Original Article

Influence of Peer Pressure on Secondary School Students Dropout in Nanyamba Town Council, Mtwara, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

School dropout is among the phenomena challenging youth to achieve education and related skills to make them competitive in today's global economy. This study explored the influence of socioeconomic factors and the dropping out of secondary school students; the extent of school dropout; and established the strategies for overcoming the school dropout syndrome at Nanyamba Town Council. The study utilized a qualitative approach using a study sample which included five headmasters, five class teachers, five class monitors, one ward educational officer, one quality assurance officer and one headquarters officer. A semi-structured interview was used for data collection. Findings disclosed that socioeconomic factors lead to students dropping out of school due to a lack of awareness of the importance of education and illiteracy in families. Parents' low income and cultural aspects such as early marriage and early pregnancy. Divorce, lack of family planning, negative attitudes towards education especially for girls and parents' deaths were also found to be the problems leading to school dropout. Among the recommendations given are: the provision of scholastic materials, the provision of lunch by schools, mass mobilization and the need to sensitize the community on education to make them aware of the importance of secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing reports show that there has been a downward trend in the academic performance of secondary school students in Nanyamba Town Council in Mtwara Tanzania. The academic outcome of students has been linked with the role of parents, teachers, and individuals. Increasing reports show that there has been a downward trend in dropping out of secondary school students in Nanyamba town council Mtwara Tanzania. Dropout outcomes of students have been linked with the role of parents, teachers, individual students and their peers (Reid, 2006).

Out of these factors, peers rank highest as one of the factors directly influencing the academic performance of students. Peer group is an important influence throughout one's life but they are more critical during the developmental years of childhood and adolescence. A peer group is a group of people of the same age or social status. The issue of peer pressure is often prominent during the adolescence stage of a teenager because this is the stage the maturing individual seeks comfort among their peers and intends to do what their peers do without knowing if it is good or bad for them. The peer group is the first social group outside the home in which the child attempts to gain acceptance and recognition. It has long been suggested that students may be motivated as much by the desire to gain social approval from their peers (Kalinga, 2013). Secondary school students are adolescents and adolescence is believed to be the period of the greatest vulnerability to peer pressure, during which the desire to be popular or fit in is felt most acutely.

The dropout problem has caused negative economic development and resulted in wasted talents and an incompetent labour force in most parts of the world. This can be evidenced by economic and social stagnation in some parts of the world. Processes of change brought by student dropout have become so rapid and intense that they give rise to major social-economic challenges which can have disruptive effects on traditional lifestyles, morals, religious beliefs and everyday patterns without clear new values (Barton, 2005).

A study by Kalinga (2013) on the causes of school dropouts in secondary school in Tanzania pointed out several reasons for school dropouts including; lack of awareness of education matters, high poverty in families, cultural aspects such as early marriages, divorce, polygamy, lack of family planning and negative attitudes towards education especially for girls and parents' deaths. As the case, the schools are losing students as well as the society at large because these young ones are the leaders of today and tomorrow. If a large number of students fail to complete a given level of education, it is a waste of resources to one society and the country at large. The current study aims to investigate peer pressure factors influencing student's dropout of public secondary schools at Nanyamba town council in the Mtwara region.

Peer pressure may be influenced in a number of ways: fashion choice, alcohol and smoking and other drugs used, decision to have a boyfriend/girlfriend, choice of who their friends are, organizing and extending parties. Peer pressure may be due to pressure at the workplace, at school or within the general community. It can affect people of all ages and backgrounds. Researchers such as Oetting and Beauvais (1987) and Oetting et al. (2012) have shown that peer pressure has a much greater impact on adolescent behaviour than any other factor. A teenager spends more of his/her time with peers than with family members. The interaction with peers is direct, and more powerful than the influence of teachers and other authority figures. Peer pressure tends to have more of an effect on children with low self-esteem. If a child feels compelled to fit in, the teen may do things that go against his/her beliefs simply to be part of the group. Peer pressure can lead to experimentation with drugs and alcohol, sex, skipping school and various high-risk behaviours. According to Oetting et al. (2012), any sudden changes in children's appearance, attitude and clothing, especially when co-occurred with secretive behaviour, might be the result of peer influence.

Aim/Objectives of the Study

1. To discover how socioeconomic factors influence school dropout at Nanyamba Town Council.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the government providing free primary and secondary education, training, recruiting teachers, providing school infrastructures, teaching and learning materials, learners are still seen dropping out of school. Socio-economic factors have been pointed out among the factors influencing school dropouts (Reid, 2006). However, studies on how socioeconomic factors influence school dropout at Nanyamba Town Council are minimal. This study, therefore, aims to explore how socioeconomic factors influence school dropout of public secondary school students at Nanyamba Town Council.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peer influence among secondary students, which is a kind of social pressure on them to adopt a type of behaviour, dress, or attitude in order to be accepted as part of a group, affects them either positively or negatively. The work of Castillo (2010) suggested that there are students who influence others positively as they display discipline and become role models for others to emulate or negatively as they portray social problems like immoral behaviour because, at this level, the youths seek to establish their independence from their parents due to new lifestyles, growth of unruly character epitomized by drug addiction, alcoholism, wild cat, strikes in schools and carefree sex behaviours.

Peer pressure, which can bring about dropping out of school, is one of the most serious issues being emphasized by the developing governments of the world (UNICEF, 2001). However, certain factors encroach on and impede the educational progress of young people in society. Such factors include early marriages, pre-marital sex leading to pregnancy, sociocultural factors, and geographical factors among others. Research carried out by Drewry (2007) to examine the extent to which peer pressure influences school dropout in the USA revealed dropouts reported significantly higher rates of cigarette, marijuana and other illicit drug usage than students who graduated from high school. Ombuya et al. (2012) emphasized that implicit in this difference, may include socio-economic factors like continued poverty, inadequate housing, peer influence, lack of parental guidance as well as being

underserved within other services by the school management.

Another study by Duflo et al. (2010) on gender gaps in education also realized that adolescent pregnancies brought by peer influence mostly result in the dropping out of girls and their continuity to secondary school education. Many of such girls end up in marriages or abandoned at home without any academic achievements realized. Similarly, boys are equally endangered because when they drop out of school, they engage in some activities which are detrimental to their dear lives and are prone to poor health hazards (Kadzamira & Schiwana, 2000).

When discussing how peer pressure influences students' choices, Castillo (2010) and Mooney et al. (2007) stated that the kind of friends that students in high school make differs according to students' gender, social class, race-ethnicity and academic background. Consequently, some students are more likely to have friends who are careless about school learning and are less likely to associate with peers who care about school. The students may drop out of secondary school due to the pressure of rejection by peers making them feel lonely and disassociated from having friends to fit within a group (Mutwol et al., 2012).

In consideration of the parent-child relationship, Castillo (2010) postulated that sometimes unknowingly, a parent may put too much pressure on their son or daughter by trying to drive them in the opposite direction as opposed to the clique they belong to and often the student can fail to meet these demands put upon him or her, particularly on educational matters. Each of these problems can be resolved because education is extremely important to the victim in the future. Furthermore, Mudis and Yambo (2015) found out that the students are that are bullied by their peers can report first to the prefects and then to the school administration which will ensure that every student has a free and fair learning environment and that bullying laws are put in place to protect the innocent and press charges on the bullies no matters age or gender.

Peer pressures among students are of various natures. According to Ombuya et al. (2012), there are three main categories of peer influence that can

lead to dropout. These include: Outside influences by friends and peer pressure from other high school dropouts, lack of interest in gaining education and teen pregnancies which have accounted for a higher percentage of girls who drop out of secondary school. These categories can only be managed by the head of the institutions with the support of the parents and other education stakeholders. Moreover, prefects and schools' guidance and counselling masters are equally key in this regard (Mudis & Yambo, 2015). Rejected students by peers are normally discontented with themselves and their relationship with other students may be wanting. Results from different researchers including Odhiambo and Yambo (2012) and Mudis and Yambo (2015) indicated that, on average, about 31 percent of low-accepted children drop out of school compared to 9 percent of other children. Parents and the school administration may need to seek professional psychological help for children suffering from negative peer influence by establishing a strong guidance and counselling department with skilled personnel and a good religious foundation

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the influence of socio-economic factors on students' dropout in public secondary schools at Nanyamba Town Council. The approach could enhance a researcher to deeply explore, understand, and interpret social phenomena within its natural setting by employing interviews to collect data (Creswell, 2002). Purposive sampling was employed, where 13 public schools were sampled. However, it was not easy to reach the entire targeted sample, thus this study used 5 out of 13 public secondary schools of Nanyamba Town Council. The sample selected was based on the knowledge and experiences of the informants on the topic of the study. Heads of schools, class teachers, quality assurance officers, ward educational officers, district educational officers and class monitors from the selected secondary schools of Nanyamba Town Council in Mtwara Tanzania were involved in the process of data collection. The selection of the informants was done based on their knowledge and experiences on the topic of the study. At the end of the interviews,

all recorded interviews were saved on the computer. The recorded audio was transcribed for the verbatim data. The verbatim information is grouped into tables consisting of discourse units, researchers, interviews, transcriptions and remarks. The table was also categorized based on interview questions, superordinate (main point from the interview question), and subordinate (main point from the conversation). This methodology was used for the current study. The discussion included the population, the sample size of the study, the sampling techniques, the data collection method, and the ethical considerations. The researcher used interviews and recordings in order to give their views and explanations on the major socioeconomic factors which lead to students dropping out of public secondary schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this study, the researcher was interested in investigating the socioeconomic factors influencing school dropout at Nanyamba Town Council. The specific objective was guided by the question "what socio-economic factors influence the school drop-out rate at Nanyamba Town Council? A qualitative method was used in the study. Simple purposive sampling was used and the sample size consisted of 18 respondents; five Headmasters, five Class Teachers, five Students, one Ward Education Officer, one Quality Assurance Officer and a Head-quarter Officer. Interviews were used to collect data from class WEO, QAO HQO, teachers, students, and headmasters. The obtained data was analysed by using thematic analysis, where the data was categorised into several sub-themes to reveal socio-economic factors for the school drop-out syndrome at Nanyamba Town Council. The obtained data could be sorted as missing family care, walking a long distance to school, fearing punishment from teachers, imitating students who dropped out of school, unsatisfactory school services, and unattractive school buildings.

Lack of Parental Care and Monitoring; few parents engaged in their children's schooling activities (Kadau, 2023). In the interviews conducted with teachers, it was found that parents were reported to be reluctant when it comes to family monitoring and caretaking. Some students miss family care because

of single parents not understanding the importance of education which causes them to incomplete their studies. For example, when a student says" they are not motivated. Despite many students reporting living far from the school, walking a long distance to school happens due to poverty of students who are in need to reach early to school but their means of transport (mostly bicycles) break down or they do not even have them due to poverty of their families. For instance, informant (teacher 4)… said

This led her to ask for help from her fellow students or sometimes from Dala dala conductors where instead of helping her, they start making negotiations on how she can pay bus fare. As the student tells them she doesn't have money for bus fare, the conductor asks her to have sex in order to do compensation and because of low autonomy in making decisions, she comes to accept having sex as a result get pregnancy and that makes an end of her study. (Teacher 4)

The findings from the interview indicate that lack of parental and monitoring has contributed to school dropout. Some students are expelled from studies, engage in sexual activities and get pregnant because their parents do not care about their learning environment. These findings support the findings of Sekine and Hodgkin, 2014 who found that girls who are sexually engaged at a young age are more likely to have dropped out of school and/or have no formal education.

Fearing punishment from teachers; some teachers used corporal punishment. Even if the government has abolished the use of corporal punishment in primary and secondary schools still there are some teachers reported to use corporal punishment which results in some students dropping out of school. During the interview session with one of the class teachers, a respondent suggested that:

Alternative methods to corporal punishment should be embraced in order to prevent drop-out among secondary school students. Similarly, large families should embrace effectiveness in the provision of school facilities to their children. There should be deliberate efforts to educate parents and the community in general

on the use of family planning methods so as to control birth rates. (Class teacher 1)

In light of the quotation above, to some extent, secondary school dropout is caused by punishment provided by teachers to the students. The finding implies that teachers are apathetic to students' situation. They do not care about the challenges students pass through.

Low autonomy in decision-making; and low autonomy in decision-making due to insufficient life skills including decision-making, problem-solving, negotiation, and critical thinking skills were other reasons for propelling the participants to early marriage. Because those students misunderstand the proper way to make decisions as the class teacher (4) explained;

due to poverty, students who are living far from school need to go early to school but as her bicycle breaks down or she doesn't have this leads her to ask for help from fellow students or sometimes to dala dala where instead of helping her, conductor or driver as her to pay bus fare or by making sex and as she has low autonomy in making decision, she comes to get pregnancy and that makes an end of her study. (Teacher 4)

The finding indicates that the absence of some life skills in secondary school girls has contributed to the dropout since students particularly girls have less ability to make their own autonomous decisions, this results in early pregnancy hence school dropout.

Imitating from students who dropped out of school; some students stop their studies because of the influence from their fellow students who have dropped out from the school. These students influence their fellows who have not dropped out. Teacher number 3 said,

Because of living for a long while with an empty stomach, it is better to join with street vendors who sell local foods (ming'oko) and other business-like flesh, cassava rather than going to school". Therefore, a number of students drop out because they imitate other students who are out of the school and still no action to their dropping from school. (Teacher 3)

In light of the findings from interviews, to some extent, secondary school dropout is influenced by peer groups in two senses. Number one, students who have been expelled from school tend to influence those who are not expelled from school. The students who are progressing with their studies are eager to join their fellows in the street to perform illegal economic activities.

Recommendations

- There is a need for the government to introduce laws, policies and regulations to guide activities of child labor especially those that touch on sexual exploitation of children. It should also find new means of positively engaging farm activities in supporting the education sector amongst other economic support towards alleviating poverty in the region.

- The public should be informed that the cost of living in general and the cost of education in particular have increased tremendously and therefore there is a need to have fewer children that they can effectively educate with the limited resources available.

- The school management boards, parents' associations, teachers and even students need to initiate income-generating and learning programs within the school to help needy students in terms of provision of school supplies.

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