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The Effectiveness of School Rules and Sanctions in Managing Pupils' Schooling among Tanzanian's Economically Disadvantaged Pupils

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Abstract

This paper presents the qualitative findings of a study which examines the effectiveness of school rules and their associated sanctions in guaranteeing pupils' regular school attendance and completion among economically disadvantaged pupils. The paper attempts to provide answers to three research question: (1) what are the school rules and sanctions which are used to encourage pupils' regular school attendance and completion? (2) Are these rules and sanctions effective in ensuring that pupils from economically disadvantaged households attend school regularly and complete their primary schooling? (3) What should be done to improve school attendance and completion of the pupils from economically disadvantaged households? Data were collected using interviews, a literature review, and children's stories and activities. The findings suggest that, in the studied schools, the rules require the pupils to: attend school regularly, attend all classes, remain on the school premises until the end of the school day, and miss school only after permission has been requested from the school by their parent/guardians. It has been noted that pupils who attended school irregularly were punished by being whipped, instructed to cut grass, dig pit latrine holes, water gardens and uproot tree stumps, and by being chased from classroom. Furthermore, some of their parents were fined in cash and kind, while others were taken to village executive secretaries, police stations and courts. The study produced two key findings: firstly, to a certain extent, the school rules and sanctions were very helpful and the children were enrolled, attended and completed school because of fear of the rules and their associated sanctions. Secondly, despite the rules and punishments, a number of pupils continued to play truant and others dropped out of school, suggesting that the effectiveness of the rules and sanctions is questionable. This study proposes that attendance rules should be jointly developed by the parents and teachers. Instead of being punished, truants and their parents should be educated on the importance of schooling compared to the presumed benefits of engaging in income-generating activities. The parents should also be encouraged to instil in their children a sense of education commitment and positive value towards education.

Key Words: School rules, school sanctions, pupils' schooling, economically disadvantaged pupils, Tanzania.

Introduction

Pupils' primary school dropout is one of the major problems that impede the efforts made by most developing countries to achieve universal primary education. The various pieces of evidence suggest that most of these countries have succeeded in enrolling the majority of school-age going children, yet keeping the children in school for the whole primary school cycle remains a problem. Worldwide data regarding school-age children who are not in school suggest that almost half (31 million) of these are located in Sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2010). Further evidence shows that more than a half of all children aged 10 to 19 dropped out of school in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali and Mozambique (Hunt 2008). In Ghana, more than 20% of all children of school-going age (6-15) have either dropped out or have never been enrolled in school (Ampiah & Adu-Yedoah, 2009).

Tanzania is also experiencing similar problems. The research evidences (see, for example, Ngorosho 2011) cited dropout as one of the major problems in public primary schools. Notably, on average 30% of children who are enrolled in school fail to survive the seven years of primary education. Furthermore, the data from the Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST) for 2011 show that only 53% and 62.6% of 13-year-old children reached standard seven in 2010 and 2011 respectively (United Republic of Tanzania URT 2011). In line with the various literature (see, for example, Mbilinyi, 1999; Watkins 2000; Dufur, 2001; Willms 2003; Considine & Zappalla 2002; Cooper & Crosnoe 2007; Garcial-Reid 2007; Muschamp, Wikeley, Ridge & Balarin 2007; and Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah 2009), the researcher anticipates that the majority of the children, who are not enrolled, attend school irregularly and drop out of school come from economically disadvantaged households. Arguably, children from poorer households are less likely to be enrolled and, of the few who are, the majority do not engage in learning fully, have low retention rates, attend school irregularly, lack a commitment to school and finally are more likely to drop out of school.

The high dropout rate in Tanzania has prompted the introduction of several strategies aimed at tackling the problem. At the national level, Government Education Act number 25, 1978, section 35, stipulates compulsory enrolment and attendance, asserting that primary education is a child's basic human right; hence, all school-age children should be enrolled, attend and complete the seven year cycle of education. To ensure the successful implementation of the Act, the government released various circulars which, *inter alia*, state that any person who in any way interferes with a pupil's primary education cycle will have committed a crime. Among other things, the circulars forbid child labour of any kind and prohibit men from impregnating or marrying female pupils. Regarding

marriage and early pregnancy, the circular clearly stated the kinds of punishment to be administered to the male offenders, the families of the girls and those of the male partners. These punishments include paying a fine ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 Tanzanian shillings (equivalent to $63-313) and imprisonment for two to six years (URT 2005). To ensure successful implementation of the national enrolment and attendance law, by-laws and rules have been formulated in regions, districts and schools. This study attempts to explore the effectiveness of the school rules and their associated sanctions in ensuring pupils' regular school attendance and completion.

Literature review

Across the world, families' financial capital is arguably a significant determinant of children's likelihood to be enrolled, attend and complete a given cycle of education. The mainstream argument established is that "there is a positive correlation between families' financial capital and children's engagement with school″. Divergent explanations have been offered to explain the poor educational outcomes among children from poor households: firstly, there is the inability of poor parents to cover the direct and indirect costs of education. Education is associated with various costs which can easily be met by better-off families. Hence, the poor households' response to the costs of education is: not to enrol any or only a few of their children in school, and to engage them in income-generating activities instead. Secondly, the likelihood of children from poor households attending school is also affected by the opportunity costs of schooling i.e. the value of the child's potential contribution to the family income (Dachi 2000; Sachs 2005; Oketch & Rolleston 2007). Notably, for poor families, sending a child to school is a trade-off between the time that the child spends contributing to the family income and doing various household chores and that spent at school. Thirdly, poor families are more likely to be illiterate. In situations of poverty, families of illiterates are less likely to spend money on their children's primary schooling than their literate counterparts (Dachi 2000: Sachs 2005).

The pupils' tendency to disengage from school is caused by a number of factors. Yet, schools need to set rules that will enable children to attend school regularly regardless of their parents' poverty or other factors that may hinder their schooling. Rules and regulations are among the major characteristics of bureaucratic organizations. The proponents of organizational bureaucracy believe that an organization cannot exist without rules and regulations, and that these rules and regulations reduce the chaos and anarchy within the organization (Hoy & Miskel 2001). Schools, being bureaucratic organizations, therefore have rules and regulations. School rules serve several functions, including making explicit the specific obligations of the pupils, maintaining consistency and a

positive school climate as well as regulating and controlling the pupils' actions and behaviour (Hoy & Miskel 2001).

It is pertinent to note that rules in organizations legitimize punishments. This means that the availability of rules in schools provokes the need for sanctions to be imposed against pupils who violet them. Other literature holds that rules and sanctions help to maintain harmony, a factor which is crucial in sustaining social relationships (Coleman 1988, 1990). Notably, rules that force individuals to forgo their self-interest at the expense of the interests of the collective are crucial for society development (Coleman 1988, 1990). Hence, in the education context, this means that rules and effective sanctions that will make the parents forgo the current share of the children in the family's total income generation may facilitate the achievement of the government objective of reducing poverty via the provision of primary education for all. It also means that rules and sanctions aimed at increasing children's engagement with school may mean that the parents and children will have to bear the opportunity costs of schooling. That is, the children's contribution to the total family income and their participation in activities, like taking care of their siblings and animals, cooking and farming, must be sacrificed. The literature further maintains that the probability of the effectiveness of organizational rules depends on a number of factors, such as whether the rules are consistently applied, and if their purpose is understood by the stakeholders (DeHart-Davis 2009). Similarly, for the school attendance and completion rules to be effective, the parents must subscribe to a similar ideology regarding the role of education (Komba 2010). They must understand and acknowledge that education can lead children out of poverty. On the other hand, children need to be committed and believe that schooling contributes to a better future life. Furthermore, there is a need to involve the pupils in formulating and implementing the rules and sanctions. Notably, children should not be treated as empty vacuum, they want to be listened to, heard and take part in issues concerning their wellbeing (URT 2007). Are the school attendance rules in Tanzania efficient in achieving the objective of ensuring regular school attendance and completion among pupils from poorer households?

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in Chunya District, Mbeya Region. This district is located in the north-western part of Mbeya Region and is one of the eight districts of the region. The district is bordered by Singida and Tabora regions to the north; the Iringa and Mbarali districts to the east; Mbozi and Mbeya districts to the south; and Rukwa Region and Lake Rukwa to the west. This district was purposefully selected because of the persistent evidence of truancy and dropout

there. The data show that, between 1990 and 1995, 40% of the pupils dropped out of school whereby, in 1995, about 606 girls and 497 boys dropped out (URT 1997). Further evidence from Chunya shows that primary school dropout among girls rose from 44.1% in 1990 to 54.9%, while that of boys fell from 55.9% in 1990 to 45.1% in 1995. Other data show that, in 2007, Chunya District led the other eight districts of the region in terms of dropout numbers, whereby more than 60% of primary school pupils dropped out (URT 2008). The main reasons for this high dropout rate, as identified by the URT (1997), were early marriage, truancy, pregnancy, petty trading, and the nomadic lifestyle, especially for livestock keepers. The high incidences of dropout in Chunya suggest that this district is a good case for studying the effectiveness of school rules and sanctions in curbing pupils' dropout.

This study employed a qualitative research methodology using a multiple embedded case study design (Yin 2008). Within the district, data were collected from three schools located in a rural, remote part of the district. The aim was to obtain a sample of parents, guardians and pupils who were economically disadvantaged. The schools were purposefully selected on the basis of evidence of truancy and dropout. Within the schools, a sample of 25 parents and guardians, 24 standard seven pupils and 10 education officers i.e., one District Education Officer (DEO), 3 Ward Education Officers (WEOs), 3 head teachers and 3 teachers, constitute the embedded unit of analysis. Data were collected by using interviews, observation, documents and the children's activity i.e., a rule flow chart. In this activity, the children were asked to follow the arrows to answer different questions about, respectively, the rules in their schools that monitor their schooling. The questions on the rule flow chart require the pupils to: (1) state if their schools had any rules that monitor the pupils' schooling; (2) explain what happens if pupils fail to attend school; (3) identify the different kinds of punishment meted out; (4) mention if the strategies used help to improve the pupils' schooling; and (5) suggest other strategies which could help to improve the pupils' schooling.

The data analysis was performed using triangulation strategies: variable and case-oriented strategies. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis strategies were employed. The data analysis and collection were performed simultaneously. In the field, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into Kiswahili, then translated into English. Then, the transcribed information in each case (the parents, children, teachers, head teachers, DEOs, and WEOs) were analysed following Miles and Huberman's (1994) model of qualitative data analysis, which involves data reduction, data display and, finally, conclusion drawing and verification. The documents were analysed using qualitative content analysis (May 1997; Robson 2003). The data gathered from

the children's activities were analysed using the quantitative method. SPSS was used to analyse the descriptive responses, which assisted in generating the numbers of children who gave each response.

Findings and Discussion

In order to obtain information about the school rules and regulations regarding attendance, the parents were asked to respond to the following questions: What are the school rules regarding pupils' attendance? Are these rules viable in improving the pupils' schooling? The findings indicate that all of the interviewed parents were familiar with the rules regarding school attendance. They all noted that they understand that all children aged seven were required to be enrolled and attend school regularly for the whole seven year period. However, concerning the viability of these rules, the majority of the parents observed that these rules were less helpful, while a very few parents stated that they are very helpful and that, without them, the majority of the parents would not sent their children to school. The following comments were recorded:

> The rule states that enrolment and attendance are compulsory. It requires all children who are seven years old to be enrolled in school and attend school for seven years. This rule is helpful to some extent. I believe that, without this, the majority of the parents could never send their children to school (interview, parent).

> The school rule regarding attendance says that this is obligatory. Children should be enrolled and attend school for seven years. This rule helps, but not much. Despite the availability of the rule, there are a lot of children who are never enrolled or attend school while others are enrolled but attend school very rarely. Truancy is common, especially among boys, as they opt to undertake mining activities (interview, parent).

> The enrolment rule helps a lot. Because of it, the majority of the children are enrolled in school. However, the problem is how to retain them, and a lot of children drop out of school despite the fact that the rule states that attendance is compulsory (interview, parent).

The responses suggest three key findings: firstly, in the studied schools, the parents were familiar with the rules regarding pupils' enrolment, regular school attendance and completion. Secondly, on the one hand, the rules were helpful and some of the parents would have never sent their children to school nor encouraged their continued attendance without them. Lastly, on the other hand,

the rules were less useful since, despite them, the majority of pupils attended school irregularly and others simply dropped out.

To obtain further information regarding the school rules and punishments, the head teachers were asked to respond to three questions: (1) What school rules do you have which are aimed at fostering school attendance? (2) Which punishments are administered if pupils fail to conform to these rules? (3) Are the rules and punishments viable in improving the pupils' schooling? The responses suggest that the studied schools had three rules which were aimed at fostering pupils' attendance. The first rule states that pupils are responsible for attending school regularly and participating in all classroom activities. The second rule requires that the pupils remain in school for all allocated school hours. The third rule states that permission for children to miss school should be requested by the pupils' parents or guardians.

Concerning the punishment applied to the parents who failed to enrol their children in school or those whose children attend school irregularly, the findings show that these were first asked to go to the school were the teachers talked to them, trying to find out the reasons for their children's truancy. Further, it was mentioned that, if it were discovered that, despite this measure, the children kept on missing school, the parents were asked to pay a fine in the form of cash or materials. In some schools, the parents were required to pay 100 Tanzanian shillings ($ 0.06) for each day on which their child missed school, while in other schools the parents were required to pay one bag of cement each time a child misses school for a month. It was also revealed that, if the problem persists, the matter was referred to the school committees and, if the school committee was unable to resolve the problem, then the parents were referred to the village executive officers. Hence, all serious truancy cases were referred to the village executive officers, who impose their own punishments, including sending the parents to the police and finally to court. The following comments were recorded:

> Parents who failed to conform to the attendance by-laws are asked to come to school and are also required to pay a fine. Sometimes, they pay a bag of cement or money depending on how many days of school their child has missed. If the problem persists, we send the matter to the village executive. If these also fail to solve the problem, the children and their parents are sent to the police and finally to court. Because of poverty, the parents are, in most cases, unable to pay the fines (interview, head teacher).
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> According to our school by-laws, the parents pay a bag of cement when a child fails to attend school for a month or money depending on how many

> days of school the child has missed. The parents are required to pay 100 Tanzanian shillings for each day that a child misses school. If the problem persists, the parents are referred to the village executive (interview, head teacher).

Indeed, the findings suggest that a number of punishments may be applied to truants and their parents. The head teachers noted that, through these measures, some of the truant children return to school while others never do. It was also revealed that, when the children refuse to go to school even after the above stated measures have been taken, the teachers give up and the children abandon school for good. The findings also suggest that, given the existing poverty among the parents/guardians, in most cases, the fines were not paid. Hence, this suggests the need to devise alternative, easily enforced punishments.

Regarding the viability of the rules, some of the head teachers admitted that, to some extent, they helped a lot while others deny this. Those who noted that the rules and sanctions were effective admitted that, in the studied school, the parents would never have sent their children to school unless they had been influenced by the rules and sanctions. One head teacher noted:

> These rules help a lot, taking our environment into consideration. In these areas, there is no way that children will be sent to school without forcing the parents. It is an area where people are more concerned with the immediate earnings gained from mining activities rather than with education. In this regard, we send the parents to the village executive officer whenever the children have poor school attendance records. Once a parent is sent to the village executive officer, other parents become scared, hence, encourage their children's attendance. Briefly, the majority of the community members are less interested in education- related matters. They send their children to school out of fear of the government measures, not because they are convinced about the necessity of schooling (interview, head teacher).

These responses suggest that, in the studied schools, the rules and sanctions were very useful and that some of the parents encouraged their children to attend school regularly out of a fear of the rules and their associated punishments, not because of the necessity of primary education for children. Those who noted that the punishments were ineffective gave the following reasons: firstly, some of the parents used strategies to avoid punishment. Among others, these include a tendency for the families to take their children to other distant villages where no one knows them (a similar thing was noted in the children's stories). Secondly, the procedure at the district level for dealing with

this matter took a long time. The head teachers mentioned that they report children's truancy or non-enrolment but that it takes a very long time before the matter is resolved and the necessary steps are taken. A head teacher noted:

> The rules help very little, mainly because of the long procedures involved in resolving the matter. We send information regarding pupils' truancy but it may take a year to deal with the matter. Hence, it is difficult to bring the children back to school after they have been out of it for a year. Similarly, the majority of the children who are truants relocated to distant areas (interview, head teacher).

Thirdly, the rules and punishments were not very helpful because some of them, especially those relating to dropout due to pregnancy, concentrate with the man responsible and the girls' family, rather than the impregnated girl. Hence, the girls feel less responsible, as a result of which; other schoolgirls consider it normal to get pregnant. A head teacher made the following response:

> The rules and by-laws regarding girls' pregnancy are less helpful because they pin the responsibility on the man and the girl's parents. The rules exclude the impregnated girl. Certainly, this has an impact on other pupils. As a result, other schoolgirls find it normal to be pregnant. This is because, once they have a baby, they continue to live a normal life; and nobody takes action against them (interview, head teacher).

Another head teacher noted:

> The law that requires the victim to be jailed is difficult to implement. I propose that there is a need to enact another law that will require the families of both sides (the girl and the boy), as well as the boy and the girl involved, to be summoned to court. Under the current law, families are not cooperative in giving evidence. We send the matter to court but, sometimes, the families never attend the court or, even if they do, they end up giving false information (interview, head teacher).

Fourthly, other findings show that the extent to which the laws were helpful depended on their implementers. The village government was responsible for filing charges against a family that fails to send its children to school or interferes in any way in their children's schooling. The findings suggest that the law was difficult to implement because, in the village, all of the community members belong to the same clan. The village government leaders were unable to drag suspects to the court, since this would poison social relationships. Lastly, the other thing mentioned was the tendency for the girl's family to agree to a marriage and receive a dowry. In that case, they protect the victim and sometimes avoided the court sessions to act as witnesses. The DEO mentioned this:

> It is a pity that, despite many recorded pregnancy cases, I have never heard of anyone who has been sent to jail for impregnating a girl. The evidence suggests that there are a number of cases that have been sent to court but the victims were acquitted after being found to be innocent. We have noted that the families of the male and the girl, in most cases, opt to resolve the problems amicably by arranging a marriage between them (Interview DEO).

Further data collected from the DEO suggest that all matters regarding children's school enrolment and attendance were supervised by the village executive officers. It was revealed that the officers were expected to charge all parents who never send their children to school. Regarding attendance, it was revealed that the district's strategy was to send to court all parents whose children's school attendance records was poor. The DEO explained that most parents were charged in court over their children's irregular school attendance. When asked to explain if the punishment applied was effective in enforcing the pupils' school attendance, the DEO noted that these strategies help a lot. However, he also noted that the main problem was that most of these measures were temporary. He pointed out that, had the measure to send parents to court been sustained, the district would have succeeded in ensuring the pupils' regular school attendance.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the pupils in a rule flow chart were asked to mention if their schools had any rules that monitor the pupils' schooling. All of the studied pupils noted that, in their school, there were rules to monitor school attendance. Concerning the punishments administered to pupils who failed to conform to the rules, the findings from the children's stories and rule flow chart suggest that children who skip school were whipped or given punishments like cutting grass, digging pit latrine holes, watering garden, uprooting tree stumps and being chased from classrooms. The following extracts from the children's stories:

> In this school, pupils who fail to attend school are whipped and punished. The types of punishment include, for example, cutting grass, cleaning the school compound and digging pit latrines holes. I think that these measures help a lot to avoid children missing school unnecessarily. However, for me, they are less helpful. I missed school because of family problems. Punishments will never make me attend school regularly (children's stories).

> In my school, pupils who attend irregularly are punished. They are caned. This strategy helps, as caning a pupil today will remind him/her to attend school tomorrow (children's stories).
>
> At my school, pupils who attend school irregularly are punished. However, when they decide to leave school for good, no one follows them (children's stories).
>
> At our school, pupils who attend school irregularly are punished. Sometimes, their parents are asked to come to school. In my view, corporal punishment encourages pupils to come to school because they fear the punishment (children's stories).
>
> Pupils who attend school irregularly are punished. Sometime, they are asked to stand outside the classroom as a punishment. Imagine, those pupils missed lessons on those days when they did not attend school, and, even worse, on attending school, they once again miss lessons because of their punishment (children's stories).

The pupils were further asked to mention if the strategies used to encourage pupils' schooling were helpful. The findings show that six disagreed and 14 agreed, while five noted that these strategies are neither helpful nor unhelpful. The question further requires the pupils to suggest other strategies which could help to improve pupils' schooling. The responses by most of the studied children indicated that they all proposed the need to educate parents about the importance of education so that they will voluntarily encourage their children's schooling. When education officers were asked to explain the strategies that should be used to encourage school attendance, most of them noted that there is a need to counsel the truants and educate their families. Among the three studied schools, one school noted that they used this strategy and admitted that it helped greatly to improve the pupils' school attendance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence from this study shows that the sampled schools had by-laws, rules and sanctions aimed at monitoring the pupils' schooling. Regarding the punishments, the findings suggest that the common sanctions imposed on the pupils and their parents if the pupils failed to conform to the attendance rules were to punish and whip the pupils, while the parents were fined and taken to court. Regarding fines in the form of cash, the findings show that, due to poverty most parents were unable to pay them. The study has also produced two

sets of findings regarding the usefulness of these rules and sanctions. The first set suggests that, to some extent, the rules and sanctions were helpful and assisted greatly in ensuring that the children were enrolled in school, attended regularly and completed their primary education. The second set of findings suggests that these rules and sanctions were less helpful, as a number of children were never enrolled, others attended school irregularly and others still dropped out of school regardless of the existence of rules and sanctions. Similarly, the families used various strategies to hide their children. One argument that explains the failure of sanctions in encouraging pupils' regular school attendance is the fact that most of the sanctions used were cruel, aimed at pushing families to adhere to something which was less valued. In the studied schools, the evidence suggests that the majority of the poorer families valued gold mining activities more than education. Hence, this suggests the need to opt for more civilised methods that involve conversing with the families and pupils regarding the necessity of schooling compared to their other means of income.

On the basis of these findings, the following measures are recommended: firstly, attendance rules and punishments should be developed jointly by parents and teachers. This will enable the schools to produce practical, sustainable solutions to the existing problem. Secondly, instead of using punishments, the parents and pupils should be educated on the necessity of schooling compared to other means of economic production. Thirdly, there is a need to reduce the long processes involved in dealing with truancy and dropout cases at the district level. Thirdly, the parents should be encouraged to instil in their children a sense of education commitment and positive value towards education. Lastly, the present study uses case study design and employs a small sample that was purposefully selected. Hence, a quantitative study is required using the same dimensions aimed at establishing generalization across the wider population

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