

School Dropout in Community Secondary Schools: A Case of Nyamilama Secondary School-Mwanza Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted at Nyamilama secondary school in Kwimba District- Mwanza Tanzania. The main objective was to identify reasons for school dropout in community secondary schools. A purposeful sampling technique was used to sample the respondents. Well structured questionnaires were enumerated to ex-students and parents. Data from key informants (the school administration) were obtained through an interview checklist. Quantitative data was descriptively analyzed using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. Non quantitative data were analyzed by content analysis method. Social demographic differences, poor academic performance, incompetency in English language, household income, cultural and traditional beliefs have been the major reasons for school dropout. Development of appropriate policies and intervention strategies to help poor people improve their livelihood through income generation has been among the major recommendations.

Key words: *School dropout, community secondary schools.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Formal education or schooling describes learning that takes place in schools [1]. During colonial era as stated by [2], education was provided in racially separated education systems, in different categories of schools run by different agencies and according to different curricula. The privileged few and those from well to do families managed to access it. [1] Further explains the fact that, students from poor families were generally unable to continue with formal education up to the university level. They failed to be promoted from one grade to the next in primary schools or they failed the entrance exams to secondary schools particularly in rural community secondary schools. A similar scenario is currently being observed by those who enroll in secondary schools dropping out before they graduate because of many and some unknown factors. Policies and measures to improve school progression and reduce the numbers of students dropping out of school in community secondary schools of Tanzania are critical if national educational goals are to be achieved. Observations indicate that students are starting secondary school in greater numbers than ever before, but dropout rates are significant and lead to low levels of secondary school completion in many countries [3]. With these substantial rates of drop out and non-completion of secondary school education it means many students are leaving schooling without acquiring the most basic skills. Their brief schooling experience frequently consists of limited learning opportunities in overcrowded classrooms with insufficient

learning materials and under-qualified teachers [4]. Students of different abilities are mixed together in single classrooms without proper adaptation of teaching methods to improve learning and to induce school engagement [5]. Such schooling circumstances, together with personal and family level factors such as poverty, jeopardize meaningful access to education for many students. As a result, many children are registered in schools but fail to attend, participate but fail to learn, are enrolled for several years but fail to progress and drop out from school [3]. Failure to complete an ordinary secondary school not only limits future career opportunities for children but also represents a significant drain on the limited resources that countries have for the provision of secondary education. Despite its importance, strategies designed to improve school retention and progression has received relatively little attention. Typically, national education plans assume that secondary school progression will improve automatically as a result of interventions designed to improve initial access and educational quality. Nevertheless, improving progression in secondary school as argued by [6] may not necessarily be about improving the quality of education alone, but through considering and addressing some other factors.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Secondary school dropout is increasing tremendously in rural community schools. This situation has caused a challenge to school administration, staff, parents, community, employers and to youth themselves. As minimum skill expectations have

increased at every educational and employment entry point, so has the importance of attaining an ordinary level secondary education. Despite this trend and the increased severity of the negative consequences of dropping out [7] for many community secondary school students particularly those from low-income families, graduating from school has remained problematic. This is happening parallel to government's deliberate actions and initiatives to spearhead national education goal through National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) towards realization of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). Soon the communities will be overcrowded with youths who lack basic knowledge and life skills to make a living. Coping with globalization will become a nightmare to a nation with illiterate or semi-illiterate people. This paper therefore explores factors contributing to school dropout in community secondary schools. A case study of Nyamilama secondary school unveils the extent of the problem and provides a cue to mechanism for sustainable school attendance and completion for those enrolled.

III. STUDY METHODS

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted at Nyamilama secondary school in Kwimba District in Mwanza Region. The school is about 24km south of Ngudu- the District headquarters. It is a community school whose catchment area is five primary schools. These are Nyamilama, Bugembe, Bulikinda, Mwankulwe and Mwashigi. Nyamilama is basically an ordinary level day secondary school though it runs a hostel accommodating both boys and girls on private arrangement basis.

Research Design and Sampling Procedure

This study used a cross-sectional research design which employs a survey method. According to [8] and [9], in this design, data are collected at a single point in time. The study population constituted dropout students, parents of the affected families and the school administration as key informant.

Purposive sampling method was used to select 60 students (30 males and 30 females) who dropped out of school. Each village (in which a primary school is situated) among five forming the catchment area, contributed 12 dropped students of which 6 were males and 6 females. Again 20 heads of the household from the five villages forming the catchment area were purposefully selected for interview. Each village contributed 4 household heads for interview. Nevertheless the head of the school was purposefully picked for interview as a key informant.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

Data collection was done through personal interviews administered to dropout students using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were organized, coded, and descriptively analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme. This is because the sample size was above 30, and according to [10] such data could be analyzed statistically. Descriptive statistical analysis yielded frequencies, percentages, means and ranges of the data. Data from parents and key informant (the school administration) were analyzed by the content analysis technique.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major goal of the study was to assess factors influencing dropout in community secondary schools and suggest ways that could be employed to alleviate the problem based on breadth of the situation. Evidence shows that dropout rate is largely contributed by respondents' characteristics, poor academic performance, language of instruction, long walking distance as well as poor household income as illustrated here below.

Social demographic characteristics of respondents

This section deals with social demographic characteristics of respondents who dropped out of school before completion.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents (ex students) according to Social Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Sex of respondents		
Male	30	50
Female	30	50
Total	60	100
Marital status		
Married	16	26.7
Single	42	70
Divorced/separated	2	3.3
Total	60	100
Whether both parents are alive		

Yes	48	80
No	12	20
Total	60	100
Parents of the respondents who died		
Father	2	16.7
Mother	6	50
Both	4	53.3
Total	12	100
Parents of respondents still living together		
Yes	32	66.7
No	16	33.3
Total	48	100
The year in which parents of the respondents parted		
Before 1998	8	28.6
1998-2005	14	50
Beyond 2005	6	21.4
Total	28	100
Cause for partition of respondent's parents		
Death	12	42.9
Divorce	12	42.9
Separation	4	14.2
Total	28	100

Note (A total of 28 includes 12 who parted because of death and 16 who parted because of other reasons)

According to Table 1, among 60 respondents, 50% were males and 50% were females. The data also revealed that 26.7% of the respondents who dropped out of the school were married. This implies that some of the students might have left school because of marriage. Eighty percent of respondents said their parents were still alive. This testifies that most of the students are dropping out of the school not because of missing one or both of the parents but because of some other reasons. However, the 20% who lost their parents could have contributed to the dropout because of the created psychological effect, together with lack of parental care and support. The Table further shows that 6 of the respondents lost their mothers and 4 lost both of their parents. For those respondents who said that their parents separated between the years (1998-2005) inclusive, this is the period when most of the respondents started or were continuing with their studies. Causes for their partition were revealed to be death and divorce. Being the active school period for most of the respondents who were interviewed, loss of one or both of the parents was expressed to be among the causes for dropping out of school because of dwindling resources as well as assisting in domestic chores.

Academic Performance

Good academic performance is a great incentive to students. They become encouraged and anticipate more years of schooling to reach their ambitions and destinations. All respondents were asked to state whether they were satisfied with their academic performance. Results indicate that 56.5% were not satisfied. This suggests that students could drop out of

school due to poor performance. Through probing it was revealed that poor performance was caused by irregular school and classroom attendance searching for various school dues such as fees and hostel contributions (food, cash). Similarly, some parents dared to dismiss them from school to do various activities such as herding, farming and other household chores [11]. When interviewed, the school administration echoed the same sentiment that, apart from other factors poor academic performance contributes to school dropout. The administration noted with concern that, the situation was terrible after the release of form two national examinations. Failed students were always not ready to repeat the same class. Interviewed parents on the other hand said that, they had a stake in pulling their children (poor performers) out of the school to get rid of extra cost which would be incurred for nothing. It was of interest to also determine the highest form reached by most of the respondents (Table 6).

Table; Distribution of respondents according to highest form reached (N=60)

Form	Frequency	Percent
I	18	30.0
II	36	60.0
III	2	3.3
IV	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

The table above shows that, majority 60% went as far as form two. Through probing it was found that most of them left school

because of failure in form two national examinations together with failure to pay for examination and school fees. [12] Reported similar findings in his study. He found that student inability to pass examinations, low interest, low competence in learning academic subjects, poor examination results and poor classroom learning environment had a great influence towards dropping out of school.

Language used as a medium of instruction

When asked whether they were proficient with the English language used in secondary schools, majority 95% said they were not competent. It should be remembered that, whilst primary education is taught through Kiswahili, secondary education is officially taught through English medium. This implies that the immediate change of the medium of instruction from Swahili in primary schools to English in secondary schools disturbs many students. According to the literature review, many academics argue that it is no longer feasible to achieve effective learning in the majority of secondary schools using an English medium [13]. This situation encourages poor performance and interest loss as a result students drop out of school before they graduate. In the same alignment, the school administration noted with concern that the language problem was intense. Even Swahili- a national language was not well comprehended by the majority; instead students were conversant with their vernacular languages. In that situation it was difficult for students to comprehend subjects taught in English language.

Distance from home to school

Rural community secondary schools in most cases are established at the ward head quarters. Some of the villages are far away from the headquarters where the school is located. Taking in consideration that most are day students, this situation affects them much. In this study a total of 46.7% of the respondents were found to reside 5km to as far as 20km and above away from the school premises (Table 9). This is not a conducive distance for a student to walk. It was found that students were inconvenienced by rains, got tired, arriving late nearly every day and got punished. All of these led to reduced morale of schooling.

Table 9: Distance from respondents' residence to secondary school in km (N=60).

Distance in km	Frequency	Percent
0-5	32	53.3
6-10	10	16.7
11-15	6	10.0
16-20	8	13.3
Above 20	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

The study further revealed that, of the total respondents, 53.3% walked on foot and 40.5% used bicycles as their means of transport. Nevertheless both means of transport led to tiredness. Tiredness, lack of breakfast/lunch and late arrival due to crude means of transport accelerated to the notion of equating schooling to a burden and hence lack of morale. It is clear that rural areas have very poor infrastructure such as roads. In some places there were no outlets from residences to the main road. Students use local paths which are sometimes flooded during rain season. This makes accessibility to school difficult. The study also sought to explain this phenomenon. The results are indicated in (Table 10).

Table 10: Status of roads from student's locality to school (N=60)

Status	Frequency	Percent
Very poor roads (passable in dry season with difficulties)	10	16.7
Poor roads (passable during dry season only)	40	73.3
All weather roads	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

The majority 71.4% said that roads were poor (passable during dry season only). This implies that there was frequent absenteeism due to inaccessible roads leading to their dropout.

Students' Category

Respondents were asked whether they were day or hostel students. Among all, 90% were day students. The results further shows that all day students (90%) were offered neither breakfast nor lunch when at school. This signifies that high dropout rate is much with day students than it is for hostel or boarding students. As it was observed during data collection and through further discussions, day students were troubled with poor and unreliable social infrastructure, lack of reliable means of transport, long distance from homes and starvation due to lack of lunch or breakfast. Students from distant areas often ended up renting accommodation so that they can attend a day school but could only afford very low quality accommodation and had to raise their living costs through part-time working [14]. These issues contribute to reduced classroom concentration leading to poor performance, lack of school interest and ultimately dropping out of school [15]. [1] Points out that, lack of resources in rural areas make it impossible for many parents to send their children to school and those who manage dropout before they graduate. The significance of this statement is that, had parents got the necessary resources such as funds, they could have accommodated students in school hostels and get rid of all other unnecessary inconveniences. Parents also echoed the same sentiment.

Household Income

Involvement in small income generating activities

Respondents were asked to state whether they were involved in small income generating activities to supplement family income after school hours. The study found out that 70% were actually involved. Further inquiry indicated that small income generating activities included farming, casual farm labour, livestock herding, charcoal making, radio mechanic and casual labour in house construction activities. Among the 42 respondents who participated in income generating activities herding occupied 33.3% followed by farming 28.6%. This also signifies that the region is of agro pastoralists communities. However, many of the respondents interviewed said they were working for wages. It also shows that many families were poor to the extent of involving their children in supplementation of income (Table 11). Qualitative data from interviewed parents suggested that, poverty made parents involve their children deliberately in small income generating activities to supplement family income as well as recover school expenses. The school administration on the other hand suggested that, it experienced massive irregular attendance when students are emphasized to pay school fees and other dues. This shows that students had to work during school days in collaboration with their parents in order to raise the school dues.

Table 11. Involvement in small income generating activities to support family income after school hours (N=42)

Activity	frequency	Percent
Farming	12	28.6
Casual farm labour	2	4.8
Herding	14	33.3
Charcoal making	2	4.8
Radio mechanic	8	19.0
Casual labour in house construction	4	9.5
Total	42	100.0

The above trend may be explained by specific realities of traditional roles and chores and how they impinge on acquisition of modern education [16]. There is a conflicting demand for child work (labour) on one hand and a need for education at the same time [17].

Parents/guardian occupation

The results show that 80% of respondent's parents were farmers (Table 12). This implies that most students who drop out of school are from farm families probably because of unstable economic condition caused by adverse climatic condition of an area. Similarly an extensive critical review of about 50 studies

on public school education [11] described dropouts as coming from low-income families whose parents had little or no education, and who were unemployed or had jobs that gave them little or irregular income. Majority of farmers in rural areas of Tanzania cultivate on subsistence basis. Obviously, meeting school expenses and other life necessities becomes difficulty.

Table 12: Distribution of respondents (ex-students) according to parent's/guardian's occupation (N=60)

Category	Frequency	Percent
Farmers	48	80.0
Wage employees	8	13.3
Others	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

Family size

The study further learnt that among the interviewed respondents (ex-students), 86.7% said that family size in one household exceeded 5 individuals where as 13.3% between 1-5 individuals. This implies that, the per capital income within the household is below the poverty line per day i.e. an income below \$ 1 is approximately equal to Tshs 1250/=, the family of a minimum of five individuals is expected to have a minimum expenditure per day of Tshs 6250, the study found that among 60 families, 46 had a maximum income of Tshs 1,000,000/= per year. From this evidence a family with a minimum of 5 members with a maximum of Tshs 1,000,000/= has a minimum expenditure per day of Tshs 2740/=. It is obvious that under such a situation, meeting school expenses i.e fees, uniform, breakfast, lunch, transport facility (bicycle), kerosene, lamp and other emerging dues for even a single student who is schooling from among the members of the household is jeopardized.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Despite its relative neglect in terms of funding, both from the government and from donors, and its low profile within the national development vision, the secondary school system grew considerably from 1990's to 2004 with the majority of the growth being accounted for by new community-built government day schools [18]. The construction of secondary schools by the local communities, in the face of extensive poverty and very limited government support, is indicative of the high social demand for secondary education [19]. Since demand for education and ability to construct schools is not evenly distributed, the growth of community schools has increased regional disparities. However schools are challenged with many problems, higher dropout being the critical one.

Factors for school dropout

According to different literatures, dropout is caused by many factors. The variety of causes impinging on different groups of dropouts, males and females, elementary and secondary, urban and rural, indicate that school leaving is a multi-dimensional

phenomenon [20] which involves not only economic reasons but also psychological, cultural, and sociological factors. The low quality of education and the financial burden of fees on parents have had negative effects on efficiency in terms of high dropout rates. Out of 83,509 students in form one in 2001 there were only 60,861 in form IV in 2004, meaning that less than 73% of the original cohort continued directly to form IV [21]. The lowest transition rates are for form II to form III, with the form II national examinations acting as a barrier to progression. Many students live in poverty, working out of school hours to earn enough money for food and rent [22]. But, the majority of students don't manage to last the four years at school under these conditions, with large numbers dropping out after the form II examinations. While this is a rather extreme case, the dropout rate in many rural schools is much greater than national statistics would suggest. Majority of rural communities are served by day schools. Students from rural areas often end up renting accommodation so that they can attend a day school but can only afford very low quality accommodation and have to raise their living costs through working. Youths, especially girls, are made vulnerable to risks of sexual abuse as they are forced to live away from home [14]. These conditions tend to have a very negative impact on their learning. When considering quality of secondary education in Tanzania, the issue of the medium of instruction cannot be ignored. Whilst primary education is taught through Kiswahili, secondary education is officially taught through English medium. The choice of the medium of instruction in education has been hotly debated throughout Tanzania's history [23]. The data from numerous studies implies that the level of English of both teachers and students is a severe limitation on the quality of learning in secondary schools. Many academics argue that it is no longer feasible to achieve effective learning in the majority of secondary schools using an English medium [13]. This makes students fail to comprehend materials as a result they lose interest and ultimately drop out of school.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings have shown that social demographic, academic performance and home based factors which include, household income, family size, parent's occupation, cultural and traditional beliefs all contributes substantially to the school dropouts. Girls and boys are pulled out of the school when the family income dictates that all children cannot be educated at a time. Students miss school when there are chores to be done at home or there is a sick family member to nurse. Girls are taken out of school when they mature to prepare them for marriage or to help supplement the family income by selling, farming or performing other income earning activities. Similarly, students lose school interest when they are subjected to new instructional language. It should be remembered that Kiswahili is the instructional language in primary schools where as English is the instructional language in secondary schools of Tanzania. The immediate change causes difficulty in comprehending ability of the students, a situation which lead to

poor performance. Eventually students lose interest to school as a result they drop out of school. The factors which interplay and affect children's education are limitless. Extracurricular and out of school factors play a big role in children's education. Long distances from school, sexual harassment in case of girls by classmates, teachers and males in the community (attributed by lack of hostels) and inefficient use of time for both males and females contribute to making attendance in school poor.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To alleviate the school dropout problem, the following have been proposed.

- The government should treat the school dropout issue seriously and make national education plans to assist the poor continue with their education.
- Development of appropriate policies and intervention strategies to help poor people improve their livelihood through income generation, with particular attention given to rural industrialization, provisional of capital through loans and grants, and capacity building programs. This will enable rural people invest in various non-farm activities and ultimately meet their needs together with school needs for their children.
- English should be the medium of instruction in all primary schools to avoid language shock as students enters secondary schools.
- Sensitization activities to enable society do away with cultural beliefs which marginalize the girl child.
- Boarding schools should be encouraged to cut down on distance as well as on domestic chores burden.

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