Students' Intelligence and Causal Attributions for Academic Under-achievement among Secondary School Students in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigated how students make attributions when explaining their academic under-achievement in secondary schools in Tanzania. A survey was conducted using an attribution scale in the Likert format and was administered to 414 students. In externalisations and internalisations, there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores for externalisations at p<.001. Also, a significant difference was found in the externalisation between high and low achievers at p<.001. Furthermore, it was also found that male students externalise more than their female counterparts, the difference being significant at p≤.05. Whereas females internalised more than males, the difference was significant at p=.001. Self-perceived 'intelligent' students externalised more than those less intelligent self-perceived students, their difference being statistically significant at p≤.05. It was also found that parental occupations did not influence students' attributions. These attributions are true human characteristics that vary from one group to another. In the case of academic under-achievement in Tanzania, educational actors have to notice this variation in order to help students with motivational problems.

Introduction

The importance of education is clearly appreciated by various educational actors, including the government, parents, students, teachers and charity organisations. As education is one of the basic rights of children, several efforts are made to ensure the provision of education to children. However, the quality of this education in Tanzania has been challenged as a substantial amount of academic under-performance is evident in the country. Consequently, academic under-achievement has been greatly debate by educational actors. The explanations given to account for such under-achievement may either facilitate or hamper the motivation of students to succeed. In fact, when feedback is given to students, especially when blame is directed at students who have failed, the affected students may feel helpless when it comes to learning, when their self-esteem and self-efficacy is at their lowest ebb.

Nature of Secondary Schools in Tanzania

Secondary schools in Tanzania differ from one another, as they are categorised as community-based, government, private or charity-owned schools, which differ in class size and the resources available. Some schools are in underserved regions, which are not favoured by

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teachers. As a result, only a few teachers manage to report and work in those areas for long periods, so that the shortage of teachers becomes an intractable problem. The differences in these schools are overlooked in the national examinations, due to the assumption that the schools use the same syllabi. Nevertheless, the manifestations of differences are evident in the national examination results.

Pattern of Secondary Schools' Under-achievement in Tanzania

The issue of poor academic performance in Tanzania's secondary schools has been the subject of debate for a long time. There has been a general trend of massive failure in national examinations over a sustained period. Despite pupils qualifying for secondary education, those who progress constitute a minority of the population of school-age children (UNICEF, 2001). Presently, there are many secondary schools due to interventions such as the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP), aimed at ensuring that there were secondary schools in each ward. However, the challenge is that not all primary school leavers pass the Standard VII national examination that would enable them to join secondary school with confidence. Of those who join secondary schools, only a small fraction manage to pass in divisions I, II and II in their national Form Four examination; the majority only manage to get division IV or zero—poor performance at the very least. Table 1 shows the trend in overall performance in Tanzania's secondary schools from 1999 to 2008, with the percentage of students scoring divisions IV and zero being far higher than those for divisions I, II and III. On the whole, there is gross under-achievement as more 60 percent of students literally failed the examination.

Table 1: Form IV Examination Results in Percentage by Divisions, 1999 - 2008

Year	Divisions				Under-achievement:		Number of Candidates
	I	II	III	IV	Fail	Divisions IV and Fail	
1999	4.3	6.2	18.4	51.1	20.0	71.1	44,172
2000	4.1	5.7	16.0	52.6	21.6	74.2	47,389
2001	4.5	5.7	18.2	49.1	22.6	71.7	50,820
2002	6.4	8.2	21.6	50.1	13.7	63.8	49,512
2003	7.2	7.3	23.6	50.0	12.0	62.0	62,359
2004	4.8	8.4	24.6	53.7	8.5	62.2	63,487
2005	5.2	6.5	21.9	55.7	10.7	66.4	85,292
2006	4.5	6.9	24.3	53.4	10.9	64.3	85,865
2007	5.1	8.6	21.9	54.7	9.7	64.4	125,288
2008	3.5	6.4	16.8	56.9	16.3	73.2	163,855

Source: URT (2009, p.62).

Such poor performance was not unique to the national Form Four examinations but was also true of other levels of education, such as Standard IVs VII, and Forms II and VI. For instance, the percentage of students passing the national Form Two examination has decreased from 91.9 percent in 2007 to 68.4 percent in 2008, whereas the failure rate increased from 8.14 percent in 2007 to 24.4 percent in 2008 (URT, 2009). It should be noted that the pass mark is low, as the required average is 30 percent, according to Circular Number 2 of 2002 (URT, 2002).Table 2 shows the national Form Two examination results from 2004 to 2008, showing that 258,907 (22.3%) candidates failed.

Table 2: Form Two Secondary Examination Results: 2004-2008

Year	Pass		Fail		Number of candidates
	N	%	N	%	
2004	80,037	66.6	40,219	33.4	120,256
2005	121,738	73.1	44,826	26.9	166,564
2006	159,972	76.3	49,710	23.7	209,682
2007	257,023	91.9	22,742	8.1	279,765
2008	284,167	68.4	101,410	24.4	385,577
Total	902,937	77.7	258,907	22.3	1,161,844

Source: URT (2009)

Such serious under-performance of the majority of students has been difficult to explain. Teachers are often the first culprits. But teachers alone might not be the cause of failures in such proportions. Myers (2005) reported that even teachers themselves might be in a dilemma when it comes to explaining such widespread under-achievement. A teacher may wonder whether a child's under-achievement is due to the lack of motivation and ability, which is a dispositional attribution, or due to physical or social circumstances, which is a situational attribution. Dispositional attributions refer to internal causes whereas situational attributions refer to external causes (Fincham & Hewstone, 2001; Myers, 2005).

In particular, the 2009 national Form Two examination results were reported to be the worst ever as 126,131 (34.6%) out of 364,957 candidates, who sat the examinations, failed, of whom 61,374 were female and 64,757 were male. Of the 238,267 (65.3%) candidates, who passed the examinations, only 88,636 had grades A, B and C; the remaining 149, 514 had a D grade. Grade D is considered an under-performance grade as it is not a credit pass.

Explaining Academic Under-performance in Tanzania

Several studies have been conducted in Tanzania on students' under-achievement. A study by Mbwambo (2005), for example, investigated whether academic performance was attributable to teacher motivation. The study found that salaries, accommodation for teachers, the availability

of teaching-learning materials, the leadership and student discipline influenced students' performance. Mvungi (1982) also reported that the training of teachers, poor methods of teaching, the lack of textbooks and the frequent change of syllabi were factors behind poor performance. Other studies also cited students' poor performance in relation to a deterioration in the standard of English language among students due to teachers' low level of competence in the language, coupled with inadequate teaching and learning materials. However, most of these factors reported as causes of poor performance among students in Tanzania tend to focus a lot on external factors and underestimate the internal causes.

Generally, the government, the mass media, teachers and parents vary in their explanation for academic failure in Tanzania. When releasing the national examination results, for example, the appropriate government official convenes a press conference and presents an analysis report regarding the results, including the percentages of failure and success. Confronted by the sheer magnitude of academic underachievement, the government official tends to account for such under-achievement. Normally, the government has been citing factors such as the incompetence of teachers, the shortage of science laboratories, libraries, teaching and learning materials, and teachers' laziness as some of the factors behind such under-achievement. In fact, there are even reports of some teachers being caned by the district commissioner for being irresponsible. Other factors have included students' poor foundation in Mathematics, the Sciences and English (Moshi, 2009, December 28; Mwendapole, 2010, January 14). The mass media, for its part, when explaining such under-performance normally takes a swipe at the government, as it is responsible for developing the education policy, preparing teachers, developing the curriculum, providing teaching and learning materials and paying salaries (for teachers in public secondary schools),. The students are blamed for truancy, lack of seriousness in their academic pursuit as well as a lack of confidence, forcing many of them to even to consider cheating in their examinations. Indeed, when releasing the national Form Two examination results for 2009, the government official reported that 671 students' results were withheld due to cheating (Mwendapole, 2010, January 14). Also, in this blame game, teachers blame the government for failing to settle their claims, for paying low salaries and perks, providing poor or no housing for teachers, and for the critical shortage of teachers in many schools, which causes the few available to be over-worked. As for the parents, they blame the government, the teachers and even the students. Therefore, there is no consensus when it comes to explaining students' academic under-performance.

According to the attribution theory, perceivers can have attribution biases due to motivational processes relating to needs or cognitive processes that are related to the information available (Fincham & Hewstone, 2001). When discussing the attribution theory and its effects on teachers' attitude towards students' performance, Rodriguez and Tollefson (1981) reported that attribution is made to low ability and lack of effort, which are regarded as internal or dispositional factors.

Statement of the Problem

The magnitude of the academic failure of students in Tanzania is gigantic as various statistics reveal (MOEC, 2003; URT, 2009), and when the national examination results are released, the causes for such mass failure or under-performance are given and no attempt is made to get to the crux of the problem. This practice of attempting to assign causes to effects is what Finchman and Hewstone (2001) termed "causal attributions". One of the often overlooked effects of such attribution is that feedback on students' performance and comments may affect students' attributions pertaining to their success or failure in the classroom (Peterson & Steen, 2005).

Generally, teachers, parents, students and the government may have differing attributions to explain students' under-achievement. Their explanations are based on their understanding of a set of factors that they believe are behind such worrisome academic performance. Their focus tends to be on external factors, with internal ones being largely overlooked. Even the many studies that have been conducted so far to explain the issue of under-performance tend to focus largely on these factors. As a result, no study has been conducted that focuses primarily on students' intelligence and causal attributions. It is against this backdrop that this study was aimed at investigating how students explain their academic under-achievement**.**

Purpose of the Study

This study was aimed at investigating whether students explain their academic under-achievement in secondary school in Tanzania differently on the basis of their academic ability, sex, and self-perceived intelligence, as well as occupations of their parents.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following four objectives, which were to investigate:

1. How attributions for academic under-achievement vary with the level of intelligence of the students.
2. Whether female and male students explain academic under-achievement differently.
3. How attributions for academic under-achievement vary with the level of the students' self-perceived intelligence.
4. Whether parental occupation influences students' attributions for academic performance.

Theoretical Perspective

This study on causal attributions for students' under-achievement in Tanzania's secondary schools was guided by the Attribution Theory that presupposes that when human beings normally explain human behaviour, it can be either internal or external. Heider's Attribution Theory ascertains that human beings assign causes of human behaviour to either internal or external causes, that is, individuals have causal explanations for social events by attributing causality to either themselves, other human beings, or to physical forces in their surroundings.

Therefore, Heider and subsequent attribution theorists have been interested in finding out how individuals perceive a wide range of events such as intentional human actions and unintentional human accidents. Heider argued that it was crucial to know what people believe because beliefs tend to guide behaviour. Heider (1958) made a distinction between beliefs in the external and internal causes of human behaviour or events.

Later theorists sought to understand corresponding inferences comprising the cognitive process involved in making either external or internal attributions. As a result, Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelley (1967) developed perspectives supporting the original propositions of Heider's Attribution Theory, even though they were sceptical of naïve psychologists. They were convinced, however, that some processes take place before making attributions. To Weiner (1986), there are motivations for attributions in achievement that have implications for the future, simply because attributions are not serendipitously made but are made with a purpose.

Factors that have been found to affect the attribution process include gender, culture, and the level of one's mental abilities, as well as ethnicity, socio-economic class, and technological sophistication. However, these variables have not been verified in the context of Tanzania. This study intended to investigate how students explain the phenomenon of their academic under-achievement and to find out whether some of these variables could provide both internal and external explanations for the issue of under-achievement prevalent in the country's secondary schools. This study specifically employed Heider's Attribution Theory.

Operational Definitions of Key Concepts Used in this Study

Under-achievement or ***Under-performance:*** These interchangeable terms refer to divisions IV and Zero results in the national Form Four examination. In the case of the national Form Two examination results these terms apply to the D and F grades.

Attributions: These refer to a sample of factors considered by students as causes of success or failure. The factors can be either caused by students themselves (internal) or caused by external circumstances (external).Therefore in explaining students' academic under-achievement students can use internal or external factors to explain the phenomenon.

Academic Ability: In this study, academic ability refers to the degree of students' performance in the national Form Two examination that helps to determine high and low achievers. High academic ability consists of students who scored the average of grades A, B, and C; low academic ability, on the other hand, comprises students who scored the D and F grades.

Methodology

Choice of Research Design

This study employed the survey method to collect data on the attributions of students for academic under-achievement. It was designed quantitatively. Students' academic records were in the school files and background information was obtained from the main attribution scale.

According to Daley, as cited in Feldman (2005), there is no better or more straightforward way of finding out what people think, feel and do than asking them directly.

Population and Sample Selection Procedures

The population of this study was all 2010 Form Three students, who did their national Form Two examination in 2009. In the seven selected schools, all Form Three students had an equal chance of being involved in the study. One stream was selected randomly in schools with more than one stream. This was helpful for collecting their school academic achievement reports to compare students' academic ability. In schools with one stream, however, the whole stream was taken for the study, except for steams that had more than 80 students, in which case some students were left out 'randomly', considering gender representation.

Instruments and Procedures

Attribution scales

Generally in psychology, researchers prefer to observe behaviours directly rather than rely on participants' reports of how they behave, feel, or felt. However, when feelings, past experiences, and attitudes have to be assessed, self-reporting is appropriate. Therefore, in investigating how students explain their academic under-achievement in secondary schools in Tanzania, attribution items were made on a Likert-scale form, with measures ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The scale had 40 attribution items which were in three mixed parts. The first referred to the students' external attributions, whereby they directed their blame at their teachers, i.e. *most teachers are lazy*. The second referred to internal attributions, whereby the students directed blame at the students themselves, i.e. *students' lack of confidence in themselves*. The third could be classified as "neutral" since students neither apportioned blame neither to the teachers nor to the students, i.e. *students fail because of frequent syllabus changes.*

The third part of the scale included six items designed to measure the level of externalisation of students. These items mentioned attributes that directed blame for students' academic under-achievement not at the students, but either at the government or the parents. The following are examples of neutral items in the scale:

- Parents' socioeconomic problems at home
- Poor state of schools, especially classrooms
- Frequent syllabi changes

The students were requested to choose one of the four levels of agreement in the Likert scale after reading an attribution statement by ticking one of the boxes provided. Figure 1 gives the format of the Likert scale used to collect the attributions of students for academic under-achievement.

Students' academic under-achievement in schools can be explained by:	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
1. Unfair marking of scripts by the teacher				
2. Bad luck				
3. Students' lack of confidence in themselves				

Figure 1: Sample of Attribution Items in the Data Collection Scale

Students' academic achievement records

The academic ability of Form Three students in core subjects was obtained from students' academic records available in the schools. Only national Form Two examination performance results were collected for 2009. The records helped the researcher to group the students into high achievers (intelligent students) for students with average grades in 'A' 'B' and 'C' and low or under-achievers (less intelligent students) who were students with low 'D' and 'F' grades.

Validity and reliability of the instruments

The instrument was originally written in English but later translated into Kiswahili, creating a language barrier; back translation was also done to check the validity of the instrument before finally being administered in the field. Kiswahili is the national language of Tanzania and the medium of instruction in primary schools. Although English is the language of instruction in Tanzania's secondary schools, students across the board, including those with difficulties in understanding English. can understand and are fluent in Kiswahili, also the language of socialisation, hence the inclination to use Kiswahili. A pilot study was done in one secondary school in Dar es Salaam. According to Kerlinger (1973), Malim and Birch (1998) and Spata (2003), a pilot study is useful for the researcher when it comes to ascertaining the applicability, relevance and usefulness of the research tools, research design, and the proposed data collection techniques. The instrument used in this study yielded a reliability of Cronbach's alpha .828, which was reliable enough.

Administration of the instruments

The research instrument was administered to students by the researcher himself. When administering the instrument with the students, the researcher ensured that the seating arrangement was adequate enough to allow each student to respond to the questionnaire individually.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

After being coded, the quantitative data were entered into the computer using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 15. The items were put into three categories first, with 17 items measuring the of students whose blame was directed at the teachers, the six items externalising based on neutral items, and the second group of 17 items measured students' internalisation . Each item had a range of 1 to 4 scores and, therefore, in a category with 17 items, for example, it was assumed to have a minimum of 17 scores and a maximum of 68 scores for internal attribution. For externalisation, the total number of items was 23, with the minimum score assumed to be 23 and the highest 92. The SPSS analysis involved the computation of mean scores, standard deviations, t-values, and the tests of significance of differences in students' attributions; high academic and low academic achievers' attributions; high self-perceived intelligent students and low self-perceived intelligent students, female and male students' attributions; and then attributions of students based on the background of their parents, either in professional occupations or from peasantry backgrounds. The t-test for independent samples was adapted to test whether there were significant differences in mean scores between the groups subsumed in the identified variables.

Results

Characteristics of the Subjects of the Study

The subjects in this study were Form Three students. The number of students who participated in this study was 414 from randomly selected secondary schools in Hai, Rombo and Moshi Rural districts. These Form Three students had sat their national Form Two Examinations in 2009 before proceeding to their present level. Gender balance was a major factor in this study. Thus, among the 414 students, 207 (50%) were male and the rest, 207 (50%) were female. Their ages ranged from 14 to 20 .

Students' Attributions for Academic Under-achievement

The question was whether students would explain academic under-achievement by using external or internal factors. Therefore, the study sought to determine whether the students differentially use internal or external attributions for under-achievement in school. It was anticipated that the students would explain their academic under-achievement by using external factors. Table 3 shows the responses of the students on attribution items intended to measure the level of externalisation among the students when attributing for their academic under-achievement. The agreement levels were *Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Agree,* and *Strongly Agree.* For purposes of analysis, these categories of levels of agreement were collapsed into two only: of **Agree** and **Disagree**. The students' agreement with these items signified levels of externalisation as opposed to internalisation since they heaped blame on their teachers.

Table 3: Students' Externalisation Responses

The Stimuli: *Students' academic underachievement is attributable mainly to:*	Students			
	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Unfair marking of scripts by teachers	241	58	173	42
2. Examinations are often difficult	237	57	177	43
3. Invigilators are often biased	75	18	339	82
4. Time given not enough to finish examinations	245	59	169	40
5. Poor instructions given to students on what to do	147	36	267	65
6. Difficult words used in examination questions	268	65	146	35
7. Poor timing of examinations	130	31	284	69
8. Teachers' conflicts with government over salaries	235	57	179	43
9. Incompetence of teachers results in failure	304	73	110	27
10. Poor teaching strategies used by teachers	293	71	121	29
11. Examinations not based on taught syllabus	237	57	177	43
12. Teachers lack job satisfaction	347	84	67	16
13. Examinations on what they did not teach	232	56	182	44
14. Most teachers are lazy	218	53	196	47
15. Teachers get drunk during working hours	100	24	314	76
16. Teachers' involvement in corruption	244	59	170	41
17. Teachers have a tendency to miss classes	295	71	119	29
Average	**226**	**55**	**188**	**45**

It can be concluded from Table 3 that the data obtained were as anticipated. The findings show that 226 (55%) students agreed with the items to signify externalisation. It can thus be concluded that 226 (55%) students attributed their under-achievement to external factors; they blamed their teachers. On the other hand, the stimuli items in Table 4 were meant to measure the level of internalisation of attributions among students. In this regard, agreement with the items would signify internalisation as the students owned up and blamed themselves. It should be noted that the instrument was administered as a whole, and so this separation is for results presentation purposes only.

Table 4: Students' Internalisation Responses

The Stimuli: *Students' under-achievement is attributable mainly to:*	Students			
	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
18 .Students too worried about examinations	166	40	248	60
19. Students' poor vision of schooling	235	57	179	43
20.Students' low expectations of themselves	232	56	182	44
21.Students don't study hard enough	313	76	101	24
22.Most students are generally lazy	285	69	129	31
23.Students lack positive work spirit	304	73	110	27
24.Students can't control themselves well	291	70	123	30
25.Students lack confidence in themselves	344	83	70	17
26.Students are born unintelligent	85	21	329	80
27.Students' cheating in examinations	204	49	210	51
28.Students' regular absenteeism	282	68	132	32
29.Students' poor relationships with their teachers	238	58	176	43
30.Students' lack of interest in schooling	300	73	114	28
31.Psychological problems that students have	268	65	146	35
32.Students often fall sick during examinations	229	55	185	45
33.Students don't care much about their school work	322	78	92	22
34.Many students believe they will fail anyway	174	42	240	58
Average	**251**	**61**	**163**	**39**

It can be observed from the findings that 251 (61%) students agreed with the items, hence signifying internalisation, whereas 163 (39%) students disagreed with the blame directed at them. Generally, it can be concluded that for the 251 (61%) students who accepted the blame directed at them, their attributions were internal to them. Table 5 gives the statistical tests for the difference in their attributions, based on the mean scores obtained from their external and internal attributions.

Table 5: Difference between Students' External and Internal Attributions (N=414)

Attributions	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	*p*
Externalisation	59.17	10.7	22.43	413	.000*
Internalisation	46.67	7.93			

*The mean differences were both significant at p< .001

The possible maximum score for internal attributions was 68 while the minimum was 17, and for external attributions the possible maximum score was 92 while the minimum possible score was 23. To get the mean scores for the students' internal attributions the scores were added up and then divided by the number of students (N=414). Similarly, in the case of external attributions, the scores for attributions were added and then divided by the number of students. The mean scores obtained for students' internalisations and externalisations were 46.67 and 59.17, respectively.

Through pairing the mean scores obtained for students' externalisations and internalisations, the study established that students' mean score for externalisation was higher than that of internalisation. The tests of significance of the differences in mean scores were conducted through paired samples and the mean scores for attributions yielded p-values significant at $p<.001$ levels. Therefore, since the obtained $p=.000$ it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores for externalisation $(M=59.17; SD=10.7)$ and internalisation $M=46.67; SD=7.93, t(413)=22.43, p<.001$.The results reveal that students tend to use external attributions for explaining their under-achievement more than they do internal attributions.

Students' Attributions on Neutral Items

To confirm the externalisation of students, six neutral items were involved. The outcome of this aspect is presented in Table 6, which shows the results pertaining to the students' responses to the six neutral items on the scale. These items were categorised as neutral since they were neither directed at the teachers nor the students, but rather at either the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) or simply the government or their parents as those responsible for the under-achievement situation the students found themselves in.

Table 6: External Attributions Responses for Students in Neutral Items (N=414)

The Stimuli: ***Students' academic under-achievement is attributable mainly to*:**	**Students**			
	Agree		**Disagree**	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1. Bad luck	173	42	241	58
2. Poor Parents socioeconomic circumstances	292	71	122	29
3. Frequent syllabi changes	266	64	148	36
4. Doing examinations on empty stomach (no food)	153	37	261	63
5. Frequent changes of textbooks	255	62	159	38
6. Poor environment for teaching and learning	255	62	159	38
Average	**232**	**56**	**182**	**44**

The scores for each item were added up, then the total scores for all six items of all the students were divided by the number of students (N=414). The maximum possible score was 24 while the minimum possible score was six (6) for each subject. The mean scores were the summed up scores for all six items divided by the number of subjects. These items were aimed at finding out how the students' externalisation of factors would vary when presented with neutral items. Surprisingly, 232 (56%) students externalised their attributions.

Students' Academic Ability and Attributions for Academic Under-achievement

The question here was whether the students' attributions varied on the basis of their academic ability. In this regard, the study sought to investigate whether the students' attributions for academic under-achievement varied with their academic ability. It was hypothesised that students with high ability would attribute their academic under-achievement to external factors, whereas students with low ability would attribute their academic under-achievement to internal factors. As already stated, high ability in this regard were students who had obtained A, B and C average grades in their national Form Two examination in the previous year (2009). These grades are classified '*credit'* passes. The low ability students had obtained either a 'D or F grade. Table 7 shows the categories of high ability and low ability students in the sample:

Table 7: Students' National Form Two Examination Results by Grades (N=414)

	Performance Grades and Range of Marks in Percentages			
Academic Ability	**Grades**	**Range of Marks**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
High Ability	A	100-81	00	00
	B	80-61	37	8.9
	C	60-41	114	27.5
Low Ability	D	40-30	175	42.3
	F	29-00	88	21.3
		Total	**414**	**100.0**

It was found that no student had got the average of grade A (81-100) among those who participated in this study. Their mean scores for attributions for both high and low ability were computed and subjected to a t- test to test for the mean scores' statistical differences.

Table 8 shows the mean scores and the t-tests computed to find out whether there was a statistically significant difference between students with high academic ability and those with low academic ability for their attributions.

Table 8: Students' Academic Ability and Attributions for Students' Under-achievement (N=414)

Academic Ability	Number of Students	Externalization Score					Internalization Score				
		Mean	SD	t	Df	*p*	Mean	SD	t	df	*p*
High Ability	151	62.17	10.12	4.421	412	.001**	47.47	7.6	1.561	412	.119
Low Ability	263	57.45	10.65				46.21	8.09			

**The Mean Differences were Significant at p= .001 level

The findings reveal that both students with a high level of academic ability and those with a low level of academic ability had higher mean scores for external attributions than for internal attributions. The variation in mean scores for external attribution was found to be 62.17 (SD=10.12) for students with high academic ability and 57.45 (SD=10.65) for those with low academic ability. Students with high academic ability registered 47.47 (SD=7.6) while students with low academic ability scored a mean of 46.21 (SD=8.09) for internal attributions for their academic under-achievement. A t-test for independent samples was carried out to compare the mean scores for external attributions of students with high academic ability and those with low academic ability. The findings reveal that there was a significant difference in the mean scores (*M=62.17, SD=10.12)* for students with high academic ability compared with *M=57.45, SD=10.65, t (412) =4.421, p=.001* for low ability students. The difference in the mean scores was small but significant. This means that students with high academic ability attributed under-achievement to external factors more than students with low academic ability. However, when an independent samples t–test was computed to compare the mean scores for internal attributions students with high academic ability and students with low academic ability, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the students (*M=47.47, SD=7.60)* with high academic ability against *M=46.21, SD=8.09, t (412) =1.561, p=.119* for those with low academic ability.

Gender and Attributions for Students' Academic Under-achievement

The question on this aspect sought to determine whether students' attributions for academic under-achievement would vary on gender lines. The findings are presented in Table 9:

Table 9: Sex and Students' Attributions for Academic Under-achievement

Sex	Number of Students	External Attribution					Internal Attribution				
		Mean	SD	t	df	*P*	Mean	SD	t	df	*p*
Males	207	60.30	10.86	2.161	412	.031*	45.43	8.18	-3.203	412	.001**
Females	207	58.04	10.42				47.90	7.49			

**The mean differences were significant at p=.001 level
* The mean differences were significant at p ≤ .05 level

It was found that male students attributed academic under-achievement to external factors with a mean score of *60.30 (SD=10.86),* whereas that of female students was *58.04 (SD=10.42).* The mean score for male students was thus a bit higher than that of their female counterparts. On the other hand, male students scored less *(M=45.43, SD=8.18)* than their female subjects (M=*47.90, SD=7.49)* for internal attributions. These differences were significant at *p=.001* level, which means that female students were more likely to attribute academic under-achievement to internal factors than male students.

The study also compared the mean scores for external attributions of male and female students. There was a significant difference in the mean scores for external attributions in favour of males (*M=60.30, SD=10.86)* as opposed to females (*M=58.04, SD=10.42), t (412) = 2.161, p=.031*. That means male students explained their under-performance using external factors more than their female counterparts.

Students' Self-Perceived Academic Ability and Attributions for Under-achievement

Students were also asked to rate their academic ability, to state how they perceived their intelligence or academic capability. This measure was intended to find out how self-efficacy might be related to attributions. Table 10 shows how students perceived themselves academically:

Table 10: Students Self-Perceived Intelligence or Academic Ability (N=414)

Distribution of Students by Self-Perceived Ability		
Self-Rate	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Very Good	76	18.4
Good	138	33.3
Average	185	44.7
Poor	11	2.7
Very Poor	4	1.0
Total	**414**	**100**

For the purpose of analysis the students' self-perceived abilities were categorised into '*very good and good'*. The '*poor, average and very poor'* were categorised as '*average and lower'***.** Table 11 presents the mean scores and the t-tests computed to find out whether there was a statistically significant difference between students based on their self-perceived academic ability and their attributions.

Table 11: Self-Perceived Students' Academic Ability and Attributions for Under-achievement (N=414)

Self-Perceived Ability	N	%	External Attributions					Internal Attributions				
			Mean	SD	t	df	*p*	Mean	SD	T	df	*p*
Very Good and Good	214	52	60.32	10.36	2.273	412		47.01	7.94	.916	412	.360
Average and Lower	200	48	57.95	10.92			.024*	46.30	7.92			

*The Mean Differences were Significant at p≤ .05 level

In comparing mean scores of students who rated themselves as 'good and very good' and those who rated themselves as 'average and lower', there was no significant difference at *p=.05* for internal attributions since the obtained *p=.360,* which is greater than p-value.05, compared with external attributions, where a significant statistical difference was observed at *p≤ .05* level since the obtained *p =.024,* which was less than significant cut-off point of *p=.05*. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between students with 'Very Good and Good' self-perceived ability *(M=60.32, SD=10.36)* and students with 'Average and Lower' self-perceived ability *M=57.95, SD=10.92, t (412) =2.273, p=.024* as regards externalisation. This means that as regards internalisation no significant difference was observed in mean scores as opposed to externalisation, where students who perceived themselves as 'Very good and Good' externalised more than the students who perceived themselves as 'Average or Lower' academically.

Parental Occupations and Attributions for Students' Academic Under-achievement

In this study, it was also important to record the information on students' parents or guardians' occupations, as the researcher was curious to find out whether the students' attributions would differ, based on their socioeconomic backgrounds. Table 12 shows the distribution of parents' occupations in two categories only, professionals and peasants. Table 12 shows the occupations of parents. It seems, as self-reported, the majority of the students were from peasantry backgrounds.

Table 12: Parental Occupations and Students' Attributions for their Under-achievement (N=414)

Parental Occupations		N	%	External Attributions					Internal Attributions				
				Mean	SD	t	df	*p*	Mean	SD	t	df	*p*
	Peasants	221	53	58.99	10.30	-.372	412		46.65	7.88	.06	412	.952
	Professionals	193	47	59.38	11.14			.710	46.69	8.00			

The mean differences were not significant at the p ≤ .05 level

When comparing the mean scores of students from peasant families and those from professional families, it was established that there was no significant statistical difference.

Discussion

Students' internalisation and externalisation of attributions for under-achievement

It was found that students were likely to accept blame for the items intended to measure internalisation, which meant that the students were the cause of their academic under-achievement. The internalisation of unstable-controllable factors indicates that changes can take place in the future as noticed in students' internalisation. Students accepted blame for the items directed at them, with a rate of above 50 percent. These items included the fact that the students had a poor vision of schooling, lacked interest in schooling, did not study hard enough due to laziness, absented themselves from school and did not care about their school work. In addition, the students accepted that they faced psychological problems because of lack of confidence and self-drive. Having low expectations of themselves and being sick during examinations seemed to be counted as factors that made students fail. In this regard, school counsellors are in a position to help such students overcome their psychological problems and deal with their problem of academic under-achievement.

Though students accepted some of the blame, they also heaped blame on their teachers. This problem can be solved by the teachers themselves, or the ministry concerned as well as other education stakeholders. More than 50 percent of the students accused their teachers of being responsible for their under-achievement. They claimed the teachers were incompetent in the subjects they teach and used poor teaching strategies. They also accused the teachers of setting examinations which were not based on what was in the syllabus or what was taught in the class. Furthermore, teachers were said to use difficult words in the examinations, hence making them unnecessarily hard. The students also felt that they were also marked unfairly. Furthermore, the students blamed their teachers for being lazy, skipping classes, being preoccupied with conflicts with the government over delayed salaries and the payment of travel allowances. In fact, in 2009 teachers in Tanzania publicly announced their intention to go on a nation-wide strike over their multifaceted grievances, such as unpaid dues and lack of promotion. In this regard, the teachers were treated as causes of the students' under-achievement due to their volatile relationship with their employer. The question is: Will academic failure vanish when the government meets all the teachers' demands?

Conclusion

It is concluded that in explaining students' academic under-achievement, both external and internal factors are used, the difference being the extent of externalising. In this study, it was found that students had internalised for some variables and externalised for others. Therefore, the way one explains the behaviour of others can reflect how one would perform in the future. Attributions reveal one's motivations. This implies that the functions of attributions, such as explanatory attributions, promote an understanding of the social world. Another function of

attribution is to be predictive, which facilitates the development of expectations concerning the likelihood of future events. As an individual needs to meet social needs and reduce anxiety, egocentric attributions are applied. The most popular function is that of inter-personal attributions that provide communication of social identity information to others (Forsyth, 1980). In a collectivistic society, such as Tanzania, externalisation means the concern of everybody "*I am not responsible because you are not responsible"*; therefore, 'if you become responsible I will be responsible'. A consensus on explaining students' academic under-achievement can be a starting point working out how to share responsibility for improving students' academic achievement instead of just blaming others. Externalised factors are subject to change. In fact, changes take place only if all the actors, such as the government, parents, teachers, students, and non-governmental educational actors, collaborate effectively and efficiently. Only then can the predictive function of attribution work, predicting success in the educational sector. Since avoidance of taking the blame for the existing problem by externalising does not solve it, it is therefore recommended that each educational actor take responsibility and be committed to owning up and solving the problem in a co-operative manner.

Recommendations

It is recommended that in providing feedback based on the students' performance, teachers and government officials should consider the possible impacts of students' attributions on the their future performance. In this regard, they should focus more on strengthening the positive parts of the students and teachers to ensure success. The positive parts motivate more than they demoralise.

In unnoticeable way, feedback is given while committing fundamental attribution errors. Thus, all stakeholders of education should avoid attribution biases by practising attribution restraint.

It is also recommended that schools should have guidance and counselling services for students to raise their self-esteem and self- efficacy so that they can become confident enough to become better performers in their academics. Instead of simply counselling students on careers and social matters, these counsellors should focus on motivating students to greater achievements. They could also focus on how attributions should be handled in schools.

At the ministerial level, it is recommended that steps be taken to include guidance and counselling on students' achievements as a component in student teacher training modules to enable them to become competent in explaining and understanding behaviours. Also it is suggested that training in attribution analysis and problem-solving be given to student teachers during their training. Doing so would enable student teachers to help students develop stable attributions which are perceived as unalterable.

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