

Role-perception as a Factor for Parental Involvement in Primary School Children's Schooling: Comparative Analysis from Moshi Municipality and Meatu District in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which parents are ready to take responsibility in supporting their primary school children's schooling. The study also intended to find out whether there was any significant difference in role-perception between parents in districts with contrasting academic records in Tanzania. The findings indicated that parents in Moshi municipality differed significantly from parents in Meatu district with respect to role-perception beliefs ($p < .05$). For instance, parents in Moshi municipality ($M=2.96$, $SD=.204$) as contrasted to parents in Meatu district ($M=2.47$, $SD=.804$) showed stronger beliefs that it is their responsibility to buy books for their children ($p < .001$). The study recommends for intensive sensitization campaigns to enhance parents' commitments in support of their children's education.

Keywords: *academic success, home supervision, motivational beliefs parental roles,*

Introduction

Studies on school-community linkages support the view that parental involvement is an important factor in the academic success of a child. Parents are reported to have unique and complementary contributions in building cognitive, social and emotional precursors for effective learning (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler,

2005). Their supervision at home is also reported to nurture children's home-learning habits (Epstein, 2001; Case, 2009). According to Uwezo (2013), it is the parents' responsibility to create a supportive learning environment at home and make sure that the same is happening at school. Thus, children of actively involved parents have a greater chance of developing better social skills, attending school regularly, demonstrating more improved behaviour and adapting well to school routines, which in turn can lead to earning higher grades and test scores (Donlan, Prescott & Zaff, 2016). From these reported benefits, one would support the view that parental involvement in children's education is of great importance.

Parental roles in child learning and education

From the day a child is born, it (the child) is exposed to different life experiences at home and in the community, which are further shaped in their formal schooling. The home and community environment in which schooling occurs is argued to have a perpetual impact on school performance (Tolan & Woo, 2010). Practices at home and in families tend to reinforce values and competencies learned in classrooms and schools (Ailei, 2016; Tolan & Woo, 2010). A study by Case (2009) points out that a parent's concern at home about school reinforces pupils' skills, abilities and test scores. It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that children are provided with good nutrition, sufficient funding and comfortable housing (Ailei, 2016). They are also expected to provide school supplies, supervise and support them at home (Epstein, 2001). It is from these important parental roles that children's development and socialization are secured.

Parents play important roles in ensuring the development of required qualities to be brought to school. Early parent-child interactions and communications are argued to have significant long-term effects on children's behaviour (Marotz & Kupzyk, 2016). Through these interactions important social skills are developed and used in the learning process (Marotz & Kupzyk, 2016). Parents are children's first teachers who mould their language development and communication skills (Saravia-Shore, 2008). They are also reported to teach children different survival skills such as hardiness, perseverance, resilience and respect (Ailei, 2016). All these qualities are reported to be crucially required for children's success in school.

Direct engagement with children's learning activities at home matters a lot for their school success. Parents can help their children with homework (Kimaro & Machumu, 2015), supervise after-school activities and control their after-school time (Ailei, 2016). Children's learning at home is nurtured when parents read to them and encourage other outside learning activities (Case, 2009; Epstein, 2001).

It is through these learning activities that parents can support the development of children's talents, reward their successes and redirect failures (Epstein, 2001). Children who are exposed to parental monitoring (Donlan et al., 2016), as well as those who received more parental support (Akomolafe & Adesua, 2016), are reported to have higher rates of academic attainment. These roles complement teachers' efforts by creating a school-like environment (Manasi, Ndiku, & Sang, 2015) for practising learned skills and competencies (Tolan & Woo, 2010).

Another role played by parents is that of motivating children's learning at each stage and grade level (Epstein, 2001). The value of education as perceived by parents is important in motivating children to learn more. Parents should establish goals to be met and share educational expectations with their children which thereafter form a basis for rewarding (Ailei, 2016). Through this practice, children can be encouraged to work hard in their learning activities (Epstein, 2001).

The surveyed literature supports the view that parental involvement is an important factor for children's schooling and educational success. In all the studies reviewed, parents have been reported to play an important role in the primary socialization and subsequent schooling for their children (Ailei, 2016; Donlan et al, 2016; Marotz & Kupzyk, 2016). From the point of view of these studies, children whose parents are involved can be expected to surpass in their school careers. They are more likely to earn higher grades in examinations, enrol in higher-level programmes, attend school regularly without fail, develop better social skills, show improved behaviour and adapt well to school and society at large.

The current study used the model of parental involvement by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) to investigate role perception as a factor for parental involvement. According to this model, the involvement of parents in children's education is a conscious process that begins with decision making about whether to get involved or not in certain activities about their children's schooling and education matters. The model holds an assumption that parents' basic involvement decisions are driven by three psychological constructs: role perception, sense of efficacy and general invitations (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Concerning 'role perception', parents would choose to involve themselves in activities or behaviours which are perceived to hold value. For instance, parents will choose to involve with activities that seem to be important, necessary and permissible for their actions; activities that can bring about change or success in children's educational outcomes; activities in which there is a clear call for help from children and/or from teachers. Thus, parents' perceptions of their roles in children's schooling and education matters are examined as an important precursor of their involvement choices.

The role of parents in the context of Tanzania

In Tanzania, parents' responsibilities for their children's education are primarily stipulated in the National Education Act of 1978, with subsequent amendments in 1995 and 2002 (Muganda, 2004) and in other policy guidelines. Parents are legally obliged to enrol their children in school once they reach primary school-going age and ensure that they attend school till they complete the full primary cycle (Mbelle, 2008). Similarly, decentralization policies in local government aimed at empowering and improving the involvement of parents and local communities in school-related matters (Muganda, 2004). Parental involvement in Tanzania can, therefore, be viewed in terms of formal stipulations supported by legal frameworks.

The need to enhance parental involvement is also supported by empirical studies. For instance, a study by Mbelle (2008) recommended the involvement of parents in decision making related to school matters. In addition, with aspirations to improve children's academic performance, Mpiluka (2014) recommends a need to raise parents' awareness of their roles such as providing food to their children, space for afterschool self-study, a good sleeping place and basic learning materials.

Despite given recommendations, only limited studies have been conducted in Tanzania that give a clear indication of consistently active parental involvement in educational matters concerning children's learning process and impact on pupils' academic performance and school success. A study by Maganda (2016) reported that collaboration among parents and teachers impacted positively students' development of writing skills. Previously, in 2015, Kimaro and Machumu (2015) had explored the parameters of parental involvement in school activities and their possible impacts on academic achievements among primary school children in the city of Arusha. It was revealed that parental involvement at home, particularly in making follow-ups with homework, seemed to connect significantly with children's academic achievements. Similarly, Mpiluka (2014) had observed similar tendencies in Makete district in Njombe. These are only a few instances of a positive relationship observed, and almost exclusively limited to urban locations.

In an assessment of pupil learning conducted by Uwezo (2012), it was reported that only one out of four parents had helped their children with homework; only one out of four parents had discussed education matters at a school committee meeting, and only four out of ten parents had spoken with their children's teachers at least once in the past year. A study by Wabike (2012) reported that parents in fishing communities were not involved with their children's education at all. Rather, they spent most of their time fishing or working in palm trees, hardly making follow-ups on their children's schooling. More attention seemed to be paid to economic

activities side-lining the actual learning and development of children. Cooperation with teachers was also at a low level. Chahe and Mwaikokesya (2017) reported that a substantial number of parents did not support their children's teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy skills due to their socio-economic status, poor living conditions and unfavourable home environments. Also, parents hardly visited schools to check on their children's progress (Hamad, 2012).

From the literature surveyed, little is known about what parents perceive as their roles. This situation raises doubts as to how parents can be obliged to take responsibility, especially where there are already mass-failures of children at the levels of primary school-leaving examinations. There is a need to trace and learn the nature and basis of the discrepancy and how support by parents can best be cultivated or propped up to rectify the situation. This study intended to find out what parents perceive to be their roles and the extent to which they are ready to take responsibility in support of their children's schooling and education matters. The study is anticipated to contribute towards the understanding of the variation of parental role-perception across districts with contrasting academic records.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method approach and a sequential explanatory research design. It was conducted in two sequential phases. In the first phase (which was conducted from April to May 2019), the researcher administered questionnaires to selected parents to capture their perceptions of their roles in children's schooling and educational matters. In the second phase (carried out in July 2019), the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with selected parents. Conducting follow-up interviews after the collection of numerical data enabled complementarity and clarifications of the quantitative results. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics and independent sample T-Test while qualitative data were subjected to content analysis.

The study was conducted in Moshi municipality in Kilimanjaro and Meatu district in Simiyu. The two districts were purposively selected due to their stark variation in the pupils' performance at the primary school level over a consistently long period of formal examination administration. It was noted that, over a period of ten years (2007-2016), Meatu among other districts, has had among the lowest levels of academic records, while Moshi municipality, among others, has had the highest academic performance. The selection of these districts provided a comparative view of the parental role-perception across two educationally contrasting contexts in the country.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to obtain the required participants. In the first stage, the researcher purposively sampled six (6) government-owned primary schools of which three best-performing schools were from Moshi municipal council and three least-performing schools from Meatu district. In each selected school, a stratified random sampling process was conducted to obtain Standard (Std) IV and V pupils with gender representation. Selected pupils had spent four or five years in school, which is an important time factor for both demonstrable or else absentee parental interest in child-education matters. A total of 141 pupils were selected (66 girls and 75 boys). Parents of each of the selected pupils qualified to form a sample. A total of 109 parents participated in responding to the administered questionnaires and it was from the same group that twelve parents were selected to participate in the qualitative interview phase.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive analyses of parents' perceptions of their roles in children's education

The study examined parents' perceptions of their roles (what they should do) in relation to their children's education [by using 16 items of parental role construction adapted with some modifications from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005)]. To get the full dimensions of the items, the items were subjected to reliability analysis, which yielded high reliability (Cronbach's alpha 0.90) and therefore the items were retained as subscribing to the "role construction" dimension. In examining parents' perceptions of their roles in children's schooling, descriptive analysis was performed for individual items in the role construction dimension as shown in table 1.

Findings in Table 1 indicate that majority of parents had positive beliefs about their roles in children's education. Parents generally believed that it was their pertinent role to be involved in matters related to their children's schooling and education. Despite the overall indication of reported positive beliefs, parents in Moshi municipal district outperformed their counterparts in Meatu district in all items of the role construction. For instance, while 87.2 percent of parents in the overall sample agreed that "it is their responsibility to reward children when they do well in school", Moshi municipal council had 97.9 percent in contrast to only 79.0 percent in Meatu. Similarly, while a total of 95.7 percent of parents in Moshi municipality agreed that it was their responsibility to buy books for their children, only 66.1 percent of parents in Meatu district agreed.

Table 1: Parents' Ratings on their Beliefs about Roles in Children's Education

Items [Parent's belief in their responsibility....:]	Overall sample (N =109)			Meatu (n = 62)		Moshi municipal (n = 47)	
	Agree (%)	Not sure (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. To reward my child when he/she does well in school	87.2	2.8	10.0	79.0	17.7	97.9	0.0
2. To notify the school when my child has a problem	84.4	3.7	11.9	80.6	17.7	89.4	4.3
3. To make sure my child understands his/her homework	81.7	6.4	11.9	67.7	25.8	93.6	4.3
4. To communicate with my child's teacher	81.6	3.7	14.7	77.4	17.7	89.2	10.6
5. To talk with my child about the school day	80.7	4.6	14.7	72.6	21.0	91.5	6.4
6. To talk with my child about what he/she is learning	80.7	5.5	13.8	75.8	19.4	87.2	6.4
7. To ensure that my child's homework assignments get done	78.9	4.6	16.5	72.6	21.0	93.6	0.0
8. To buy books for my child	78.9	10.1	11.0	66.1	19.4	95.7	0.0
9. To set a study room at home	77.1	4.6	18.3	66.1	27.4	91.5	6.4
10. To set study rules and codes of behaviour	73.4	10.1	16.5	66.1	19.4	83.0	12.8
11. To explain tough assignments to my child	72.4	8.3	19.3	64.5	24.2	83.0	12.8
12. To talk with other parents of my child's school	72.4	13.8	13.8	64.5	17.7	83.0	8.5
13. To volunteer at my child's school	67.0	5.5	27.5	62.9	32.3	72.3	21.3
14. To help my child with homework	66.1	11.9	22.0	54.8	29.0	80.9	12.8
15. It is teacher's responsibility to ensure that homework is done	23.0	11.9	65.1	17.7	64.5	29.8	66.0
16. It is school's responsibility to ensure that children pass their examinations	11.0	11.0	78.0	9.7	74.2	12.8	83.0
Average	70	7	23	62	28	79.6	16

Source: Field data (2019)

NB: "Not sure" response rates are disregarded for district sets

Parents in Moshi municipal district (a district with some of the most outstanding academic performance in the country) displayed more positive perceptions of their roles compared to parents in Meatu district (the district with some of the lowest levels of academic records in the country). Although schools (particularly government-owned schools) use some text books brought by the government, a large proportion of parents in Moshi municipality supported the view that it was their responsibility to buy extra books for their children. This was consistent with the theory advanced by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) that parents' beliefs about their perceived roles accordingly 'provide the drive and direction' towards actual involvement [or non-involvement] practices, as has amply been demonstrated by parents in Moshi municipality in contrast with those in Meatu. This tendency and trend confirm the study findings in Japan by Yamamoto, Holloway and Suzuki (2016). The study, attested that mothers' role construction was positively associated with their engagement in cognitive and intellectual activities with their children at home.

Comparing parents' role-perceptions between the districts with contrasting academic records

To determine whether the observed difference in role-perceptions between parents from the studied districts was statistically significant, an independent sample T-Test was performed on all the items in the "role construction" dimension. A confidence level of 95% was set as a criterion of analysis and the findings as presented in Table 2 support the contention about the variation between parents in the two districts.

Table 2: *Independent Sample T-Test for Parents' Role-perceptions by District*

Manner of parental belief/push	Meatu (n =62)		Moshi municipal (n=47)		t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD			
	1. To help my child with homework	2.26	.886	2.68			
2. To explain tough assignments to my child	2.40	.858	2.70	.689	2.02	106.62	.046*
3. To talk with other parents at my child's school	2.47	.783	2.74	.607	2.08	106.94	.040*

4.	To make sure my child's homework is done	2.42	.879	2.89	.429	3.71	93.18	.000***
5.	To inquire about child's school day	2.52	.825	2.85	.510	2.61	103.22	.010*
6.	To reward my child when he/she does well in school	2.61	.776	2.98	.146	3.63	66.63	.001**
7.	To make sure my child understand his/her homework	2.52	.825	2.94	.247	3.79	74.91	.000***
8.	To set a study room at home	2.39	.894	2.85	.510	3.42	100.15	.001**
9.	To buy books for my child	2.47	.804	2.96	.204	4.60	71.12	.000***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Source: Field data (2019)

Overall, results in Table (2) indicate that parents in the two districts differed significantly with regard to their beliefs about their roles in children's education. In all items that had statistically significant differences ($P < .05$), parents in Moshi municipal district showed stronger/more positive beliefs regarding their role in contrast to their counterparts in Meatu district. Parents in Moshi municipality had statistically significant higher mean score ($M=2.96$, $SD=.204$) as contrasted to parents in Meatu district ($M=2.47$, $SD=.804$) on their beliefs about buying books for their children ($p < .001$). Parents in Moshi municipality believed that it was their responsibility to buy books for their children. That is to say, as compared to parents in Meatu district, parents in Moshi municipality were more likely ready to buy books for their children. As it was argued by Monti, Pomerantz and Roisman (2014), children who are provided with adequate school requirements such as textbooks have a greater possibility of succeeding in their educational efforts. In this regard, this observation does provide certain explanations for the stark variation in academic performance between the two districts.

In addition, significant differences were observed between parents in Moshi municipality and Meatu districts concerning rewarding children's good performance ($p < .01$), where Moshi municipality had stronger/more positive beliefs ($M=2.98$, $SD=.146$) compared to Meatu ($M=2.61$, $SD=.776$). These finding in Moshi municipality were supported by parents' interview responses. When asked about rewarding their children's performance in examinations, the parent of a standard five pupil had this to say:

When they finish doing their examination, I usually ask him how he performed. So if I find that this time he has performed better than in the previous exam, I reward him. I can also prepare something and take it to the meeting at school. After the school awards, I also give him my gift as a surprise.

This was similarly reported by a few other parents who had been giving rewards to their children when they passed their examinations. The practice seemed to motivate children to work harder and compete to get rewards both from the school and from their parents. Novianti and Garzia (2020) argued that rewards from parents have the potential of motivating children to learn. A similar trend was observed on other aspects of role-perceptions such as homework supervision, explaining tough assignments, sharing their views about children's school experiences to other parents as well as setting a room and codes of behaviour for children's successful home study. That is to say, as compared to parents in Meatu district, parents in Moshi municipality considered their children's education provisions as something very important that required primary commitment at the family level.

As opposed to more positive beliefs observed among parents in Moshi municipality, it was revealed from the interview sessions held with some parents in Meatu district that children's education was merely an obligation of the school and teachers. As it was reported by Hasnat (2016), parents from rural Bangladesh did not consider children's education to be their responsibility but only teachers' duty. These parents do not realize the important roles they may play in contributing to their children's education, which is why they do not find any reason to get involved. For instance, one parent (a male of around sixty years of age) directed blames to teachers. For him, parents were not obliged to know what and how children are learning at school but, rather, teachers who were paid by the government had to take that responsibility. He was wondering why children repeatedly fail year after year. The parent showed his concerns openly and was annoyed by the teachers' act of wanting to keep the kids in "intensive study review sessions" [makambi] away from children's homes for exam preparations, and wanting parents to contribute food items. He said, "...You see these years we don't get enough rains; where can we get food? These teachers, I think they have their agenda but anyway what can we do?"

To him and a few others, sending children to school was wastage of resources and a risk to children's exposure to bad behaviours. These parents seemed to prefer providing their children with family education more than sending them to these formal schooling camps and "learning pretences". That was because they believed that children were taught important skills on how to take care of cows

and how to work on the farm in their respective family households. These, as noted in interviews with parental groups, point to individualised personal and family priorities for spending their income. While in Moshi priorities hinge around sending children to school, paying for tuition and better education, construction of more educational institutions, their counterparts in Meatu indicated spending more resources for farm projects and less on school construction or facilitation to a children's schooling. As reported by Swai (2019), education has been accorded little value among pastoral communities; and Meatu shares this pastoralist community trait, including impermanence of homesteads. The study is also in line with Iddy (2021) findings that some parents, particularly those in rural communities did not provide for their children's study needs despite having the resources to do so. These parents did not bother to pay necessary contributions for their girls to stay in a hostel or even provide them with school necessities. All these factors like those observed in Meatu can be argued to impact negatively children's schooling and performance at school.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the findings of this study, it is pertinent to make the following conclusions. Firstly, participants—irrespective of their location—agree that it is their pertinent role to be involved in matters related to their children's schooling and education. Secondly, for both districts under study and, based on the research evidence adduced, it is arguable that parental role perception is important and can have an influence on the drive and extent of parents' commitments in supporting children's learning at school and at home. For the two districts of Moshi and Meatu, the commitments of parents have been more towards a positive attitude to attendance and learning in the Moshi community relative to Meatu district community and, conversely, more towards a negative inclination in the community in Meatu as compared with that in Moshi district.

The study recommends that, since parental role-perception is an important drive for their choices to get involved in their children's education, efforts should therefore be directed to strengthen parents' awareness of the important contributions they can make to support children's school and academic success. This, among other ways, can be achieved through a public-supported appeal by way of sensitisation seminars and public discussions in the less-educationally-performing districts, organised and directed towards changing frequently conservative, atavistic and resistant attitudes by parents, initiated by or through local village governments and community leaders.

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