

Effects of School Dropout on Surrounding Communities: A Case of Secondary School Students in Mvomero District

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Abstract: *This study to investigate effects of school dropout on surrounding communities, the case of secondary school students in Mvomero District. A case study research design and mixed research approach was used. The study involved 128 respondents, selected using simple random techniques and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection utilized questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions, with quantitative data analyzed descriptively and qualitative data subjected to thematic analysis. The study reveals that dropout leads to increased criminal cases, unwanted pregnancies, child labor, early marriages, discrimination, and illiteracy in the community. These findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach involving community engagement, infrastructure development, and collaborative efforts to reduce student dropout effectively.*

Keyword: School Dropout, Surrounding Communities and Secondary School Students

1. Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, specifically Article 26, unequivocally asserts the right to education for all individuals, a principle upheld by countries worldwide. In developing nations like Tanzania, education is seen as a catalyst for societal and economic progress, nurturing individuals to contribute to their community's development (Galabawa and Narman, 2004). Tanzania has demonstrated its commitment to global education agendas like Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both highlighting education's significance. EFA emphasizes meeting basic learning needs for every child, and Tanzania's Education and Training Policy (ETP) underscores universal access to education (MOEVT, 2013). Nevertheless, student dropout remains a major hurdle in realizing these goals (UNESCO, 2015).

Dropout, defined as a student's failure to complete their enrolled educational program, varies widely based on regions, customs, and culture (Chugh, 2011). The rising number of children dropping out of school is a concern for policymakers and educators globally (UNICEF, 2011), obstructing governments' efforts to achieve diverse objectives. Numerous studies have classified the causes of school dropout into socio - economic and socio - cultural factors (Olofinyo, 2014; Origi, 2016). Mhehe (2002) emphasized the transformative power of education as advocated by Mwalimu J. K. Nyerere, asserting that self - determination is pivotal to human development.

Ensuring conducive learning environments in community secondary schools is the responsibility of both the government and society. The repercussions of dropout, such as increased community costs and unemployment among dropouts, strain the nation and its communities (Moshia, 2014). The current educational landscape in Tanzania reveals that only a small percentage of students successfully complete their secondary education, hindering progress (BEST 2007 - 2011). Barriers, including social, political, economic, and operational challenges within the education

system, limit most Tanzanian children's access to secondary education (Moshia, 2014).

Despite government efforts, dropout remains a persistent issue. Policies like the fee - free education policy, increased student enrollment, and poverty reduction strategies have led to a surge in school attendance, exacerbating the dropout problem (Moshia, 2014). Studies on dropout rates have predominantly focused on urban areas and causal factors, overlooking the impact of increased dropout rates on surrounding communities. This study aims to investigate how secondary school student dropout affects the communities, providing valuable insights for addressing this complex issue. The findings hold the potential to inform strategies aimed at mitigating secondary school dropout in Tanzania.

2. Study Methodology

This section presents the methodology that was used in this study. A case study research design and mixed research approach was used. The study involved 128 respondents, selected using simple random techniques and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection utilized questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions, with quantitative data analyzed descriptively and qualitative data subjected to thematic analysis.

3. Study Finding and Discussion

Dropping out of secondary schools has far - reaching consequences, negatively impacting communities through increased crime, higher rates of unwanted pregnancies, worsened poverty, child labor, early marriages, discrimination, and overall illiteracy. Addressing this issue is crucial for the well - being and future prospects of individuals and their communities.

Table 3.1: Effects of students' dropout in secondary schools to the surrounding communities (n=77)

Effects of dropout	Frequency of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Increase in criminal cases	28	37.0
Unwanted pregnancies	13	16.5
Increase in poverty level	4	5.6
Child labour	12	15.8
Early marriages	3	3.6
Discrimination in the community	4	4.8
Increase in illiteracy	13	16.7
Total	77	100

Source: Field Data (2023)

The findings in Table 3.1 indicate that high dropout rates among respondents have significant societal consequences, including a 37.0% increase in criminal cases, highlighting a potential link between lack of education and criminal behavior. Additionally, 16.5% reported unwanted pregnancies, emphasizing the need for better sex education and support systems. Dropout rates were also associated with a 15.8% incidence of child labor, revealing vulnerability to exploitative work conditions. The data showed a 16.7% increase in illiteracy, underscoring the importance of educational retention for community development. Less common but still concerning effects included a 5.6% rise in poverty levels, a 3.6% occurrence of early marriages, and a 4.8% experience of discrimination, indicating the diverse impact of dropout rates on society.

3.1 Increase in Criminal Cases (37.0%)

One of the most concerning effects of a high dropout rate is the substantial increase in criminal cases, as indicated by the 37.0% figure. When individuals do not complete their education, they often lack the skills and qualifications necessary to secure stable employment, leaving them financially disadvantaged. This economic vulnerability can push some individuals towards criminal activities as an alternative means of survival. Addressing this issue involves not only improving access to education but also implementing programs that offer skills training and job opportunities for at - risk youth to reduce their involvement in criminal activities.

These findings were supported by a respondent in an interview who pointed the following:

".... many of the criminals are former school drop outs who have resorted to crimes due to idleness and total lack of what to do. Many of the parents are so worried of further drop outs for fear of increased crime rates which is now affecting the area. . ."

The correlation between dropping out of secondary school and negative life outcomes is a well - documented concern, supported not only by Oxfam (2005) but also by extensive research in the field of education and social sciences. Oxfam (2005) assertion that dropouts tend to earn lower incomes, experience deteriorating health, and face an increased risk of incarceration resonates with broader empirical evidence. Beyond these socioeconomic disparities, the link between secondary school dropout rates and an elevated propensity for involvement in violent crimes highlights the far -

reaching consequences of educational disengagement. This alarming connection underscores the importance of addressing dropout rates through comprehensive educational interventions and support systems, not only to improve individual life prospects but also to promote community well - being and safety.

3.2 Unwanted Pregnancies (16.5%)

Dropout rates also correlate with a significant 16.5% incidence of unwanted pregnancies. Lack of comprehensive sex education and awareness can lead to risky behaviors among adolescents who leave school prematurely, resulting in unintended pregnancies. These pregnancies can have lifelong consequences for both the young parents and their children, impacting their overall well - being. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive sexual education programs that inform students about safe practices, reproductive health, and family planning, aiming to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and support the educational aspirations of young parents.

These findings were supported by a respondent in an interview who pointed the following:

"...unwanted pregnancies cause a lot of effects to the parents who are forced to take care of the new born babies since their daughters cannot afford looking after such children. Thus, causing disturbances in the normal life routines of parents, who are supposed to engage in economic activities and not taking care of grandchildren, adding more to poverty in the community..."

3.3 Increase in Poverty Level (5.6%)

The 5.6% increase in poverty levels associated with dropout rates underscores the economic ramifications of incomplete education. Without a high school diploma or higher qualifications, individuals often find themselves limited to low - wage and unstable jobs, making it difficult to escape the cycle of poverty. Poverty, in turn, can lead to various negative outcomes, including limited access to healthcare, housing instability, and reduced opportunities for personal and professional growth. To mitigate this effect, efforts should focus on providing alternative educational pathways, vocational training, and support systems that enable individuals to break free from the grip of poverty.

3.4 Child Labor (15.8%)

Dropout rates among children have far - reaching consequences, with a disturbing 15.8% incidence of child labor being a direct consequence of this issue. When children leave school prematurely, they become highly susceptible to exploitation, forced labor, and hazardous working conditions. These young individuals often find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation, deprived of the opportunity to pursue an education and a brighter future. Not only does child labor rob them of their childhood, but it also severely hampers their long - term development, limiting their potential to break free from the cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

3.5 Early Marriages (3.6%)

The 3.6% occurrence of early marriages is a poignant illustration of the far - reaching consequences of high dropout rates, especially when it comes to girls' education. When girls drop out of school prematurely, they are not only denied access to essential knowledge and skills but are also left vulnerable to societal pressures and injustices. The lack of education often results in a limited awareness of their fundamental rights and the opportunities available to them. This lack of awareness leaves them susceptible to early marriages, which are frequently driven by economic hardships or deeply ingrained cultural norms. In many cases, families may see early marriage as a way to alleviate financial burdens, while traditions may dictate that girls marry at a young age. Consequently, this perpetuates a harmful cycle of disempowerment for young brides, as they are thrust into adult responsibilities without the proper preparation, both mentally and emotionally.

3.6 Discrimination in the Community (4.8%)

Dropout rates in education not only hinder an individual's personal growth and economic prospects but also have broader societal implications. One significant consequence is the perpetuation of discrimination within communities. When individuals do not complete their education, they often find themselves marginalized and stigmatized. This discrimination can manifest in various forms, from limited access to job opportunities to social prejudices that label them as failures. Such discrimination not only hampers the individual's chances of success but also perpetuates a cycle of exclusion that affects the entire community. It reinforces harmful stereotypes and biases that hinder social cohesion and economic progress.

3.7 Increase in Illiteracy (16.7%)

Perhaps one of the most far - reaching effects is the 16.7% increase in illiteracy rates. Without adequate education, individuals lack essential literacy skills, which are fundamental to personal development and participation in modern society. Illiteracy hampers individuals' ability to access information, find employment, and engage in civic activities. Reducing illiteracy rates necessitates comprehensive literacy programs and initiatives that target individuals who have dropped out of school, aiming to provide them with the literacy skills necessary for a better quality of life.

These findings were supported by respondents in a focus group discussions who agreed that, having a young generation that is illiterate places a significant burden on our community, as it hampers their ability to seize opportunities due to a lack of essential qualifications and skills. This predicament not only affects the youth themselves but also deeply pains us, the older generation, as we witness strangers arriving and occupying job opportunities that should rightfully belong to our own children. The influx of outsiders capitalizing on these opportunities further exacerbates the problem, leading to rising levels of poverty within our community. It is imperative that we invest in education and skills development for our youth to break this

cycle, empower them to contribute positively to our community, and ultimately reduce the scourge of poverty.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that high dropout rates in secondary education have serious societal consequences, including an increase in criminal cases, unwanted pregnancies, child labor, illiteracy, poverty, early marriages, and discrimination. These consequences have a broad impact on both individuals and communities, emphasizing the need for comprehensive solutions.

Bases on the study's findings, the study suggests a multi - faceted approach to address dropout rates, including improving access to education, enhancing sex education programs, providing support for at - risk students, offering vocational training, combating child labor and early marriages, and raising awareness about discrimination. These recommendations aim to create more inclusive and prosperous societies by addressing the dropout crisis comprehensively.

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