

Title

**ANALYSE THE EFFECTS OF “JANDO” CULTURE PRACTICE IN MALAWI  
AMONG BOY CHILD ON THEIR ACADEMIC: CASE STUDY AT GROUP VILLAGE  
HEADMAN MANGWALE, (T/A) MAVWERE, MCHINJI**

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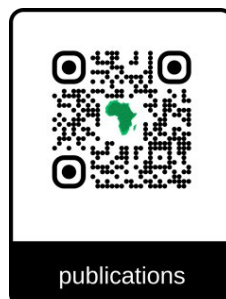
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## ABSTRACT

Analysis of the effects of Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of boy children in Malawi is a socio-cultural and educational study that examines how traditional initiation practices influence boys' schooling outcomes, using Group Village Headman Mangwale under Traditional Authority (T/A) Mawere in Mchinji District as a case study. Jando is a widely practiced rite of passage that marks the transition of boys from childhood to adulthood and plays an important role in transmitting cultural values, discipline, moral behavior and community responsibilities among many Malawian communities.

Despite its cultural significance, concerns have emerged regarding the compatibility of Jando practices with formal education. This study sought to assess the extent to which participation in Jando affects school attendance, academic performance, and learner engagement. A mixed-methods research approach was employed to provide comprehensive insights. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 120 male pupils aged 10–18 years, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with parents, teachers, and traditional leaders.

The findings indicate that prolonged absence from school during Jando initiation periods is closely associated with negative academic outcomes. Many boys who participated in initiation camps recorded lower test scores, reduced classroom participation, increased repetition of classes, and a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. Qualitative findings further reveal that some boys experience psychological stress, fatigue, and difficulty readjusting to school routines after initiation, which negatively affects concentration and motivation to learn.

The study concludes that while Jando remains culturally valuable, lack of

alignment with school calendars and limited academic support undermine boys' educational progress. It recommends collaboration among educators, parents, traditional leaders, and policymakers to harmonize cultural

**Keywords:** Jando cultural practice, Academic performance, Boy child education, Cultural initiation rites, School attendance, Malawi.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Culture plays a central role in shaping the behaviours, values, beliefs, and social identities of individuals within a society. In many African communities, cultural practices function as important mechanisms for socialisation, moral instruction, and the transmission of societal norms from one generation to the next. In Malawi, traditional initiation ceremonies continue to exert a strong influence, particularly in rural areas where cultural values are deeply embedded in everyday life.

One such practice is Jando, a traditional male initiation rite predominantly observed among the Yao ethnic group and other communities across the country. Jando serves as a rite of passage that marks the transition of boys from childhood to adulthood. During the initiation period, boys are secluded for several weeks under the guidance of traditional instructors, commonly known as anamkungwi. They are taught values such as respect, obedience, discipline, courage, and social responsibility. The practice is highly regarded within communities and is perceived as essential for producing morally upright and culturally grounded men.

As noted by *Munthali and Zulu (2007)*, Jando is not merely a cultural ritual but a transformative process that significantly shapes the psychological and social outlook of the boy child. This underscores the importance of Jando as a cultural institution with lasting influence on individual identity formation and social behaviour.

## **Context of the Study**

Despite its cultural significance, Jando often presents challenges to the formal education system. One of the major concerns relates to the timing and duration of initiation ceremonies, which frequently coincide with the school calendar. In many cases, boys are withdrawn from school for extended periods sometimes lasting several weeks or months to participate in initiation camps. This results in prolonged absenteeism, loss of instructional time, and difficulties in catching up with academic content upon return to school.

According to *UNICEF Malawi (2016)*, initiation ceremonies that remove children from school for long periods contribute significantly to absenteeism and poor academic outcomes.

Beyond absenteeism, the content and social implications of Jando teachings may also influence boys' attitudes toward schooling. After initiation, some boys return to school with a heightened sense of maturity and social status, believing they have attained adulthood. While this increased confidence may be beneficial in certain contexts, it can also lead to behavioural challenges within the school environment. Studies have shown that some initiated boys exhibit resistance to school rules, reduced respect for teachers particularly female teachers and diminished motivation to participate in academic activities (*Chirwa, 2010*).

While substantial research attention has focused on female initiation practices and their impact on girls' education, relatively little emphasis has been placed on male initiation rites such as Jando. This gap is particularly evident in communities like Group Village Headman Mangwale under Traditional Authority Mavwere in Mchinji District, where Jando remains widely practiced. Understanding how this cultural practice affects boys' education is therefore both timely and necessary.

## **Research Objectives**

### **General Objective**

The main objective of this study was to examine the effects of Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of boy children at Group Village Headman Mangwale, under Traditional Authority Mavwere, in Mchinji District.

### **Specific Objectives**

**The study was guided by the following specific objectives:**

- To assess the impact of Jando initiation on school attendance among boy children.
- To examine the effects of Jando on the academic performance of boys in primary and secondary school.
- To analyse behavioural and attitudinal changes among boys after undergoing Jando initiation.
- To explore the relationship between Jando initiation and school dropout or class repetition among boy children.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The reviews existing literature related to the effects of Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of the boy child in Malawi, with specific reference to Mangwale under Traditional Authority (T/A) Mavwere in Mchinji District. The review draws on scholarly works, policy reports, and empirical studies to provide a theoretical and contextual foundation for the study. It focuses on the cultural and social significance of Jando, its impact on education, cognitive and psychological effects, gender norms and identity formation, community attitudes and school responses, and existing policy and advocacy gaps.

Jando is a traditional initiation ceremony that marks the transition from boyhood to manhood and is widely practiced among the Yao people. The rite typically involves circumcision, seclusion in initiation camps, and instruction in moral values, cultural norms, and social responsibilities. Elders regard Jando as a critical institution for instilling discipline, respect, and maturity in boys, thereby preparing them for adult roles within society (*Kalinga, 2014*).

According to *Owen J.M. (2008)*, Jando is not only a cultural ritual but also a social indicator of maturity and readiness for adult responsibilities. The ceremony reinforces cultural identity and ensures the preservation of traditional values among the Yao people. In addition, Jando plays a vital role in strengthening social cohesion, as it brings together families and communities through collective participation, storytelling, dancing, and celebration. This shared experience fosters unity, solidarity, and a strong sense of belonging.

The Yao community has made significant contributions to Malawian society in areas such as politics, education, and entrepreneurship. *Nkhata (2018)* notes that Yao individuals have held influential

leadership positions and have actively promoted education and economic development within their communities. *Mkandawire (2010)* further emphasizes that cultural practices such as Jando remain central to the Yao people's identity and continue to enrich Malawi's cultural diversity.

A major concern highlighted in the literature is the disruption of formal education caused by Jando initiation practices. Boys often spend several weeks or months in seclusion, resulting in prolonged absence from school. *Phiri (2018)* found that boys who underwent initiation experienced a noticeable decline in academic performance compared to their non-initiated peers, particularly when initiation coincided with examination periods.

Jando ceremonies are frequently conducted without coordination with school calendars, leading to absenteeism, learning gaps, and difficulties in curriculum coverage (*Chirwa & Tembo, 2020*). Such interruptions negatively affect learners' continuity and academic progression, especially in rural areas where remedial support is limited.

The literature also highlights the cognitive and psychological implications of Jando initiation. *Mwale (2015)* argues that teachings during Jando may conflict with formal education goals by promoting masculinity, independence, and dominance, which can lead to classroom defiance and disengagement. This cognitive dissonance may hinder concentration and learning.

However, some studies suggest positive cognitive outcomes. *Phiri (2020)* notes that Jando teachings can enhance boys' understanding of social structures and cultural values, potentially improving analytical and social reasoning skills.

Psychologically, Jando may foster a sense of identity, belonging, and self-esteem (*Chimango, 2021*), which can positively influence motivation and discipline.

Conversely, *Kondowe (2022)* found that pressure to conform to rigid gender roles may cause stress and anxiety, negatively affecting academic engagement. *Banda (2023)* further observes that emphasis on physical strength and manual labor may reduce boys' academic aspirations, leading to long-term underachievement.

Jando contributes significantly to the construction of gender norms and masculine identity. *Zimba and Banda (2019)* argue that initiation reinforces patriarchal values and limits emotional expression, leading some boys to perceive formal education as less relevant after initiation. This shift in identity can result in poor academic performance or school dropout.

Additionally, initiated boys may receive increased respect within the community, which can diminish their regard for school authority, particularly female teachers (*Gondwe, 2016*). Such dynamics may negatively affect discipline and learning outcomes.

Community perceptions of Jando and education vary widely. In some rural areas, traditional leaders prioritize cultural rites over formal education, viewing them as complementary (*Nyirongo, 2017*). However, many schools lack strategies to accommodate cultural practices, leading to tension between families and educational institutions (*Mphande, 2021*).

Supporters argue that Jando instills discipline, leadership, and responsibility, which may enhance academic motivation

(*Mason, 2021*). *Chirwa (2022)* found that some initiated boys demonstrated increased commitment to their studies. In contrast, critics highlight absenteeism and restrictive gender teachings that limit subject choices and career aspirations (*Kabwaza, 2023; Nkhata, 2022*).

Despite extensive discussion, literature reveals limited national policies addressing the interaction between traditional practices and education. Although Malawi has child protection laws, enforcement in rural areas remains weak (*UNICEF, 2020*). *Kamwendo and Chimombo (2013)* advocate for culturally sensitive interventions that harmonize education with tradition while safeguarding children's rights.

## METHODOLOGY

It will present the research methodology employed to explore the effects of the Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of boy children in Group Village Headman Mangwale, under Traditional Authority (T/A) Mavwere, Mchinji District. It details the research approach, design, study area, population, sampling methods, data collection instruments, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The methodology aims to ensure that the study's findings are valid, reliable, and culturally sensitive, while safeguarding participants' rights and confidentiality. Given the sensitive nature of Jando as a cultural practice, a qualitative and participatory approach was deemed appropriate to capture the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and traditional leaders.

## Research Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and

qualitative techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative approach enabled systematic measurement of objective data, such as school attendance, academic performance, and demographic information. The qualitative approach provided in-depth insights into participants' perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences regarding Jando and its influence on education.

The qualitative component utilized semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation. This approach allowed participants to express their views freely in their own words, providing rich, nuanced data. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience of Jando, ensuring that the study captured culturally and contextually relevant perspectives. By integrating these approaches, the study aimed to explore both measurable educational outcomes and the socio-cultural dimensions that shape boys' learning experiences.

## **Research Design**

A descriptive case study design within a qualitative research framework was adopted. The case study design facilitated an in-depth exploration of how Jando, a traditional male initiation practice, affects the academic performance of boys in a real-life context. It allowed for data triangulation from multiple sources, including interviews, focus groups, and observations, enhancing the credibility and reliability of findings.

The descriptive case study design was appropriate for this research because it:

- Captured the perceptions and lived experiences of boys who have undergone Jando, their parents, teachers, and community leaders.

- Enabled examination of complex socio-cultural phenomena that quantitative methods alone could not fully capture.
- Supported thematic and narrative analysis, allowing identification of recurring patterns and insights grounded in participants' perspectives.

## **Study Area**

The study was conducted at Group Village Headman (GVH) Mangwale, under T/A Mavwere in Mchinji District, located in Malawi's central region. Mchinji is a rural, agrarian district bordering Zambia, characterized by strong traditional leadership structures, cultural heritage, and limited access to educational and social services. GVH Mangwale was selected due to the prevalence of Jando ceremonies, providing a suitable context for studying the intersection of traditional practices and formal education.

## **Population and Sampling**

### **Study Population**

The population consisted of residents of GVH Mangwale affected by Jando, particularly in relation to boys' education. This included: Boys aged 10–18 who have undergone Jando and are enrolled in school. Parents and guardians of initiated boys.

Teachers and head teachers of local schools. Traditional leaders, including chiefs and elders. Anamkungwi (initiation counselors).

Community education stakeholders, such as school management committee members. **Sampling Technique** A combination of purposive sampling and simple random sampling was used. Purposive sampling targeted participants with direct experience or knowledge of Jando, while simple random sampling ensured

unbiased selection of school-going boys.

## RESULTS

The findings of the study on the effects of the Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of boy children in Group Village Headman Mangwale, T/A Mavwere, Mchinji District. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) from school-going boys, parents, teachers, and traditional leaders. The results are presented in line with the research objectives, focusing on school attendance, academic performance, cognitive and psychological effects, and community perceptions. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding.

### Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study included 90 participants: 50 school-going boys (aged 10–18), 15 parents/guardians, 10 teachers/head teachers, 10 community leaders and initiation counselors, and 5 district education officials.

The majority of boys were between 12–16 years old, reflecting the typical age range for participation in Jando initiation.

### School Attendance

Data from questionnaires and school records indicated that boys who underwent Jando missed between 2 to 6 weeks of school during the initiation period.

Average Weeks of School Missed Due to Jando  
Weeks Missed: 2 3 4 5 6

**Percentage: 10 25 40 15 10**

Findings from interviews revealed that prolonged absence disrupted learning continuity, particularly in core subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Science. Teachers noted a decline in classroom participation immediately after the initiation period.

Some boys return confident and assertive, but they often miss important lessons, which affects their performance in exams,” a teacher from GVH Mangwale noted.

### Cognitive and Psychological Effects

- Qualitative data revealed mixed effects:

Positive impacts: Boys reported improved confidence, discipline, and sense of responsibility, which sometimes enhanced motivation to study.

Negative impacts: Some boys experienced stress, anxiety, and behavioral changes, including resistance to authority and reluctance to participate in classroom activities.

“After Jando, my son thinks he is grown and sometimes refuses to listen in class,” one parent stated. These findings align with previous literature suggesting that Jando shapes masculinity and identity, which can influence learning engagement either positively or negatively

- Interpretation and literature alignment

Findings are consistent with literature indicating that rites of passage like Jando shape masculinity, identity, and social roles, which can influence cognitive engagement and learning outcomes.

Effects are context-dependent, varying by individual temperament, family environment, and school support.

The dual impact enhanced self-efficacy on one hand, increased stress and resistance on the other suggests the need for careful integration of cultural practices with educational strategies to support positive development.

### Key Observation

A significant proportion of boys either repeat classes or drop out after initiation, often due to:

Loss of interest in school

Engagement in piecework or early economic activities

Early sexual relationships encouraged by initiation teachings

## DISCUSSION

The effects of Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of boy children in Group Village Headman Mangwale, T/A Mavwere, Mchinji District. The findings reveal that while Jando plays an important role in cultural identity formation and socialisation, it has significant negative implications for boys' academic participation and performance, particularly when undertaken during the school term and at a critical stage of schooling.

### Jando and School Attendance

One of the most prominent findings of the study is the high level of absenteeism associated with Jando initiation. Boys were absent from school for extended periods—often between three and four weeks during initiation, with continued irregular attendance after returning to school. This finding aligns with earlier studies in Malawi and neighbouring countries, which indicate that traditional initiation ceremonies frequently conflict with the academic calendar, leading to lost instructional time (*Kendall & Chisanya, 2012; Munthali, 2015*).

From an educational perspective, regular attendance is strongly associated with academic success. Prolonged absenteeism disrupts learning continuity, limits syllabus coverage, and reduces learners' ability to keep pace with their peers. The results of this study suggest that boys who undergo Jando struggle to reintegrate academically after initiation, supporting existing literature that identifies cultural ceremonies as a structural barrier to sustained school participation among rural learners.

### Impact on Academic Performance

The decline in academic performance after Jando, particularly in Mathematics and English, is a critical finding. These subjects require consistent practice and cumulative learning, which is undermined by long absences. Similar patterns have been reported in studies on initiation practices in Southern Africa, where learners returning from initiation ceremonies

exhibit reduced concentration, lower test scores, and difficulty catching up with missed content (*UNESCO, 2016*).

Interestingly, performance in Chichewa declined only slightly, suggesting that language familiarity and cultural relevance may buffer the negative effects of absenteeism. This supports the argument by educational theorists that culturally grounded subjects are more resilient to learning disruptions than abstract or skill-intensive subjects such as Mathematics.

### Behavioural and Attitudinal Changes

Another significant finding relates to changes in learner behaviour and attitudes following Jando initiation. Teachers reported increased disobedience, reduced respect for authority particularly female teachers and a perception among initiated boys that they had attained adult status. These behavioural changes are consistent with literature describing initiation ceremonies as rites of passage that redefine social identity and authority relations (*Van Gennep, 1960; Nsamenang, 2006*).

In Jando teachings, boys are often encouraged to see themselves as men, with responsibilities and privileges that may conflict with the expectations of a school environment, where obedience, discipline, and respect for teachers are central. This tension between cultural masculinity norms and school norms has been widely documented in African education research, where initiation is seen to accelerate adulthood before educational maturity is achieved.

The findings therefore support the argument that the content of Jando teachings, not only its timing, plays a role in shaping negative academic attitudes. When boys internalise messages that devalue schooling or promote early independence, their motivation to engage in formal education diminishes.

### School Dropout and Repetition

The study found relatively high levels of class repetition and dropout among boys who had undergone Jando. This outcome is consistent with national and regional studies indicating that



cultural practices, combined with poverty and gender norms, contribute to early school exit among boys (*MOEST, 2018*). In the case of GVH Mangwale, some boys reportedly engaged in piecework or informal economic activities after initiation, viewing schooling as less relevant to their newly acquired social status.

This finding resonates with human capital theory, which suggests that when the perceived returns to education are low, individuals are less likely to invest in schooling. If Jando socialisation emphasises immediate economic productivity or adult roles over long-term educational benefits, boys may rationally choose to leave school.

### **Positive Cultural Outcomes and Their Limits**

Despite the negative academic impacts, the study also identified positive outcomes associated with Jando, including increased self-confidence, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging. These findings echo anthropological literature that views initiation rites as essential mechanisms for transmitting values, morals, and social cohesion within communities.

However, the challenge lies in the misalignment between cultural objectives and educational goals. While confidence and identity formation can enhance learning when properly harnessed, in this context they often manifest as resistance to schooling. This suggests that the issue is not Jando per se, but how it is structured, timed, and integrated with formal education.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the effects of Jando cultural practice on the academic performance of boy children in GVH Mangwale, T/A Mavwere, Mchinji District. The findings demonstrate that while Jando remains a culturally significant rite of passage that promotes identity formation, confidence, and social belonging, it has substantial negative implications for boys' education when practiced without alignment to the formal school system. The study revealed that participation in Jando

often leads to prolonged school absenteeism, particularly because initiation ceremonies are conducted during the school term. This loss of instructional time disrupts learning continuity and makes it difficult for boys to catch up with their peers upon return to school. As a result, many initiated boys experience a decline in academic performance, especially in core subjects such as Mathematics and English, which require consistent engagement and progressive learning.

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