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Are economically disadvantaged children in Tanzania committed to primary schooling?

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Abstract

This study attempts to answer two research questions: (1) Are economically disadvantaged children in Tanzania committed to their primary schooling? (2) What are the factors that enhance or limit the commitment to primary schooling among this group? The informants for this study were pupils, dropouts, parents and guardians, and education officers. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, using a multiple case study design that covered three schools in the Chunya district. The findings show that most of the children from economically disadvantaged households in the studied areas were less committed to school and that pupils' commitment to school was associated with seven key factors: (1) family poverty; (2) parents and community members' level of education; (3) parents' attitudes, values and interests regarding their children's education; (4) family structural constraints; (5) parent monitoring of children; (6) home rules; and (7) parent/child socialization and conversations on educational matters. The paper concludes with a discussion of the practical implications of this study.

Keywords: primary schooling, children's commitment to schooling, economically disadvantaged children, Tanzania, Chunya

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Introduction

The Tanzania Development Vision 2025 stipulates that education is instrumental to creating the mindset necessary for national development. The vision envisaged the provision of a high quality livelihood devoid of abject poverty through various strategies, including the provision of Universal Primary Education (UPE) (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2005a). Indeed, the government of Tanzania, since independence, has considered education the primary springboard in a war against its three national archenemies: poverty, ignorance, and disease. Hence, achieving Universal Primary Education is one of the central aims in most of its national educational policies. For example, the government implemented the UPE policy in 1977, which requires every child aged 7-13 to be enrolled in school. The 1977 UPE policy succeeded in enforcing children's schooling across different socioeconomic and geographical groups. More children were enrolled in school, and the total primary school population rose from 1,228,886 in 1974 to 3,553,144 in 1983, an increase of 189% (Sumra, 2000, p. 63).

Furthermore, to achieve Universal Primary Education, the public education sector, particularly at the primary education level, has depended almost entirely on government funding from the period of independence to the early 1980s. This, among other expenses, has placed a heavy burden on the national exchequer and resulted in the adoption of cost recovery as well as privatization policies. As part of these policies, the government reduced the education budget and involved community members in the construction of schools, purchase of textbooks, and payment of school fees. Other measures were decentralization, whereby the responsibility for primary education was assigned to district and urban councils, despite local variations in wealth, willingness, and community attitudes towards education. These measures resulted in poor quality primary education, low enrollment rates, inequality of access to and distribution of scarce education services (Kuleana, 1999). These problems weakened the government's capacity to deliver basic educational services, thereby contributing to poor provision of UPE.

Following the problems experienced during the cost sharing period and the need to meet the United Nation's (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of achieving Universal Primary Education by 2025, the government, in collaboration with the donor community and international financial institutions, introduced the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) in 2002. The major objectives of the PEDP were to (1) provide and maintain quality primary education and to make basic education accessible to all school-age children, (2) make basic education equitable by eliminating disparities and inequities, and (3) provide the basic and necessary resources to enable every child to enter and complete the primary school cycle (URT, 2001). Through this plan, the government abolished all fees and other enrollment-related contributions from parents and increased the budget allocated to primary education to 29.4% of the

total budget, or 2.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared to 1.8% of the GDP in 2000-01 (URT, 2001).

Most of these financial resources were absorbed into primary education mainly as capitation and development/investment grants. Indeed, the PEDP contributed significantly to increasing children's engagement with school. It was noted that the Gross Enrollment Ratio reached 105.3% and 106.3% in 2003 and 2004 respectively, while the Net Enrollment Ratio reached 88.5% and 90.5% in the same years (URT, 2005b, p. 12). The PEDP opened doors for more children, especially those from disadvantaged households, to attend school. Similarly, the government initiated the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) in 2005. One of the aims of this strategy is to achieve Universal Primary Education as a means of empowering children and thereby promoting national development and individual well-being. Under this strategy, the government continued to implement various initiatives aimed at improving primary schooling and increasing access to education.

In line with the aforementioned efforts, the government also formulated rules, laws, and acts to monitor pupils' regular school attendance. The roots of the enrollment rules, acts, and laws can be traced back to the government's 1978 Education Act No. 25 Section 35, which stipulates compulsory enrollment and attendance and asserts that primary education is a child's basic human right; consequently, all school-age children should attend and complete the seven year cycle of education. The government also released various education circulars which, inter alia, stated that it is a criminal act to interfere with a pupil's primary education cycle in any way. Despite the availability of these laws, circulars, and sanctions at the national, regional, district, and school levels, and despite the previously mentioned efforts under the Primary Education Development Program, national dropout rates continue to increase annually. This increase indicates that the laws, rules, by-laws, and sanctions intended to ensure compulsory attendance and the government's efforts to improve the condition of primary schooling have proved of little help. A tracer study of pupils who were enrolled in all primary schools in Tanzania in 2003 and graduated in 2009, revealed that, of the 1,481,354 pupils enrolled in Grade I in 2003, only 1,059,640 completed the seven year education cycle, an indication that 421,714 (28.5%) dropped out along the way. The same applied to a 2004 tracer cohort whereby, out of 1,368,315 pupils who were enrolled that year, only 948,532 progressed to enter standard VII in 2010, an indication that 419,783 (30.6%) had dropped out (URT, 2010, p. 19). Other evidence suggests that, in 2010, a total of 76,246 pupils dropped out of school for the following reasons: 57,085 (74.9%) truancy, 1,056 (1.4%) pregnancy, 2,657 (3.5%) death, 4,585 (6%) inability to meet basic school needs, 1,579 (2.1%) illness, 816 (1.1%) caretaking responsibilities for sick relatives, and 8,468 (11.1%) other reasons (URT, 2011, p. 31).

The literature points out other factors that contribute to children's tendency to drop out of primary school in developing countries: (1) grade repetition, which, in Tanzania, is caused by pupils' tendency to fail the national examination in standard IV (2) child labor; (3) disengagement from school, which is caused by the failure of

teachers to connect learning to real life; (4) behavioral and discipline problems; (5) poor school environment; (6) the community in which the child's school is located; (6) the child's family background factors; and (7) teachers' absenteeism (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Hunt, 2008). Stated on most of the Basic Education Statistics reports in Tanzania, these reasons for dropping out suggest that children from poor households constitute the majority of those who drop out of school. The literature cites poverty as harmful to children's educational development. It affects children's ability to participate fully in school and contributes to non-enrollment, low retention rates, irregular attendance, lack of commitment to school, poor academic performance and higher dropout rates (Considine & Zappalla, 2002; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Garcial-Reid, 2007; Kuleana, 1999; Willms, 2003). Arguably, children from poorer households do not perform well in school, are less likely to be enrolled, and, even if enrolled, the majority do not fully engage in learning and are more likely to drop out. This study sets out to explore whether children from economically disadvantaged families are committed to school and the factors that enhance or limit their commitment to primary schooling.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study is to explore whether children from financially disadvantaged families in Tanzania are committed to their schooling. The study attempts to answer two research questions: (1) Are economically disadvantaged children in Tanzania committed to their primary schooling? (2) What factors enhance or limit the commitment to primary schooling among this group? In the context of this study, pupils' commitment can be defined as the extent to which pupils value school and believe that primary education is important to them and will benefit them economically. A variety of factors may contribute to educational disadvantage; yet, this study focuses on educational disadvantage as a result of families' economic disadvantage or poverty.

Literature review

Ensuring the right to education for all children is one of the most critically important and controversial roles assumed by governments in developing countries' activities. The majority of developing countries spend significant resources on education, particularly on basic education. This spending has led to a tremendous expansion of primary schooling. Essentially, this governmental role has been strengthened by various world declarations and agreements reached at international conferences on education. Among the declarations are the following: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in

1948, the 1961 Addis Ababa Conference, the 1990 Jomtien (Thailand) Conference, the 1999 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals. All of these declarations stipulate that primary education is compulsory and every child's fundamental birthright. Indeed, these declarations contributed to the increasing concern about the role of governments in providing and financing education, particularly basic level education.

Tanzania is a signatory to all the aforementioned declarations and has joined the many nations that have ratified the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child. Hence, Tanzania, like many developing counties, is striving to ensure that all children are guaranteed the right to education. While the government is focusing on increasing access, there is a general assumption that providing free primary education and improving the condition of primary schools will automatically result in increased access to education. In this paper, I maintain that the government can provide free education, yet, these efforts may prove fruitless without children's commitment to and positive evaluation of education. Notably, children's commitment to schooling stands at the heart of efforts to increase access to education.

Children's commitment to school can be explained by their beliefs regarding the expected benefits of schooling, which in turn shape the value they attach to school (Willms, 2003). Conversely, children's beliefs and values are shaped through their orientation towards schooling by their families (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007). Arguably, children who are oriented towards school tend to value education and attend school regularly, believing that they will receive positive returns. Various scholars have compared commitment to school among children from different socio-economic strata. It has been noted that children from financially disadvantaged families are likely to be less committed to school for two reasons: Firstly, poor children grow up in areas where they are less exposed to positive role models, and their parents are more likely to be illiterate, with low-paying jobs. Even worse, their neighbours' and other members of the community are more likely to be less educated (Considine & Zappalla, 2002; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007). Hence, the absence of positive role models means that poor children are less exposed to educational matters. Secondly, children have a low perception of the future returns of education. The literature asserts that children from poor households do not believe their efforts and commitment to school will be rewarded in the future. This belief has foundations in their poor cultural capital. The perception of a low return from education contributes to poor children's tendency to devalue schooling (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007).

The literature on developing countries explains that, poor families and their children place less value on primary education, and that most poor children rarely progress beyond primary education (Eward & Narman, 2004; Okuni, 2004). This tendency interferes with children's commitment to school. Primary education is thus devalued and becomes a low priority for most families and also the children themselves, with families investing their efforts in activities believed to be more fruitful than education. The mainstream argument is that children from poor households are

less committed to school due to their family's poor financial, human, and cultural capital. Does the research evidence support this pessimistic argument?

Theoretical framework

This study draws upon human capital theory as proposed by agricultural economist Theodore W. Schults in 1960. The study adopts some of the basic dimensions of human capital theory: (a) Expenditure on education should not be treated as pure consumption but as an investment; (b) Increased investment in human capital not only increases productivity but also increases an individual's income; and (c) Education spending is an individual and societal investment because it is associated with a positive rate of return to both the individual and society (Harobin, Smyth, & Wiseman, 1970). In line with various studies on human capital, I maintain that social rates of return are greater at the primary level than at the other levels of education, justifying the need for government intervention. Despite the government's limited capacity to provide free primary education to all, economically disadvantaged households can choose to invest in education after considering the private returns of investment (e.g., the empowerment of children and their potential liberation from poverty). Yet this engagement is possible only if economically disadvantaged households understand and believe that the future benefits of education outweigh the present costs of investment. Using human capital theory, I explored whether children from economically disadvantaged households valued primary education and were committed to schooling. I continued the analysis by determining the factors that enhance or limit commitment to schooling among this group.

Research methodology

The study was conducted in Chunya District, within which three schools were selected. The district was purposefully selected based on my predefined criteria (i.e., a district with evidence of irregular school attendance and high dropout rates). The evidence of children's disengagement from school was captured through government leaders' speeches in addition to regional and district educational reports. The criteria used to select schools were a large number of individuals living in poverty and evidence of children's disengagement from school, including irregular school attendance and high dropout rates.

In the selected schools, two criteria were used to select pupils: pupils' class level and their level of engagement with school. The pupils involved in this study were in their last year of primary school. Regarding engagement with school, pupils were categorized into two groups: disengaged and engaged. The former had irregular school attendance or had dropped out, while the latter were enrolled in school and attended

school regularly. These children were selected on the basis of their school records and teachers' observations regarding their commitment to school. Two student documents were used as data: attendance registers, which provided information regarding the number of days pupils attended school in the past three months, and monthly school reports, which provided information related to pupils who had dropped out.

The study employed a qualitative research methodology using a multiple embedded case study design (Yin, 2008). It involved a sample of 25 families (parents and guardians); 10 educational officers (1 District Education Officer [DEO], 3 Ward Education Officers [WEOs]); 3 head teachers and 3 teachers; 24 Standard VII pupils (12 engaged and highly committed to school and the remaining 12 less committed to school and attending irregularly); and 9 pupils who had dropped out. Data were collected using interviews, observations, school documents, and figures produced by the children themselves (i.e., spider diagrams).

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed following Miles and Huberman's (1994) model of qualitative data analysis. The model involves data reduction, data display (by organizing the summarized information into data display sheets), and finally the conclusions and verification. I verified interview data using data collected from observations, documents, and spider diagrams. Data collected from observations and documents were analyzed using qualitative content analysis while data gathered from the children's activity were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS.

Characteristics of the research sites

The study was conducted in Chunya District of the Mbeys region. This region has eight districts, and, according to the 2002 census, a population of 1,079,221. Economically, the region ranks seventh out of 25 regions, with 21% of households in Mbeys living below the poverty line (URT, 2005b). Further data indicate that, in 2007, the Chunya district led the other eight in the region in terms of dropout rates, with more than 60% of primary school pupils dropping out (URT, 2008). The evidence indicates that, among the 8,336 pupils (4,515 boys and 3,821 girls) enrolled in school in 2001, only 3,257 (1,672 boys and 1,585 girls) sat the 2007 Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), which is only 39% of the total pupils who had enrolled in Standard I (URT, 2008, p. 65). This means that 5,079 pupils, or 61% (2,843 boys and 2,236 girls), had dropped out of school. Hence, Chunya provided a good case for investigating the school commitment of children from financially disadvantaged families. In Chunya, the study was conducted in three schools, which are briefly described below.

The first school is called Kiwanja Primary school and is located in a semi-urban area, established in 1958, it has 754 pupils and 10 teachers and serves a poor community and has cases of student dropouts and irregular attendance. The second school is called Mwaoga primary school, is located rural area, established in 1988, it has 411 pupils and 6 teachers. The third school is called Patamela primary school, was

established in 1989. It is located in rural area. The school has 261 pupils and 8 teachers. Like the other two schools, it has cases of non-enrollment, irregular attendance, and student dropouts.

Results and discussion

The first research question was aimed at determining whether economically disadvantaged children were committed to school. The necessary data were sought through conducting interviews with families, students, teachers, WEOs, and DEOs. The families of the children who attended irregularly or dropped out identified their children's lack of commitment to school as the main reason for their tendency to disengage from school. When asked how their income affects their children's school attendance, families made the following comments: "My income never affects my children's schooling. What affects my children's schooling is their own personal ambition. My son doesn't attend school because he doesn't want to! He deliberately doesn't want to go to school" (Guardian, personal communication, July 8, 2008). Similarly, another parent noted: I don't think that my income has any effect on my children's attendance. All of my other children attended school and completed Standard VII on the same income. Despite my poverty, this boy eats well; he has a school uniform and all the other school equipment, but he is not ready to attend school (Parent, personal communication, July 8, 2008).

As noted above, parents and guardians reported that their children had poor school attendance because of their lack of commitment to school, as was further verified by head teachers and WEOs. When asked whether they believed pupils from poor households were committed to school, most head teachers and WEOs explained that, in their schools, some of the children from poor households were less committed to school. One head teacher reported that through the support of non-governmental organizations, children from poor households in her school had all of their basic school supplies; however, there was no improvement in their school attendance (Head teacher, personal communication, July 10, 2008). Furthermore, another head teacher reported that his school implemented a school feeding program to attract pupils and to increase school attendance. Despite this initiative, some students still played truant (Head teacher, personal communication, July 11, 2008). These findings suggest that the provision of food and other material support do not result in improving attendance or children's engagement with school. One explanation of this result is the children's lack of commitment to school.

The DEO further provided a case whereby students were caught leaving school; when asked to return to school, the children explained that they no longer wanted to attend (DEO, personal communication, July 4, 2008). Indeed, educational officers insisted on the prevalence of cases where children refused to attend school;

additionally, there were cases whereby parents, despite their poverty, were willing to finance their children's education, but their children were not ready to attend school (WEO, personal communication, July 14, 2008). It was further revealed that some children from poor families in the studied area attended school for the sole purpose of pleasing government authorities, causing them low achievement in Standard VII and leaving them less likely to progress to secondary education (Head teacher, personal communication, July 10, 2008). One head teacher noted: "The majority of children come to school to pass the time, not to learn. They are not committed to school. They do not consider that they attend school in order to learn. They don't like to learn. They are not motivated towards schooling; they don't love school!" (Head teacher, personal communication, July 11, 2008).

Some of the stories collected from children who dropped out of school validate families and educational officers' responses by suggesting that some children dropped out because they never wanted to go to school. One child noted: "Before dropping out of the school, my father urged me to attend school and gave me all the basic school equipment. He asked me to work hard at school. He beat me on days when I missed school. He was annoyed when I decided to drop out. He sent me back to school several times, but I was not ready to continue with school" (Child, personal communication, July 9, 2008).

Providing further evidence to support the idea that low-income children were less committed to school, the interviewed educational officers further explained various school, village, ward, and district by-laws and sanctions aimed at enforcing children's regular school attendance. These included punishing pupils, sending families to the village executive and ultimately to ward educational officers, asking families to pay fines varying from cash to bags of cement, and sending families to the police and to court. However, educational officers further noted that, despite the law and its associated punishments, ensuring compulsory attendance was extremely difficult, and some children remained persistent truants, while others dropped out.

Factors which enhance or inhibit children's commitment to school

The second question aimed at investigating the factors that enhance or inhibit children's commitment to school. Data were collected using interviews, documents, observations, and children's spider diagram work. I found seven factors that enhanced or inhibited pupils' commitment to school: (1) families' social economic status; (2) parents and community members' level of education; (3) parents' attitudes, values, and interests regarding their children's education; (4) families' structural constraints; (5) parental monitoring practices; (6) home rules; and (7) parent/child socialization and conversations on educational matters.

Family poverty

The findings reveal that poverty interfered with the families' ability to support and be involved in their children's education, a tendency which affected children's commitment to school. Families' lack of sustainable income was detrimental to their children's commitment to school in the following ways: Firstly, because they could not afford it, parents failed to enroll their children in school, while others did so but failed to support their children any further. The problem of poverty was further compounded by the families in the studied district tendency to have larger families. Another common tendency was to enroll children in school, acting solely out of a fear of government sanctions. In this case, the children were enrolled but never encouraged to attend school, which reduced their commitment to school. In the same vein, the findings revealed that school transfer policies in Tanzania were very expensive. The procedure requires completing a form at the school where the child was originally enrolled, then sending it to the DEO and finally to the regional educational officer. Transfer request forms are required to follow the same route in the new region to which a child has transferred. Hence, the process of transferring a pupil involves transport and accommodation costs, as the district and regional offices were located far away from the villages. The findings suggest that it was difficult for the families to follow these procedures because of their poor economic ability; additionally, policies were perceived as a nuisance. Hence, families opted to ignore them and take their children out of school without requesting an official transfer, and the children were never sent back to school. This tendency contributed to children's disengagement from school and affected their commitment to schooling.

Secondly, the findings show that poverty made the parents focus on immediate family needs. Consequently, children were frequently asked to miss school in order to engage in various activities (e.g., mining) that would support families' basic needs. This tendency to pursue immediate financial gain interfered with the children's valuing of education, contributing to their low commitment to school. Some children also developed the view that the mines were more necessary than school, leading them to drop out in order to participate fully in those activities. Notably, children learn to value the stuffs to which they are exposed; hence, parents serve as a source of their children's identity (Beblo & Lauer, 2004). The WEO noted: "There is a tendency among children to dislike school. This happens because we have discovered that mothers have a tendency to go to the mines along the rivers with their small children. The children assist their mother in sorting gold from the soil. When the children sell the gold, they earn very little money, but even that small amount encourages them to dislike school. Hence, the children are brought up in an environment which makes them value the quick money earned from the mines more than education" (WEO, personal communication, July 21, 2008).

Thirdly, families were heavily involved in various activities in order to obtain food for the household. The findings show that most parents left home early in the

morning and returned late in the evening, leaving them unable to check whether or not their children had attended school. This problem was further compounded by factors like single parent families, large families, and old age parents. A lack of parental participation in educational activities at home might signal to children that education is unimportant, affecting their attitudes, values, and commitment. Fourthly, the families' poverty limited their ability to make financial contributions to schools, find time to volunteer, and attend school meetings. This tendency affected the quality of school buildings. The findings reveal that many pupils studied in poorly-furnished, dilapidated classrooms, while others sat on the floor for class. The general poor school environment might have contributed to the children's low commitment to school.

Fifthly, poverty interfered with the families' ability to provide comfortable, safe and protective home environments. The children lived in very poor houses. Some slept on poor beds made of ropes with mats serving as mattresses. It was normal for a two-bedroom house to accommodate more than ten individuals. The findings indicate that very few parents had education related facilities at home (e.g., tables, chairs or books). Hence, home environments were neither safe nor secure. The home environment is a material resource that reflects parental commitment to investing in a child's education and general well-being (Dufur & Parcel, 2001). Arguably, the general cleanliness and safety of the home environment influence children's educational development, enhance positive schooling outcomes, and reduce children's behavioural problems. The home environment further serves as a child's daily experience, and the availability of education related materials facilitates children's intellectual stimulation. A poor home environment and a lack of education related materials mean that children enroll in school when they are poorly prepared to remain and succeed in such an environment. This lack of preparation interferes with their commitment.

Lastly, poverty made the families and children undervalue education. Interviews with parents and guardians revealed that, despite the introduction of ward secondary schools, parents thought secondary education was expensive and expressed concern over their inability to bear educational costs. When explaining their expectations regarding their children's education, all of the interviewed families had positive expectations; that is, they all hope their children will proceed to secondary education. The children, in their stories, all stated that they wish to do so as well. However, families were uncertain whether or not they would be able to send their children to secondary school. In the same vein, other findings indicate families' belief that primary education alone will never liberate their children from poverty. Hence, this understanding might have affected families' values and willingness to invest in their children's education, a tendency which interfered with their children's commitment to school. The children also indicated similar concerns in their stories. They noted that primary education by itself would never liberate them from poverty; completing primary education and proceeding to secondary education was necessary. However, they also realized that their parents were too poor to afford the cost of secondary education. This knowledge might have affected their commitment to school. This finding endorses the literature,

suggesting that free education provided by the government does not guarantee poor children's engagement with school. Parents have to see the benefits of education for themselves and their children in order to sacrifice their children's full participation in household chores and income-generating activities (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996).

Parents and community members' level of education

The findings show that most parents and community members in the studied schools had never been to school. The data suggest that 17 of the 25 families interviewed had never been to school, and only 8 of the studied families had members who were primary school graduates. Educational officers noted that the majority of community members had also never attended school. In addition to most members of the community never going to school, the following contributed to children's lack of commitment to school: the negative trend whereby the people who had a better life were those who had not attended school, the tendency whereby some individuals completed Standard VII yet remained poor in the villages, and the fact that the children were living in areas where they had little contact with people who had earned a good living due to their education. The WEO noted the following: "Most of the families here devalue education. The main reason is the presence of the gold mines around here. In this village, most of the people who are rich have never been to school. They engaged in mining activities and, in the end, earned a lot and became rich. This tendency decreases the families and children's motivation towards schooling"(WEO, personal communication, July 21, 2008).

The findings suggest that the families and children failed to contemplate the future returns of education. Consequently, some pupils opted to drop out in order to engage in activities believed to bring greater economic benefits. Additionally, some guardians were unwilling to spend their few resources on education and encouraged their children to undertake short-term earning activities, which contributed to pupils' low commitment to school. The findings support the observation that the imprecise economic returns from education investment may make poor families reluctant to spend money on educating their children (Hunt, 2008; Lloyd & Blanc, 1996). The findings also support the literature which asserts that poor children are more likely to devalue primary schooling because they have a low perception of the future returns of education (Considine & Zappalla, 2002; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Dufur & Parcel, 2001; Garcial-Reid, 2007).

Parental attitudes, values, and interests regarding children's education

Interviews conducted with families, teachers, and children classify families in the studied area into two types: those who had positive attitudes, values, and interests in their children's education and those who had negative ones. The findings show that families who valued education, and those who translated these values into supporting

their children's education, were more likely to have children who were committed to school. These families participated in various education related activities, including providing their children with basic school equipment and food, and socializing their children into a positive schooling culture by urging regular school attendance. Furthermore, other parents responded to their children's disinterest in school by visiting school, punishing their children and escorting them to school. Likewise, other parents monitored their children's school progress and took the necessary steps to help them. Due to their positive values, these families spent their few resources on supporting their children's education, and engaged in activities like providing casual labor, burning charcoal to sell, collecting firewood to sell, and preparing and selling local beer in order to supplement their low income. It is possible that these families' commitment to financing primary school education helped their children develop a sense of obligation, like school, and attend regularly in light of their families' investment. The findings concur with two observations made by Furstenberg (2005): (1) Families who value education are more likely to sacrifice their immediate and ultimate needs to support their children's education, and (2) children will value their parents' sacrifices. This means that parents' sacrifices are translated into their children's obligation to work hard and succeed in school.

Indeed, families' participation in education at home was found to be associated with their children's commitment to school. Parental involvement in home education activities conveys a positive message to children regarding the importance of education (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; McNeal, 1999), which helps shape their children's schooling commitment. Indeed, out of all the participants, families who engaged in various educational activities at home were more likely to have children who were committed to school. Parents who were uninterested in or harbored negative attitudes towards their children's education never participated in any educational activities either at home or at school. Parents' negative attitudes, values, and interest regarding education affected children's commitment to school in three ways: Firstly, some parents were unwilling to send their children to school, did not encourage them to remain in school, and did not provide basic school equipment. Whenever possible, families used various strategies to avoid enrolling their children in school or to take them out of school. Methods of concealment included taking children out of school without making an official transfer. For example, during the school enrollment census, some families explained to officials that they were not living with the children found in their homes. The parents insisted that these children should not be enrolled in school because they would soon be returning to their own families. Similarly, other families registered their children in school but moved to a distant village before the beginning of the school year, failing to enroll their children in a new school. Parents' negative attitudes contributed to pupils' non-enrollment, truancy, negative schooling commitment, and dropout rates.

Secondly, parents spent the few resources they had on luxuries (e.g., drinking alcohol, taking several wives) and other activities, meanwhile forgetting their

responsibilities to their children's education. Lastly, families rarely discussed their children's schooling, inspected exercise books, received and read reports, or encouraged and acted upon student progress, as indicated in children's school reports. These tendencies interfered with the children's commitment to school. Poor participation sends out the negative message that education is not important and so indirectly contributes to children's low commitment to school.

Families' structural constraints

The structural constraints of families, including single parent families, large families, and families living with grandparents or elderly parents, were found to be associated with children's lack of commitment to school. In these families, children were less well-monitored, and most were expected to contribute to the family income. The likelihood of having children who were committed to school was high among parents who were married. A possible explanation of this finding is that the presence of two adults in a household increases their likelihood of providing the resources to support their children's schooling. Conversely, this factor also reduces the level of dependence parents have on their children to fulfill the family's basic needs. Hence, the children are more likely to be encouraged to attend school, which translates into their commitment to school. Regarding family size, the findings suggest that the odds of a child being committed to school were higher among families with fewer children, which may be due to the poverty of families studied. Families with fewer children were more likely to support their children's education than those with more children.

Parental monitoring

Parental monitoring constituted another factor that was found to be associated with children's commitment to school. The findings show that most of the children in the studied areas were less well-monitored. For example some parents were unaware of what their children were doing after school, at what time they were due home, or on which days they were supposed to attend school. This lack of oversight contributed to children's low commitment to and disengagement from school. The teachers commented: "The pupils are strongly attracted to luxuries. They spend most of their out-of-school time watching videos! The families never care! This is because, to them, everything seems fine" (Teacher, personal communication, July 10, 2008). The other teacher noted: "The families do not monitor their children's out-of-school behavior. The children spend most of their out-of-school time on mining activities. From the money that they earn from the mines, the children spend some on watching television and videos. The children miss school in the morning and, in the evening, watch videos until midnight. Nobody cares!" (Teacher, personal communication, July 16, 2008). Parents who monitored their children's out of school activities were more likely to have children who were committed to school. This finding concurs with the

observation that effective parental monitoring and restriction of after school activities are crucial for children's engagement with school (Ericsson & Larsen, 2002). Children who are less well-monitored by their parents are more likely to disengage from school than their counterparts.

Home rules

The sixth factor associated with children's commitment to school is the existence of home rules and sanctions that foster children's schooling. The findings uncover various sanctions imposed by parents, including reprimands, beatings, and withholding food. One parent noted: "If a child will not attend school without good reason, I don't give him/her any food. Truly, the rule helps. If a child is denied food today, he/she will obviously attend school tomorrow. Providing them with food irrespective of their irregular attendance causes them to think that what they did was OK. They won't care and they will keep on missing school. But if you deny them food, they will go to school, as they have no other house where they can eat"(Parent, personal communication, July 6, 2008).

Most families with home rules fostering children's schooling had children who were committed to schooling, suggesting that these rules enable children to realize that education is a necessity and help shape their commitment to school. Similarly, a lack of home rules or a failure to reinforce them due to poverty reduced children's commitment to school. Another parent noted: "I have a rule. I ask them to attend school regularly, and I beat them if they don't. However, sometimes it is difficult. How can I force a child to attend school when she/he is hungry? Sometimes, it is I who asks them to miss school so that they will find any job to enable them to earn money" (Parent, personal communication, July 17, 2008).

Parent/child socialization and conversations on educational matters

Parent/child conversations involve parents talking to their children about school in general, what they have learned in class, and the importance of education to a child's future. Conversations strengthen parents' role in building their children's commitment to school. Notably, children's commitment stems from their belief in the benefits of schooling and is determined by the value they attach to school; these values are derived in turn from children's socialization into schooling culture by their parents (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007). The findings from this study suggest that children's socialization and conversations on educational matters were associated with their commitment to school.

The studied families were asked two questions: "Do you talk to your children about the benefits of education?" and "Is there anyone else who talks to your children about their education?" Among the 25 interviewed families, 14 explained that they never talk to their children about the necessity of schooling or about any other school

matters, with the remaining 11 stating that they did converse with their children. These eleven parents added that other people talked to their children about educational matters as well, although they were generally other family members (e.g., a spouse, sibling, uncle, grandparent, etc). This finding is consistent with that of Tanzania children's perception of education and their roles in society (URT, 2007), which noted declining rates of community collaboration in teaching children general good behavior, and that collaboration in this matter was mainly undertaken by relatives. The families who never conversed with their children noted that no other member of the family did so either. The 11 parents who conversed with their children and whose sons and daughters were engaged with school believed their children would never learn or adhere to a positive schooling culture by living in a vacuum. Rather, children learned from their families. One parent stated: "I talk to my daughter. I don't think that she would have agreed to go to school if I didn't talk to her. Children are supposed to be told the reasons for doing things. They won't like doing something if they are not regularly asked to do it. Children need to be encouraged to do things! Even in farming if the families do not urge the children to cultivate, they won't cultivate. Once the children are enrolled, if they aren't motivated and urged to attend school, then they may simply decide to drop out. Children attend school when you tell them to. If not, they won't attend" (Parent, personal communication, July 17, 2008).

Findings from an interview with parents who engaged with school suggest that it was through their efforts that their children learned to love school. Head teachers further noted that most of the interviewed families never conversed with their children regarding the necessity of education. Educational officers insisted that family conversations about educational matters were not part of some families' culture. The following quotes echo the responses of the interviewed head teachers: "Very few families talk to their children about the benefits of schooling or urge them to attend school. The families are not concerned about their children's education" (Head teacher, personal communication, July 18, 2008). "Such a culture is not popular only for a few families who understand the necessity of schooling" (Head teacher, personal communication, July 21, 2008).

Similar responses were reflected in children's stories; most of the children explained that their families never conversed with them about any educational matter and that, besides their parents, no one else undertook that responsibility. Children noted how their families never urged regular school attendance or encouraged them to work hard in school. Most of the children added that they never shared with their parents what they learn in school, as the following excerpts from the children's stories show: "My aunt never urges me to attend school regularly or work hard at school. She never talks to me about education" (Child, personal communication, July 22, 2008). "...My guardians never encourage me to go to school regularly, and they never tell me why it is important for me to go to school. Also, they never encourage me to work hard. Apart from my guardians, nobody else encourages me to go to school regularly. No one asks me what I learn in school. I never show my school reports to

my guardians; they never ask for them, nor do they check my exercise books..." (Child, personal communication, July 22, 2008).

Parents' failure to socialize their children into a positive schooling culture contributed to their children's poor knowledge about the future benefits of education and, as a result, reduced their children's commitment to school. A spider diagram was created with 24 pupils to explore their knowledge of the benefits of education. This activity was intended to enable the children to generate various ideas about their understanding of primary education. One part of the diagram required pupils to explain the benefits of primary education. The second part of the spider diagram required pupils to explain the kind of job they would like to have after completing their primary education. The responses from this activity indicated that 10 of the interviewed children appear to be unaware of the necessity of primary education; hence, they never understood the reasons for schooling. On the other hand, 10 children appeared to be unaware of what they wanted to do in the future and so attended school out of habit. These children attended school irregularly.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that most of the economically disadvantaged children in the studied areas were less strongly committed to school. Similarly, family poverty; parents and community members' level of education; parents' attitudes, values, and interests regarding their children's education; families' structural constraints; parental monitoring; home rules; parent/child socialization and conversations on education matters are associated with children's commitment to school. On the basis of these findings, the following measures are recommended. Firstly, children need to be educated on the benefits of education for society, themselves, and their families. The findings indicated that some children had little knowledge regarding the role of education while others were disinterested in school, even in cases where they were supported by their families. This problem can be resolved by adding units on education in subjects like general studies.

Secondly, there is a need to help families increase their income by improving their accessibility to small-mining scale credits which enable them to practice modern mining. These strategies may help to improve their income and their consequent ability to support their children's schooling. The evidence from the study indicates that most of the studied families were so poor that they found it difficult to feed themselves. In a situation of rampant poverty, how can families divert their efforts from meeting immediate needs (e.g., food) to making long-term investments in education? As indicated in the study, even when education is free, from the government's point of view, parents are still expected to bear some of the costs of their children's education. Thirdly, there is a need to consider empowering head teachers so that transfers can

be made at the school level. Fourthly, given the large number of children who are dropping out of school, the government needs to strengthen the provision of the Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET) program to provide more educational opportunities for dropouts or children who have never enrolled in school. Similarly, children need to be encouraged to enroll in the program willingly.

Fifthly, there is a need to educate and motivate families about the private and social returns of investment in education. The findings show that some families were unaware of the future returns of education, and they devalued education but valued mining and other activities resulting in immediate financial gain. Sixthly, there is a need to engage parents in socializing and instilling in their children a sense of commitment to school. Parents should be encouraged to acknowledge that they have a role to play in educational matters. Seventhly, it is necessary to educate, encourage, and motivate parents and community members to construct more spacious houses using the same local materials. Lastly, the present study uses a 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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