

ABSTRACT

Dissertation Title: **UNIVERSITY GOING IN CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF GUSII STUDENTS OF SOUTHWESTERN KENYA**

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The main objective of this qualitative ethnographic case study is to ascertain the level of awareness and preparedness among high school students in Gusiiland, Southwestern Kenya, for university education opportunities and possibilities. Through an in-depth interviewing process, a purposive sample of twelve students and four focus groups were conducted in four Gusii high schools to capture students' perceptions and conceptions of the university going process. In addition, twelve parents and eight teachers participated in the study. The data were analyzed to identify a set of ideas, issues and themes from all the participants.

Also, data from each target student were analyzed as case study, and later a cross-case analysis was undertaken to refine data across participants and schools. Utilizing the theories of social capital, cultural capital and human capital, this study explores the role of the family, school and community in the preparation of students' university going within their socio-cultural environment. Structural inequality in the distribution of educational resources, rigidity of the curriculum and overemphasis on examinations, extreme poverty and local politics emerged as some the barriers to university pathway for Gusii high school students. To overcome these impediments, students adopted unique strategies characterized by strict study schedule, group networks and holiday tuition to gain entry into university.

This research contributes original material on the university going process in Kenya and hopes to shed light for future research in this hitherto unexplored academic area. Finding out what students know about higher education including their plans on how to pay for their university costs is worthwhile in helping Kenyan policy makers and scholars in understanding the needs of prospective undergraduate students entering Kenyan universities.