dream is to become an engineer, and according to him and his teacher (Geography/Physics teacher), Mazura has made very promising academic progress. When at home, Mazura's regular schedule begins with milking cows, after which he takes the cattle to graze in the bush. Thereafter, Mazura returns home or joins other family members to continue farming. Mazura also engages in other out-of-school practices, such as brickmaking, as the subsequent findings chapter shows.

Nanzura (female-15-year-old) lives in Nzengo village. She is a Form Three student at Nzengo Secondary School. Nanzura's name has the same meaning as Mazura's. The only difference is that Nanzura is a name given to a female child, born in the rainy season or on any rainy day. During a focus group discussion, we agreed to assign her the pseudonym Nanzura not only because she spent most of her out-of-school time engaged in farming, particularly gardening activities, but also because she identifies herself as a current and future gardener.

Nansato (female -15-year-old) is a Form Three student at Nzengo Secondary School. Nansato is a name given to a female child born during the peak tilapia fishing season, a fish species found in Lake Victoria. In the Kerewe language, tilapia is called

‘*ensato*’, and its plural is “(a)*masato*”. In my research, we assigned this student the pseudonym Nansato because her father’s major economic activity is fishing for tilapia, whereas Nansato’s favourite out-of-school activity was mainly cooking (of the tilapia and other foods).

Masato (male, 16 years old) is a Form Three student at Nzengo Secondary School. Unlike other students, Masato helps his father with fishing activities. This is why we assigned him the pseudonym Masato. Masato is a name that carries the same meaning as in Nansato. The only difference is that Masato is a name given to a male child. Masato occasionally fishes for tilapia. Besides fishing, Masato also engaged in various activities, such as artistic drawings and football commentary, in his local area. It should be noted that all these names were agreed upon and suggested by the students themselves during a focus group discussion. They should not be understood as being imposed on the students based on assumptions about what they liked to do in their out-of-school daily practices.

Table 2

Student participants

S/N	Name	Sex	Age (Years)
1.	Mazura	Male	15
2.	Nanzura	Female	15
3.	Nansato	Female	15
4.	Masato	Male	16

I contacted these students individually, explained the project’s aims, and invited them to participate voluntarily. I asked students to choose between English and Kiswahili versions of the consent forms. All students preferred the Kiswahili version.

While students did not have many questions about the study’s purpose, one student, Mazura, asked about its utility. Mazura wanted to know whether, after this study,

they would expect to see things changing in their curriculum. To me, this was an ethical tension grounded in my positionality as a university instructor and Ph.D. candidate who was like ‘a returning son’ to the local context. My presence as perceived by Mazura was signaling a social contact for him to share his stories of struggle, as echoed in the desire to see changes. I did not have the personal capacity to bring about the change he hoped for. I aimed to build rapport with Mazura to enhance his participation in my research, and I chose to be honest.

Drawing on the Heshima framework (Kakuru, 2025), I did not give false promises. I explained to Mazura that changing practices within the school was beyond my control, as such decisions largely depended on policymakers. However, I emphasized that the information such as those Mazura and colleagues provided would be documented in the dissertation and that part of it would be shared at various academic conferences and published in journal articles. This way, their perspectives could be heard by various educational actors and might help change educational practices in contexts where educational stakeholders deem it appropriate to use them.

On this point, I explained to all four students that the primary purpose of my research was to share knowledge, in the form of their perspectives, with global audience on students’ out-of-school practices. As such, understanding and documenting their perspectives was a step towards the change. Finally, all four students agreed to participate in this study. I gave students one week to read and reflect on the consent forms and to reassess their decision about whether to continue participating in this study. I reminded students that their participation required their parents’ approval, and that I would contact their parents shortly.

Parents

After recruiting students, I required their parents' approval. Meanwhile, I was required to recruit the same parents whose children had agreed to participate. With the help of school leadership, teachers and students, I finally recruited four parents whose children also participated in this study. I provided parents with consent forms written in Kiswahili, a language they were very familiar with. Then, I allowed them one week to read and ask any questions. I used mobile phones to keep in touch with parents and teachers. For the sake of this research, I assigned these parents the names according to those assigned to their children (Table 3).

The methodological tension I experienced when recruiting parents was that, for some parents, their children had already explained to their parents about my research. For instance, Nansato and Nanzura had already made agreement with their parents that they were both (the parent and the student) going to participate. This made it easy for me to get these parents' consent. This agency by students challenges the traditional hierarchy in doing research, assuming that the researcher is the only gatekeeper for participants access to the goals of the research (Denscombe, 2025). Students had helped me to break some boundaries in navigating their parental participation. However, those parents whose children showed this agency were females. This agency, female children convincing female parents, whereas boys did not show such agency, may require further exploration.

Table 3*Parent participants*

S/N	Name	Sex	Occupation	Age (Yrs)
1.	Mazura's father	Male	Fishing & farming	48
2.	Nanzura's mother	Female	Farming	46
3.	Nansato's Mother	Female	Farming	44
4.	Masato's Father	Male	Fishing/farming	56

Data collection procedures

After recruiting all three participant groups, I did not begin data collection straight away. I provided the participants with one week to reread the consent forms and reflect on their decisions about whether to continue participating in this study, and to ask any questions they might have. While waiting for participants' time to reflect on their will to participate in my research, I spent one week learning about the school's routines. I paid attention to the extracurricular activities at the school. Extra-curricular activities in Tanzanian context refer to activities that students engage within the school settings and regular school time, but outside the classroom. These can be cleanliness, gardening, sports and games. Also, my observation was meant to determine whether any practices from students' out-of-school engagements were allowed on the school premises. After school, which usually ended at 3:00 pm, I visited the villages where the recruited students and parents lived to learn about and observe various activities being undertaken there. I documented my observations in my field notes. Luckily, after one week all participants were ready to continue with their participation in the study.

Ethnographic conversations

I gathered data for all research questions through ethnographic conversations. There is little research to offer a distinctive definition of ethnographic conversation.

However, as employed by previous researchers (e.g., Celikoglu et al., 2020; Ley & Krause, 2019), it refers to a qualitative research method in which understanding is built through open, two-way dialogue in real social contexts. In this approach, meaning is co-constructed through socially situated interaction shaped by relationships, context, and cultural background, and participants articulate their experiences primarily through narratives that reveal how they interpret their lives and social worlds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hammersley, 2006). I used ethnographic conversations in my research because they facilitate the integration of ethnographic data, such as focus group discussions and observations, with narrative inquiry stories (Maynard, 2006). I visited participants' local contexts and held informal conversations. Throughout this dissertation, I have strived to use the term ethnographic conversation consistently. Thus, where the term *interview* appears, it should be understood as referring to these ethnographic conversations rather than to formal, (semi) structured interviews.

Ethnographic conversations were used for all research questions. For instance, on the first research question – ‘what types of out-of-school practices students regularly do?’, I used ethnographic conversations guide with open ended questions I had prepared prior going to the field. While these were entry-point questions to start conversations, participants, and I, had turns for additional probing questions. Unstructured questions in this study involved those emerging from the students (sometimes interfering with the ongoing ethnographic conversations), all of which for relational care purposes, I welcomed and rendered them similar worthy discussion. I used unstructured ethnographic conversations because I wanted to let the participants define what was important. The approach allowed students to share stories about many out-of-school daily practices they did. Students explicated how those activities shaped their school learning, personal identities and how they drew on these practices in determining their social futures.

On the second research question—exploring the educational importance out-of-school daily practices offer students, I engaged students in face-to-face conversations, asking them to talk more about the types of knowledge, skills, and values, identities they gained in those activities. Regarding the third question, ‘how can out-of-school daily practices that build valuable skills be integrated into a formal classroom?’ I started by asking students about the careers they wanted to pursue in school and how they felt the out-of-school practices contributed to those pursuits. I asked students to illustrate out-of-school practices that had helped or continued to help them in any specific school subject or assignment.

Likewise, I used ethnographic conversations to engage parents and teachers. I used unstructured open-ended questions to understand parents’ and teachers’ perspectives (Hammersley, 2006). These conversations lasted for one hour, although during observation (for instance in Nanzura’s mother garden and at Masato’s father net fixing site), such conversations recurred alongside other topics. I valued these off-topic conversations because they were providing additional data. At some point, these conversations clarified something already mentioned during the one-hour session. I engaged with individual teachers and parents on separate occasions. The focus of these conversations was to examine their views on the types of students’ out-of-school daily practices they were aware of, what educational significance they perceived in those practices, any support they provided and how they thought were the appropriate ways to integrate those practices into the school curriculum, as well as students’ life skills.

Drawing inspiration on the Heshima framework, which centres respect and relational care (Kakuru, 2025), all these conversations were organized as per participant’s availability and preferred place. Giving participants power to choose places for ethnographic conversations, implies that I was acknowledging their agency. I noted that

this also enhanced trust building. This way, I reduced my influence as a newcomer from the Global North trying to shape the rural setting. All participants provided informed consent to be recorded during the conversations. In short, throughout the data collection process, I ensured “an ongoing conversation and listening to participants’ stories” (Celikoglu et al., 2020, p. 137) around the research questions.

Participant Observation

Drawing on ethnographic methods, I used participant observation to observe various activities in the family setting to determine what learning experiences the home environment offered to students. Participant observation can uncover new insights into behaviour as it allows for human interactions to occur with less obstruction (Mackellar, 2013). Using participant observation enabled me to engage directly in the social setting while conducting systematic observation of participants, contextual dynamics, and my own positionality (Mackellar, 2013). While observing, I took field notes and photographs as per negotiated ethical agreements and as trust developed with the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). My observation was guided by two observational guides one for classroom and another for home settings (appendices F & G, respectively), whereby each had a set of prepared questions I sought to address through observation.

Participant observation involves extended periods of observation, typically several months, where the researcher immerses themselves in the community (Hammersley, 2006). In my research, I thought that one-time observation, such as visiting a family once, was insufficient for a true participant observation. Thus, I spent three months [July to October 2026] immersed in Nzengo village and school. I made regular attendance from morning to afternoon. I spent three months observing some lessons and extra-curricular activities such as sports in the school setting during the day (7 am - 2:30 pm). This gave me a chance to observe how the daily scheduling of events in a school unfolded. Also, it

allowed me to have conversations with teachers, some of whom were eager to know about my Ph.D. studies (in Canada). Whenever such conversations yielded insights, I embraced them. I rendered these conversations with teachers with paramount importance.

The conversations with teachers focused on my doctoral studies, which in my view, suggested teacher's exploration of their own personal aspirations. Some wanted to know about the possible opportunities for advancing their teaching profession. From these conversations for instance, I noted teacher's discontent with the way the competency-based curriculum is being implemented in Tanzania. To me, all these were shadow data to be recorded in my research diary. The methodological tension these conversations reveal is that while I was studying participants' experiences and perspectives, they were also studying about me. As a researcher, I could not be invisible as traditional research practices would emphasize neutrality (i.e., Gerson & Damaske, 2020). Involving in these conversations was a shared intellectual reciprocity which to me was like giving back (my perspectives and expertise) to the community, while also learning from it.

I had the opportunity to observe two different classroom interactions twice each. Teachers who invited me into their classrooms were those who also took part in ethnographic conversations about my research. These were the Business subject and Geography/Physics teachers. My classroom observation lasted 40 minutes per visit. I observed teachers interacting with students in the classroom through teaching approaches such as small-group discussions (5-6 students per group) and the teacher's lecturing approach. I admit that my presence in the classroom might have changed the atmosphere of the day. I witnessed an active engagement from students. From my experience as a teacher, I understand that many teachers use code-mixing and code-switching, which I had expected to observe during my visits to classes. However, classroom communications were largely in English language with very minimal code switching and code-mixing with

Kiswahili language. These interactions might be due to my presence. I am cautious that teachers and students might have decided to act in a way that pleases the ‘university lecturer’. I attempted to break this hierarchy by participating into the class activities such as asking for clarifications on some ideas raised. This enhanced relational trust as I appeared to be in the class to learn. Afterall, these were Geography and Business subjects, while I had already disclosed that my expertise was in Literature. In this regard, whenever I asked for clarification, I was being considered as a novice to the subjects. Through asking questions, I actively participated in a process of co-constructing knowledge in the classroom. Much of what I observed in the classroom is presented in the chapter on the research findings.

However, I felt an ethical dilemma when the Business subject teacher asked me to give him my personal advice on other teaching resources I think he would use to enrich his classroom practices. I had not promised in my ethical clearance whether I would instruct teachers or give them my educational assessment. However, refusing to provide my professional advice to the same participant who had already invited me to his class and invested his time in my ethnographic conversations, would be an ethical insult. Such refusal would contradict the Heshima framework. Embracing the sense of relational care and respect, I shared with the teacher my perspectives. We brainstormed how the fishing site and those villagers engaging in the fishing business cycle around the school could also be resource for his Business subject along digital resources such as YouTube installed on his own mobile phone.

After school time, I used to visit some villages where parents lived. This was the evening time, usually from 4:00 am to 5:00 pm. I used to spend at least 30 minutes with students’ families’ in-home settings. I observed various out-of-school activities that students did after school hours. During observations in home settings, I engaged with

parents and students in informal conversations, which also yielded critical insights for this research. In home settings, I observed activities such as gardening, brickmaking, and preparing fishing nets. Also, I observed students' engagement in sports, especially playing football after school, as well as doing some school assignments given to them by their teachers. In the findings section, I have included photos of some of these activities that I observed. Our conversations with parents often took place away from other family members. I did not experience any destruction such as noise from children or from the neighborhood during our ethnographic conversations and in my observations.

Focus Group Discussion

I also engaged with students in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). FGDs generated rich, complex, and contradictory accounts and perspectives, which were crucial for better understanding what I was studying (Mayan, 2023). Besides serving as sites for consciousness-raising, FGDs helped decenter my role as researcher by democratizing the research process, in which participants became owners of the conversations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I used an open-ended focus group guide to facilitate the discussion. Focus group discussions helped supplement information on students' narrative stories they had shared during ethnographic conversations. These discussions involved the four students who had participated in the narrative inquiry sessions (ethnographic conversations) and lasted for one hour. I had clarified to students that their participation was voluntary and did not have any implications with their schooling experience.

Also, I ensured them protection through several reminders that everything heard at the discussion was to be kept confidential. I insisted that every member in the group had responsibility to protect each other. I also encouraged students not to disclose any information they would later regret sharing. Understanding my positionality as a teacher and university instructor, students might have decided to provide pleasing answers.

However, the use of multiple methods especially observation along ethnographic conversations helped in addressing this challenge. Students were already aware that I would also visit their homes and in fact I had made several visits prior to the ethnographic conversations when negotiating with parents. This might have helped for their honest opinions. I can confirm that most of what they said was what I ended up observing in the home settings.

Data management processes

Prior to the data collection process, I clarified to participants and several research ethics authorities that the data collected in this study were primarily used to write this dissertation to meet the requirements for the fulfillment of my doctoral degree at the University of Victoria. I employed a range of procedures to ensure an ethical management of the data. First, I was the only one with access to my reflective journal, in which I was recording field notes. The reflexive journal was always kept in my handbag, which I securely kept other research tools such as a tape recorder and a computer. Second, I was the only one with access to my password-protected laptop on which the audio data were stored immediately after recording. I ensured that all participants' identifiers were removed from all data sets at each stage, especially starting from audio-text transcription towards analysis and report writing. As the data were collected for research purposes, part of these data will be disseminated through article publications, presentations, workshops and academic conferences to benefit educational stakeholders.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (reflexive TA) positions the researcher's subjectivity and reflections as central to the process of creating categories from the data (Braun et al., 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The approach draws on Braun & Clarke's (2006) six

iterative stages of Thematic Analysis: familiarization, coding, initial themes generation, theme review, theme refining, and writing up. In this research, these processes did not flow systematically but iteratively. As Braun & Clarke (2006) note, these steps do not flow uniformly across all research processes.

The familiarization phase of my data began immediately as I arrived at Nzengo Secondary School. I observed and noted key insights into the school schedule, including students' practices during extracurricular activities. I observed that students were participating in sports, mainly soccer. Outside the school (in Nzengo village), I observed activities such as farming, fishing, and gardening. All these later became the central categories in my findings chapter.

The familiarization phase continued as I transcribed my audio data into English-written texts. In this phase, I did not undertake a full verbatim transcription. Instead, I selectively focused on some non-verbal cues, including participants' tone, pauses, and laughter, which I recognized as carrying significant socio-cultural meaning in Nzengo village. Keeping these cues was crucial for my use of a reflexive analysis. I was aware of the views of scholars (e.g., Point & Baruch, 2023) who argue that the ubiquity of specialized coding software in the current era necessitates that researchers skip transcription and begin coding directly. This was totally different from my research in which I had audio ethnographic conversations in a mix of Kikerewe and Kiswahili. I could not get appropriate software to transcribe this data. Thus, drawing on my linguistic background in Kikerewe, Kiswahili, and English, I transcribed these data from Kikerewe/Kiswahili into English. I transcribed the data manually by typing all the accounts into a word document on my password-protected computer, which, for ethical purposes, only I accessed.

After transcribing the data, I read the transcripts several times and repeatedly to make sense of them, while noting some initial impressions of potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I noted these impressions, I was also recording my personal assumptions and biases in my reflexive journal (Byrne, 2022). These included my familiarity with the culture and Nzengo village, as well as my conception of learning as an educator. I aimed to ensure an accurate representation of participants' voices. Accordingly, as Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest, I ensured that data familiarization was a continuous, iterative, and recursive process that spanned the entire data analysis phase. On several occasions, I refined my reflexive notes and, at times, reorganized my earlier thematic categories as I reread the data.

I developed initial codes in my datasets using QualCoder 3.7. This qualitative software enabled me to organize my initial codes and themes in different colours. During the coding process, I used descriptive codes – phrases carrying explicit meaning as in participants' words, as opposed to interpretive codes, which tend to delve into the underlying meaning and connections (Byrne, 2022). I used these descriptive codes because I wanted to develop themes that were highly reflecting participants' verbal accounts.

I found that the qualitative software, QualCoder 3.7, was better for coding than for organizing codes into various categories. Thus, I exported the coded data into an Excel file, which was very helpful for organizing it into various categories and subcategories. Meanwhile, I integrated the data I had initially coded manually into my field notes and reflexive journal since entering the field. Exporting the data to an Excel file enabled me to group the initial codes and then explore how they overlapped, intersected, and contrasted with each other. At this stage, I moved beyond the surface meaning of the descriptive

codes towards interpretive engagement, which helped in capturing the underlying meanings of the codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

When organizing the data into categories, I used my research questions as a major reference point (Ahmed et al., 2025). Then, I reviewed and refined the categories to ensure they fit together logically. In what follows, I present information about my reflexivity which is a key practise to RTA.

Researcher's reflexivity

My position in this study was beyond the insider-outsider binary. First, I approached the research as an insider, drawing on my personal connection to Ukerewe Island (born and raised there, and having pursued primary and lower secondary education there). This gave me linguistic and cultural access to Nzengo village, allowing me to speak Kikerewe and Kijita, which were mainly spoken by participants at home, and Kiswahili, which they either rarely used (unless in formal places such as church) or mixed with or code-switched between these languages. Second, I have professional experience as an English literature teacher, having worked at a public secondary school in the Njombe region of southern Tanzania for two years. This experience gave me insight into teaching the Tanzanian secondary competency-based curriculum in a rural context, although I recognize that Ukerewe and Njombe differ. Third, I worked for four years as a university instructor, preparing future English literature teachers for secondary schools. Fourth, now arriving in Nzengo village as a researcher (Ph.D. candidate) from Canada, having spent three years there, gave me the positionality of an outsider researcher (with Western assumptions about research). My positionality was therefore operating in the space of what I call 'betweenness'. My academic trajectories (pursuing secondary school, college education, and currently a Ph.D. candidate in Canada) dislocated me from my village and from my out-of-school daily practices, such as farming, caring for siblings,

and caring for animals. As a university instructor, I have remained in the city (Dar es Salaam), allowing me to return to my village only during holidays. In short, I no longer fit in perfectly with my Ukerewe community. Meanwhile, I do not fit in perfectly in Canada (because of my roots). I am in between these spaces, holding the positionality of betweenness, a researcher who belongs everywhere and nowhere.

Rather than attempting to remove these positionalities (to be neutral), I embraced them through reflexivity, using them as my analytic tool at all stages of data analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023, 2023). Reflexivity, as used in this research, entails a careful, ongoing process in which researchers reflect on how their background, personal views, and social and cultural settings influence every aspect of the research, including data collection and analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). In this regard, I considered all four forms of reflexivity recommended by Olmos-Vega et al. (2023): personal reflexivity, reflecting on how my biographical history and emotional responses shaped my interpretations; interpersonal reflexivity, examining the relational dynamics and power asymmetries between myself and the participants; methodological reflexivity, evaluating the alignment between analytic procedures and epistemological commitments; and contextual reflexivity, by situating the findings within broader socio-historical condition. Nencel (2014) calls a consideration of all these elements “situated reflexivity” (p. 81), implying that the researcher’s self-awareness must adapt to the specific context.

Practice of Heshima

My personal awareness of the culture-shaping practices in Nzengo village necessitated embracing the most relevant ethical stance. To this end, I adopted the Heshima framework, an Afrocentric ethical approach proposed by Kakuru (2025). Kakuru (2025) adopted the Swahili word “Heshima,” meaning “respect” (p.91), to propose ethical research practices for engaging with Black people and people of African descent. The

Heshima framework, according to Kakuru (2025), is grounded in the spirit of Ubuntu, an African philosophy that emphasizes vigilance and care. As such, the major tenet in the Heshima framework is “respect”, which, in this context, means “treating everyone and everything with care” (Kakuru, 2025, p. 91). This also positions Heshima as a decolonial framework for conducting research, as it advocates ethical engagement grounded in respect and relational accountability to participants (Kakuru, 2025).

Drawing on Kakuru (2025), I applied Heshima in this study as an ethical approach that emphasizes treating people and things with respect and recognizing their equal worth. By this, I mean that I accorded participants’ questions, views, and perspectives the same weight as those given to my own research project. Heshima demands that researchers prioritize “voices, perspectives, experiences, cultures of Black people and communities” (Kakuru, 2025, p. 92). I practised the Heshima framework throughout the research process.

Practising Heshima provided me with a window to treat the perspectives and experiences of students, teachers, and parents in Nzengo village as “culturally responsive narratives” (Kakuru, 2025, p. 92), sufficient in their contexts, unlike Western-centric frameworks that would have regarded these as deficient. Embracing the Heshima framework, in which I treated participants and their practices with the same worth as my research, I was able to navigate dynamics I would not have otherwise navigated if I had stuck to traditional research norms, such as neutrality. The illustration below provides a clear picture of why embracing the Heshima framework was crucial in this study.

During my ethnographic conversations with students, my initial assumption was to engage students with probing questions that would lead to a deeper exploration of the data for my project. I was not aware that students also wanted to use the conversation sessions to learn more about me. Students’ desire to know more about me and to ask several

questions they had, although outside the scope of my research question, arose after I disclosed my positionality. While some researchers (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2016; Dursun, 2023; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Shohel et al., 2015) report avoiding such questions to remain focused on the research topic, I did it differently. Rather than suppressing students' questions and their desire to know more about me as irrelevant and out of my research's scope, I accorded them equal weight, as I had rendered to my own research. I did not view them as threats to neutrality, but I valued them as significant and their desire to know as valid as my own desire to know about the participants.

Practising Heshima was useful in many ways. It heightened my rapport with the students, reshaping our ethnographic conversations from a hierarchical, rigidly formal encounter into an informal dialogue. Students moved from giving formal answers to lived stories, which was what I wanted. The more I valued their questions, the more their interest in engaging with my research project increased. Also, it unlocked shadow data: after students felt a strong sense of rapport, they offered their genuine perspectives, including sharing some practices they valued but kept secret from their parents because parents thought they were not useful for academic learning. This helped me understand that some students engaged in secret artistic drawings, reading newspapers, and watching television when parents were away, all of which were always hidden from parents and would probably not be easy to disclose to any outsider. More importantly, it helped me understand students' hidden aspirations, fears, and markers of personal growth, which would otherwise have been hard to capture if I had suppressed their questions. In the excerpt below, I show how I practised Heshima by responding to students' questions, even when those questions fell outside the scope of my research, which eventually enriched data generation.

(in the middle of the ethnographic conversations, Masato interrupts...)

Masato: Before I forget, you said that you were born on this Island and did part of your education here.

Leonard: Absolutely. My primary and secondary education.

Masato: I have been wondering: where did you learn English that lets you not only speak with people in Canada but also reach a Ph.D. level?

Leonard: Learning any language is a continuous process. My primary and lower secondary education, which I acquired while on this island, laid a foundation. I can say my English language fluency was closer to, or even less than, your proficiency. You speak good English, Masato!

Masato [*smiling*]: Yeah! Many people say so, but I am still not sure. Now can have confidence that when speaking English with Canadians, they say my English is good.

Leonard [*smiling and lightly laughing*]: Me too. I have heard you several times, including during my visit to your class. And I agree with those who say: you speak good English.

Masato: I try to be better. You know, I have my own special programme to learn some words from my home English dictionary. I want to improve my football commentary. People like it when I do it in English. When I get a word from the dictionary, I practise using it in my football commentaries. But I don't practise at home because I don't want my parents to know.

Leonard: Interesting! Why don't you want your parents to know about it?

Masato: Because to them, that is wastage of time. They want me to focus solely on academic subjects. I draw pictures too. About people and nature. I will show you all these. I hide them because parents see them as destructive to school subjects.

In the above excerpt, the conversation continued, criss-crossing between the scope of the research and Masato's question. It was an iterative process, which led to a deep understanding of students' engagement in out-of-school daily practices. Responding to Masato's questions has generated in-depth data. For instance, he reveals that he engages in football commentaries as a form of shadow practice in his parents' eyes. Although I had conducted participant observation in Nzengo village a week before starting ethnographic conversations with participants, I had realized that Masato was well-known at school as a football (soccer) commentator, and I had no clue that he did this under such tension at home. Allowing off-topic conversation also reinforced my understanding that many students in Tanzanian public secondary schools feel inferior when they cannot speak

English (Adamson, 2024). This inferiority stems from English being the language of instruction at secondary school. In this sense, students who are unable to communicate in English often feel they are failing the national exams.

Reflecting on my own experience, I understood Masato's disbelief in his English language proficiency very well. As in my own experience, Masato's mother tongue is Kikerewe, and he attended a public primary school where Kiswahili was the language of instruction. At primary school, he learned English as a subject. At secondary school, he uses English as the medium of instruction. As a day scholar (one who spends his daytime at school and comes back home in the evening), school is the only place he can get the audience to speak English with, unless he attends private tuition, thereafter. This explains why he felt confident only after being validated by someone who has interacted with English speakers.

Also, welcoming Masato's questions helped me to notice another tension in Masato's attendance at private tutoring. He mentioned that his favourite subjects were History and English language (see Chapter 5), but his father always wanted him to attend maths private tutoring programmes. As presented in the findings chapter, Masato attends such private tutoring sessions to comply with his father's instructions, while he secretly practises football commentary by reading a dictionary and drawing pictures as his favourite out-of-school practices.

The point I want to emphasize here is that I could not have revealed all these underlying tensions if I had suppressed Masato's seemingly off-topic questions. Considering Heshima made my ethnographic conversations a site for a shared knowledge-generating process rather than an extractive one (Kakuru, 2025). More importantly, embracing Heshima in this regard helped me treat Masato as a human being who deserves the right to know.

Scholars (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2016; Gerson & Damaske, 2020) who suppress participants' questions not only miss important 'shadow data' from their participants but also reinforce traditional interviewing practices that maintain power hierarchies. Such scholars (e.g., Gerson & Damaske, 2020) tend to do so, claiming to maintain a professional stance of neutrality to avoid biases. These scholars still practice interviews in the way Platt (2002) clearly explained as one of the earliest orientations to the use of interviews in the history of human research. Platt notes that qualitative researchers were being trained that, when using interviews, "the interviewer should also, when questioning, appear unshockable, have no detectable personal opinions, and behind the front of friendliness be objective and scientific" (p. 20). In other words, the interviewer was supposed to appear nice and calm through their outward demeanour but had to hide their personalities and stay focused on the research project.

In my view, this is a colonial practice anchored in the colonizing mission to know more about the colonized while keeping them less aware of the colonizers or denying them any right to know about the outsider (Viruru & Cannella, 2016). It is an epistemic injustice to demand the participant's self-disclosure while the researcher maintains self-closure. I concur with Viruru and Cannella (2016) that interviews (including ethnographic conversations), as a research method, can reproduce colonial power structures because it potentially allows the researcher to control who speaks, what is asked, and how people must express their experiences. Embracing Heshima framework enabled my research to balance this power hierarchy. It specifically enabled me to abandon rigid interview boundaries during our ethnographic conversations by allowing open dialogues with participants, which, in turn, provided opportunities to co-create knowledge through reciprocal dialogues.

As for parents, having realized that I valued not only their curiosity about me but also their daily practices, they would sometimes call me to join them to observe or photograph their activities. For example, this happened to Nanzura's family when they invited me to their garden several times (see figure 4). I had the strongest rapport with the participants, which I would not have achieved without practising Heshima. Nevertheless, I also recognize that my rapport with participants might have been heightened by my positionality as a Ph.D. candidate from a Global North university. This might have implied carrying the perceived colonial legacy of superiority, in that parents, teachers, and students might have perceived me as someone with social and academic power. In this research, I have acknowledged these influences arising from my positionalities, not as weaknesses but as evidence that power shapes relations. This is why Heshima was an appropriate framework as it offered me an opportunity to interrogate my assumptions, while treating all the emerging dynamics during my interaction with participants, not as destructions but as data to enrich qualitative research practices.

During data interpretation, the use of Heshima served as an additional framework for looking at the other side of students' out-of-school practices beyond the multiliteracies framework. Kakuru (2025) notes that, while reflexive TA gives more power to the researcher's perspectives and assumptions in making sense of the data, Heshima framework reverses this hierarchy, by centring participants' experiences. It was through the Heshima framework, that is, respecting by centring participants' experiences (Kakuru, 2025), that I came to understand that students' experiences extend beyond meaning-making and identity formation, and that some of their out-of-school daily practices are better understood as life-sustaining rather than obstructive, necessitating a theory of life-sustaining practices.

Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a detailed account of how the research process unfolded. It has documented every stage, including entering the field, familiarizing with the research site, negotiating and eventually selecting participants, and how they participated in this research. Also, the chapter documents the analysis process used to make sense of the data. A key takeaway in this chapter is that this research unfolded in a non-linear pattern that at some point challenged the ethical assumptions held by some research bureaus. In the next chapter, I present the findings of this research.

Chapter 5: Findings on Students' Out-of-school practices

Overview

In this chapter and other subsequent chapters (chapter 6 & chapter 7), I present the findings of this research, which examined students' out-of-school daily practices and their relevance to students' academic learning and personal growth. The main question was: How do students' out-of-school practices contribute to their learning and personal development? I explored this question through three sub-research questions: what out-of-school daily practices do students engage in? What learning experiences do students gain when engaging in those practices? How can those out-of-school practices be utilized to enhance students' classroom learning and personal growth? Data were collected from each of the ten participants. This number comprised 4 students, 4 parents, and 2 teachers, all from one secondary school in the rural (Nzengo village), Ukerewe District in Tanzania. Given the different categories the data show in each sub-research question, I present these findings in three chapters in order of the sub-research questions. In this chapter, I present the data for the first research question, what out-of-school daily practices do students engage in.

Students' out-of-school daily practices

Out-of-school daily practices, as used in this research, refer to activities that students engage in at home or in their villages (outside the school). Thus, this first sub-research question aimed to identify the various activities students engaged in during holidays, after-school hours, and on weekends at home. All ten participants contributed to generating the information for this research. I employed ethnographic conversations with all participants and, then I engaged in a focus group discussion with students. I complemented this information with participant observation. During the observation, I

took photos of some practices for which participants had consented to be photographed. As noted in the previous chapter, I analyzed these data using a reflexive thematic analysis and interpreted these data using a multiliteracies framework and a theory of life-sustaining practices. I embraced Heshima framework as an ethical lens throughout the research process.

Overall, the findings reveal six categories: household and domestic responsibilities, agrarian and economic production activities, academic literacy practices, religious and faith-based literacy practices, multimodal literacy practices, and sports and physical recreational literacy practices.

Household & Domestic Responsibilities

I use the terms “household” and “domestic responsibilities” in this study to refer to home-based tasks that students perform within their respective families. I found that during out-of-school hours, on weekends, or during holidays, students were engaged in various household and domestic responsibilities, organized by gender. In Nzengo village, children are integrated into their society through social competence. In this light, many household and domestic responsibilities they engage in aim to help them develop what Nsamenang (1992) calls “social maturity” (p. 147). Hence, out-of-school daily practices here differ from school-centric practices, which are ingrained in Western modes of social integration through “biological maturity,” often determined alongside cognitive and academic achievements (Nsamenang, 1992, p. 147). During the analysis, I classified the household and domestic responsibilities observed in Nzengo village into the following subcategories.

Sweeping the compound. Sweeping the compound involved cleaning the home surroundings. This was identified as the first household responsibility that students carried out in the morning before engaging in other tasks scheduled for the day. The boys were

mainly responsible for cleaning the household compound. During focus group discussions, Masato said, *“I just do personal reading in the morning after doing the cleanliness around the home surroundings.”* Also, Mazura revealed that, *“It depends on the day. For instance, my day on weekends and holidays begins with sweeping the home compound. But if it is a school day, I just wake up and prepare to go to school”*. These voices suggest the rituals (routines) of sweeping the compound Masato and Mazura perform during weekend. Students’ weekend is filled with tension in that school assignment (homework) competes for time with household sweeping practices. Figure 3 below shows Mazura’s home compound.

Figure 2

Mazura’s home with the compound where he sweeps.



Mazura and Masato's views suggest a clear ordering of activities in which caring for the home comes first, and reading occurs only afterwards. In other words, care and survival organize life; literacy (reading and writing) fits within that organization. This organization of daily life highlights care and responsibility as primary, with literacy embedded within broader relational practices. While literacy can be understood as socially situated and relational (Curtin, 2024), these findings suggest that not all relational and care-based practices should be subsumed under the category of literacy. This is because these household practices exist to sustain life and relationships, not to produce meaning. These students are not engaging in sweeping practices to primarily represent meaning or design any future as in the multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996). They prioritize sweeping to fulfill their family obligations.

However, it cannot be denied that engaging in this manual labor can cause physical fatigue, which may interfere with students' engagement in academic literacy practices such as completing homework effectively. During ethnographic conversations, while students expressed their involvement in these activities, I also reflected on my own childhood experiences. I then considered these early morning practices (such as sweeping, which Mazura does before starting homework) from a teacher's perspective. I imagined a tired student sitting with homework at their desk, and hence, I asked Mazura (and all participants) whether this work makes them too tired to do homework. They responded that they are used to these household practices, framing them as part of their family responsibilities. For instance, Mazura said, "*nimeshazoea*," meaning "*I am used to it.*" This response complicates the idea that fatigue necessarily disrupts academic engagement.

During my observation at school, I also saw students sweeping the school compound before entering class. I noted that although students arrived at 7:00 a.m., they

first engaged in school routines such as sweeping, assembling on the school grounds, singing school songs and the national anthem, and listening to announcements from the teacher on duty or school leadership. Classes began at 8:00 a.m. This routine aligns with Mazura's view of "*being used to it (sweeping practices)*," as appears something students regularly do within the school context.

On the one hand, this serves to illustrate how school and home are not disconnected. On the other hand, it complicates the idea of fatigue, since it cannot be assumed that students experience exhaustion only when sweeping at home but not when performing similar tasks at school. If students' engagement in sweeping at home is framed as child labour that interferes with schooling, as some research suggests (Abdullah et al., 2022; Singh & Mukherjee, 2018), then school-based sweeping also raises similar questions about labour within schooling itself. At the same time, if sweeping is considered child labour, its presence in schools suggests that some forms of labour are institutionally normalised.

From a cultural perspective grounded in the Ukerewe community, household practices such as sweeping are part of cultural competences that families value and expect children to develop. Viewed in this way, sweeping is not only labour but also a social competency that supports everyday care and responsibility in Nzengo village.

Washing dishes. Washing dishes was a specific task for girls; although boys could still do it, only female students mentioned doing the dishes. For instance, Nanzura narrated, "*When I wake up in the morning, I do the dishes, usually on weekends and during holidays. Sometimes, I do the dishes before going to school, but that is very rare—only when my mother is sick and there is no one to help,*". From within the local cultural context, washing dishes is commonly considered a female task. It is not by coincidence, but rather a cultural logic guiding everyday life practices in Nzengo village, that

Nansato's narration of her typical day also reveals her engagement in dishwashing practices as early as the morning. She said, "*in my weekends and holidays, first thing I always do is to make sure the house is clean, especially my own room before I do dishes.*". These stories suggest that weekends and holidays are not luxury moments for these rural students. It is the time for students to serve crucial roles such as dishwashing to their families. Nanzura and Nansato engage in dishwashing as a life-sustaining household responsibility that directly supports family care, hygiene, and everyday survival. Like sweeping, dishwashing also comes upfront, while the school schedule follows later. The stories complicate the school logic in that, whereas teachers may assume students have ample time during weekends (and thus load them with assignments), students' weekend schedules are already filled with household responsibilities. Failure to recognise these realities in students' lives may lead to deficit labels, such as regarding them as unfit for the academic literacy practices at school. If the argument that children's engagement in household practices such as dishwashing is the reason for their failure in school, as some scholars (e.g., Singh & Mukherjee, 2018) suggest, then girls are the most vulnerable group in Nzengo village in this regard.

However, girls do not do all the dishwashing in Nzengo village; this work may vary depending on family structure. In my own experience, growing up in a household where the first three children were male, my two siblings and I regularly undertook tasks traditionally assigned to girls, such as dishwashing and cooking, because there was no female child to assist our mother. This illustrates how domestic labour is reorganized as needed to maintain everyday household functioning. Here, dishwashing is a life-sustaining household responsibility shaped by family needs rather than by fixed gender norms.

Preparing a family meal. As part of their family responsibilities, girls mentioned engaging in cooking practices such as making porridge for their siblings and preparing the family meal. The porridge was prepared in the morning mainly for the younger siblings, whereas the meal was made to serve all the family members. Nanzura narrated, *“I prepare some food for the family’s meals. This includes lunch especially on the weekends and holidays, and dinner on weekdays because by evening time I am already at home”*. Also, Nansato described taking on similar responsibilities, saying, *“I make porridge for my young siblings and prepare an afternoon meal for the family on weekends and holidays. But when I am not at school, I can prepared meals for midday and night.”*

This implies that cooking is a gendered task in Nzengo village, mainly done by girls. It does not mean children’s exploitation, as in what Webbink et al. (2012) have called “hidden” forms of child labour (p.640). Numerous studies (e.g., Assaad et al., 2010; Webbink et al., 2012; Woldehanna et al., 2021) have highlighted children’s engagement in work as a barrier to school participation and academic attainment and have seen it as something that should be avoided. These studies miss the contextual reality that the needs of most African children “are interdependent with those of their siblings, parents, and other members of their social networks” (Abebe, 2019, p. 11). In such an interdependence, work becomes an integral component of life. In contrast, Skelton (2016) advocates for educators to recognize that “work itself is a learning process and site for the acquisition of knowledge and skills” (p. ix). While I support Skelton’s view that work such as washing dishes, cooking, and sweeping compound are effective learning sites, in Nzengo village, students engage in these practices to sustain everyday life rather than to serve learning purposes.

Caring for siblings. In addition to their schooling, students had a social responsibility to care for their siblings. The care did not involve only feeding them or

ensuring they play around safe places but also encompassed their overall health management. For example, Nansato described an incident in which she had to manage her sibling's health condition in an emergency. Nansato remembered a day her sibling collapsed while the parents were away. Nansato notes: *"I remembered that she[sibling] had "chango" [chronic stomach pains] and had the special medicine that our mother gave her. Understanding this as an emergency health condition, Nansato narrated that, "I quickly grabbed the medicine and forced it into her mouth. After like ten minutes, she was back to her normal condition"*.

Nansato's experience suggests a leadership role in which she assumes full social responsibility for caring for her sibling. She provides social care and emotional support to her siblings and is aware of their health and well-being. What is more important is that she even understands how to handle critical emergencies. In this regard, Nansato's literacy moves beyond reading and writing towards a sense of care for others.

Nsamenang (1992) highlights that in the West African context, "caregiving is a collaborative enterprise in which siblings participate" (p.151). Reflecting on my own experience growing up in the village, I recall taking care of my siblings, and I still feel the same sense of care for them. This sense of responsibility endures; I continue to care for my siblings in many ways, including paying for their schooling and providing moral guidance. In a similar way, I provide [financial] care for my parents when needed, while also depending on them for moral guidance. This operates within the dynamic framework that Nsamenang (1992) expounds that in the African context, "as long as one's parents are alive, a child is always a child and must come under the sphere of parental authority" (p. 151). This means that the child remains under parental control regardless of age. In this sense, childcare is a lifelong engagement circle, a lifelong social practice. Furthermore, in this cultural context, a measure of one's success or failure is defined by the success or

failure of one's dependents. An individual's achievement becomes a family's achievement as well (e.g., parents, siblings). In the context of Nzengo village, taking care of one's siblings is a sign of one's *Obhuntu*, a Kerewe language word for Ubuntu spirit, an African ideology of 'I am because we are.' It implies that care for siblings is a relational and reciprocal human practice. Looking at this practice through the multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996), we can explain how Nansato creates meaning through childcare. We can understand how she engages in multimodal practices such singing and uttering verbal expressions, not only to comfort her sibling, but also how these practices and the creativity involved in them may contribute to her school learning. However, the framework gives less attention to the relational significance of childcare itself. In other words, the multiliteracies lens offers little space for understanding how disruptions or stability in caring relationships may shape Nansato's engagement with schooling.

Agrarian & economic production practices

In this study, I use the terms agrarian and economic production activities to refer to subsistence farming and other income-generating activities that students engage in with their families alongside their schooling practices. In Nzengo village, students were engaging in various agrarian and economic production activities. These activities meant both students' responsibilities to their families and to school, and economic survival. Some students had to engage in these activities to meet school financial demands, without which they could never continue with their schooling. I categorized these activities into the following sub-categories.

Farming & gardening. In relation to farming, three students expressed their meaningful engagement. Their farming practices ranged from growing staple crops and crops for petty business (selling to meet the family's basic needs) to growing a variety of vegetables. The following excerpts indicate students' engagement with these farming

literacy practices. In my ethnographic conversations with Masato, he commented, “*On some other weekends, I also help my parents with farming of food crops.*” Nansato also indicated her involvement on weekends, insisting that, “*I help in doing farmwork. We grow food crops such as cassava, rice and sweet potatoes*”. Additionally, Mazura noted, “*If it is a farming season, I go to do farmwork with my parents until 11 am*”. Overall, all four students acknowledged their involvement in doing farm work.

In these farming practices, Nanzura said that she engaged more in gardening than in farming other food crops. In my ethnographic conversations with her, she said, “*I do most of my farming activities in the garden, although sometimes I accompany my parents into farm fields of other food crops like cassava, sweet potatoes, and rice. We keep the garden at home. We grow spinach, Chinese, Msusa, Mkanzabi, tomatoes and onions. My family income and my own school needs come from this garden*”. I observed Nanzura’s home and witnessed a large garden with a variety of vegetables. Figure 3 below shows various vegetables that not only Nanzura’s family grows for food but also provide their family’s living.

Figure 3

Vegetables in Nanzura's home garden



Nanzura's gardening practices include clearing the plot with a hand hoe, then sowing seeds and planting seedlings. She waters the vegetables every morning and evening. She said, *"I must wake up early in the morning to do some irrigation. Sometimes, my parents help me with this so I can go to school"*. Her mother explained that Nanzura's passion for gardening is so strong that even if she is excused from morning watering to attend school, *"she would still make sure she tends at least part of the garden before she goes to school."* Nanzura's priority for gardening over schooling reinforces my view that survival comes before academic schooling and is a significant out-of-school daily practice. Also, this

passion might be because she is not good at academic subjects. Conceived this way, gardening acts as Nanzura's strong alternative path to personal success.

After harvesting, Nanzura and her mother take turns selling the produce at the village market on weekends or during holidays. Gardening is at the heart of Nanzura's goals. Her mother said, "*Nanzura says that when she completes school, she will focus on gardening and become a big businessperson*". Nanzura also revealed in the ethnographic conversations: "*My dream is to supply vegetables in Tanzania and beyond. This is my dream after school.*"

From a multiliteracies perspective, Nanzura's gardening could be interpreted as a material for designing meaningful classroom learning (Blair, 2009; Green, 2014; Williams & Dixon, 2013). However, in Nanzura's context, gardening is an everyday practice that links her to social, ecological, and cultural relationships beyond academic measures (Hancock et al., 2025). In other words, Nanzura values gardening more than academic studies, not because of its utility value in her academic learning, but because it is practically and relationally meaningful within her home context.

However, Nanzura's engagement in gardening practices encounters some tensions. Nanzura says that "*gardening is my favourite task*", which is evident in how she uses a lot of her out-of-school time to work in the home garden. Nanzura wishes she had the chance to maintain her gardening literacy practice even when at school, a chance she does not get. She says, "*We have a school garden. I like working in the garden, but I don't get a chance regularly.*" Nanzura explains that her school focuses on academic literacy practices. Hence, students who work in the school garden (figure 3) are always the ones found with mistakes and assigned to do gardening as a punishment. Nanzura's views are supported by the Geography and Physics teacher, who said, "*The government recommends alternative punishments to caning. We usually punish rule breakers to work*

in the garden”. While the easy ticket to working in the garden is to breach school rules, Nanzura is at a crossroads. She says, *“I try to maintain good conduct. I don’t make mistakes regularly”*. This suggests an obvious tension between Nanzura’s personal interests and the structured school system, as she wishes she were able to work in the garden but also desires to be successful in academic areas.

Figure 4

Nanzura’s school Garden



While at home, Nanzura sees gardening as a form of enjoyment, the school system sees it as a punishing task. Unfortunately, Nanzura is happy to conform to school orders but unhappy to miss the opportunity to work in the school garden. Her conformity to school rules denies her the opportunity to practice the literacies of her interests. In other words, if Nanzura wants to work in the school garden, she must commit as many mistakes as she can at school.

Milking cows & cattle herding. In my conversation with the students, I also found that some were engaging in animal care practices. Animal care included milking, taking the cows to the bush, and tying their leashes to a strong pole or tree (Figure 5).

Later in the afternoon, students would move the cows from where they had been tied in the morning to a place where they could drink water, then to another spot with fresh grass. In the evening, students would bring the cattle back home.

Figure 5

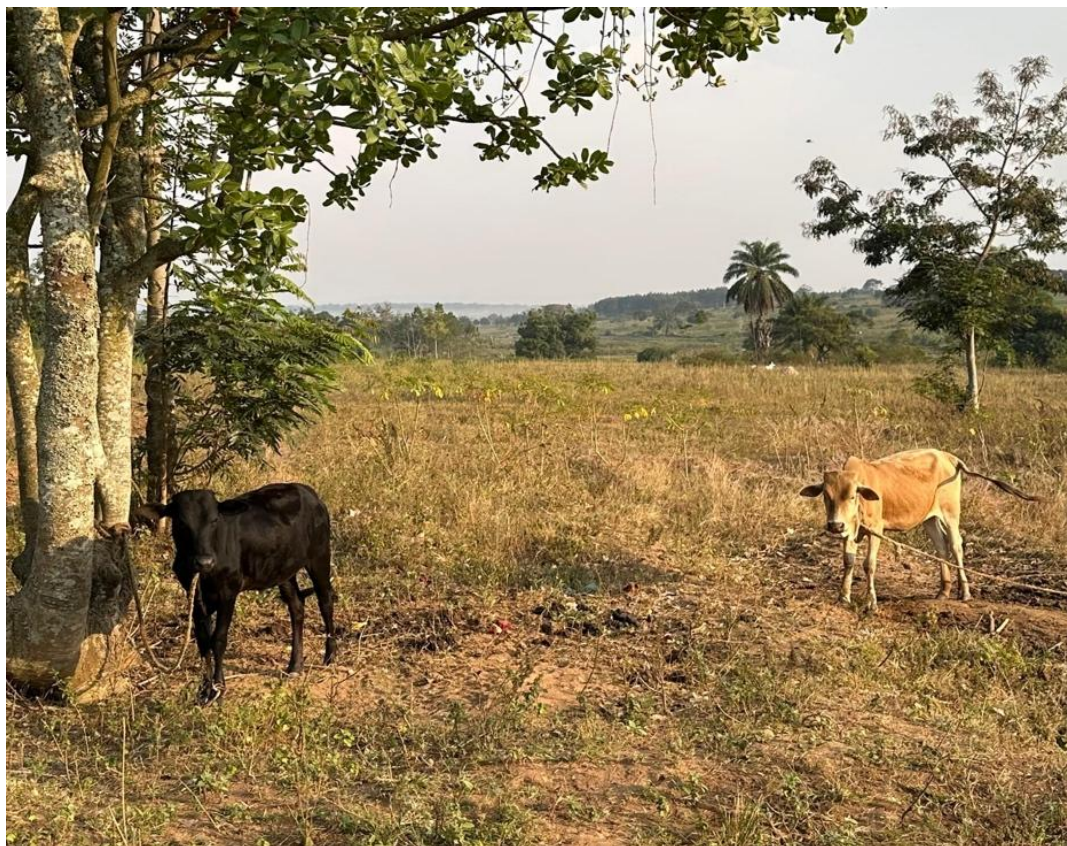
Mazura's cow on a leash tied to a strong home-made pole in the bush



Given this, Mazura, whose home has cows, said, *“I milk cows if there is a cow we milk. Then I take the cows to the bush.”* This suggests that animal care involves several procedures to be aware of. For example, mastering animal care practices includes being aware that the calves are cared for separately from the adult cows. Figure 6 below shows the calves at Mazura’s home being cared for separately from the adult cows.

Figure 6

Calves separated from their mother cows



In the above figure, calves are kept at home while their mother cows are taken to graze in the bush. The calves will be fed at home and reunited with their mother cows in the evening. As a researcher who also had experience of taking care of the cows, I understand that calves are separated from their mothers to avoid them sucking the milk at any time, because if that happens, the family will have no milk. However, while intending not to impose my own perspective, and to capture Mazura's understanding on the practice of animal care, I inquired to know why calves are kept separately from their mothers. Mazura explained,

“The calves must be controlled from sucking their mothers' nipples all the time. If you allow that, they will suck excessively and suffer from amasuyu (swollen throat). Another disadvantage is that if you let your calf suck all the time, you cannot get milk for yourself. But when you are milking its mother, the calf should be around. Cows are like humans; they love their babies. If you separate them at the milking moment, the mother will never settle”.

I observed Mazura showing the great competence in milking the cow. From a multiliteracies perspective, Mazura's ability to milk the cow suggests his mastery of the procedural knowledge. Also, he has an overall mastery of animal care, including understanding how cows behave because he uses procedural knowledge, observation, and context-sensitive decisions to interpret and communicate meaning about the animals' needs (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016).

However, in Mazura's context, this understanding is primarily practical, relational, and focused on survival. While it is acquired through hands-on experiences, as many other literacy practices are, its purpose is to sustain life and support the household, not to produce or communicate meaning. It should, however, be understood that milking has

some literacy insights that cannot be undermined. For example, through milking Mazura develops procedural knowledge on how to engage with cows. Milking requires hygiene such as washing hands before and after milking, which is a crucial component of health-related content taught at school. Also, I observed Mazura communicating with cows such as yelling at them, commanding them by blowing whistle as well as calling them names, such as ‘imutuku’, referring to a cow with red color.

Brickmaking literacy practices. Besides farming, Mazura engages in brickmaking, which he says is one of his family’s main economic activities. In Mazura’s village, bricks are made during the dry season (summer) when it is not raining. This is because bricks are made of clay and need plenty of sunlight to dry before being heated in the tunnel. Thus, Mazura’s engagement in this activity is seasonal. Mazura engages in brickmaking practices with full commitment because it is one of his family’s economic activities. He said, “*Brickmaking is my family’s major task along with fishing activities*”. Upon my visit to Mazura’s home, I observed the brick-making process. Figure 7 below shows Mazura’s brickmaking site.

Figure 7*Mazura's brick-making site*

Mazura's family makes bricks using the traditional processes. In the figure above, the bricks in the grey colour are still raw. They were made three days before. On their first appearance, they were first covered up by dry grasses. Mazura mentioned that *"If you do not cover them with grass for at least the first three days, they will develop some cracks"*. After one week, the bricks are always ready to be put into the heating tunnel. Making a heating tunnel requires some further skills. Mazura understands how to make the heating tunnel; as he said, *"I know every step in making bricks."* In the les of multiliteracies framework, Mazura's claims to know every step in making brick can be understood as offering an important resource for his experience to be utilized in classroom learning. The photo on the right above shows bricks that have already been heated in the tunnel and are now ready to be unpacked for sale. Much of Mazura's school expenses are met through this economic activity. Also, his family largely depends on it for their survival. This implies that understanding the survival and material conditions that brickmaking offers in Mazura's life is also important.

Academic Literacy practices

In this study's context, academic literacy practices refer to reading and writing activities. The study found that the most common academic literacy practices students engaged in outside school included attending to teacher-assigned homework, attending remedial classes, and participating in private tutoring sessions, as revealed in the following sections.

Doing school assignments (homework). Homework was found to be a dominant academic practice in students' out-of-school literacy practices. Students handled these assignments, along with other tasks at home. In most cases, these assignments were preceded by other out-of-school daily practices in form of household responsibilities, depending on the home schedule. During our focus group discussion, students illustrated doing school assignments, often after doing their other household activities. For instance, Nanzura said, *"I wash the dishes and then do some homework"*. Nansato highlighted the same point by saying, *"I spend my afternoon time doing my school homework."* On this, Masato also said, *"When I am at home, I do my homework (classroom assignment)"*. Nanzura's doing homework after washing dishes signals an obvious time conflict between schooling and household responsibilities. As I look at this from the cultural point of view (insider position), it would appear unethical for a female child to start engaging in other activities while the dishes remain unwashed. So, this priority can be understood as arising from ethical compliance rather than personal choice.

Using the term 'homework' to refer to a task meant to be an extension of schoolwork highlights the encroachment of academic literacy in out-of-school spaces. From my experience as an educator, I understand that nowadays, there is an increasing practice of schools in Tanzania assigning students bundles of assignments under the guise of 'holiday packages.' As a researcher, I see these frequent assignments as aiming to

completely disconnect a student from engaging in other (non-academic) practices at home. Unfortunately, household practices are rarely given a space in school. I understand that in Nzengo village, as in many public schools in Tanzania, students, when at school, sweep their classrooms and clean around the school premises, just as they clean their homes. However, at school, this is not regarded as official literacy or even as valuable learning. In some other private schools, students do not sweep at all. This disparity between public and private schools can be understood differently. For instance, on the one hand, it can be understood as private schools have sufficient resources to hire cleaners while public resources do not have such a budget. On the other hand, especially in my view as a researcher and educator, this disparity implies that the public schools regard sweeping as a civic duty or a hidden curriculum for teaching students some life skills, while the private schools erase such form of hidden curriculum in the life of students. This erasure may also signal a message to students that their main duty is to study and that a non-academic practice like sweeping is not for the schooled people.

The Business subject teacher mentioned his awareness that *“students’ out-of-school practices are important for the students’ acquisition of life skills. They help them in meeting their financial needs to attend school. But we load them with take-home assignments to keep them focused on the academic track”*. This comment has several implications, as it shows a teacher acknowledging the tensions of working in a rural setting where students integrate work and schooling. Reflecting on my experience teaching at a rural secondary school in the Njombe region in southern Tanzania (2014–2016), I observed a similar tension: students often did not have time to read assigned literary texts because of work responsibilities at home. I used to see this as a barrier to students’ effective learning. However, the main tension I had, which the teacher also acknowledges here, is that he understands that students’ engagement in work is crucial to

sustaining life (including earning money to pay for remedial classes) yet still denies them the opportunity to do so. It sounds paradoxical that the school requires money from activities such as farming and fishing but uses homework to erase them.

The Business subject teacher expressed the same perspective. He said that giving students homework, *“is good but also denies them (students) opportunities to engage in other activities which also help them survive”*. The teacher mentioned that this sometimes puts him in a dilemma, saying, *“I know some activities like fishing make students lose a lot of time which they should have used for studying, but sometimes you cannot even discourage them because these activities are what students need to survive in school.”*

Similarly, the Geography and Physics teacher acknowledged that, *“Some students are the ones heading their own families. When such students engage in fishing, they earn some money to support their families and cover school expenses.”* This suggests that the teachers recognize the economic utility of students’ out-of-school literacy practices yet still default to assigning daily homework. Overall, these views from both teachers imply that in Nzengo village, homework (school assignment students take home) is used by Nzengo Secondary School teachers as a defensive pedagogy, whereby teachers believe they can shield students from the home setting, which is presumed to be destructive.

Also, I noted that sometimes teachers assign homework to comply with the system rather than to enhance students’ authentic engagement. The Business subject teacher mentioned that *“sometimes a student submits unfinished Homework”*. He understands that *“Some students completely lack time to do the Homework due to their engagement with home economic activities. And some do these HomeWorks partially, and if you are not even careful, they just copy from each other”*. This teacher’s expression indicates students’ ceremonial compliance with the teacher’s Homework demands. In this sense, Tanzanian education, as viewed from Nzengo Secondary School, operates at various levels of

ceremonial compliance rather than authentic learning. While teachers sometimes assign homework to please the system they work for, students complete it to please their teachers. In short, what the teachers do in this regard suggests an obvious pedagogical decoupling, a disconnect between what the syllabus articulates and what happens in the classroom (Coburn, 2004).

The Business subject teacher mentioned several aspects indicating pedagogical decoupling. The first thing he said was that “*Students have been raised to believe that the only success that counts is passing examinations*”. In this kind of programming, the teacher insisted, “*It is therefore very tricky that even when a teacher attempts to make their lesson align with students’ real-life experiences, students feel uninterested, especially when a teacher engages them in activities they believe will never appear on the examination paper.*” This means that the pressure to pass the exam leads to pedagogical decoupling, in which teaching does not aim to foster the authentic learning envisioned in the recent educational reforms in Tanzania.

The Business subject teacher also mentioned that “*school authority and inspectors prioritize syllabus completion over competence development*”. This is a powerful excerpt that suggest hypocrisy in the formal education where a priority is put on document (syllabus completion records) over human growth (student’s authentic learning). From my experience as a secondary school teacher, syllabus completion is often emphasized so that students are not disadvantaged by the national exam, which teachers and students remain unaware of what portion of the syllabus will exactly appear on the exam. Syllabus completion in this sense, seems not only a safety net but also proxy for quality (a good teacher). As a result, teachers prioritize syllabus coverage and use formative assessment practices such as HomeWorks and weekly tests primarily to prepare students for high-stakes final examinations rather than to support ongoing learning (Mkimbili & Kitta,

2019). This finding supports the view that the Tanzanian secondary competency-based curriculum operates within what is noted as “discrepancies between policy ideals and classroom practice” (Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025, p. 5).

Examinations may not lead to pedagogical decoupling if they assess what is stated in the syllabus. However, I found that teachers feel the exams do not align with what the syllabi claim to offer students. Although teachers are aware of this mismatch, they still focus on exams to avoid disadvantaging students in education systems that prioritize exam metrics. The Business subject teacher said, *“Our (Tanzanian) syllabuses want students to develop competencies, but exams do not assess such competencies. And since exams count most, as a teacher, I must focus on how to help my students pass exams instead of focusing on how to develop their competencies.”* This means that the curriculum promises competences, but it offers grades. Looking at this from my research positionality, the dissonance is not on teachers but anchored in the broader global context of competency-based curriculum, which Levin (1991) noted that it articulates competencies but awards grades. It is no wonder that even the competencies that students develop in their respective homes through engaging in various activities, remain less valued at the expense of academic grades. In other words, teachers do not practice pedagogical decoupling because they lack the competency, as previous research has shown (Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025; Kisalam & Kafyulilo, 2012; Komba & Mwandaji, 2015; Tilya & Mafumiko, 2010). Instead, the current findings suggest that the pedagogical decoupling in Tanzanian secondary schools is not the teacher’s lack of pedagogical capacity, but rather their survival mechanism to thrive in a system that still prioritizes more traditional rote memorization and high-stakes exam metrics over students’ authentic learning.

Attending remedials/private tuition. The study found the prevalence of private tuition among students, teachers, and parents. Students were at the centre of this shadow schooling, bringing teachers and parents together in what is perceived to support students in passing the exams. In my conversations with students, I realized that some attended shadow schooling (remedial classes and private tutoring) to address gaps in their academic subjects, especially in those subjects they felt they were falling behind. For instance, Nansato said, *“I use my afternoon time to attend tuition classes for subjects that I feel are still tough for me.”*

Teachers have normalized the remedial sessions. The Physics and Geography teacher expressed in my ethnographic conversations with him that remedial sessions are so compulsory that if teachers do not practice them, *“students will fail”*. He also mentioned that *“the allocated classroom time is not sufficient to help students understand everything in a subject like Physics”*. In this regard, private tuition appears to be a mechanism teachers use to survive within an education system that prioritizes high-stakes examinations, especially the national examinations, which largely determine students’ socio-economic mobility (Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025).

For parents, private tuition gives them hope that their students will pass exams. Hence, parents invest in private tuition to ensure their students are well-positioned to pass the exams. Nanzura’s mother said that when Nanzura works in the garden, it reduces *“the pressure on the family to find money for private tuition”*.

Given the prevalence of private tuition, some parents control students’ interests by directing their children to attend private tuition, sometimes without considering the students’ interests. In response to this pressure, Masato attends private maths tuition to please his father rather than to deepen his engagement with the subject. He mentioned that *“My favourite subjects are the Arts subjects. I like History and English language”*. Since

Masato performs well in Arts subjects, his father demand that he attends private tuition in Mathematics. This parent hopes that this will help Masato improve in Mathematics as well. Considering that Masato has made it clear that Mathematics is not his interest, it can be argued that Masato attends private tuition mainly to comply with his father's demands.

Generally, students use their weekends or holidays to engage in private tuition or home-based activities to strengthen their academic literacy practices. Teachers and parents perceive these academic practices as means of achieving better exam grades or of meeting the promises that education carries. These motives are anchored in traditional/colonial notions of literacy and education for a better life. This is expanded in the discussion section.

Reading notes/ dictionary. My study found that students were engaging in academic literacy practices, such as reading subject notes provided by teachers and solving some Maths exercises. For instance, Mazura revealed that *“I use my free time on weekends or holidays to read my notes”*. Mazura perceives himself as a future engineer. To achieve this dream, Mazura said, *“Usually, I solve mathematics questions”*. In this sense, academic literacy means having a deep understanding of academic material. That is why these students read notes and solve Maths problems. In a multiliteracies perspective, using free time to read notes is a literacy practice in which the student engages in meaning-making by organizing and interpreting academic knowledge within a socially and culturally structured framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016).

Also, I noted that, reading the dictionary was meant to improve students' English language proficiency. Masato mentioned that *“When I read a dictionary, I learn new vocabulary for school debating”*. Tanzania is a multilingual country with more than 120 ethnic languages. In Nzenge village, students speak Kikerehe and Kijita at home as early as before they begin schooling. When they enter primary school, they must use Kiswahili,

the national lingua franca, and the primary language of instruction in public schools. At secondary school, they must use English. Thus, these students need to navigate four languages to be successful in formal school. In this navigation, their home languages are not considered in the literacy discussion either. Research shows that cross-language switching, particularly a later emphasis on English as the language of instruction, affects many students' learning in Tanzanian secondary schools (Adamson, 2024). Also, Masato's reading of a dictionary to improve his English proficiency can be understood as a form of personal agency in addressing the language barrier. Masato does not seek private tuition or remedial classes to improve his English proficiency. Instead, he directs his own learning using a dictionary at home. This implies that students can be self-directed not only in addressing academic barriers but also in defining their own learning.

Religious/faith-based literacy practices

I found that, in addition to other literacy practices, students were engaging in religious practices such as keeping the Sabbath, attending choir, youth programmes, and seminars. For instance, Nansato identifies herself as a Sabbath keeper. She said, "*On Saturday, I go to church because I am an Adventist*". Demonstrating the significance of her Sabbath keeping, she added, "*I don't do any work on Saturday [For the sake of keeping Sabbath]*". Also, Nanzura, who is Catholic, attends youth church programmes such as choir or seminars.

These activities entail what scholars have called "religious literacy" – "the ability to reflect, communicate and act in an informed, intelligent and sensitive manner towards the phenomenon of religion" (Hannam et al., 2020, p. 224; Wright, 1993, p. 47). From a multiliteracies perspective, practices such as keeping the Sabbath, attending choir, youth programmes, and seminars are literacy-rich, as participation involves procedural

knowledge, multimodal communication, and socially and culturally situated meaning-making (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; Hannam et al., 2020).

I found that religious literacy practices are encouraged both at home and at school. For instance, Nansato's mother, who is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expressed strong trust in religious practices for raising children who are morally good. In her view, *"Even when students succeed and become doctors or any other officer, they will serve our nation with a good heart."* Nansato's mother went on to suggest that religious literacy practices be incorporated into teacher education. In this, she said, *"We need teachers who have the fear of God to teach our children good morals"*. Nansato's mother mentioned the religious values she would like to be highlighted in the school calendar, although she likely does not recognize religious practices as *literacies*. In her view, religious practices strengthen community and family bonds and support moral and spiritual development. Her view partly concurs with scholars who advocate for religious education in schools, such as Bishop & Nash (2007), who have explicitly argued that "If we wish to promote a peaceful and pluralistic global population in the future, we need to teach for young adolescents' religious literacy now" (p. 31).

Multi-modal literacy practices

I used the term multimodal literacy practices to refer to the processes of using multiple media to create or communicate meaning. I found that students were engaging with other media beyond writing and reading to communicate or make sense of meaning, outside of school settings. These included watching TV, reading newspapers, browsing Facebook, playing digital games, and listening to live football commentaries.

Watching television. Through my conversations with students, I found that students watched television to engage in their favourite out-of-school literacy practices. They use television as a learning platform, which both reinforces their personal identities

and upgrades their literacy practices. For instance, Nansato, who dreams of becoming a chef, uses television as a learning space for cooking. She said, “*I spend much time watching cooking programmes on TV to learn about cooking techniques at home*”.

Likewise, Masato watches television for both entertainment and learning. He wants to be a football commentator, and he uses television as a platform to know the teams and players. When asked how he knew different players from African football teams in a focus group discussion, Masato said, “*I watch football on TV.*” For Nanzura, watching TV serves as a means of connecting with her role models. She said her favourite TV programme is “*Nyota wa Wiki (Star of The Week)*”. She explained that this is a programme about people who have succeeded in their lives, or about famous people, such as artists and educated professionals, who narrate how they have come to reach where they are.

Students’ desire to seek further information on TV suggests that reading and writing alone do not suffice to fulfil students’ desire to define their identities and explore their personal learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016). Students need multiple media to enhance their understanding of who they are and who they want to become (New London Group, 1996). In this regard, literacy encompasses reading about people, listening to their stories, and aspiring to be like them. This suggests the relevance of multimodality for students to make meaning in their lives including developing their own identities (Arnott & Yelland, 2020; Jewitt, 2008). It also suggests that not all people whom students admire to model are in a school setting. Some students’ role models are on television, which suggests the limitations of schools in addressing students’ educational and lifelong needs and interests.

Reading (out-dated) Newspapers. Besides reading school notes at home, Nansato reads her father’s newspapers. However, her father does not like her to read those

newspapers. According to Nansato, her father expects her to be busy with schoolwork; hence, for him, reading newspapers suggests she is wasting her precious time. Nasato said, *“I occasionally read some news in papers. But they are not always up-to-date news because I read once my father is done with them and is about to discard them”*. Nansato mentioned that she reads these newspapers *“stealthily”* when her father is away. I did not have a chance to talk to Nansato’s father. However, from what Nansato mentioned, this parent seems to believe that true learning only comes from the academic texts. In implementing this assumption, Nansato’s father ends up diminishing Nansato’s passion for reading beyond academic texts. Also, Nansato’s attempt to read the newspapers stealthily, even though they are already outdated, illustrates her personal agency in pursuing literacy practices aligned with her own interests.

Digital gaming & surfing on Facebook. During our focus group discussion, Masato explained that he also plays digital games on his father’s mobile phone. He plays these games when he is done with household activities and school assignments. He said, *“I play a game about car-driving and sky-lifting”*. Masato mentioned that his father knows the main reason Masato asks for his phone is to play games, and nothing else. However, Masato’s use of the phone goes beyond playing games to surfing on Facebook. Masato said, *“Sometimes I use Facebook to ask various questions. I read information about soccer updates.”*

However, Masato’s use of Facebook is not a smooth practice because he must first trick his father. Masato’s father (56 years old) does not use Facebook. Masato thinks his father *“is not even aware that the Facebook app exists on his phone”*. This indicates that Masato’s father knows little about digital technology, as he is unaware of certain functions on his own phone. Taking advantage of his father’s lack of digital knowledge,

Masato has opened an account on his father's device and sometimes uses it to look up football news and socialize.

This can be understood in different ways. It can be established that, drawing on his own digital awareness, Masato uses his father's limited digital knowledge to his own advantage. Looking at it from my perspective as someone born and raised in Ukerewe (drawing on my insider cultural positionality), I understand that by taking advantage of his own father's ignorance, Masato goes against community moral expectations, which I take to mean that a child should not deceive an adult or use his parents' property such a mobile phone without permission. In this research, this was one of the findings that challenged my expectations as an insider. I did not expect to find a 16-year-old student with such courage as trespassing moral values as tricking a 56-year-old parent.

On the other hand, through a multiliteracies lens, it demonstrates Masato's agency, skills, and quest for digital literacies (Sanford et al., 2014). Furthermore, Masato not only demonstrates his evolving capabilities in using technology, but he also resists technology exclusion by not waiting for parental consent to use it (Livingstone & Sylwander, 2025). In the words of Livingstone and Sylwander, Masato not only fights for his right to use digital space but also challenges the myth of "the right age" (p. 6). The myth of the right age, in this sense, refers to discourses by adults who view children as incapable of using technology. Masato does not indicate facing a lack of skills or requiring adult guidance to use his father's phone. This way, he complicates the discourse on children's agency, for through the lens of the multiliteracies framework, he demonstrates that he has the capacity to design meaning across digital media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016).

When using Facebook, Masato learns to communicate on a digital platform, including how to search for or access the information he prefers. Besides reading and writing texts on such a platform, he also interprets images and videos, practices that entail

multimodal meaning-making (Dahlström, 2022; S. S. Lee & Azman, 2021). Masato's multimodal literacy practices reinforce the view that some students' daily lives are shaped not only by their local setting but also by their interactions with digital spaces (Sanford et al., 2014).

From my experience as an educator, I understand that in Tanzanian secondary schools, students are not allowed to own mobile phones. Even at home, students are not expected to have mobile phones, and many parents discourage their children from owning one. Yet, under such restrictions, Masato has learned digital skills that he uses to meet his learning needs on his father's mobile phone. This implies that students' learning cannot be limited to teachers' control or parents' supervision. It also means that there are many literacy practices students engage in that educators and parents alike may not be aware of, signaling the complexity in understanding students' experiences. On the other hand, Masato's unnoticed use of digital platforms cannot be overly romanticized, as he also might require some guidance on ethical use.

Doing live commentary on local football matches. Masato makes live commentaries on various football events in his village. In my ethnographic conversations with him, he said, *"I want to be a football commentator."* He expressed a deep interest in this practice, saying, *"That [doing football commentaries] is what is in my heart"*. However, since this practice is not recognized as valuable, it eventually collides with academic learning. To avoid this collision, Masato said, *"I do football commentaries in my spare time"*. This suggests that Masato's daily practice of football commentaries does not get a space in the formally scheduled time in his life. As a result, Masato is forced to find time to pursue something in his heart.

Masato's football commentary goes hand in hand with analysis practices. He analyses football matches by explaining some statistics to the audience. He mentioned

that “*I analyze football matches and keep records like how many passes, corners, fouls the players have made.*” According to Masato, people who listen to him love what he does. Conducting football commentaries on live local matches has made Masato a well-known young man across various villages. Masato said that “*many people love how I write down players’ profiles and match statistics while the game is on*”. This also shows that Masato combines written literacy with his street journalism. He also uses digital media, such as recording audio clips using the phones of friends he meets during his commentary practices. In the lens of the multiliteracies lens, this means that Masato engages in numerical, symbolic, and textual representation by translating live sporting action into structured records and statistics. In this sense, he produces and communicates meaning across modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005, 2016; New London Group, 1996). Unfortunately, his parents do not appreciate his commentary practices. While his parents encourage him to focus on his studies, Masato identifies himself as a future journalist. As a result, Masato practices this literacy behind his parents’ closed doors. He learns about all these stealthily. He has been denied time to watch soccer on the home’s television because the parent wants him to focus on academic literacy practices. Thus, he practices his favourite literacy practice under a very strictly limited environment. I observed the books in which Masato keeps his records.

Figure 8

Masato's football commentary records

Player Name	Team/Position
1. EMMAUEL	MICRODEM
2. JOSEPH	KAJA
3. JACKBO	MIAFIRI
4. ANAN	ABERD
5. GODIAN	VEDASTU
6. VIAN	PASTORY
7. JANYUA	LAKAI
8. JANYU	EMMAUEL
9. JANTONY	MIMI
10. EVALI	LYAMAKVLO
11. KELVIN	LEVIGATUS
12. KELVIN	MGANKA
13. GODRACK	SALUMU
14. KREDO	MAJUID
15. TITO	PASCHAL
16. NEOGRATIAI	MADARA
17. LAULIAN	JOHN
18. ELIAS	PETER
19. ELICK	BAKIRANA
20. MOHI	MOHI
21. JACKBO	MATELO
22. EDISON	EDISON
23. GEORRY	JOE TOOKI
24. MATHIAE	MATHIAE
25. JORALI	MATHIAE
26. PETRO	MATHIAE
27. DIDAS	MATHIAE
28. JONAS	MATHIAE
29. JYVESA	GEORGE
30. TILUUBA	TEJUNGA
31. PHOSIA	PASTORY
32. JOSEPHAI	KRISTOPHER
33. FINIA	MATHIAE

Statistics	Value
65-2%	40.5%
367 pass	214 pass
14 fairs	19 fairs
9.17/8	14.5/8

Referee	Score
REFREE	01
	02
	03
	04
LEMAI KATIRA	

The above image shows Masato's records during football commentary. Since Masato does this commentary without his parents' support, he does not have enough exercise books to keep his records systematically. As the above image indicates, he keeps the records on torn paper and sometimes strips pieces from his own subject exercise books. That is how Masato strives to live his favourite literacy practices.

Masato's parent is a primary school teacher. He has a good chance of having unused exercise books at home. Masato surveys his room and grabs whatever seems like a useless piece of paper he can find. The image below (see Figure 9) lists the players in a match played in Masato's village. Masato has listed these names on a school's official document, which his parents use at school as a logbook. It tells the mechanism Masato uses to survive in his strictly academic-literacy-focused space.

Figure 9

Masato's football commentary records

JINA LA SHULE	JINA LA MWALIMU	DARASA	UMAHIRI MUKU	UMAHIRI MAHUSU	SHUGHULI ZA UFUNDISHAJI
STARI YA	ILMEKA PA	LE MWANA	UBUNAO MAMOMEMI	MILKASHI DAR KALAM	MLIMANI CITY FOOTBALL
K LUB 2018-10 ALAYA	MSI YA MWANZA MBANDA	LIPULI AKADEMI MBO	MAETA LILALIA BANDAUM	CHIPUKIZI BOUNG BOYS	MKAJOKE 2022-2023
MAJUGUO WA JIJI LIVAPU	MAJUGUO YA DARALAMA	WACHESANI KITA	KATUKU - SERA	KATUKU - HIMA	SANGI - PHILIP
MUNGUWA - MIESIWA	DAMAS - DEGRATAS	DUNA - JAY	HAKURU - PHIRI	HAKURU - DAMAS	HAKURU - MARY
PHATO WA MHEZO M	SULUFI - MHEZO M	LAKI MAMANI	MAMANI MAMANI	LAKI MAMANI	RUGOZI - KADYABE (2)

Masato's football commentary has made him well-known and earned him community support. He and a friend commentate together in and out of school, including in Igala Village, Serema Village, and Bwiro Kisiwani. In all these places, people support him. Masato says, *"I get much support from the street,"* referring to support from people outside school. His commentary is well-received. People who listen to his commentary always tell him, *"Dogo umetisha [young man, you did it so well]."* While Masato is highly praised in the community and at school, he does not receive the same recognition at home or at school.

Artistic drawings of pictures/cartoons. In my ethnographic conversations with Masato, I noted that he also draws pictures. He said, *"I like drawing. I draw various pictures"*. Masato explained that he draws pictures to express several aspects *"about people, about life, and about nature"*. In so doing, Masato expresses himself through other media beyond reading and writing. Such expression encourages original thinking

and allows him to explore new ideas. In his drawings, Masato mirrors his local setting, including his own family's everyday lives. Masato allowed me to observe and photograph some of his drawings.

Figure 10.

Masato's artistic expression of a family at farmwork



In the picture above, Masato portrays people collaborating during farm work. The Swahili description: “*collaboration at work brings good development to our nation*” [Researcher’s translation], speaks loudly about how Masato construes development in his nation. Reflecting on his local context, Masato believes that national-level development will be achieved through collaboration. He, therefore, has a sense of collaboration, which is one of “the basic competences in the 21st Century Skills”, according to the Tanzanian secondary school syllabus (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023, p. 1). Masato’s picture depicts the hand-hoe farming that his village undertakes. He

believes such kind of farming requires collaboration as illustrated in one of his drawings (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Masato's artistic expression of family meeting



Researcher's English translation: *"Family meetings are essential for good children upbringing"*

The picture above shows a family meeting. Masato's Swahili inscription, translated to English, reads: *"Family meetings are essential for good child upbringing"* (Researcher's own translation). It suggests that Masato perceives the family as an appropriate place to raise children with the moral standards that society deems valuable. As the drawing suggests, Masato appears to have trust in dialogue between adults and children. His picture and its textual description suggest his trust in democracy. The drawings demonstrate his creativity in presenting social reality in visual form.

Masato explained that he does not tell his parents because he knows they would not support prioritizing artistic work over what is considered ‘academic’. He said, “*I know my parents will say that I should focus on school first. That is why I do not want to disturb.*” There is, therefore, a direct clash between the school-centric literacies and Masato’s out-of-school literacy practices. Masato’s story echoes a study by López Gándara et al. (2021) in Spain, which also found that students’ out-of-school literacy practices, focused on oral communication, music, and interactions outside school, although students considered them meaningful, were being crushed by school-centric literacy practices. This also mirrors the study by Stewart (2014) in which a 19-year-old, pseudonym Pablo, was engaging in various self-initiated out-of-school daily practices, such as writing poetry, language brokering (translation), reading, using technology, and activism, which were not being valued in school. Stewart notes that, a disconnect between school and Pablo’s out-of-school daily practices made Pablo drop out twice, with the second drop out occurring just weeks away from graduation. Stewart notes that after the second drop out, Pablo never returned. According to Stewart (2014), Pablo later successfully completed military boot camp. This means that Pablo attained a military certificate after failing in his primary mission of attaining an academic certificate through schooling. Masato has not dropped out yet and never mentioned about planning to drop out. However, these studies, despite coming from different contexts, illustrate a common tension, showing the struggles experienced by students whose out-of-school daily practices they themselves perceive as useful are not welcomed in school settings.

Sports & physical recreational daily practices

In addition to academic literacy practices and other household responsibilities, students engaged in recreational literacy practices. These included playing and watching

football. Students played football either at school or at home but watching it on television occurred solely in an out-of-school context. Below, I present these two sub-categories.

Playing football. During our focus group discussion, Mazura mentioned that he plays football when at home. His playing time is in the evening after all household responsibilities and school assignments. On this, he said, *“Around 4 pm, I go to play football [soccer]”*. Mazura explained that while he plays football, he also remembers to *“bring the cattle home early, before it gets dark, for milking”*. This denotes that in Mazura’s context, literacy encompasses the practical ability to manage responsibilities. It means understanding how to prioritize tasks such as academic assignments, household responsibilities, and personal recreational activities.

Also, students mentioned that schools should recognize sports. However, some students feel that, as of now, the school does not accord significant recognition to sports. Masato mentioned that although his school has a timetable for sports and games, in my ethnographic conversations with Masato, he said, sports sessions are *“not seriously taken like the academic subjects*. In explicating this claim, Masato highlighted that even when students are at the sports grounds, *“many teachers do not show up. They just leave all the management to the sports teacher”*. With a facial expression showing dissatisfaction, Masato summed it all up, saying, *“In short, we have the education system that does not recognize talents.”* Thus, according to Masato, true schooling experience [education as used here] is that which values a student’s talent. In other words, in Masato’s school, there is no recognition that literacy practices such as reading, which the school values so much, are a social practice which becomes effective when it involves physical or virtual actions, sensory experiences, and real-world contexts (Liew et al., 2020; Odendahl, 2021).

Watching football. Masato does not play football but loves watching it on television. He said explicitly, *“I don’t play, but I like watching it.”* Besides watching

football as an entertainment, Masato treats this as a serious learning platform where he develops skills for his football commentary practices. Unfortunately, his father believes that watching football wastes valuable time that should be spent on academic practices, such as school assignments or personal reading. Masato's father has therefore restricted Masato from watching soccer at the home television. For this reason, Masato said, *"Sometimes I go to 'Kibanda Umiza'"*. *Kibanda Umiza* is a Swahili term used by soccer lovers in Tanzania to refer to local soccer broadcasting halls where fans gather to watch matches. Masato does not have the money to watch football regularly at *Kibanda Umiza*, making it unreliable alternative for him.

Although Masato is restricted from watching football matches on television, his expressions suggest that, for him, watching football is not only a recreational activity but also a serious learning opportunity. Masato explained that he sometimes waits to watch recorded football shows on the home television when his parents are away. He said, *"When my father is away, I turn on the TV and watch, usually the recorded matches which are being repeated on Soccer TV"*. This suggests that when students want to learn the literacy practices of their choice, they are ready to learn these under any circumstances. It also signals the complexity of students' experiences that teachers and educators remain unaware of.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have reported various out-of-school daily practices that Mazura, Masato, Nanzura, and Nansato engage in at home on weekends or holidays. A key point in this chapter is that, when viewed through the multiliteracies lens, activities such as academic literacies, religious participation, sports analysis, and media engagement are literacy-rich because they involve multimodal communication, procedural knowledge, and socially situated meaning-making. For this reason, these are typical evidence of

students' out-of-school, self-directed multiliteracy practices embedded in their everyday routines. However, activities such as farming, milking, animal care, and caring for siblings, when understood in context, are organized to prioritize care and survival over the development of academic competencies. They exist to organize daily life, sustain family relationships, support identity formation, and enable material and social survival. They resist the conceptual stretching of 'literacy' into 'multiliteracies,' in which every human social practice is understood through the lens of semiotic design and meaning-making. For example, we cannot call these practices '*milking literacy*', '*animal care literacy*', or '*care for siblings*' *literacy*' because these do not exist to serve the goal of meaning-making. They would rather exist to serve the goal of care, survival and relation. This discussion is well documented in Chapter 8. In what follows in chapter 6, I present the findings on the second sub-research question on the value of students' out-of-school daily practices.

Chapter 6: Findings on the relevance of students' out-of-school daily practices

Overview

In this chapter, I present findings related to the second sub-research question, which examined the relevance of students' out-of-school daily practices. The analysis focuses on what students learn through these activities. In this study, learning is understood as participation in socially and culturally situated activity (Nsamenang, 1992). Overall, the findings show that students engage in many out-of-school practices mainly to develop social competence, responsibility, and relational capacity. Although some of these practices also support academic achievement, academic aims are generally secondary to social, familial, and community obligations. As the analysis shows, parents and students do not determine what students learn in these activities through academic measures such as grades or GPA. Instead, they evaluate learning based on how these activities enhance students' ability to meet community expectations, fulfil responsibilities, and contribute meaningfully to family and social life. In this sense, learning reflects becoming socially competent rather than achieving academic success.

Functional Life Management/Executive functioning

Life management skills in this context refer to the requisite operational knowledge required to run the household efficiently and safely. I noted that students who engaged in household activities such as washing dishes, sweeping the compound, and preparing the family meal developed a set of life management skills. These included having a sense of personal responsibility, self-reliance and autonomy. During our ethnographic conversations, students demonstrated how they self-direct themselves in the home settings in fulfilling various household responsibilities. For instance, Mazura knows that when he wakes up in the morning, *“on weekends and holidays begins with sweeping the home compound”*. Nansato also mentioned, *“On the days when we do not have to go to school, I*

do dishes in the morning.” Likewise, Nanzura has developed a sense of duty to prepare her family’s meal. She said, *“I do prepare some food for the family’s lunch”*. Nansato also felt the same obligation, as she mentioned, *“I make porridge for my young siblings and prepare an afternoon meal for the family.”*

These students learn to plan and constantly remember instructions to handle these activities. They learn that managing the household demands switching between and across multiple tasks. In Nzengo village, managing the household means more of one’s contribution to the family than being a literacy practice as understood as meaning-making or designing social futures (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016). Hence, students here develop an internal sense of duty and a sense of contribution to a shared living (family), which is not tied to grades or any performance metrics. This learning process is more guided by the immediate family’s needs than by a fixed curriculum, as in school settings.

I observed that although students’ engagement in many out-of-school daily practices is intended to develop life management skills, they are often coerced into spending this time preparing for weekly tests. This suggests a tension between policy rhetoric and practices in Tanzania. For instance, the Tanzanian secondary education curriculum illustrates that it is “committed to providing quality and inclusive education based on the philosophy of Education for Self-Reliance, founded in 1967 by the Father of the Nation, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere.” (MoEST, 2023, p.1). These policy rhetorics mention inclusive education, but the practical implementation excludes students’ out-of-school daily practices. Mwalimu Nyerere’s Education for Self-Reliance pushed back against exam-metric educational practices (Nyerere, 1967), but at Nzengo Secondary School, students are given tests weekly. In addition to frequent testing in school, students are urged to attend both remedials and private tuition to prepare for passing tests. Nyerere’s philosophy aimed to integrate students’ local world of work into

their academic learning (Nyerere, 1967, 1968), whereas in Nzengo village, secondary school teachers urge parents to exempt students from working at home, so they have time to study. The Tanzanian secondary school education curriculum mentions that it has “been prepared to increase the number of Tanzanians with knowledge, skills and positive attitudes towards contributing to the development of the nation” (MoEST, 2023, p.1). However, it overlooks that through ‘mundane’ household activities such as cooking and sweeping, students develop crucial life-management skills, including a sense of personal responsibility, self-reliance, and autonomy. These practices contribute to family and community life, yet schools do not recognize them as important. Essentially, they are life-sustaining practices rather than future-oriented design processes. Therefore, in my view, schools’ failure to recognize them as literacy suggests that the multiliteracies framework is less suited for explaining certain human practices. When students engage in these activities, they are not designing a future but enacting the future within their present lived realities.

Permanent & foundational life skills

I found that some household economic activities provide students with permanent life skills. Some parents encourage their children to engage in certain household economic literacy practices, such as fishing, animal care, and milking, because they see these activities as a foundation for lasting life skills. To some parents, work represents the legacy they themselves inherited and can pass on to their children. Masato’s father highlighted fishing as a *“preparation for life”*. He went on to emphasize that *“fishing skill was the only asset my brothers and I inherited from our father”*. Recognizing the significance of fishing, he teaches his children to understand how to engage in this practice. Masato’s father expressed his trust in fishing, noting that *“fishing will help them [children such as Masato] in the future. It is something they should not ignore”*.

Fishing practice, in this sense, is not only a survival mechanism but also an intergenerational heritage. Masato's father's comments that *"fishing skill was the only asset my brothers and I inherited"* stood out to me because it aligned with Masato's school motto, *"education (formal schooling) is an asset"* (Figure 12). This similarity suggests that both formal schooling and fishing must be recognized as important human social practices that weigh relevant values in their contexts of application.

Figure 12

Masato's school logo with the school motto: Education is an asset



Empathy and Relational Competencies

I found that engaging in out-of-school daily practices such as caring for siblings and animals helps students develop not only leadership skills but also important relational and empathy competencies. The term “competence” here does not mean individual achievements measured against standardized academic benchmarks. Instead, I mean the capacity to belong and sustain life. For instance, Nanzura takes care of her siblings. She prepares their porridge and food. Nanzura illustrated that care for siblings involves managing their health and well-being. She recounted a situation where she and her elder sister were the only ‘adults’ their young sister relied upon when she got a stomach problem. In this situation, Nanzura was practising leadership skills by taking responsibility for her sibling’s safety. On my regular visits to participants’ families, I realized that in Nzengo village, when parents are away, they trust elder children to take care of their siblings. Indeed, students like Nanzura lead responsibly. Hence, through caring for siblings, students practise leadership roles such as instructing, warning, and controlling them.

Also, students who engage in animal care develop empathy and relational competencies. For instance, Mazura mentioned that *“I go to school after taking the cows to the bush. I knot cows to a fresh green grassy area”*. This suggests that Mazura understands when the cows need food and water. This way, Mazura develops empathy for the animals. He learns by being physically and mentally engaged, rather than just thinking about animal care as he would in a classroom. This is assessed through sustainability and care, other than mastery. Hence, while taking care of the cows, he also cares for the environment so that grass and water remain consistently available for them. Accordingly, Mazura develops relational skills with himself, the cows, the environment, and other people, especially farmers whose crops his cows must not graze on.

This understanding is gained by grounding the practice in its real-life context. In this sense, Mazura's animal care practice is understood primarily as necessary for survival, care, and responsibility, rather than for meaning-making goals. Mazura engages in animal care as part of his social obligation and contribution to family survival. These are embedded within local systems of labour, care, and interdependence (Abebe, 2019). Understanding these through a multiliteracies approach alone does not give us a clear picture of these practices. I explain this below.

If one looks at Mazura's comment, "*I go to school after taking the cows to the bush. I knot cows to a fresh green grassy area*", using a multiliteracies framework, the focus becomes on the semiotic and cognitive dimensions of this practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016). As such, this practice serves as evidence of situated meaning-making and procedural literacy (e.g., Häggström & Schmidt, 2020). This is because in the process of taking care of the animal, Mazura practices environmental knowledge, spatial reasoning, symbolic interpretation of ecological signs (e.g., grass quality, soil condition, weather cues), and embodied practice. These actions signal multimodal literacy practices in which Mazura reads the landscape, interprets signs, and designs action accordingly (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005). In other words, what Mazura does, through the lens of multiliteracies, is instant simulations based on actual experiences" to elicit his situated social cognition (Gee, 2009, p. 203). In this view, cattle herding becomes a literacy-rich activity because it involves decoding environmental information and producing purposeful action within a social context. Here, "the form of representation [ability to engage with multiple modes]" becomes "integral to meaning and human learning" (Jewitt, 2008, p. 241). The point I want to emphasize is that while animal care can be a site for students to engage into multimodal meaning making practices, in Nzengo village,

the practice exists to sustain life, care and relation whereby meaning making comes as a secondary purpose.

A sense of community & Belonging

I observed that, when engaging in various out-of-school daily practices, students develop a strong sense of community and belonging. I noted these across a range of practices, such as religious practices, gardening, peer socialization, and football commentary, as I explain below.

A sense of belonging through religious practices. I noted that students who attend various religious practices such as choirs, youth programmes, and seminars develop a sense of community. Such communities seem reliable and give students a sense of belongingness. Nanzura's religious network, which she has formed through attending the choir, appears to be a reliable community that she envisions as belonging even in the future. Nanzura expressed that, "*I make friends. My choirmates are my friends. We are great friends. This is a good thing..., we can remain connected and help each other in the future*". This implies that religious practices such as singing in the choir and attending various church youth programmes are great sites for students to develop social networks. Nanzura and colleagues also develop interpersonal intelligence, respect and compassion through religious programmes.

On the other hand, students' engagement in religious practices can be understood as doing multiliteracies. For example, singing in a choir requires coordination and interpretation of symbolic cues. I observed Nanzura's choir book in which she writes religious songs. This suggests she combines texts and audio media to make sense of the religious songs. Through a multiliteracies lens, this is a multimodal engagement (Jewitt, 2008). Also, in observing the Sabbath or attending youth seminars, she must understand and apply culturally encoded rules and norms that guide her church, which suggests

procedural knowledge leading to religious literacy (Bishop, 2012; Hannam et al., 2020).

However, what I want to emphasize is that Nanzura did not express that she attends religious programmes to develop religious literacy. She did not mention any literacy skills she has developed because of attending these programs. Instead, she mentioned making friends whom she feels are reliable.

A sense of community through gardening practices. Nanzura narrated how she formed a social community because of engaging in gardening practices. During weekends and holidays, she sells vegetables to villagers. This has enabled her to meet many people. She said that “*the garden helps me to make friends, including those who are not students, because I go to the marketplace to sell vegetables*”. Through gardening practices, Nanzura has made connections with many people she knows. Nanzura’s face glowed with a big smile as she mentioned being famous for supplying vegetables. Nanzura has developed a large community beyond her school, which suggests that students who engage in out-of-school practices, such as gardening, build a community that may not be developed by students confined to academic literacies.

A sense of community through socialization groups. Some students develop a sense of belonging when in informal socialization groups with their peers. For instance, Nansato mentioned that, when she is done with her daily household activities and HomeWorks, she mingles with her female peers. When they meet, they not only socialize but also discuss serious matters related to their gender and future aspirations. She said, “*We share stories and challenges we face as girls, especially how to succeed in school*. In the lens of multiliteracies, such peer interactions could be interpreted as analyzing the context to understand how things work, thereby developing problem-solving literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005, 2016). However, in this study, I conceptualize them primarily as relational survival practices. This is because Nansato and colleagues use ideas about

schooling as tools to negotiate their identities, handle their relationships and care for each other, rather than as final goals. It is a site for empathy rather than a meaning-making practice.

Nansato's mother, however, does not trust such socialization groups. Instead, she wishes Nansato would use her spare time like this to attend church programmes. This implies that, while parents might see Nansato's group as an appropriate socialization site, for Nansato and colleagues, this is a learning community. It is a platform through which they seek collective solutions to the problems they face as girls. Additionally, since they use this community to reflect on their school academic progress, it can be argued that such an opportunity is probably not provided at school or at home. In other words, Nansato's socialization group is a third space for enhancing girls' agency and literacy capacity.

A sense of belonging through football commentary practices. Masato's practice of football commentaries has made him develop a sense of belonging to a community of journalists. Masato emulates Ayubu Hinjo, a famous Tanzanian football commentator whom he regards as his role model. As a result, even fellow students call him by that name. He said, "*I model Ayubu Hinjo, and everyone calls me by this name*". This suggests that Masato sees himself as belonging to the group of journalists or football pundits. He speaks the jargon of football commentators. He feels a stronger sense of belonging to this group than to the group of academicians, which he is being forced to join through private tuition and remedial routines. His own role model is in the group of football commentators, rather than any teacher at his school or any professor he has ever heard about in his own country.

Defining personal identities & Imagining one's own future/Personal values

My data showed that when students engaged in out-of-school practices, they shaped their personal identities and values, including their sense of who they want to become in the future. While students were engaged in academic literacy practices such as attending remedials and HomeWorks and receiving private tutoring, most of their identities and future aspirations were defined outside these practices. Some of these identities are presented below.

Defining personal identities through cooking literacy practices. Nansato imagines her future as making sense through cooking literacy practices, which she enjoys more than academic literacy practices. She imagines that “*I want to own my own restaurant.*” Nansato imagines that, if she cannot own her own restaurant, her cooking skills can help her secure a job. She insisted, “*I can also get a job and get employed in big hotels*”. While her parents want her to focus on academic literacy practices, such as attending private tutoring and remedial programmes, she does not see herself as a future academician, but as a chef. On this, Nansato said explicitly, “*The cooking skills will help me become a great chef in the future*”. To make this dream possible, Nansato uses her precious free time to watch TV and learn cooking skills. She said, “*I spend much time watching cooking programmes*”. Nansato’s TV-watching to improve her cooking skills is an example of how multimodal learning helps students engage meaningfully with what they want to learn.

Nansato’s passion for cooking has led her to imagine her future through cooking, not academic subjects. Whereas current educational reforms in Tanzania (MoEST, 2023) aim to equip graduates with employable skills, Nansato believes these skills develop through out-of-school daily practices such as cooking. She does not see employable skills emerging from academic practices like tuition, remedial classes, or extended stays at

school. At Nansato's school, students preparing for national examinations temporarily leave home to camp on campus. Students' temporary camping at school has become a common practice in many Tanzanian day schools. Such camping aims to remove students and, hence, protect them against what are seen as distractions at home, and to focus only on exam preparation. However, for Nansato, these academic routines do not support the kind of skills she values or sees as useful for life beyond school. In other words, Nansato's personal future imagination outside the academic scope advocates that the school's core curricula (academic subjects) recognize that her greatness lies not in academics, but in what is currently perceived as a mundane, non-academic literacy practice, such as cooking.

Defining personal identities through gardening literacy practices. The study found that for some students, gardening practices not only helped them meet family responsibilities but also gave them a space to imagine their own futures. For instance, Nanzura mentioned that *"I see myself becoming an entrepreneur. After school, I will start a serious commercial gardening. I want to become a big supplier of vegetables both in Tanzania and beyond"*. This means that, for now, Nanzura feels she has little time to engage in gardening activities. Although she supplies vegetables to the whole village, Nanzura still views her gardening practices as limited. Her statement that *"After school, I will start serious commercial gardening"* depicts schooling as something that delays her from fully engaging in gardening practices.

Also, Nanzura's mother sees her daughter as more suited to gardening entrepreneurship than to an academic path. She said, *"I see her as more of an entrepreneurial person"*. This suggests a clash between two knowledge regimes: academic schooling and gardening entrepreneurship. In this clash, Nanzura's mother is

aware that, “*Nanzura says when she completes school, she will focus on gardening and become a big businessperson. And I don’t see that she is doing well in class.*”

Despite Nanzura’s passion for gardening, Nanzura’s mother insists that Nanzura must attend remedial classes in academic subjects that the mother herself knows Nanzura struggles with. Nanzura’s mother’s position is that “*the [academic] certificate is also important*”. Thus, while she knows that Nanzura has little potential to achieve such qualifications, the mother insists, “*Let her try her luck with the certificate. Gardening is not going anywhere. She will always find it here.*” This shows a paradox in Nanzura’s mother’s hope for her academic success. The mother knows Nanzura is unlikely to pass the national exams, yet she lets her try her luck instead of supporting her in gardening, where she already excels. This dilemma can be understood first as parents’ overvaluing of academic certificates because of their perceived power to enable social mobility, which may not necessarily be achieved. Secondly, the Tanzanian government offers fee-free education, and each student is obliged to complete basic education that runs from pre-school through lower secondary. In this regard, parents are accountable for ensuring their children attend school. Also, when Nanzura’s mother insists that Nanzura must first try her luck in schooling before completely focusing on gardening, might be an attempt to comply with government directives (for compulsory schooling) rather than acting on personal convictions.

When Nanzura says she wants to supply vegetables “*in Tanzania and beyond,*” she shows that she has already linked her gardening to future goals. Unfortunately, school demands such as remedial classes, private tuition, and camping at school reduce the time she must fully develop gardening skills. This shows that when educational practices focus only on the officially prescribed academic subjects, students’ future aspirations also remain limited.

Defining personal identities through academic literacy practices. I found that while many students identified with some out-of-school literacy practices, others clearly defined their personal identities and future imaginings through academic literacy practices. For example, Mazura said consistently that, *“My dream is to become an Engineer”*. Upon visiting Mazura’s home, I learned that he regularly solves Maths and Physics questions. He also insisted that Maths and Physics are his favourite subjects at school. He expressed that, *“I need to invest more time in Maths. I get good support from my teachers in pursuing these subjects [Maths and Physics]. Also, when I am at home, I still find people who can help me with Maths”*. I learned that the people that Mazura expect to help him with Maths at home are those university graduates, also born and raised in Nzengo village, who are yet to be employed. Unlike Nansato, Nanzura, and Masato, who largely imagine their futures through out-of-school practices, Mazura imagines his future through academic literacy practices. Thus, all these students’ imagined futures, taken together, reinforce the view that equitable educational practices can be achieved when we value many types of learning experiences, rather than prioritizing only one academic literacy practice, as is the case in Nzengo village. Students like Mazura must be supported through academic literacy practices like remedials, private tuition, and even camping to help them realize their engineering dream. Also, students like Nansato, Nanzura, and Masato need support through out-of-school practices to achieve their dreams: Nansato as a chef, Nanzura as a gardening entrepreneur, and Masato as a football commentator. In other words, academic literacy and non-academic literacy (such as students’ out-of-school practices) should coexist and be equally valued.

Identities through a mix of academic and non-academic literacy practices. I noted that at some point, students needed to combine both academic and non-academic literacy practices to clearly define their personal identities and to determine their futures.

For instance, Nanzura expressed the need for combining gardening literacy practices with academic literacy practices. She expressed that “*When I become a great supplier of garden produce in the future, English will help me to communicate with people who speak English*”. In Tanzania, the English language is taught as a compulsory subject in the Secondary school curriculum. Since the whole country uses Kiswahili as the lingua franca and Nanzura’s village uses mostly Kikerewe, the school is the most appropriate site for Nanzura to learn English. Besides the English language, Nanzura believes she gains many other aspects of her personal growth from schooling that are important to her future dream of becoming a gardening entrepreneur. She implicitly said, “*I believe that something from school will help me in the future*”. This means that Nanzura sees her own future as becoming possible when she combines both academic and non-academic practices. This reinforces the need to recognize both school and out-of-school literacy practices as crucial to shaping students’ futures and helping them become who they want to be. Nanzura insisted that her dream is to supply vegetables “*in Tanzania and beyond*”. She therefore views the English language as a requisite tool for achieving such a goal. Nanzura shows that school-centric and out-of-school literacy practices not only can co-exist but also must.

Some parents, too, feel that students can become who they want to be when academic literacy practices are combined with students’ out-of-school literacy practices. On this, Masato’s father said, “*Studying is important, especially if a student passes their subjects. But work will help one to manage life*”. This shows why integrating out-of-school daily practices with academic practices is important.

Personal awareness & self-reflection

I found that engaging in various out-of-school activities helped students reflect more deeply on their own lives and enhance their personal awareness. This included

understanding the kind of literacy practices that best suited their own successful future. Some categories identified here included the following qualities.

Personal assessment of academic strength. Nanzura expressed awareness of her own academic progress. Her personal assessment of her academic progress indicated a disjunction between what she likes and what she is good at. She said, “*The subject I perform better in is the Kiswahili language subject, but I like the Business subject*”. Nanzura’s expression shows a major dilemma: while she is good at only one subject, Tanzanian academic credit transfers require a student to sit for at least seven subjects and must have at least a good pass (balanced) in three subjects to qualify for a combination that allows them to proceed to high school. This is the dilemma that sometimes school poses for students regarding their career paths. Nanzura is caught up in an education system that is not flexible to her needs; rather, she must adjust to fit into the system. In the Tanzanian secondary education system, the subject combinations are already predetermined, and a student must fit into any of the available combinations; otherwise, one becomes a failure. While the study shows that students are aware of their self-efficacy, Nanzura’s self-assessment advocates for rethinking whether some students’ failures are due to their limited ‘academic intelligence’ or the weaknesses in the education system itself.

Awareness of agricultural skills from gardening literacy practice. Nanzura expressed that she has developed a crucial understanding of the key skills required to undertake scientific agriculture. She said, “*I know which kind of fertilizer the vegetables need. I just ask my parents for money to buy them[fertilizers]*”. This suggests that Nanzura has developed personal awareness of agricultural and economic skills. She is aware of the fertilizers appropriate for her gardening. This way, she develops self-awareness not only of the appropriate agricultural fertilizers but also of their cost. She gains a self-awareness

that might be difficult to develop through abstract classroom learning or simply writing essays in class on why gardeners should use fertilizers. These are important agricultural skills that students who do not engage in agricultural practices during their academic schooling rarely develop.

Personal awareness of why combining work and schooling is crucial. I found that many students are aware that they must combine work and academic literacy practices to thrive in both school and home settings. For instance, Mazura expressed why it was important for him to engage in household economic activities after his classes. He said, “*Work is also important. I must help with work to meet some school costs*”. Work supports Mazura’s schooling. He meets most of his school-related financial needs through work, such as farming, especially by selling the crops. Similarly, Masato engages in fishing practices after school hours and during holidays because fishing is his family’s primary livelihood. Masato mentioned that fishing was his family’s “*economic livelihood activity*”. His financial needs also came from selling fish, which in turn necessitated his participation in fishing activities. Masato’s awareness might be highly influenced by his father, who construes fishing as “*a preparation for life*”. Likewise, Nanzura was aware that she met her school financial needs like paying for private tutoring and buying exercise books through selling gardening produce. Her self-awareness strengthened her commitment to gardening practices. Overall, my study shows that students are aware that work is integral to their lives and that once disconnected from working, they may not even pursue schooling. It is unfortunate that school schedules do not take this reality into account for these students. Previous research on Tanzania has categorically stressed that “children wishing to combine work and schooling should be given opportunities to do so without compelling all the children not to work” (Masabo, 2016, p. 12). In that too, schooling time should be arranged in a manner that “reconciles competition between

children's time for work and time for school" (Masabo, 2021, p. 593). My research reinforces this view.

Awareness of one's internal motivation. Through engaging in various out-of-school daily practices, some students have been able to identify what speaks most to their passion and motivation. For example, despite engaging in activities such as farming, caring for siblings, church programmes, and remedial classes, Nansato still singles out cooking as her favourite life practice. According to her, cooking is something she can do without being pushed by anyone. She said, "*Cooking is my passion. I don't need to be pushed or supervised to do it, and I do it well*". This is very powerful. It questions why Nansato is pressured to pass exams when she can comfortably engage in other life practices, such as cooking, and become a productive member of her society without external motivation. Nansato's passion for cooking resembles Masato's passion for doing football commentaries, through which he can grasp crucial information such as football players' names and statistics, despite his parents' strict ban on watching football matches on TV. It also resembles Nanzura's passion for reading newspapers, even when they are outdated, to get information on cookery, while she does not have the same motivation to read her school notes.

Overall, these students demonstrate self-regulation. The findings suggest that, first, students must be exposed to various practices to identify where they fit best. Second, when students engage in literacy practices that align with their personal goals, they do not need external pressures, such as parental surveillance or teachers' monitoring. Instead, they become active and responsible for their own learning.

Personal Agency

I observed that, through their engagement in various out-of-school daily practices, some students have developed a sense of personal agency. Personal agency in this context

refers to students proposing alternative perspectives to the prevailing practices they are currently engaging in. During our ethnographic conversations and focus group discussion with them, students demonstrated the following personal agencies.

Agency in questioning the academic curriculum and its inadequacy. After engaging in both academic and various out-of-school literacies, some students expressed thoughts that indicated their agency in pushing back against academic literacy practices. During the focus group discussion, Nanzura posed one critical question: *“is it not possible for a student to just specialize in one subject?”* This question caught almost all students’ interest, and it led the discussion into students expressing what they would really study if education provided such an opportunity to focus more on only one subject. For instance, Nansato said, *“If given a chance to specialize in a single subject upon which I will only be employed, what will you pursue, that will be cookery”*. Nansato also mentioned other practices such as carpentry, hair dressing, and poultry. Nansato’s suggests signals are resistance against the current secondary curriculum. She critiques it for missing the cookery component, which she really values. She also proposes literacy practices that she sees not being reflected in the formal curriculum. Likewise, Mazura, despite his interest in becoming an engineer, suggested that he would love to see sports become a core subject in secondary school education. These suggestions by students not only push back against the dominance of academic practices but also point to what is missing in formal schooling. In other words, students advocate for broadening the scope of literacy through formal schooling to include other important out-of-school daily practices.

Agency in challenging teachers’ and parents’ dominant perspectives. In Nzengo village, students are prohibited from engaging in fishing practices. To ensure students focus on academic literacy practices, teachers’ main discourse has always been that fishing will make students earn money while still young. Many parents assume that

when children make money, they may feel schooling is less important. Also, since many fishermen did not excel in school, teachers and the community at large regard them as individuals who lack ‘anything academic’, and students can learn little from them when they associate with them. Clearly, the knowledge possessed by fishermen is not valued, and therefore, the individuals themselves are not valued. Masato’s father, despite acknowledging the significance of fishing in supporting his children’s schooling, expressed that the fishing environment was not friendly for the young ones. In my ethnographic conversations with him, he said:

We live close to the fishing camps. So, the young children are too influenced by the lifestyles at that camp. When they engage in fishing activities, they make money and misuse it for drinking, smoking and women. So, this environment is not friendly for schooling. This is the biggest disadvantage for us who live in fishing communities.

The above quote appears to be a paradox: Masato’s father feels disadvantaged by living in a fishing community that provides him with economic benefits, such as selling fish, supporting his children’s schooling, and supporting his family. However, understanding it requires a careful analysis. First, it is true that there are women who also engage in fishing practices (Mazigo, 2017), and these are the women Masato’s father believes that young people like Masato are likely to end up into sexual relationship with these women. Second, it is important to understand how fishing practices are framed in Nzengo village when it comes to involving students. In my informal conversations with teachers, parents, and students, I noted that fishing is negatively described as an inappropriate site for children’s schooling. If a fishing site perpetuates a lifestyle of drinking and inappropriate relationships among the youth, I agree with parents and teachers that it might not be an appropriate site for young people.

Also, it is important to consider the view that opposition to fishing is influenced by teachers and policymakers urging parents in Nzengo villages to disengage their children from this practice. In this light, I can argue that Masato's father's view of the fishing site as a disadvantage in his life can be seen as imposed on him by external influences, such as teachers and educational administrators, who want children to be completely disengaged from practices like fishing. This is even more so because during my ethnographic conversations with him, he described it himself as "*an asset*". What stands out here is a contradiction. As for many students, once they cannot achieve adequate academic grades to advance to higher levels of schooling, fishing will be their livelihood, even if they gain formal education. The real contradiction is that, while they are now excluded from fishing, they are afforded no alternative opportunities if they cannot complete high school or college. In the same vein, even those who go on to college are not guaranteed employment, which implies they may end up returning to the same fishing site to secure jobs.

Nevertheless, Masato challenges these perspectives. During my ethnographic conversations with him, he said, "*I don't believe that fishing will make one automatically bad*". Masato disagrees based on his own experience. He engages in fishing, and it has not led him into any inappropriate behaviour such as drinking and having inappropriate sexual relationships. In this regard, it can be argued that Masato's critique is genuine as he speaks from a lived experience. In other words, without engaging in fishing, Masato might not have been in a good position to challenge perspectives that frame fishing practices as inappropriate for young people. Perhaps students and teachers who have not had the opportunity to engage in fishing practices cannot give a similar critique.

Passive resistance as a form of agency in doing favourite literacy practices. I found that when parental surveillance and teacher control limited students' engagement in

their preferred out-of-school daily practices, students responded with passive resistance. This encompassed engaging in some academic literacy practices to please parents. For instance, Masato said, *“I put much effort into Maths because I don’t want to disappoint my parents”*. Masato likes football commentary, but his parents want him to put his effort into Maths. Maths is not his favourite subject, and he does not even associate it with any of his future dreams; he just attends tuition and remedial classes to please his parents. This is passive resistance. Similarly, Nansato said, *“The problem with parents is that they will start valuing something like cookery once you succeed in it”*. Nansato went on narrating that, *when I ask my mother to allow me more out-of-school time to cook, she always tells me to focus on school first*. From my experience of growing in Ukerewe, I understand that parents perceive formal education as the most relevant key for a child to access socio-economic mobility. When Nansato quotes her mother as telling her, *“Focus on school first,”* I not only record it as data but also feel the echo of this voice in my childhood experience. As a child in this same context, I too was excluded from the household responsibilities, especially farming and animal care, to focus on school.

This is how parents negotiate their local lives with the need for their children to access the global currency (the academic certificates). Reflecting on my own childhood, I see that parents are conflicted about balancing these two. They end up creating a temporary alienation (temporarily excluding the child from work, so that they can focus on school, as Nansato puts it, *“first”*) as a safe way to help their children seize the opportunity to access academic literacy. Looking at the current Tanzanian landscape, the government has, since 2015, been offering fee-free education, which, in turn, mandates that all parents ensure their children are in school. As such, prioritizing academic literacy over survival and care might be due to their compliance with government directives. In the global discourse on childhood, particularly through the lens of the CRC (United

Nations, 1989), these parents are protecting their children from labour, which they perhaps perceive as destructive to schooling. Using my own history as a diagnostic lens, I recall that when I was excluded from household responsibilities to focus on school, my siblings, who were not yet enrolled in secondary school, continued to engage in household economic labour. Being primary scholars, my siblings had enough (out-of-school) time and fewer school assignments (HomeWorks) to do after school, on weekends, or on holidays.

My siblings' engagement in household labour generated money that also supported my schooling. My experience at this juncture complicates the child labour discourse in that my parents were 'protecting' the older child to 'risk' the younger ones. The latter's exposure to work was meant to provide a direct survival for the former in schooling. I wanted to confirm this experience from my student participants. Masato was the only participant in this study who was the last-born in his family. As such, he said he had no siblings. However, three students, Nansato, Nanzura, and Mazura, said they had siblings in primary school who were also helping at home while older brothers and sisters were away, such as were camping at school, as was the case for these three students. Nanzura said her younger sister (an 11-year-old) can wash dishes and keep the kitchen clean on days Nanzura is away. Also, Mazura disclosed that his sibling born after him (a 12-year-old girl) does the household activities, including taking care of their last born (a 5-year-old). When I visited Nanzura's and Mazura's homes, I observed these children engaging in various household activities, including running errands for their parents. Grounded in their contexts, running errands is not merely a chore but a crucial form of relational care. This signals a discourse of evolving capacities and a view of children's agency as operating on a continuum of dependence and interdependence (Abebe, 2019; Varadan, 2019).

Furthermore, looking at why the academic schooling practices receive the ‘first’ hierarchy in organizing the daily practices of the child, through the positionality of a researcher, I understand it as deeply rooted in the colonial legacy in which success in the Western academic schooling is attributed to success in personal life (Graff & Heath, 2017). Anchored on this legacy, parents tend to regard non-academic practices as not leading to a successful life.

Nansato’s view that “*parents will start valuing something like cookery once you succeed in it*” reflects this view. Nansato explained that her parents have never seen such a successful cook, which is why they do not want her to prioritize it over academic subjects. Put differently, Nansato’s view implies that the parents have witnessed successful scholars, such as teachers at Nzengo Secondary School. This might be the confidence they have to keep their children in school so they may chase the imaginary promise of academic schooling. Although Nansato disagrees with this, framing it as mentioned above as “*the problem with parents*”, she said that she has opted to focus on schooling, while keeping her dream of becoming a great cook alive. This way, her parents might see her going to school daily, thinking she is defining her future through schooling, when in fact she defines it through cookery. In keeping her hidden dream alive, she watches cookery programmes on television. In this regard, the television becomes Nansato’s core classroom and literacy teacher, keeping her dream alive. However, keeping her own dream, which runs contrary to her parents’ beliefs, supports her in pursuing her schooling, signalling the invisible agency she must define her own future.

Engaging in hidden practices as a form of agency. Students expressed that where parents were too restrictive, they practised their favourite out-of-school daily practices behind closed doors or out of their parents’ sight. Nansato said, “*I just read them [Daddy’s newspapers] stealthily during my father’s absence*”. Likewise, although

Masato's father has prohibited him from watching football matches on television so that he can focus on academic literacy practices, Masato watches recorded matches when his father is not present. He said, "*When he [the parent] is away, I turn on the television and watch soccer, usually the recorded matches which are being repeated on soccer channels*". These findings suggest that when parents deny students space to practise what they like, students might end up creating their own hidden practices to keep their dreams alive. In this regard, such hidden practices become a form of agency that students use to protect their out-of-school daily practices from erasure.

Assessing one's environment as a form of personal agency. I observed that engaging in some out-of-school daily practices beyond reading and writing has helped some students critically assess their own local environment. For instance, after engaging in football commentary practices, Masato has become critical of his own rural area. In our informal conversations, Masato reflected that, "*One day, my friend (his colleague, with whom they do football commentary together) and I agreed that if we were in town, we would not be here (in the village and feeling unrecognizable)*". Masato's reflection on his rural environment is that it limits his visibility compared to that of children in town. While what he does is loved and appreciated by the villagers, he still feels it should reach a wider audience across Tanzania. Also, he wishes to meet in person with his idol, Ayubu Hinjo, the Azam Sports TV commentator in Tanzania, but he feels that being in the village is standing in the way of this dream. Masato's analysis of his local environment signals how places matter in determining whether certain literacy practices hold value. In other words, Masato now understands that literacy practice is a place-based human practice, and that place matters in validating it. Masato perceives that if he were in a town with plentiful media, he would have excelled more than he currently does. Whether or not his imagination is accurate, the finding suggests that Masato engages in critical reflection

grounded in his local context, something that a student whose daily life is limited to academic literacy practices, such as those in boarding schools elsewhere in Tanzania, may not do.

21st century skills

Tanzanian secondary education curriculum highlights 21st – century skills, which it aims to develop as: “communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, digital skills, ethics and patriotism” (MoEST, 2023, p.1). While most learning activities for developing these skills are limited to academic literacy practices and confined to school contexts, the current study showed that some of these skills can be developed by students through their out-of-school daily practices, as presented below.

Communication skills through drawings, gardening & socialization. I found that students can develop communication skills such as charisma, stage presence, and vocal control through doing football commentary. When Masato engages in football commentary, he learns how to manage his audience. I observed Masato demonstrating skills in adjusting his tone, volume, and pace to express emotion in ways that keep his audience engaged. To do this well, he focuses on the unfolding action of the football match, describing events as they happen. In doing so, he develops quick and coherent thinking skills. Thus, Masato has already developed specialized expertise outside formal academic settings. He is widely known in his village and beyond for his football commentaries. Sometimes he is hired to do football commentaries in other villages away from his own.

Through their socialization groups, girls like Nansato learn how to express their problems. Nansato mentioned that when she meets her female peers after completing her household tasks, they discuss various matters facing girls, including how to improve their academic performance at school. In this regard, Nansato’s socialization group serves as a platform for developing communication skills. Also, Nansato interacts with choirmates in

the religious space, while Masato has yet another interpersonal relationship with people who buy fish from him/his family.

Additionally, Nanzura develops communication skills through her regular interaction with villagers who come to buy vegetables. Nanzura must communicate effectively, including using polite and welcoming language. Such customers are people of varying ages. The way she gets along well with many people suggests that she has effective communication skills. Through her communication skills, Nanzura has a big community of people she interacts with through selling vegetables.

These findings suggest that effective communication skills, as a crucial component of 21st century skills, while mostly developed through academic literacy practices, can also be developed through students' out-of-school daily practices, perhaps better, and certainly in authentic ways. Out-of-school daily practices offer a limitless platform for students to develop interpersonal skills.

Creativity & innovation through artistic drawings. When drawing people, animals, and nature, Masato expresses himself through media beyond reading and writing. Artistic drawings encourage him to think creatively and explore new ideas. They also show how multimodal approaches help him make sense of the world (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016). From the way he engages in artistic drawing practices, it can be argued that Masato is not only a multimodal consumer but also a producer. He arranges imaginative elements to tell visual stories. I understand artistic drawing as a complex practice that requires skills such as using pencils, colours, and painting techniques, as well as strong observational abilities. Masato is proficient in all of these. This shows that, although Tanzanian classrooms place too much emphasis on traditional learning to develop 21st-century skills, students like Masato cultivate their creativity and multimodal abilities through out-of-school drawing practices.

Entrepreneurial skills, self-confidence, and adaptability. Masato develops entrepreneurial fishing skills by selling the fish he catches through his fishing practices. He negotiates the prices while displaying the fish to the customer. From my observation at the Lake shore, I realized that Masato's communication is inherently multimodal, as it involves the visual display of the fish, gestural expressions such as smiling at his face, and oral expressions, which he uses with great self-confidence. Masato spoke in a different tone and switched between Kikerewe and Kiswahili depending on which language the customers spoke to him first. This suggests Masato's adaptability and his unrecognized linguistic abilities. Likewise, when Nanzura sells vegetables at her home garden or at the village marketplace, she develops entrepreneurial skills, self-confidence, and adaptability.

Some teachers are very aware of the entrepreneurial skills, self-confidence, and adaptability. For instance, the Business subject teacher believes that "*Students who engage in small businesses today in front of their colleagues will not be ashamed of pursuing the same business after completing their studies*". Here, the teacher suggests that these students learn to apply business knowledge in real situations and view self-employment as a viable and dignified career pathway. When the teacher says that such students will not be ashamed of pursuing the same business after completing their studies, he implies their self-confidence and readiness to adapt to the post-schooling environment.

Ability to work under pressure, i.e. flexibility to work with dynamics. Masato illustrated how his involvement in football commentary has taught him to work under pressure and adapt to emerging dynamics. He said, "*The challenge was to do a first commentary in front of a huge crowd when the forestry manager needed us. I felt pressure, but I overcame it by trusting in myself*". In this scenario, Masato was under pressure because it was his first time doing football commentary in front of a big

audience. He knew he was under public scrutiny by both the forestry manager and the crowd. He has learned that the best way to learn how to work under pressure is to trust in himself. Such a learning experience can rarely be learned in classroom conditions, such as by writing an essay. The finding suggests that where schooling aims to prepare students for work dynamics, some students' out-of-school practices are the appropriate site.

Responsibility & empathy through animal care. While taking care of the cattle, Mazura ensures the cattle are put in a “*grassy area*”. Then, in the afternoon, he takes the cattle to the place where they will “*drink water and get them to another place with fresh grass*”. This indicates that, by caring for the cattle, Mazura understands when the cows need food and water. This way, he develops empathy for the animals. Besides getting milk, Mazura mentioned that his family also gets manure from the cows, which they use for increased productivity in gardening and farming of other crops. He insisted, “*We use manure from our cows*”. This implies that students who engage in animal care practices understand that good care of the animal, such as ensuring it is well-fed, will eventually enable them to harvest milk and manure. Thus, students learn to be responsible for their families while showing empathy for other living things, such as cows, in their setting. They are developing these skills beyond the classroom walls.

Problem-solving skills. The study also revealed that when students engage in embodied agrarian practices such as animal care, they develop problem-solving skills. For instance, when discussing his experience caring for the cows, Mazura said he learned to handle the challenges of animal care. He noted that “*cows and goats are sometimes stubborn*”. Mazura went on to say that, due to this stubborn nature, these animals “*can untie from the ropes where you have tied them*”. Mazura went on to narrate that when this happens, these animals “*can eat other people's crops*”. He insisted that “*when all these*

happen, the responsible person is the one who took the cattle to that place. You know how to solve those issues by yourself”.

The quotes suggest Mazura’s awareness that caring for the cows entails several challenges, such as untying the ropes and grazing on other people’s crops. Should all of these happen, the cow caretaker is responsible. Mazura’s comment that *“you know how to solve those issues by yourself”* speaks loudly to students’ autonomy in problem-solving. It suggests that students handle the challenges they encounter when caring for the cattle independently, without parental intervention. I asked Mazura what he does in such cases. His response was that *“in most cases, people whose crops have been destroyed by your cows would want you to go back and replant the destroyed crops, especially if they were still young plants.* He also said, *“Some people would just say, ‘Don’t worry, it was a cow, not you, but next time take proper care of your cow.”*

This shows how Mazura learns negotiation skills by apologizing. Besides understanding how to care for animals, he must also have the requisite skills to replant the destroyed crops, as these are crucial for resolving potential conflicts with farmers. In other words, students who engage in animal care possess a package of problem-solving skills that they would rarely have developed through simply reading and writing essays at school. Their engagement in animal care enables them to develop problem-solving skills that have been tried and tested on the ground. Mazura’s expression, *“next time take proper care of your cow,”* indicates the need to pay attention to every detail of the animal care practice to avoid conflict.

Understanding life cycles and food security. Engaging in farming of various food crops and gardening helps students develop an understanding life cycle of both plants and humans. I found that students who engage in farming practices understand how plants (crops and vegetables) germinate and grow until they reach the harvest stage.

During the ethnographic conversations, Nanzura, who engages in gardening, said, “*I know which kind of fertilizer the vegetables need. I just ask money from my parents to buy them[fertilizers]*”. In this light, Nanzura’s engagement in gardening enables her to understand the concept of growth in plants, which is one of the essential topics in the biology subject (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). Unlike in school, Nanzura learns about growth through everyday hands-on experiences.

Also, when participating in agricultural activities, students understand the entire food chain, from production to marketing and consumption. This way, they learn about food security. Nanzura said, “*We supply vegetables all over this village.*” This suggests that Nanzura understands that her family plays an important role in sustaining the entire village through their vegetable production. Thus, Nanzura’s local actions of engaging with vegetables align with broader global agendas, such as food security and responsible consumption.

Environmental stewardship. I found that students who engage in fishing get a great opportunity to develop environmental stewardship. Masato has learned to practise sustainable fishing, which in turn, fosters his sense of responsibility toward nature. Masato said, “We [he and other fishermen in his area] do not use poison in fishing. Insisting on this, Masato said, “*You don’t need to use Muruku [a local fishing poison] because the weather will tell you whether a day is a good one for fishing or not.*” In other words, Masato has learned to ‘listen to the weather’ when it ‘tells’ him about whether the day is good enough for him to go fishing or not. This strong connection to nature is less likely to develop simply through classroom reading about fishing and responding to essay questions. Also, Masato’s fishing community used to dry their fish on the sun by laying them on the ground. Such a practice used to make fish dry while contaminated with sand.

The community, in connection with the local authority in the study area, changed this practice. Nowadays, fish are dried on the some traditionally made structures (figure 13).

Figure 13

Drying fish in Masato's fishing community



Reflecting on these changes, Masato's comment was that *"drying fish on the traditional structures was better than drying them on the ground"*. Masato explained that since this practice began, his local community has been producing clean fish. Speaking of the same changes, Masato's father said that drying fish without sand contamination has also *"increased the value [price] of fish"*. This finding suggests that teaching the students environmental stewardship does not necessarily require reliance on global frameworks or classroom scenarios. Instead, students can develop this crucial 21st-century skill within their local settings through their everyday out-of-school daily practices.

Vocational skills

My research found that when engaging in various out-of-school daily practices, students develop some vocational skills. The skills are relevant to their immediate local

settings. These include agricultural and husbandry skills, as well as technical and maintenance skills.

Agricultural & husbandry skills through embedded farming practices.

Agriculture and husbandry included skills in animal care, crop management (especially through gardening), and aquaculture. As per recent reforms, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2023) has integrated the vocational education stream into secondary education. It highlights 15 main fields, including Agriculture and Food Processing, Hospitality and Tourism, and Commercial and Business Support Services. While the prevailing practice in Tanzania is to pursue these skills through formal schooling logic (academic literacy), my research shows that they can also be developed through out-of-school daily practices such as farming, gardening, and fishing.

Technical and maintenance skills through fishing literacy practice. Masato not only engages in fishing practices but also helps fix fishing nets. He said, “*I help my parents in preparing a fishing hook (Emigono)*”. Masato learns the skills on how to fix a broken fishing net. He also knows how to rearrange or prepare it for the next fishing trip, a skill that is not easily developed by simply writing an academic essay in the classroom, even when given scenarios.

Chapter summary

This chapter reported on the skills students develop as they engage in out-of-school daily practices. It highlights skills ranging from students feeling a sense of belonging, acquiring the 21st-century skills and vocational skills. The next chapter (chapter 7) presents findings on the views and perspectives on how to integrate students’ out-of-school daily practices into schooling.

Chapter 7: Findings on integrating out-of-school practices into classroom

Overview

This chapter presents findings on how schools and the community can value and hence utilize students' out-of-school daily practices into the school system to improve students' learning and their overall personal growth. These findings answer the third research question of my research. Overall, the findings suggest approaches such as having a curriculum that integrates work and schooling, project-based learning, practical apprenticeship, role-playing, utilizing local resources, using practical illustrations, and experience-based teaching. These findings imply the need for connecting the school and the home spaces for effective learning and personal growth.

A work–school–integrated curriculum

Parents suggested that, to ensure students benefit from the out-of-school daily practices they engage in, school practices should recognize and teach what students do in their home settings. This creates a tension: something that is already useful and meaningful at home must be changed to fit the school's logic before it counts. In my ethnographic conversations with Nanzura's mother, she complained, "*For us people born in the village, work is part of life. These children do work at home, but at school, they do not do any work. At school, they are taught to be bosses.*" Nanzura's mother highlights a major contradiction: the same students who do work at home are often the ones who do not work at school. Work in this context implies allowing out-of-school practices, such as farming or gardening, to take place at school as well. This suggests a gap between what the school offers and what it does not, which can be difficult for a child to reconcile.

Generally, parents demand the integration of work because they regard work as part of students' survival. Hence, they wish it were integrated into the school syllabus. Parents seem to overlook the fact that work at home means practical, life-sustaining activity done for family and community, but when it is brought into school, it is turned into reading, writing, or academic tasks, which changes its original purpose and meaning. These views suggest that parents are not sure what they want. Masato's father emphasized that *"students should be taught to study and work"*. He insisted that *"Studying is important, especially if a student passes their subjects. But work will help one to manage life."* What the parent speaks in the above excerpt suggests that school is useful in students' life only when certain conditions are met (if a student passes their subjects). In other words, the school has only one option to success, that is passing the subjects (exams and securing a certificate). Looking at this view from the perspective of rural experience, the parent does not have full trust in the school that is why he suggests it to be integrated with work.

Also, I understand that when parents suggest integrating work into schooling, they do not mean to devalue academic literacy practices. They rather call for broadening them. For example, Nansato's mother explained that *"teachers place too much emphasis on one thing: academic subjects."* While she acknowledged that academic literacy *"is good,"* she argued that schools should also *"look on the other side."* By this, she meant teaching other aspects of life, such as work and good morals. She is challenging the deficit view of schooling as the only viable path to human success. Nansato's mother was also supported by the Physics and Geography teacher, who said, *"We forget about teaching life itself."* In this sense, the teacher suggests the true life which is relevant to Nzenge village is in what students do out-of-school, which the school does not teach.

Parents envision an integration that adds value to out-of-school practices that students are already capable of practising in their specific areas, rather than erasing and

reducing those practices to academic subjects only. Mazura's father suggested the importance of *"teaching children how to farm scientifically, not like we traditionally farm and end up getting these little harvests"*. He also suggested teaching children *"about scientific animal keeping and then fishing"*.

In addition, teachers supported the idea of integrating scientific agrarian practices as suggested by Mazura's father. On this point, the Business subject teacher critiqued the current curriculum, noting that it is overly general and does not directly reflect local needs. He suggested, *"For students in this local area to be able to engage in business, the syllabus must be very specific"*. Instead of having a centralized syllabus, the teacher suggested, *"students must be taught commercial fishing – a kind of fish farming within the Lake."* Reflecting on the broader education system, he pointed out that, *"Our (Tanzanian education) big problem is that we are not teaching about our lives. We have already thrown away what is our own"*. The teacher used a Swahili phrase to insist on his point, saying that *"Tuna tangatanga tu (we are just wandering)"*.

Besides integrating work, some parents suggested integrating moral issues. Masato's father suggested that *"children should learn about their traditions"*. He complained that the *"Kerewe traditions have now completely perished"*. From his observation, *"the young children are no longer giving elders the due respect we used to give elders"*. The parents' concern about the erosion of the Kerewe people's moral values reflects the broader impact of a centralized curriculum in which specific local values, such as language, are compromised in the name of national interest. As it seems, the specific Kerewe people's values that the parents advocate for have been blurred by the national values as the country seeks to create national unity. The loss of moral values might also be due to the global influence. Ukerewe is a fishing site. As such it hosts people from different places who arrive for commercial fishing purposes. This might be

one of the reasons, although Masato's father does not point it out. Additionally, the global influence on moral values might be due to the children's unguided technology use. For example, Masato's father is unaware that his own son surfs on Facebook. Looking at both sides of the technology, it can be argued that children such as Masato might be picking up values from social media that appear unfamiliar to their rural context. In this regard, we also acknowledge that parents do not have full control of their children's interaction. This might be the reason they require teachers to step in.

Also, Nansato's mother calls for Christian religious values. She suggested, "*I am a Christian. I would like teachers to teach students about religious moral issues*". However, the Christian values, such as Bible knowledge, are part of the existing secondary education. Besides, students at Nzengo Secondary School participate in weekly religious sessions as part of school activities. Nansato's mother's dissatisfaction may require further inquiries into the effectiveness of school religious sessions in enhancing students' morals. Overall, the findings suggest that parents and teachers call for an integrated curriculum that recognizes that human learning extends beyond academic subjects.

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Some parents suggested that students' out-of-school literacy practices can be integrated into school curriculum through projects. Masato's father suggested, "*Schools can teach fishing in groups of students [project-work]*". He said doing such a project at school "*is very easy*". In suggesting how this should be done, he proposed the following procedures: "*Make a canoe, select students who are interested in fishing, go to fish and teach them how to do it.*" He said there is nothing to worry about who is going to guide students in undertaking such as project because "*there are many villagers who can teach students to do fishing*". He also suggested that "*students themselves can teach each other, too.*". Masato's father suggestion aligns with the Tanzanian secondary education

curriculum. As per recent reforms, Project-Based learning is the key competency-based teaching/assessment practice recommended throughout the Tanzanian secondary education syllabus (MoEST, 2023). The curriculum documents point out several times for students to learn through this approach. For instance, it emphasizes that students will “carry out a project in Geography (p. 20); a biological project work using biological principles, conduct a project in Chemistry, and in Physics” (p. 29), etc. In this list, fishing is missing, and Masato’s father, who believes fishing is an “asset” in students’ lives, suggests that it can be taught in school as well. Masato’s father suggests that villagers can teach students how to fish, a call for recognizing that students do not need only academic literacy practices, but the non-academic life sustenance practices, such as fishing, too.

Practical Apprenticeship

Some parents illustrated that some of the students’ out-of-school practices can be integrated into schooling curriculum through apprenticeship approaches. This means learning through observation, imitation, and doing. Nanzura’s mother mentioned that she and her husband teach their children to be hard working like their parents. She believes that doing so will “help them [students] to be independent even when we are gone from their lives.”

Nansato’s mother suggested that “*Schools should teach home economics and vocational skills*”. She illustrated that, “*a school could have a special day for students to learn tailoring. Or they can divide hours the same way they have divided subjects in the school timetable*”. To make this possible, Nansato’s mother suggested that schools “*purchase a particular number of sewing machines*”. Once these machines have been purchased, Nanzura’s mother believes, “*students will get opportunities to learn things of their interests. Even those who cannot do well in academic subjects will like school.*” This is experiential learning. It is very likely to help students learn from real experiences rather

than from school assignments, such as classroom essays, which are based only on imaginary scenarios.

Role-Playing

In this study, role-playing is a learning approach in which students are assigned roles to play. Teachers suggested that students' out-of-school literacy practices can be integrated into their academic learning by assigning students roles, such as acting as experts in the specific activities they do at home. The Business subject teacher said, *"I sometimes invite a student who I know participates in a particular activity at home and make them a guest speaker. This is the teaching approach I often use"*.

The Business subject teacher insisted that using this approach depends on the topic. He said, *"It will depend on the topic"*. Illustrating his own teaching approaches, he said, *"If I am teaching a topic on how to do business from small gardening activities, I will assign the students who I know engage in that activity at their home. These students will speak as experts based on what they exactly do in their home gardening"*. I attended two sessions of the Business subject and observed that the teacher assigned certain roles to some students based on their out-of-school literacy practices. During the classroom observation, I noted that every time students finished playing their assigned roles, the teacher allowed a classroom discussion. Reflecting on his own teaching approach, the Business teacher expressed that, *"I believe this approach [role-playing- followed by a classroom discussion] helps to enrich students' understanding of what they already know and what they can achieve in their own future"*. Envisioning how to improve his own teaching through role-playing, the teacher said, *"I have not used parents on this, but I think even parents can be engaged if we consult them through their children."* From my own observation, I noted that role-playing methods provided students with opportunities to exercise their expertise they have already acquired through various out-of-school

literacy practices they do. However, I also observed that the method did not benefit many learners due to a large class size, as only few students got the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Teaching using the locally available resources

Although not talking specifically to his own subject, the Business subject teacher highlighted that students' out-of-school literacy practices can be integrated into academic learning through utilizing the locally available resources. Local resources in this context refers to both human and non-human factors that can help to bridge theory and practice in students' learning process. The Business teacher critiqued some practices by teachers, saying that, *"You find a teacher teaching traffic signs through diagrams, while the school is located near a police station where traffic officers can be engaged as guest speakers to make the lesson more practical and easier for students to understand"*. The teacher believes that *"If traffic officers are asked for such a role, they will never refuse"*. Hence, he concluded that, *"in my opinion, the problem lies with the teachers"*. The teacher here overlooks the fact that teachers aim at meeting the examination demands which are the broader systemic expectations of the Tanzanian education system.

The teacher believes this approach will allow students to learn by seeing, interacting, and applying knowledge, rather than memorizing facts for exams. This could lead to both deep understanding and students' application of what they learn in the real world. The teacher's assertion that *"the problem lies with the teachers"* suggests the lack of teacher's agency, hence a call to rethink the Tanzanian teacher education as it suggests that teachers lack the agency to utilize their locally available resources. Looking at this from my positionality of a university instructor and researcher, it suggests the cracks in the Tanzanian curriculum and policies, which teachers and parents reveal through my dialogue with them as this research reports.

Offering real-life examples/Illustrations from students' communities

It was found that students' out-of-school literacy practices can be integrated into academic learning through teaching using relevant examples found in the local settings. The Business teacher explained that *"students' competencies can be recognized and valued only when we teach while using relevant examples of activities that come from their communities"*. Drawing on this recognition, the teacher said, *"I try to use daily life examples as I teach"*. The teacher illustrated that, *"I use as many examples as possible from the types of businesses students encounter in their local settings"*. The teacher is aware that *"some of these students come from families that own small shops, and they help in those shops. Those are examples I often use"*. The teacher believes that teaching this way, makes students *"feel that the learning experience is relevant and meaningful"*. During my classroom visit, I observed that the teacher deliberately uses examples from students' own communities, such as family-owned shops, to explain concepts like sole proprietorship and builds lessons around what students already know from their daily lives. He draws on students lived experiences as learning resources. In this way, he makes lessons more relevant and meaningful, helping students clearly connect school knowledge to real-life situations, yet there are still challenges. This proves that teachers know how to implement a competency-based curriculum. However, the teacher said that even when he tries to make the lesson more engaging, students do care much about whether what they are learning will help them in passing exam, rather than reflecting their daily lives.

Experience-Driven Teaching/Experiential Authentic Pedagogy

The Business teacher suggested that to integrate students' out-of-school daily practices effectively, teachers should base their teaching on what teachers themselves do in their daily lives. I call such a practice experience-driven teaching or experiential authentic pedagogy because it entails teaching based on one's practical lived experience.

The teacher said, *“I believe that the right person to teach Business subjects must be one who understands business from a true experience of having done it, not simply by the qualification of having studied it”*. The teacher went on to point out that:

If you are teaching Business Studies and have never run or owned a business, then ask yourself: what kind of business are you going to teach, other than theoretical concepts of Business Studies that you demand your students memorize for exams?” A business subject teacher must be a person who is in business or at least owns a small business.

I told the Business subject teacher that my teaching background was in literature. He then went on inquiring, *“Yes, you are a Literature teacher. Do you have any literary work you have composed that you can use to inspire your students? What have you written? What examples are you providing in the classrooms? Don’t you think that such examples would be more relevant and inspiring if they were from your own works?”*

The above teacher’s opinions advance the conversation from simply centring students’ out-of-school daily practices to teachers’ out-of-school literacy practices. In such a broader view, teachers’ out-of-school daily practices must align with their academic literacy practices, especially what they teach in the classroom. In other words, the teacher suggests that out-of-school literacy practices are integral to academic literacy practices, both by the teacher and by the student. This teacher’s suggestion for experience-driven pedagogy calls for advancing the traditional experiential learning approach, which often focuses on learners’ experience while neglecting the relevance of the teacher’s experience in helping the learner bridge theory and practice.

It is noteworthy that not all teachers can own the practical physical assets they teach. For example, not all Literature teachers can be writers, nor do all Business subject teachers own their own businesses. I understand that a teacher who has not owned a

business can still provide authentic learning through case studies, simulations, project-based learning, internships, and engagement with local entrepreneurs. However, the Business teacher's view suggests that teachers must upgrade their practical skills in what they teach. This might include interacting with people who are perceived as non-academics but are effectively engaged in practices related to the teacher's subject. In this regard, the teacher's view also challenges the traditional academic–theoretical approach to teaching, which prioritizes formal qualifications, such as subject knowledge/textbook-based instruction (academic certification alone), over real professional experience.

Chapter summary

This chapter presented findings related to the second and third research questions, which explore what students learn from their out-of-school daily practices and how these learning values support their personal growth. Overall, the findings show that students develop important skills that can improve their academic learning. Besides academic benefits, many daily practices support students' family life, care, and relationships. In fact, the findings show that many out-of-school practices primarily support daily living, family responsibilities, care, and social relationships, rather than meaning-making or serving the academic purpose commonly emphasized in the multiliteracies framework. This challenges current theories of literacy, especially the broad expansion of the term in multiliteracies, which coerces many human activities to wear the tag 'literacy' to become legitimate in the education conversation. The next chapter discusses these findings in detail and considers how the conception of literacy and the multiliteracies framework alike can be reconsidered.

Chapter 8: Summary & Discussion of the findings

Overview

In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings and then discuss their interpretation. Overall, this research found that on the first sub-research question reveals students' out-of-school literacy practices emanating through six themes: (1) household and domestic responsibilities, which encompasses literacy practices like dishwashing, household sweeping, preparing family meal, and care for siblings; (2) agrarian and economic production activities where students practise farming, animal care, and fishing literacy practices; (3) academic literacy practices, revealed through students' attending of remedial secessions, doing school assignments, reading classroom notes given by their teachers as well as self-initiated dictionary reading; (4) religious and faith-based literacy practices in which students attend church programmes like seminars and choirs; (5) multimodal literacy practices where students engage in artistic drawings, reading newspapers, watching television, and oral performance practices through football commentaries; (6) sports and physical recreational literacy practices such as playing football. Overall, these findings mean that literacy should be considered differently. Literacy must be understood as a multifaceted, contextual, value-laden construct. The findings call for questioning the deficit views of literacy and for unsettling colonial definitions of literacy.

The findings of the second sub-research question indicate that students develop a range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes through various out-of-school literacy practices. These include; (1) foundational lifelong learning skills; (2) life and household management skills in which they learn to switch between and across multiple tasks; (3) relational and empathy skills by constantly negotiating their own relationships with other humans and non-human elements such as animals and the environment; (4) a sense of

community and belonging, agency in defining their own futures and personal values; (5) enhanced personal awareness & self-Reflection; (6) 21st century skills such as effective communication, environmental stewardship, entrepreneurial skills to mention a few; (7) vocational skills such as technical and maintenance skills as well as embedded agrarian awareness. These findings imply that limiting human learning to classroom walls denies students valuable learning experiences. More importantly, the findings suggest redefining student success through students' lived experiences rather than just test scores.

Findings on the third sub-research question reveal several approaches that teachers, parents and students believe can be used to integrate students' out-of-school literacy practices into classroom learning. These include (1) designing a curriculum that integrates work and academic learning; (2) project-based learning; (3) practical apprenticeship; (4) both experiential learning and experience-driven teaching; and (5) utilizing the locally available resources. These findings suggest reconsidering current competency-based teaching and assessment practices in the Tanzanian education system.

In the sections that follow, I discuss the implications of these findings. I heavily draw on the literature section of this study to demonstrate how these findings align with and differ from previous studies. Then I discuss the theoretical contribution these findings offer to the scholarship of literacy. The findings are discussed in the order of sub-research questions.

Understanding and valuing human practices differently

In the following section, I propose alternative ways for conceptualizing literacy. Drawing on evidence from this research as well as what previous research has found, I argue that literacy, being a situated human social practice, deserves a broader conceptualization and broader values depending on the context.

Literacy is a human survival practice. The world is complex, and so must be the construct of literacy. Students' engagement in various out-of-school practices alongside their schooling practices implies that it is no longer sufficient to construe literacy as the ability to read and write. Students in Nzengo village are day scholars, meaning that they go to school in the morning and come back home at 3pm. While at home, they can spend the rest of the day engaging in some household activities, a reality that necessitates their mastery of academic and non-academic competencies to survive in both school and home settings. On the one hand, these students are biliterate in the sense that they are literate in what it takes to survive in school contexts and in what it takes to survive outside them. Since the home setting provides students with opportunities for several literacy practices, ranging from academic to religious and farming, this means that these students are multiliterate.

Like previous research in other African contexts (e.g., Abebe, 2007), students in this study engage in out-of-school activities at home, such as farming, fishing, gardening, and brickmaking, to survive. This survival is not only within the home but also means surviving at school by earning money to cover school costs. These students' schooling experiences cannot be removed from the economic realities of their households (Abebe, 2007). Students need to work (survive at home) to study (survive at school). Through such work, they learn the procedures for performing those activities and why they are important to them (Abebe, 2019). This resonates with BC's First People's Principle of Learning that "what is learned by an individual benefits their family and community" (Chrona, 2022, p.123). My research, therefore, reinforces an understanding that students' engagement in work-related practices while studying does not mean child labour, but an essential opportunity for personal growth (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Ayo, 2022; Masabo, 2016). On this note, the study contradicts a study in the US context (Rodriguez et al.,

2022), which found that students in grades 9 through 12 in public high schools failed to integrate household work with their schooling.

Surviving at school requires students to demonstrate mastery of reading and writing (academic literacy practices) skills. This is why they attend private tuitions and remedial sessions. Like previous studies (Entrich, 2014; Liu et al., 2024), this study also highlights that students attend this ‘shadow schooling’ to reinforce their mastery of academic subjects. However, as human survival in the form of shadow schooling requires financial capacity, participation in it likewise does. Nanzura’s mother is grateful that her daughter’s gardening practices help in relieving them of the financial costs to pay for Nanzura’s tuition and remedials. This means Nanzura’s parents would have struggled to pay for Nanzura’s shadow schooling practices. This concurs with Liu et al.’s (2024) observation that shadow schooling involved more students from higher than from lower economic status. Wealthier families can afford more extensive and higher-quality private tutoring, while low-income families are either unable to invest in education they cannot afford or are excluded from the field altogether (Zhang & Bray, 2020). In other words, shadow schooling, as a literacy practice, requires those with financial muscle to survive. In this study, I argue that although shadow schooling is often regarded as a supplementary academic practice, it does not bridge inequality; rather, it often exacerbates it by disadvantaging children from poor families.

Understood as a human survival practice for students within the schooling system, shadow schooling highlights the paradox of the Tanzanian fee-free policy. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2014 claims to provide fee-free education. This policy has been in practice since 2015, and statistics show an increase in enrollment (Kavenuke et al., 2026). Furthermore, we are told that the fee-free educational policy has enabled children from poor families to attend school, which they could not have done without it

(Shukia, 2020). However, although the ETP 2014 does not state this explicitly, students are entitled to fee-free learning only during regular school hours. When they need additional support, such as extra teaching on weekends and holidays, they arrange it privately with teachers and pay for it. In my two years working at a secondary school, as well as in ethnographic conversations with teachers, I have found that regular instructional time is not enough. This leads to remedial classes and private tutoring that supplement mainstream instruction, and these are not free of charge. In this sense, although students are formally promised fee-free access to learning, they often pay for additional support outside regular school hours. They are promised access to academic literacy at no cost, but in practice they pay through the back door.

Also, shadow schooling is often framed as only helpful for students in fitting into the academic system (Yelland et al., 2023). However, the current study reveals that teachers, too, depend on shadow schooling to survive. Teachers require shadow schooling to manage the pressure to ensure their students are well-prepared to pass exams (Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025).

Literacy is a contextually embedded and dynamic practice. A range of human practices that students engage in outside of school makes great sense when understood within their contexts. For instance, washing dishes may not make sense to someone living in the global North or to a wealthy African family where the dishes are washed by machines. However, for participants in their family contexts, dishwashing is a crucial practice that signifies responsibility, contribution to the family, and survival. Thus, literacy makes sense only when understood within its context. This is why practices such as fishing, animal care, and farming are seen as destructive to academic literacy practices, because teachers try to understand them outside their contexts. When we understand literacy in the context of its occurrence, we will realize that students in this study engage

in diverse practices within knowledge systems (Agrawal, 1995). Additionally, the multiple literacy practices students engage in are dynamic rather than static (Kolb, 1984; Stock & Kolb, 2021). That means they are likely to change and adapt to various forces, including the passage of time, changes in social structures, priorities, and technology. Similarly, academic literacy makes sense only when understood in the context of its occurrence.

Academic literacy practices are also dynamic and subject to change; that is why curricula and educational policies are constantly reformed. Tanzania has reformed its educational policies several times, including in 1967, 1995, 2014, and 2023 (MoEST, 2023). This justifies that literacy is dynamic. In other words, academic literacy practices cannot be reduced to only certain practices. This specifically challenges scholars such as Crawford et al. (2024), who assume that academic literacy practices, such as early reading instruction, can only be developed through a universal, mechanical practice of decoding (letter names, letter sounds, nonword reading), as if there were no other way. This reductionist approach to literacy is largely influenced by standardized testing, in which literacy acquisition is viewed as a technical, neutral skill set that can be taught and measured uniformly across contexts (Grote-Garcia et al., 2025).

Literacy as a value is a value-laden construct. Literacy is not a neutral construct; it is made of a set of stories we inherit and continue to tell. For instance, most of us, if not all researchers and educators, have been raised through the formal schooling system. We have been told stories of human success as only becoming possible through academic schooling. Even where parents have never been part of this system, mechanisms are put in place, such as through school-home partnerships, to ensure the same stories are told to parents. Once these stories are prevalent, they become the lens through which to view literacy everywhere. Academic literacy is highly grounded in the Western logic of the

Enlightenment, in which schooling is perceived as the “pursuit of autonomous and rational thinking” (Matusov, 2025, p. 25). In this logic, the school (where people develop reading and writing skills) is regarded as light, a site for civilized and advanced knowledge, whereas the home, such as the rural village, is regarded as dark, a site with primitive or unimportant literacy practices. Conceived this way, people with the academic literacies (the enlightened) are perceived as more deserving, respected, and valuable than those without.

According to Matusov (2025), the proponent of enlightenment theory, Immanuel Kant, asserted that those not yet enlightened suffered from “ignorance, irrationality, immaturity, and amorality” (p. 26); they could not even make their own decisions unless the Enlightened folks made them on their behalf. As Matusov (2025) notes, Kant argued that the capacity for rational thought is a universal feature of human beings and that reason provides the basis for knowledge, morality, and autonomy. Although Kant acknowledged the roles of experience, emotion, and culture in human life, he held that the fundamental principles of reason are universal rather than culturally relative, and hence academic literacy practices, as practiced in modern schooling, rest on these ideals (Barratt, 2025; Holma et al., 2025). Eventually, the only literacy practice that appears to be the most valuable to human life is academic literacy, such as reading and writing. When students are perceived as academically incompetent, they are coerced into attending remedial classes and private tutoring. In Nzengo village, students are even removed from their families to go camping at school because the home is perceived as destructive to their academic literacy practices.

Therefore, the dominance of literacy practice is not due to its neutral course but the value it is being accorded. It is a value-laden construct. As Graff & Heath (2017) note, academic literacy rests on the colonial notion that the reading and writing styles of white,

middle-class people are more important and legitimate, while other people's ways are seen as less valuable or ignored. In this sense, in Nzengo Secondary School, as in any other modern school, academic literacy practices are designed to benefit middle-class students who can afford resources such as sufficient learning materials, well-qualified teachers, and the costs to supplement their learning through shadow schooling, while students from poor families start at a disadvantage. The schooling system rewards those who already fit its expectations and penalizes those who do not. Unfortunately, those who fail are blamed for lacking capacity to learn rather than recognizing that the system itself is unequal (Gee, 2015; Graff & Heath, 2017).

The view that many students in under-resourced settings are disadvantaged in academic literacy practices can be supported by examining academic examination results for rural students. Tables 1 to 3 highlight the Tanzanian national examination results for the three consecutive years at Nzengo Secondary School, a rural public secondary school where I conducted this study.

Table 4

Students' academic performance by division in 2025

Sex	I	II	III	IV	0
F	0	2	5	27	45
M	3	16	19	79	17
Total	3	18	24	106	62

As the above table shows, a total of 213 candidates (79 female and 134 male) sat for the national exam. Only 45 students (7 female and 38 male) achieved grade III, which means they were selected for higher school, while 106 students (27 female and 79 male) achieved division IV, which means they received a certificate for achieving a minimum

pass mark, but they would not be selected to high school. A total of 62 students (45 female and 17 male) achieved division zero, meaning they were not awarded any certificate.

Table 5

National examination results by division in 2024

Sex	I	II	III	IV	0
F	0	1	3	40	22
M	1	7	27	41	10
Total	1	8	30	81	32

The above table shows that in 2024, a total of 152 candidates (66 female, 86 male) sat the exam. Looking at the overall pass mark, 120 students passed (Divisions I-IV) and 32 failed (Division 0).

Table 6

National examination results performance by division in 2023

Sex	I	II	III	IV	0
F	0	1	0	26	28
M	3	17	17	49	18
Total	3	18	17	75	46

Source: (NECTA, 2025, 2024, 2023. <https://www.necta.go.tz/results/view/csee>).

The above results show that a total of 159 students (55 female, 104 male) took the exam at this school. Only 38 students (1 female, 37 males) scored in a division that would take them to high school (I-III). 75 students (26 female and 49 male) who achieved division IV are considered to have passed the exam, but their certificates do not entitle them to any advancement to high school. 46 students (28 female and 18 male) failed (Division 0), which means they did not receive a certificate.

Overall, for the past three consecutive years (2023-2025), a total of 524 students completed ordinary (lower) secondary education in Nzengo village. 140 students scored division zero. When literacy is reduced to academic metrics alone, these students appear

unintelligent and no longer needed in the academic community. The paradox is that they are now forced to return to the out-of-school practices they have, for the past four years, been alienated from by camping at school, attending remedial classes, and private tutoring. Conversely, if the same students were measured by other values, such as their competencies in handling household responsibilities, their contributions to agricultural and economic production, their care for their siblings, and their fishing practices, they would have proved to be the most intelligent people. These findings reinforce the social perspective that literacy is meaningful only when understood within the context in which it happens (Gee, 2015).

The New London Group observed in 1996 that in every country they came from, what students needed to learn was changing, necessitating contextualized conceptions of literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005; New London Group, 1996). The current study argues that no single definition of literacy should travel unchanged across contexts. There must always be contextual openness in defining literacy. This study does not suggest that these examination results are wrong. Rather, it suggests that when we confine human learning to only academic literacy practices while neglecting real-life experiences and relationships, we end up with not only a limited understanding of human learning (Barratt, 2025) but also with injustice in educational practices (Gross & Rutland, 2017). In the view of the current study, these students are not failures; rather, they are in a formal education system that has failed to capture the valuable knowledge, skills, and attitudes they possess outside the classroom.

Human learning is holistic and transcends academic metrics

The findings in the current research reveal that students develop numerous skills, knowledge, and attitudes by engaging in various out-of-school literacy practices, such as farming, gardening, and fishing. The findings on sense of community and belonging

reinforce previous studies showing that, through out-of-school daily practices such as sports, arts, community service, and family interactions, students develop a sense of teamwork, creativity, and social interaction (Murphy, 2004).

These findings contradict Pensiero and Green's (2017) observation that literacy practices, such as students' self-directed study clubs, and Won and Han's (2010) study, which found that out-of-school practices, like watching television, playing computer games, and spending excessive time on the internet, did not contribute to students' academic achievements. These studies did not explore how the cultural environment and students' personal academic aspirations contributed to whether a certain literacy practice was useful. The current study fills this knowledge gap by showing how the environment, such as Masato's village's appreciation for his football commentary practices, as well as his personal aspirations to become a football commentator, drives him to watch TV to learn football commentary skills. Similarly, Nanzura's personal ambition to become a cook influences her to watch TV. Unlike Pensiero and Green's (2017) and Won and Han's (2010), the current study shows that, through watching TV, Masato and Nanzura developed skills such as communication and personal awareness, which are also regarded as academic skills in the Tanzanian secondary education curriculum.

Redefining student success beyond test scores

Previous studies (e.g., Chambers & Schreiber, 2004; Chan, 2016) have highlighted that students' out-of-school daily practices lack educational significance because, within their scope, these studies limit students' success to academic achievement. In the same vein, even those studies which have acknowledged the contribution of students' out-of-school practices are still reframing students' out-of-school practices through the school-centric logic, such as outdoor activities (Remmen & Iversen, 2023); homework, scheduled extra-curricular activities (Chambers & Schreiber, 2004; Chan, 2016; Yelland

et al., 2023); after-school program, field trips, adventure activities (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013; Power et al., 2009; Won & Han, 2010). The school-centric logic upon which these studies are anchored necessitates teachers' surveillance and control. This is why numerous studies that view students' out-of-school daily practices through the lens of school-centric logic have highlighted teachers' lack of the requisite skills to manage these activities (e.g., ÇeviK et al., 2024; Eshach, 2007; Harushimana, 2008; Koosimile, 2004; Remmen & Iversen, 2023). In this study, I call these daily practices 'structured students' out-of-school daily practices' because they are still managed as an extension to the structured classroom academic literacy practices. The dominance of such research leads to a dearth of understanding of what students really learn when engaging in out-of-school daily practices which do not necessitate teachers' or parents' surveillance and control, such as when taking animal care on their own, when caring for their siblings in their parents' absence, when fishing and gardening to meet their own financial needs. The experiences of Nanzura, Nansato, Mazura and Masato narrow this knowledge gap.

Additionally, these four students' engagement in multimodal literacy practices such as watching TV, surfing on Facebook and reading newspapers concurs with some previous studies such as Andersson's (2022) ethnography conducted from 2014 to 2016 in Sweden, involving 13 to 16-year-old-teenagers, which revealed that by engaging in social media, listening to music, and watching videos on YouTube, the youth to learned concepts related to their classroom topics and used YouTube to watch tutorials and documentaries on various school subjects. This also mirrors the study by Li et al.(2024) in which Chinese students who engaged in playing digital games, watching walkthroughs, and reading game-related materials developed language skills.

Drawing on this understanding, I argue in this dissertation that defining students' success through the lens of academic literacy practices is conceptually limited. Instead,

students' success should be determined through their everyday experiences that go beyond the academic metrics. Defined by academic metrics such as performance across divisions, as in tables 1-3 above, Nanzura, Nansato, and Masato are very likely to appear unsuccessful, except for Mazura who is good at Maths and Physics, and dreams of becoming an Engineer. However, if defined through their everyday experiences, all these students have successfully contributed to their families and their own personal lives. This study, therefore, establishes that human learning is holistic, experiential, reciprocal and transcends academic metrics.

The broken promise of the academic literacy practices

Five decades ago, the radical philosopher Illich (1970) argued that “schools make all valuable learning the result of professional teaching” and arrange this valuable learning into “packages called specializations” (p. 67). Illich (1970) went on to point out that “everyone is obligated to specialize in one of those specializations to be part of “the schooled society” (p.67). In other words, our contemporary society regards academic literacy not only as a means of social and economic mobility but also as a way of being and doing in society, without which an individual fails to survive. This is a big promise that schools make to students and to their parents. In reinforcing this dream, an individual who demonstrates academic literacy practices (the ability to read and write) and thereby signals achievement of the expected educational goals is awarded a certificate that carries “academic credentials” (Tan & McWilliam, 2009, p. 219). These academic credentials make an individual feel as if they are carrying a key to access various opportunities in the labour market (Maire, 2021).

In practice, this dream has three ways we can look at it. First, because we live in a system dominated by the recognition of academic credentials, people without these credentials lack access to jobs (professions) that require them. Second, apart from Gee

and Hayes's (2011) observation that academic credentials do not help students solve real-world problems, it is equally true that not all academic credentials lead everyone into their envisioned professions. Also, students may possess academic literacy but remain either unable or unmotivated to apply it outside the classroom (Pugh & Bergin, 2005).

According to Pugh & Bergin, this assumes that those schooled will transfer their classroom knowledge to real-world problems and develop their interests to engage with academic literacies throughout their lives; however, these remain mere assumptions.

Third, and most importantly, what will happen if a student obtains all the required credentials but fails to secure a job in the designated professional areas? That is where the broken promise arises. Parents and teachers in Nzengo village emphasize students' remedial classes, supplementary private tutoring, and temporary camping at school. These practices carry what Gee (2015) calls "the literacy myth": that a literate person (one who can read and write) is "more intelligent, more modern, and more moral" (pp. 27-28). According to Gee, such a myth also includes the belief that countries where most people can read and write are more advanced, more modern, and act more responsibly. This is not true, but it is so widespread that it functions as an ideology and a cultural narrative that helps sanction the existing social order and can obscure the real, complex causes of social and economic inequality (Gee, 2015; Graff & Heath, 2017).

In Nzengo village, schooling is seen as a pathway to social and economic advancement, but this promise remains unrealized for many students and families. Nanzura's mother spoke of her experience with Nanzura's sister, who has completed a university degree but is just at home after failing to secure employment. This has come after a long time of labouring for remedials, private tutoring, and home alienation through camping. These academic practices alienate the student from engaging in other out-of-school daily practices, which they might have developed beyond academic credentials. As

a result, Nanzura's mother says, such students even "*lack the capacity to do other works at home*". From her experience, Nanzura's mother says that these students who have been broken by the promises of schooling "*feel that their home life is punishing*". This implies that these students already feel disoriented from what they could previously do in their own contexts. Drawing on my experience growing up in a rural village, farming, and caring for the cattle during my primary schooling years, I feel today too incapable of these household economic practices because, since I joined secondary school, I have been completely alienated from my rural context. We can also imagine the situation for those 140 students who have already failed in the academic context, with zero divisions, which do not allow them even to secure an academic certificate, to keep their 'hope' that they would probably one day secure a job based on what they have spent 10 years studying. As researchers and academics, we can ask ourselves what practical knowledge and abilities would help us survive if our academic credentials were no longer recognized. Nonetheless, experiences grounded in survival, relationships, and care cannot simply be dismissed or rendered invisible.

Therefore, my research does not refute academic credentials but rather suggests that academic literacies (schooling), when integrated with one's out-of-school daily experiences, lead to a better individual. As Kolb (1984) argued, when drawing on Dewey's ideas, that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experiences and education [academic literacies]" (p. 5). Kolb underlines that it is only when learning is conceived as a holistic and adaptive process that it can bridge between school and out-of-school life experiences. This study asserts that without grounding educational practices in students' everyday experiences, schools will continue to turn many students' potential, especially those not achieving academic credentials, into

confusion. In this sense, instead of educating for rational thinking, schools will end up looking like educating for confusion.

The self-reliance paradox & the illusion of competency-based teaching

Tanzanian secondary education is competency-based, necessitating competency-based teaching in its implementation (MoEST, 2023). At its core, this curriculum aims to provide “quality and inclusive education based on the philosophy of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) founded in 1967 by the Father of the Nation, J. K. Nyerere” (Tanzania Institute of Education, 2023, p. 1). The philosophy’s core principle was ‘ujamaa’, a Swahili word that means ‘familyhood’ (Nyerere, 1967). This was an African socialist ideology that aimed to create a nation without any form of exploitation. In this regard, family was perceived not only as the basic unit of the nation but also as the family members, including children, who were taught the necessity of work by all (Nyerere, 1967). Since independence in 1961, the ESR philosophy has remained Tanzania's national philosophy of education. Reforms made in 2023 have emphasized that ESR remains the guiding philosophy of the Tanzanian education system. However, as implemented today, Tanzanian secondary education largely departs from the ESR philosophy envisioned by Nyerere.

Initial ESR not only combined academic schooling and work but was also self-sufficient in that, upon completing either primary or secondary education, students were expected to be ready to join the world of work (Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), 1974). Furthermore, Nyerere pushed back against overreliance on academic literacies as the most crucial form of learning and against placing too much value on exam metrics (Nyerere, 1967, 1968). TANU (1974) stated categorically that there was pushback against academic literacy practices that cherished “ambush-type examinations” (p. 145) and those which neglected students’ real-life contexts. This meant that, starting in

primary school, students would not be judged mainly by written exams but by their overall participation, progress, and practical work. In the view of some commentators such as Sakata et al. (2021), Nyerere's ESR was like CBT in that both approaches emphasize students' active participation, shared decision-making, respectful teacher–student relationships and learning through interaction with others in the classroom. Sakata et al. (2021) illustrate that in rural areas, not only did schools have farms to teach children work alongside academic schooling, but they also invited local farmers to instruct children about farming. There is insufficient evidence that ESR met its intended goals. A few research notes indicate that ESR was challenged by a lack of resources and limited commitment among the key actors (Mulenga, 2001). Despite these implementation challenges, Tanzania still regards the ESR as its relevant guiding philosophy.

Today, as per the 2023 educational reforms, Tanzanian secondary education encompasses both academic subjects and vocational education. At the secondary school level, students must choose between pursuing their academic schooling and vocational education (MoEST, 2014). However, at Nzengo Secondary School, where this study was conducted, I found that no vocational programme has yet started. I observed that not only are academic literacies still prevalent through remedial programs and constant private tutoring, but students are also being ambushed by weekly and monthly tests. While Nzengo Secondary School is obsessed with exams, research shows that examination grades and rewards often lead students to focus on competition rather than on meaningful learning (Sanford et al., 2023).

This not only contradicts the ideals of ESR philosophy but also departs from the ideals of competency-based teaching, which demands authentic learning over rote memorization and examination drills. Therefore, this study establishes a significant paradox in ESR philosophy in the shadow of CBC, whereby these two constructs are

invoked rhetorically but rarely observed in practice. Although previous studies have shown that this policy-practice gap is due to factors like teachers' lack of competence, inadequate teaching facilities, and a large number of students (Kisalam & Kafyulilo, 2012; Komba & Mwandaji, 2015), this study agrees partly with Kasuga and Kalolo (2025) that this gap is in many ways due to the pressure posed on teachers to meet the exam demands. Yet this study goes further by establishing that this policy-practice gap is caused by teachers' survival mechanisms in an education system that places more value on traditional rote memorization and high-stakes exam metrics than on students' authentic learning.

Rethinking the Tanzanian Competency-Teaching

Since its official introduction in the Tanzanian secondary education system in 2005, competency-based teaching has consistently been reported to face more challenges than successes. Research shows that many Tanzanian teachers lack the ability to plan lessons with competency-based learning activities (Komba & Mwandaji, 2015; Nkya et al., 2021); the ability to practice learner-centred teaching practices (Mkimbili & Kayima, 2022); and the ability to practice competency-based assessments (Kigwilu & Mokoro, 2022; Mkimbili & Kitta, 2019). These studies highlight inadequacy in teacher education programmes in preparing teachers with the requisite competencies, insufficient resources, and overcrowded classrooms as the major barriers.

My research, however, departs from most of these studies to concur with the observation by Kasuga and Kalolo (2025) that competency-based teaching in Tanzania is highly conflicted by the pressure on teachers to ensure students pass exams. In this sense, I argue that poor implementation of competency-based teaching in Tanzania is not due to teachers' lack of competence in designing appropriate lessons, but to their need to survive in an education system that cherishes exam grades over authentic learning. Therefore,

rather than viewing teachers as ‘semi-professionals’ who are not fit enough to implement CBT, my research proposes reconsidering the CBT for the Tanzanian context.

A first reconsideration must be of exactly what we expect of teachers in implementing the CBT in Tanzania. For instance, elsewhere, it has been clarified that a competency-based curriculum is designed as a thematic, flexible, and multi-disciplinary framework (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018). This means that a competency-based approach does not only integrate subjects, but also allows flexible assessment, and helps students develop skills needed for complex communication and problem-solving in the 21st-century workforce (Fu et al., 2018). For instance, in the context of British Columbia's competency-based curriculum, “flexibility” means that teachers have the freedom “to decide how and when students are assessed” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018, para 8). This means teachers do not have to adhere to a fixed testing schedule. Unfortunately, Tanzanian teachers are constantly required to administer frequent testing on a weekly or monthly basis as I observed in Nzengo Secondary School. Flexibility allows teachers to adapt learning activities and assessments to students’ interests, abilities, and goals, supporting more personalized learning paths (Fu et al., 2018). It is time to reconsider whether Tanzanian teachers can practice CBC ideals within a system that does not allow them the flexibility to do so.

Second, research that highlights Tanzanian teachers as problematic fails to critique the inherent tension in the competency-based discourse. Lewin (1991) has clearly stipulated the inherent tension in a competency-based curriculum, drawing on two influential thinkers: Thorndike and Dewey. According to Lewin (1991), Thorndike, a Behavioural theorist, emphasized an educational approach that measured and categorized students’ achievements according to how their academic abilities fit the prescribed psychometric measures. On the other hand, Dewey, the Pragmatist, emphasized an

education that valued students' experiences and interests as crucial enough to be the focus of academic schooling. In this debate, Lewin notes that Thorndike won and Dewey lost, and that globally, educational practices to date remain largely influenced by the goal of meeting exam metrics rather than by achieving students' learning. In this light, both Tanzania's policies and teachers' obsession with exam-metrics must be understood as a global phenomenon ingrained within the founding principles of CBC itself.

The dominance of high-stakes exams, even in competency-based education contexts, is also ingrained in the history of grading. Primarily, grades were designed as an internal communication to inform parents and motivate students (Schneider & Hutt, 2014). According to Schneider & Hutt, this purpose changed following the rapid expansion of national schooling in the 19th century, whereby grading now becomes a tool for sorting students, guiding decisions about advancement and admission, and communicating achievement across schools and institutions. Schneider & Hutt note that this latter purpose helped make the education system easier to organize, compare students, and communicate information to outsiders such as employers and colleges.

However, Schneider & Hutt note that too much value is placed on exam success, subverting pedagogical practices from achieving meaningful learning towards enabling learners to get better grades in exams. This suggests that the dominance of exams is here to stay, because it benefits educational decision-makers. What remains at stake is how teachers can still enhance students' meaningful learning within an education system dominated by exam-metrics. Some scholars (i.e., Sanford et al., 2023), propose that teachers can use digital platforms to design interactive learning activities. These authors assert that these platforms can help educators move from focusing on one-time testing events, which eventually promote rote memorization, to creating longitudinal evidence, such as photos, reflections, and feedback, that directly link students' learning progress to

curriculum goals. In their view, Sanford and colleagues believe that these platforms enhance transparent, continuous dialogue for meaningful learning. This might work in digitally resourced contexts, such as urban private schools in Tanzania, but can be problematic in rural contexts, such as Nzengo Secondary School, where I observed limited access to digital tools, electricity, and internet. This means that these discussions make more sense in a technology-rich Western context than in contexts without those resources.

Participants in my research advocated for an education system that integrates students' out-of-school daily practices with academic learning. The 2023 reforms imply that by design, Tanzania already has a curriculum that integrates work and academic learning. Nevertheless, the project-based learning approach emphasized by Tanzania's secondary education curriculum (MoEST, 2023) is hindered by a strong focus on teaching for exam success rather than on authentic learning. Participants in this research have recommended approaches such as practical apprenticeships, experiential learning, experience-driven teaching, and the use of locally available resources to help implement CBC and achieve the ESR philosophy. Also, project-based learning, which participants recommended and is also recommended by the Tanzanian Secondary Education Curriculum, has been shown to have potential to enhance meaningful learning in previous research (e.g., Chrona, 2022; Chu et al., 2011; Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

In addition, some of these approaches, such as experiential learning, experience-driven teaching, and the utilization of locally available resources, have been tested by parents and teachers in Nzengo village. Unfortunately, a focus on high-stakes exams remains a stumbling block to the use of these pedagogical approaches and to the effective implementation of CBT. In this research, I emphasize that teachers must not continue to be projected as incapable of implementing CBT when the fault is with the system itself.

Tanzania must recontextualize its competency-based curriculum to better align with realities, such as many students in a classroom, insufficient teaching and learning facilities, and the fact that many rural students engage in various out-of-school daily practices that are significant to their survival and personal growth.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed discussion of the findings. I have discussed what these findings mean to the field of literacy teaching, the Tanzanian competency-based curriculum and to literacy researchers in their attempts to understand human practices in various contexts. A key takeaway in this chapter is that literacy should be understood differently; human practices should not only be understood through the Western-centric ‘pedagogy of design’, as this lens limits our understanding of what practices mean in their contexts.

Chapter 9: Implications, reflections & conclusion

Overview

In this chapter, I present the implications of the findings of this research for the field of literacy and the multiliteracies framework, for education practitioners (teachers, parents, and students), and for policymakers. Then, I provide my own personal reflection on this research and its findings. In the last part, I provide an overall conclusion.

Implications for literacy and the multiliteracies framework

The findings from this study indicate that, in many students' out-of-school daily practices, the primary purpose is not to make meaning or to semiotically design a particular future. Rather, these practices, e.g., farming, animal care, milking, care for peers, brickmaking, and gardening, are primarily conducted to sustaining life, care, obligation and material survival. This is not to deny that meaning-making is involved or that designing the future is happening here; rather, it is to clarify that meaning-making is a secondary purpose, whereas the survival need is primary. Confining all these practices into the umbrella 'literacy' suggests what I call 'semantic colonization' as these practices are being forced to take on this naming to be granted 'educational legitimacy'. In other words, reducing daily labour, such as milking, fishing, caring for animals and peers, to 'literacy' not only subordinates it to the Western-centric design logic but also strips it of its material sovereignty. When students in Nzengo village engage in fishing, milking a cow or caring for their siblings, they are not doing so to design a future. They are maintaining the present. The Multiliteracies framework sees only one story; hence, the addition of the theory of life-sustaining practice is crucial in understanding the other side of the story from a single human practice.

Therefore, researchers should never fall into the trap of relentless expansion of all human practices into the literacy category. This implies that researchers who complement the multiliteracies framework with a theory of life-sustaining practices can see clearly that some human practices do not exist primarily to serve the meaning-making purpose or the designing logic. This can help push back against the current extreme expansion of almost all human practices being labelled 'literacy'. In the academic space, human practices must not be limited to the meaning-making purposes. Educators must examine students' out-of-school practices to understand the holistic values they serve in helping students become who they desire to be in life.

Implication for teachers

The findings in this research show that teachers are aware of various out-of-school daily practices that students have in their respective families. Also, teachers are aware of the care, survival, and relational purposes that these practices serve. For instance, both the Physics/Geography teacher and the Business subject teacher are aware that some students must work to meet some financial needs at school. Teachers understand that students in Nzengo village spend most of their time on these practices, which sometimes interfere with students' time for responding to homework or assignments given by teachers. This is because students need time to work to support their families. However, frequent school assignments, remedials, and private tutoring tend to encroach on students' weekends, holidays, and after-school time, forcing students' survival practices happen in the shadow of formal schooling-academic literacy practices. Teachers must allow students time to live other aspects of their life trajectories, farming, milking, gardening, caring for siblings, and fishing, instead of confining all students to the cycle of academic practices. This can be done by giving a moderate number of meaningful assignments.

More importantly, as this study has shown, within the frame of their awareness, teachers do not have the power to largely alter the curriculum because it is centrally managed. They work in an education system which prioritizes exam metrics over students' authentic learning. As a result, teachers practice a strategic pedagogical decoupling, in which their implementation of the competency-based curriculum remains anchored on rote memorization and testing drills (weekly and monthly). While previous research regards this policy-practice gap as being caused by teachers' lack of pedagogical competencies, in this research, I argue that this rhetoric-reality gap is due to teachers' need to survive in a system they know they have little to no power to challenge. It should also be understood that these are teachers who have been raised under the same exam-driven system. Thus, why the decoupling might be due to their survival mechanism, it can also be due to their own beliefs about what they perceive as a genuine human education. However, for teachers who recognize the values of students' out-of-school daily practices, such as fishing, animal care, milking, and so on, can help students' identities by acknowledging or assuring them that what they do to sustain their homes is not invisible or valueless.

Implications for students

As the research findings show, students recognize the relevance of their daily out-of-school practices and how these practices shape their family survival and personal identities. Unfortunately, they live in a space where only academic practices and their subsequent competencies, such as writing a good essay, passing exams, getting good grades, and eventually earning a certificate, are perceived as superior to practices such as farming, milking, cooking, and brickmaking. As a result, students do not have time to practice these out-of-school practices. Also, students who do not fit well within these academic framings fall into a deficit trap, feeling that not only is what they are doing less

important, but also that they are themselves failures, useless people whom society has no place for in terms of socio-economic mobility. Students do not recognize that the material competences they possess in sustaining care, survival, and relations within their families are very relevant to their lives, simply because they are not yet recognized as 'literacy', are not eventually certified, and hence remain unrecognized. These students belong to an education system that fails to consolidate what students can already do in their own local settings. Despite this failure, students are made to believe that they are the ones failing, even though it is the system that fails them.

The harsh reality is that students are consistently alienated from engaging in their daily out-of-school practices by being required to migrate from home to school (camping at school) as a strategic plan for passing exams. Also, they live in a tension of negotiating between household responsibilities and academic practices such as remedials, private tutoring, and homework. These alienate them from their daily out-of-school practices. When they fail in academic schooling, they find themselves feeling unfit to both the academic space and the community (their own village) as they find that they are incompetent in doing some survival practices. In short, students who fail experience a double alienation. Another harsh reality is that even those who pass exams remain stranded as there are no guaranteed employment opportunities for them to serve in what they have specialized for. Therefore, students must be encouraged to recognize the pragmatic utility of their practices, instead of foregrounding in their minds the myth that formal schooling is the master key to their life trajectories.

Implications for parents

Four parents who participated in this research seem confused about what they really want for their children's education. All four parents acknowledge that children's engagement in work is crucial for sustaining the family and shaping students. However,

they still alienate their children from engaging in such life-sustaining practices as farming, animal care, cooking, and brickmaking, as they believe that doing so will grab students' time to engage in academic activities. Instead of allowing students to engage in these household-sustaining practices, parents are busy paying for private tutoring and remedial classes for their children. Surprisingly, all three parents, Masato's father, Nansato's mother, and Nanzura's mother, are aware that their children's current academic progress does not promise any successful future in the academic space. They know their children as components of fishing, cookery and gardening, respectively. They know that their children do not identify themselves as future academics, yet they spend resources on shadow schooling, while denying their children opportunities to excel in what they are already good at.

Parents' contradictory stance on what really matters does not come out of nowhere. In my view, it stems from the influence of colonial policies and teachers. The fee-free education policy in Tanzania holds parents accountable to ensure their children are in school. The fee-free education policy in Tanzania aims to ensure that all children in the country have access to basic education, which is also mandatory from pre-primary through lower secondary. The government is forcing parents to keep their children in school under these policy requirements, even when they know their children will not pursue schooling.

Implications for policymakers

This research has shown that an obvious gap exists between policy statements and their implementations in Tanzania. Educational practices at Nzengo Secondary School are largely disconnected from students' daily lives. As such, what students do as part of their daily out-of-school practices, such as farming, animal care, fishing, and so on, are regarded as barriers to students' academic learning rather than as resources to enrich their

growth. The focus is on passing exams rather than enhancing authentic learning experiences. This means that the guiding philosophy of secondary education, Education for Self-Reliance (ESR), is not implemented as it was initially intended. Similarly, competency-based teaching is not being implemented as it should be. As this study has consistently noted, this mismatch is heavily grounded in the policy context, especially its implementation aspect.

School heads and educational officers emphasize the exams because policies implicitly value exams as opposed to the articulated authentic learning because it is when students have good academic grades that they become eligible for ‘social mobility’. While policies demand authentic learning, they reward grade attainment, which is achieved through rote memorization, that is, frequent testing on a weekly and monthly basis, constant remedial classes, and private tutoring. In its articulation, the educational policy promises students with educational practices that prepare them for real-world application outside school (MoEST, 2023). However, classroom practices do not recognize students’ out-of-school daily practices. Even where such recognition occurs, it is made through the school-centric lens. For instance, as of the recent 2023 educational reforms, Tanzanian secondary education now embraces vocational education alongside academic schooling. However, what is going to be recognized as a genuine ‘vocation qualification’ will be only those activities that will be selected to be recognized as part of this formal curriculum. While this curriculum has not started being implemented at Nzengo Secondary School, one might remain wondering which of these activities, farming, gardening, milking, animal care, brick making, and fishing, is going to be recognized in the curriculum. In my view, the co-actualization will select a few and qualify them as the most valuable practices for socio-economic mobility, while those not included will remain regarded as ‘lacking literacy’ or ‘pre-literacy’.

I argue that these practices have their own sufficient ontological values; they do not need to be qualified or certified to hold value. There must be educational policies that recognize these practices as sovereign competencies and skills. Understood this way, students who already have competencies in these practices must access socio-economic mobility through pathways such as recognition of prior learning. In other words, current educational policies must move beyond being rigid, such as awarding certificates (through grades) instead of competencies (life sustenance). Furthermore, policymakers must provide teachers with sufficient resources. For example, it remains puzzling how a teacher can implement competency-based learning activities such as project work, collaborative learning, and portfolio-based assessment in a class with more than 50 students. Policies should live up to their pronounced statements.

More importantly, educational policies must allow teachers to have autonomy to adapt the curriculum to fit students' varying needs in their respective contexts. There can be policies that focus on the surveillance of teachers' compliance with the stipulated curricula goals; however, this should not be the only end of educational practices. Teachers are not robots that can be programmed to reproduce what has been installed in them. They are rather humans, who think, reflect, and imagine about their schools and students' realities every day. Thus, they should be allowed to autotomize as humans. True educational reform requires giving teachers adequate autonomy on matters related to pedagogical decision-making. If competency-based education exists to serve the interests of the child, teachers in contexts where students' out-of-school daily practices hold more meaning than academic achievements, teachers must be empowered to nurture such practices. Nurturing may include adjusting school hours, such as offering balanced remedial sessions and private tutoring, to allow students time to engage in other life-sustaining practices at home, such as earning money to meet school costs.

Implications for future research

Future research may examine teachers' emotional experiences of teaching competency-based instruction without integrating students' out-of-school daily practices, which teachers themselves recognize as beneficial. In other words, future research must examine how teachers feel about the pedagogical decoupling they are practising. Such research can offer crucial information to those who design teachers' professional development programmes to broaden their programmes from being solely academically focused to addressing the emotional gaps among teachers working in contexts where policies do not align with the practices they are expected to produce.

There must be research to examine the emotional damage among parents and students who fail to realize the ideals of academic literacy. Parents invest their resources in academic schooling by paying fees for remedial classes, students' camping at school, and private tutoring. Yet it is less understood how they feel when such an investment does not yield what they have expected. Such a study will help understand how students resume life in their village after a four-year struggle to comply with academic literacies while also sustaining life. The available literature is unclear about how students who have failed to excel in school and cannot adjust to the village from which they have been alienated, negotiate this double alienation.

Finally, there must be another study that uses the theory of life-sustaining practices to understand which practices elsewhere serve purposes beyond multimodal meaning-making and future designing. This will help broaden understanding of human social practices in literacy education and how such practices can be enhanced to support students' growth, without alienating students from either literacy classes or their survival practices.

A reflective voice from the space of betweenness

As clarified at the beginning, this research is grounded in my personal experience of temporary belonging (-and-not-belonging) between spaces. It is the position of betweenness. The voice I want to highlight in this research is the experience of growing up in the space of the research site and engaging in some of these out-of-school daily practices, such as household obligations, animal care, farming, and caring for siblings. This matters most because, when conducting this research, particularly during data collection, it echoed inside my inner self. Whenever students mentioned their engagement in these practices, I was not simply observing or listening to students' stories about these practices, I embodied them. This inspired my self-introspection, especially on the fact that: I spent all seven years of my primary schooling, handling both work and schooling. Yet I got academic grades that took me to secondary school. This was not an exceptional case but the reality for students in Ukerewe and, largely, in rural Tanzania. While my secondary school was far from home, necessitating my alienation from it and from these practices, I still farmed, cared for animals, and cared for my siblings during holidays when at home. Therefore, I boldly argue that schooling and work are not mutually exclusive. Having taken this doctoral research up to this level, it is fair to regard myself as a successful scholar. In this, I want to emphasize that I am a successful researcher today because of the working spirit I developed through handling both. Looking at the home through a deficit lens as 'destructive' of academic schooling implies excluding insider-scholars of my own kind. I am a dual-citizen scholar among other dual-scholars in various contexts.

Conclusion

Literacy must be looked at differently. Scholars must avoid falling into the trap of looking at 'literacy' as the only valid category to describe human practices. Some human

practices are not literacies but life-sustaining practices. The Multiliteracies framework helps us understand the meaning-making and semiotic design purposes that human practices serve, but it does not give us the whole picture of these practices, such as their purposes beyond meaning-making. If one foregrounds meaning-making as a primary analytical lens for understanding human practices, one is very likely to label practices that prioritize life sustenance as ‘deficit’, as the latter may not have obvious meaning-making purposes.

The recent 2023 educational reforms in Tanzania are shaped by a powerful promise—that 21st-century skills will prepare learners for a global future. However, for rural students in Nzengo village, the present debt of survival, care, and relational demands must be paid first. Nanzura, Nansato, Mazura, and Masato must fulfill certain duties, such as selling garden harvests, fishing, and making bricks, to cover the cost of schooling. Therefore, we need school practices that honour students’ roles as providers in the present time before demanding them to become designers in the future we envision. We undoubtedly recognize meaning-making in students’ out-of-school daily practices, such as milking, but this literacy aspect should not collapse the survival aspect they offer. Calling milking ‘literacy’ simply because it involves procedural knowledge distorts the values of survival, care, and responsibility that underpin it. It should be understood in its own terms rather than being forced to assimilate the tag ‘literacy’ to appear meaningful or relevant, while it is already relevant in its own contexts due to the primary purpose it serves.

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Appendix A: Ethics Certificate of Approval



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of Victoria**

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Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Kathy Sanford (Supervisor)	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER:	25-0165
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT:	Leonard Misana PhD student	Expedited review - delegated	
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	Curriculum and Instruction EDCI	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	20-Jun-2025
		APPROVED ON:	20-Jun-2025
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	19-Jun-2026

PROJECT TITLE: Enhancing Competency-Based Teaching Through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: A Narrative Ethnography into Students' Out-of-School Literacies

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Tanzania), University of Dar es Salaam, Dar Salaam University College of Education(DUCE)

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
 Leonard-eptc2-certificate (1).pdf - 26-Mar-2025
 Leonard_funding_evidence.pdf - 07-May-2025
 English_Observational guide.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Observational Guide.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 English_Students' Consent form1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Students' consent Form1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 English_Research tools_1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Research tools_1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 English_Teachers' consent Form1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Teachers' consent Form1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Englis_Parents' Consent form1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Parents's consent form1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 English_Teacher's Invitation script1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Teachers' invite transcript1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 English_Students' invitation script1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Students Invitation Script1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 English_Parents' Invitation script1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025
 Kiswahili_Parent Invitation Script1.pdf - 18-Jun-2025

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons
Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Cindy Holder
Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Appendix B: Research Clearance

8/4/25, 12:09 PM

RIMS - Research Information Management System



UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR



Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 16 July, 2025

Regional Administrative Secretary
Mwanza Region

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

1. The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Leonard Salvatory Misana** who is a bonafide staff of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and who is at the moment required to conduct research.
2. In accordance with government circular letter Ref. No. MPEC/R/10/1 dated 4th July 1980, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam is empowered to issue research clearances to staff members and students of the University of Dar es Salaam on behalf of the government and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). I am pleased to inform you that **Leonard Salvatory Misana** has been granted a research clearance. Other researcher(s) in the team include N/A.
3. I therefore, kindly request you to grant any help that may enable the candidate(s) achieve the research objectives. Specifically we request your permission for the researcher to meet and talk to the leaders and other relevant stakeholders in your administrative area in connection with this research.
4. The title of the research is **"Enhancing Competency-Based Learning Through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: A Narrative Ethnography into Students' Out-of-School Multiliteracy Practices"**.
5. The period of the research is from **14 July, 2025 to 20 September, 2025** and the research will cover **Mwanza region**.
6. Should there be any restriction, you are kindly requested to advise us accordingly. In case you may require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us through the Directorate of Research and Publication, Tel. +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084 or +255 22 2410727 and E-mail: research@udsm.ac.tz

Yours sincerely,

William A.L. Anangisye

VICE CHANCELLOR

Cranford Pratt Building, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35091, Dar es Salaam.
 Phone: +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084, Direct: +255 22 2410700, Email: vc@admin.udsm.ac.tz, Website: www.udsm.ac.tz



Appendix C: Research Clearance



UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR



Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 29 September, 2025

District Administrative Secretary
Ukerewe District

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

1. The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Leonard Salvatory Misana** who is a bonafide staff of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and who is at the moment required to conduct research.
2. In accordance with government circular letter Ref. No. MPEC/R/10/1 dated 4th July 1980, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam is empowered to issue research clearances to staff members and students of the University of Dar es Salaam on behalf of the government and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). I am pleased to inform you that **Leonard Salvatory Misana** has been granted a research clearance. Other researcher(s) in the team include N/A.
3. I therefore, kindly request you to grant any help that may enable the candidate(s) achieve the research objectives. Specifically we request your permission for the researcher to meet and talk to the leaders and other relevant stakeholders in your administrative area in connection with this research.
4. The title of the research is "**Enhancing Competency-Based Learning Through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: A Narrative Ethnography into Students' Out-of-School Multiliteracies Practices**".
5. The period of their research is from **21 September, 2025 to 22 December, 2025** and the research will cover **Ukerewe district**.
6. Should there be any restriction, you are kindly requested to advise us accordingly. In case you may require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us through the Directorate of Research and Publication, Tel. +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084 or +255 22 2410727 and E-mail: research@udsm.ac.tz

Yours sincerely,

William A.L. Anangisye
VICE CHANCELLOR

Cranford Pratt Building, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35091, Dar es Salaam.
Phone: +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084, Direct: +255 22 2410700, Email: vc@admin.udsm.ac.tz, Website: www.udsm.ac.tz

Appendix D: Research Clearance



UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR



Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 16 July, 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

1. The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Leonard Salvatory Misana** who is a bonafide staff of the University of Dar es Salaam and who is at the moment required to conduct research.

Leonard Salvatory Misana and other researcher(s) namely N/A have been permitted to conduct a research titled **"Enhancing Competency-Based Learning Through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: A Narrative Ethnography into Students' Out-of-School Multiliteracy Practices."**

2. The period for which this permission has been granted is from **14 July, 2025 to 20 September, 2025** and it will cover **Mwanza region**.

3. It will be appreciated if you will provide any assistance that may enable the candidate achieve the desired research objectives.

Yours sincerely,

William A.L. Anangisye

VICE CHANCELLOR

Cranford Pratt Building, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35091, Dar es Salaam.

Phone: +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084, Direct: +255 22 2410700, Email: vc@admin.udsm.ac.tz, Website: www.udsm.ac.tz

Appendix E: Research Clearance



UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR



Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 29 September, 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

1. The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Leonard Salvatory Misana** who is a bonafide staff of the University of Dar es Salaam and who is at the moment required to conduct research.

Leonard Salvatory Misana and other researcher(s) namely N/A have been permitted to conduct a research titled **"Enhancing Competency-Based Learning Through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: A Narrative Ethnography into Students' Out-of-School Multiliteracies Practices."**

2. The period for which this permission has been granted is from **21 September, 2025 to 22 December, 2025** and it will cover **Mwanza region**.

3. It will be appreciated if you will provide any assistance that may enable the candidate achieve the desired research objectives.

Yours sincerely,

William A.L. Anangisye

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Cranford Pratt Building, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35091, Dar es Salaam.
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On teacher's use of students' out-of-school literacy practices

SN	Questions	Indicators	Researcher's notes
i).	How does a teacher acknowledge or draw upon students' out-of-school experiences and interests during lessons?	- use of real-life or cultural examples in lessons? - which students' personal experiences or interests are being encouraged? - what are the local educational media used beyond textual representation? - multiple forms of literacy (visual, oral, digital) used in teaching?	
ii).	Are there any instances where teachers explicitly connect academic content to students' everyday lives or community contexts/resources?	Classroom content reflecting local language, media, or social issues, any non-academic competencies being validated in class as crucial i.e., fixing a fishing net, farming, etc.	
iii).	What aspects of Competency-based teaching, Experiential learning and pedagogy of multiliteracies are used here?	role-plays, field works, project-based learning, what digital tools (videos, audio, social media, games) are used in lessons? Real-life situations, activities linked to critical thinking, or decision-making tasks linked to real life situations. What agency students have on their learning process and how?	
iv).	Do teachers provide opportunity for students to share their out-of-school literacy practices or projects with class? And if so, what modality do they use to facilitate this sharing?	-Student-led presentations or discussions. - Display of student work reflecting personal or cultural identities. Affirming student contributions in classroom dialogues, local practices welcomed in class?	



On what literacy practices students/families engage in in the home

SN	Questions	Indicators	Researcher's notes
i).	What kind of literacy practices do students do on their own or with their family members?	-reading of non-academic books, social media, artworks, storytelling	
ii).	Is there any support family members provide students with, i.e. materials, encouragement, guidance etc.?	-materials, encouragement (verbal support), moral/technical guidance etc.?	
iii).	Are there any cultural or community practices that students participate in which their families that help students learn, grow and develop their personal identities?	-cultural practices: songs, religious events, traditional rituals etc. -participation in storytelling, music, or community performances - family activities done by the student i.e. farming, fishing, etc.?	
iv).	What languages or modes of communication are used at home?	-language & media used	