

Causes of School Dropout among Public Secondary School Students in Ifakara Town Council, Tanzania

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bje.2013/vol12n104959>

Published September 04, 2024

Citation: Kalamba T.G. and Mpiza M. (2024) Causes of School Dropout among Public Secondary School Students in Ifakara Town Council, Tanzania, *British Journal of Education*, Vol.12, Issue 10, 49-59

ABSTRACT: *This study aimed at exploring causes of students' dropout in public secondary schools in Ifakara Town Council, Morogoro. The study employed a mixed approach. The study involved 128 participants including 1 DEO, 7 heads of school, and 120 dropout students. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 while qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that low economic status of the respondents' family was the leading cause of school dropout in the study area; the parents failed to meet school expenses and support their children education. Also, students missed school to do home responsibilities like taking care of their young siblings while the parents were working. Parents' low level of education made them to have low income and not to value the education of their children. Children from single parent families had challenges with their school requirements being met which led to some dropping out of school. Major recommendation was that, Tanzanian government, NGOs and other educational stakeholders should provide more assistance for poor students who cannot afford to pay for educational materials by creating special program from government in co-operation with the Ministry responsible for education.*

KEYWORDS: causes of school dropout, public secondary schools, Ifakara town council.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a natural right for every human being and is an integral part of every human life. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), article 26, emphasizes that every person has a right to education and that basic education should be compulsory. The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights pointed out education as one of the basic human rights which means that every individual has the right to access education (UNICEF, 2015). To achieve the United Nations' goal is where the

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education for all (EFA), emerged. Tanzania is among the countries which accepted the objectives of EFA by expanding and investing in education starting with primary education in order to reduce poverty (Wedgwood, 2005).

According to World Bank (2018) the number of registered students is very high during the early stages of schooling, however, the number of those who quit schools increases at the secondary education level, leading to many countries having very few students completing their education. Dropout is endemic in many Sub-Saharan African countries. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) carried out a survey that showed that as high as 25% of youth who should be in Senior High School are not in school (Yusuf, 2019). In Madagascar, about 14% of 16 and 17 years old people did not have access to school but 30% of those who had been to school dropped out (Sabates et al., 2010).

Despite the international efforts to universalize education, dropout is still a challenge of EFA all over the world. This is because, despite the increase in enrolment, many students are said to drop out of school every year (UNESCO, 2015). Students' dropout is a situation that occurs when a student leaves school before completion of a program he or she is taking (Ajaja, 2012). EFA Global Monitor Report of 2015 estimates show 57 million pupils and 61 million lower secondary adolescents dropped out of school in 2015. The report elaborates that in every 3 students in low and middle-income countries failed to complete lower secondary education in 2015 as a result of dropout (UNESCO, 2015).

Students' dropout can be influenced by different factors such as school factors, socio-cultural factors and home based factors. The reasons for school dropout vary with some students dropping out of schools voluntarily while others are forced to do so by circumstances. Zuilkowski et al. (2016) highlight that school dropout is not simple but is a result of events and environmental conditions interactions.

In Tanzania, students' dropout in secondary school is still a problem (URT, 2010). Moreover, the study by Chuwa (2018) demonstrated early marriage, distance from home to school, poverty, child labour, and polygamy as the major factors which influence high school students' to dropout in Geita Region. Similarly, Tanzania Youth Vision Association (2017) emphasizes this arguing that, early pregnancy, forced marriage, long distance from home to school, domestic activities and poverty were being the factors that contributed to girls' school dropout in Dodoma, Singida, Lindi, and Pwani. The danger associated with a higher rate of students' continuing to dropout is that it increases economic dependence and crime in the society (Rutakinikwa, 2016).

The government of Tanzania through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology however, made an effort to increase access to secondary education in Tanzania, whereby the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) was introduced to reduce secondary school students' dropout (HakiElimu, 2017). Despite the efforts made by the Tanzanian government in increasing secondary school accessibility and addressing dropout, it is still an issue and a major barrier in achieving the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Referring to the study conducted in Tanzania in

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2018, the statistics show a total of 3.9 million children dropped out of school, whereby in 2015, 2.2 million students dropped out of school at the primary age of 7 – 13 and 1.7 million students dropped out of school at 14 -17 (UNICEF, 2018).

Data from the Presidents' Office (Regional Administration and Local Government) known as Basic Education Statistics of 2017 and 2018 shows that the dropout rate at secondary schools had increased by 2.8 percent to 65,700 in 2018 from 63,900 in 2017 (Letea, 2019). Furthermore, a report by URT (2018) shows dropout in primary and secondary school students persist which becomes a challenge in achieving the Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP) programme. This shows that the problem of students' dropout of school persists in Tanzania.

The establishment of community secondary schools in Tanzania, better known as ward schools was an advantage to all children in Tanzania including Ifakara Town Council (URT, 2004). Despite all efforts made by the government of Tanzania, the problem of secondary school students' dropout remains a challenge in Ifakara Town council.

A number of studies have been carried out both globally and in Tanzanian to uncover factors contributing to students drop out. For example, in Tanzania, studies such as Khamsini (2010), and Segumba (2015) have all established a number of sound factors for a student drop out in Tanzania. Unfortunately, almost all of these studies have established such factors descriptively relying on either teachers or students' opinion. Therefore, this study aims to find out the causes of school dropout among public secondary students in Ifakara Town Council, Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents several studies that have been done by different scholars relating to causes of students' dropout in secondary schools. Godana and Tekle (2020) investigated factors influencing rural female students' dropout in rural secondary schools of the Woreda, West Arsi Zone of Oromia Regional. The findings revealed that gender bias in curriculum material, cover school distance on foot, lack of guidance and counselling, parents give less value to the education of girls' compared to the boys, low parental economic status (payment for accommodation cost, payment for purchasing of school materials, payment for transportation), early marriage and abduction and female genital mutilation, female student's workload at home, menstruation cycle and less individual motivation were played a great role in contributing female dropout from rural secondary schools.

Kurian et al. (2023) investigated reasons of high school dropouts from teachers' perspective in India. The results from the study revealed that financial obstacles, personal and familial situations, lack of interest, academic difficulties, or a combination of these things can all be causes of school dropouts. They also found that many dropouts experience unfavourable outcomes, including fewer career opportunities, lower earning potential, and societal stigma. Mukisa (2018) examined parental, student and school related factors as causes of parental neglect and secondary school dropout in Namutumba district, Uganda. Findings indicated

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK that parents' education background, poverty, alcohol and parental attitude are causal actors contributing to parental neglect and secondary school dropout while students related factors that caused parental neglect and eventual school dropout included; indiscipline, distance to school, poor performance and pregnancy. In addition to these, research revealed that corporal punishment, poor school performance, poor school administration and suspension/expulsion from school were school/teacher related actors that caused parental neglect and secondary school dropout.

Parreño (2023) identified the root causes of school dropouts in the Philippines, specifically in all regions for the years 2008 and 2013. The secondary data on the proportion of population 6 to 24 years' old who are not attending school from the website of the Philippine Statistics Authority were used. The findings indicated that the high cost of education and student employment or when the student is seeking employment were the root causes of dropouts in the Philippines for the years 2008 and 2013, respectively.

Winy and Muchesia (2023) aimed at investigating student's characteristics leading to students' dropout from mixed-day secondary schools in Bomet East Sub-County, Kenya for the period between the year 2019 and 2022. The study revealed that the following student's characteristics lead to students' dropout; financial problems, peer influence, pregnancy, drug abuse, operating motorcycle business, over age, community/ family, family child labour, negative attitude to schooling, migration and health issues.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed approach. The approach allowed quantitative and qualitative data collection simultaneously then analyzed separately and merged for comparison and interpretation of the results as proposed by (Creswell, 2012). A descriptive survey research design was used. And also, simple random sampling technique is used in this research. In this sampling techniques every element in population are considered and has an equal chance of being chosen as the subject.

The target population included public secondary school dropout students in Ifakara Town Council, the head of schools and district education officer (DEO) from Ifakara Town Council. This study used a sample size of 128 participants, including 120 dropout students, 7 heads of schools and one district education officer. Yamane formula for calculating the sample size for smaller populations was used to calculate sample size. This study collected data using questionnaires and interviews. The instruments were validated through pilot testing and by requesting expert opinion. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

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This section presents the research findings on causes of students' dropout in public secondary schools in Ifakara Town Council. The finding on the demographic variables of the respondents is shown in (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	73	61
Female	47	39
Total	120	100
Age		
14-16 years	12	10
17-19 years	66	55
20-22 years	30	25
Above 22 years	12	10
Total	120	100
Year of dropping		
Form 1	36	30
Form 2	66	55
Form 3	12	10
Form 4	6	5
Total	120	100

Source: Researcher 2024

Demographic characteristic of the studied population revealed that out of the 120 respondents, 73(61%) were male while 47(39%) were female. Although the study used random sampling, still it was noted male respondents to have exceeded that of female respondents, this indicates that male respondents are more dropouts in the study area. On the other hand, the study discovered that, the study noted about 66(55%) dropped out of school at the age of 17-19, about 30(25%) dropped out of school at the age of 20-22 while about 12(10%) dropped out of school at the age of 14-16 and above 22 respectively.

Moreover, the respondents of this study were dropouts from public secondary schools whereby 55 percent of the respondents dropped from school in form two, 30 percent dropped from school in form one, 10 percent dropped from school in form three and 5 percent of respondents dropped from school in form four. This indicates that form two students are more likely to dropout from school than other students because of failing the form two exam and feeling embarrassed to repeat.

Causes of school dropout

In this section, the researcher aimed at exploring the specific causes of students' dropout of public secondary schools at Ifakara Town Council. The researcher collected information through a series of questions provided on the questionnaires to dropout students and

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Table 2: Causes of school dropout

Cause	Yes (%)	No (%)
Lack of extra financial support	74	26
Family responsibilities	68	32
Relationship with teachers	51	49
School safety	60	40
Bullying and discrimination	54	46
Peer influence	59	41
Poor grades	64	36
	Frequency	Percent
Kind of family		
Single parent family	83	61
Two parent family	37	39
Loss of interest and motivational to studies		
Low	79	66
Moderate	32	27
High	9	7

Source: Researcher 2024

Lack of financial support

Lack of financial support was indicated to be one of the most contributing causes to school dropouts in the study area; the study revealed 74% of respondents dropped out of school because they had no financial support, while 26% of respondents did not dropout from school due to financial support. One of the head of school was quoted saying that some students have dropout from school because of financial issues, one day he met with one of the dropout and asked why he was dropped out from school he answered that; *“I had to leave school because my family was struggling financially, and I needed to help out at home. It’s not an easy choice, but sometimes I have to put my family’s needs first.”*

Ngwuneche (2009) confirmed this, when he underscored that, school dropout rate is higher among the poorer family class than the well to do family class. One head of schools and District Educational Officer (D.E.O) supported these findings by quoting saying; *“Poverty is a major factor for school dropout; this requires therefore the government through NGOs like CAMFED, TACAIDS, TASAFA and PLAN to provide subsidies to the students who are with environmental hardships”*

Family responsibilities

The study revealed that more than half (68%) of respondents dropped out from school due to family responsibilities while 32% of respondents did not dropout from school due to family responsibilities. A similar observation was made by Crosnoe et al. (2004) that many

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students staying in school involves navigating not only academic challenges but also fulfilling responsibilities at home and adhering to societal expectations. This underscores the crucial need for holistic support systems that encompass academic assistance alongside addressing economic pressures and cultural norms impacting student retention and success. In addition to that, one of the head of school quoted a student who said that; *“I dropped out in form two back in 2021. I had to look out for my young siblings because my parents were going to work in the farm, since then, I never went back to school.”*

School safety

Findings identified that more than a half 60% of the respondents responded school safety did cause them to dropout from school while 40% of respondents responded that school safety did not cause them to dropout from school. Students might not feel comfortable or supported at school if there is no sense of security and a positive atmosphere. They may eventually become disinterested and leave. Furthermore, it has been seen that many children live in places where education is not valued and where drugs, gangs, and violence abound. Such conditions result in low enrolment and higher dropout rates (Kurian et al, 2023).

Peer influence

The findings identified 59% of respondents agreed to the influence of peer in school dropout while 41% disagree to the influence of peer in school dropout. This indicates that, when students see some of their friends dropping out of school and start doing same things, they can easily become attracted to get out of school.

This factor is supported by social cognitive theory that suggests that humans learn behaviours by observing others and choosing which behaviours to imitate. Behaviours that are rewarded are more likely to be repeated whereas behaviours that are punished are less likely to be repeated. This can imply that students learn by imitating their fellows, when students see their fellow peers are dropping out they are likely also to drop (Bandura, 1977).

Bullying and discrimination

The study found that majority (54%) of respondents experienced bullying and discrimination at school while 46% did not experience bullying and discrimination at school. This experience caused them to dropout from school. The study by Dunne et al. (2010) found that bullying was highly associated with a highly likelihood to school absenteeism among students. Furthermore, Risper and Ngonda (2023) in their study revealed that there was a strong positive correlation between physical bullying and students' drop out and bullying significantly contributes to the number of school dropout cases.

Relationship with teachers

Findings revealed that, 51% of the respondents had good relationship with teachers while 49% did not have a good relationship with school teachers. This implies that the way of teaching or the way teachers attend students cannot be good and cause students to be discouraged and result to dropout from school, as some students are not coming to school late every day and are given punishment without giving the chance to explain why are they

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coming to school very late compared to other student and cause teachers to act differently.
This can cause students to feel bad and result to dropout problem.

Poor grades

A poor grade is revealed as the cause of school dropout. It was noted that, 64% of respondents dropped out of school due to poor grades while 36% of respondents did not drop out of school due to poor grades. This indicated that, poor grades caused some of respondents to drop out from school. Supporting the above result Chinonso et al, (2022) reported students who received poor grades repeat a grade and students who were failing even if they had put in the necessary effort to be an indicator of dropping out of school.

Kind of school household

Status of the family household can lead to school dropout, 39% of the respondents comes from two-parent family while the remaining 61% comes from single-parent family. This agrees with the findings of Ouma et al. (2017) who indicates that students from single parent family are the most affected by the problem of school dropouts, because of lack of enough income. In many of the household headed by a single parent alternatively use children as one of their assets in helping to sustain livelihoods of the household and this result to dropout of school of their children. Therefore, students lack parental care and counseling to assist them to continue with schooling. The results also relate with the interview response as narrated by one head of school; *“Parent separation is one among the major causes of school dropout. Many single parents find it difficult to support their children’s education. Sometimes other parents after separation neglect their responsibilities and abandon their children with their grandparents.”*

Loss of interest and Motivation to School Studies

The findings revealed that 66% of respondents had low interest and motivation to school studies, 27% had moderate interest and motivation to school studies and 7% had high interest and motivation to school studies. A similar observation was made by Ouma et al. (2017) in their study of analysis of the socio-economic factors that contribute to children school dropout in artisanal small-scale gold mining communities of Tanzania. The study indicated that 136 male respondents dropped out of school because they had no interest in education anymore.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The problem of school dropout is complicated, and finding a single answer is difficult because every situation is unique. Despite the fact that a number of interconnected social, economic, educational, and cultural factors influence school dropout rates, this study showed the causes of school dropout in Ifakara Town council. The study revealed that low income is the major cause of school dropout in the study area. Other causes are family responsibilities, peer influence, bullying and discrimination, poor grades, kind of household and loss of interest and motivation to studies.

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The study recommends the government should reduce the cost of education in order to be affordable by all, irrespective of economic status of the family. Also, the government should make a proper plan and adequate budget to recruit enough qualified teachers so as to make sure that the ratio between students and teachers is balanced, to at least 40 students in a class. The heads of school should have ways of motivating learners to perform better and encourage them to stay in school. Also, safeguard actions should be taken on poor performers that are not disadvantageous hence lead to students' dropout.

Furthermore, the NGOs and other educational stakeholders should provide more assistance for poor students who cannot afford to pay the education fees. This may be done by creating special program from government in co-operation with the ministry of education. Development practitioners and Tanzanian government should introduce different approaches when designing development programs because different regions may have different unique features hence the same problem may need different approach.

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