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Culture and Cognition: The role culture plays in cognitive development in rural Tanzania

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Culture and Cognition: The role culture plays in cognitive development in rural Tanzania

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Abstract

This capstone paper examines the perceived difference of cognition in a Tanzanian classroom. It also examines the effects culture has on cognition. It aims to answer the questions: What role does Tanzanian culture play in shaping the cognitive skills of its children? And, from an American trainers perspective, within an experiential learning environment, what cognitive differences are perceived in abstract thinking, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving? Nine American trainers, one Tanzanian trainer, and one Tanzanian student participated in my study. Each participant filled out a questionnaire geared toward understanding their training methods and perceptions of participant's skills and abilities. After receiving all questionnaires, four in-depth interviews were conducted to further understand themes that emerged. Once the interviews were coded and combined with the data from the questionnaire seven principal themes were pulled from the material. These themes were then used to explore and gain a deeper understanding of how the Tanzanian culture shapes perceived cognitive differences between their culture and a Western one. The data found that gender roles and age within a training session affect the participation of students in an experiential learning environment. They also uncovered other interesting aspects of the Tanzanian culture that play roles in shaping the cognitive development of its people, such as, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the nature of a collectivistic cultures, and the formal Tanzanian school system.