

Orphans' Academic Endeavors and Support Mechanisms in Tanzania

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Abstract

Orphans' access to education is still critical for most developing countries, specifically Tanzania. Government efforts, such as policy, program development, and implementation, have been made to ensure orphans' access to education, but the situation is still alarming. The literature in Tanzania has not fully explored the support mechanisms for orphans to capitalize on their access to education. This study contributes to existing literature by focusing on this topic. The study was conducted in Tanzania, specifically in Dodoma District. This study was conducted in four primary schools. A mixed-methods approach was applied in this study, covering a sample of 133 respondents. The data were analyzed using thematic and descriptive methods. The study found that support mechanisms for orphans include government, civil society organizations (CSOs), and community mechanisms. Although these entities have improved the situation, more effort is required to solve the problem. This study suggests that the government should continue expanding schools, hostels, and counseling sessions at schools. Similarly, CSOs should continue raising awareness among community members, providing necessary financial support, and enabling orphans to attend school. Moreover, community support, such as caring for orphans and encouraging them, is highly recommended. These efforts should make mechanisms applied to help orphans more meaningful and contribute towards attaining quality education toward achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords

academic achievement, orphans, Tanzania

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Introduction

Education is regarded as a fundamental human right and a catalyst for human development (Okumu et al., 2012). Education is responsible for individual, societal, and national changes in terms of social revolution, economic, political, and technical changes (Yahya, 2012). It shapes people's ways of living and thinking about various life challenges, including disease, poverty, and hunger (Adekola, 2012). Since the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights in 1948, many policy statements have aimed to substantially improve the basic education system for all children in the world (Young, 2016). The concept of 'Education for All' can be understood as the capacity within a network of primary schools to enroll all school-age children for a stipulated period without any barriers such as families' economic or social status (Pillay, 2014). Similarly, to ensure that the child's right to education is achieved, other commitments such as the Convention on Rights of the Children (2000) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), were introduced (Fleming, 2015). For example, Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child states that all state parties should recognize the right of the child to education (UNESCO, 1989).

This means that every child should have access to education, regardless of ethnicity, disability, or economic status. Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also states that every child has a right to education. Furthermore, Education for All (EFA) was introduced in 1990 by an international conference held in Thailand, and later revised in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal. According to Miles and Singal (2010), the EFA targets were improving childhood care education, enrollment in basic education, and retention, ensuring that, by 2015, all children had access to complete free and compulsory education, provision of quality basic education, and elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education. As a means toward an inclusive and equitable society, EFA needs to consider the diversity of learners, such as orphans living in vulnerable situations. Despite various conventions and declarations affirming education as a right for all children, not all have access to adequate or even basic education.

UNESCO (2010) points out that, among many groups marginalized from access to education, orphans face an especially large challenge. Some children have become vulnerable either because of the loss of parents, thereby living without adequate support, or living outside of the family's care, all of which marginalize and stigmatize them, and this can lead to being socially and educationally discriminated against (USAID, 2012). Thus, orphans present a social segment in which, if not well given attention, their current and future life in society becomes uncertain. In this study, "orphans" include all children under the age of 18 years who were maternal, paternal, or double orphans. In Tanzania, an orphan is similarly defined under the two variables of age and parental loss: A child under the age of 18 years with at least one deceased parent is considered an orphan (REPOA, 2008; Mbwambo et al., 2023). Vulnerable children

belong to high-risk groups that lack access to basic social amenities or facilities (UNICEF, 2002). UNICEF reports that the main sources of vulnerability include HIV/AIDS and civil conflict. Given this contention, it is better to note that not all orphan children are vulnerable. Some of the children may be orphans but not vulnerable. Thus for the purpose of this study, vulnerable orphans are all children under the age of 18 who are maternal, paternal, or double orphans who are abused, neglected, or at risk of neglect, hunger, or homelessness (MOHSS and UNICEF 1999).

Due to vulnerability, most vulnerable orphans are taken care of by foster parents who may be single parents, grandparents, siblings, or volunteers, and these groups still face difficulty in sustaining the social and academic needs of the child in their care (Makuu, 2019). In extreme cases, foster parents have lost their life or become wounded, leaving thousands of helpless dependents. Specifically, children have become vulnerable to social and economic hardships due to the loss of parents, illness at home, displacement, or involuntary neglect. UNICEF (2016) reported that there are 171 million orphans worldwide, including those who have lost either a mother or a father. Furthermore, UNICEF (2011) reported that an estimated 18 million orphans have lost both parents, live in orphanages or streets, and lack essential services such as education and healthcare. Therefore, these orphans are at risk of disease, malnutrition, and death. The global challenge to meet the needs of vulnerable orphans is daunting, especially in the domain of access to education. Increasing poverty, overstretched extended families, and lack of sufficient mechanisms threaten the ability to provide quality Education for All (UNICEF, 2013). This implies that, if this group of vulnerable orphans is not proactively supported, the situation may lead to escalating poverty, unrest, and other related societal challenges. This challenge is especially a concern in sub-Saharan Africa (Pillay 2014). Experiences show that traditionally vulnerable children, particularly orphans, have been cared for by elderly grandparents, adolescent siblings, and/or the extended family (Baxen 2014).

However, elderly caregivers may fail to adequately meet the educational and personal needs of orphans, leading to their low academic achievement. Despite the many children enrolled in schools following the abolition of school fees in primary schools in most sub-Saharan African countries, children from low-income families and orphans still fail to advance in school due to failure to meet educational needs such as uniformity, exercise books, adequate and quality food, and shelter (Williamson & Witzel, 2016). Some of those who attend school have to employ different coping mechanisms, such as seeking part-time wage labor and to subsidize the cost of the educational material. The situation in Tanzania is comparable to that of other parts of the world. According to Tanzania's National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2018-2022), schools must become more responsible for the needs of learners and teachers to enable all

vulnerable learners to develop access to quality education. Despite the emphasis on inclusive education in Tanzania, many children from low-income families in primary school fail to meet the various costs of their education.

UNICEF (2016) pointed out that the major reason for persistent problems in children from low-income families, including Tanzania, are the lack of access to schooling. Even when school fees are abolished, money must still be found to pay for things like uniforms and books. This leads some children to either fail to attend school or drop out before completing the seven years of compulsory basic education. Mahanza et al. (2022) reported that Tanzania has a large population of out-of-school orphans in rural and urban areas. Furthermore, it has been reported that orphans in the primary school age group (7-14 years) are out of school than non-orphans, although the difference is not statistically significant compared to secondary school age (14-18) orphans. For instance, in (2014) the out- of-school rate was high for secondary school-age children in general, in which 55 percent of single orphans were out of school compared with a significantly lower percentage of non- orphans (45 percent) in rural areas. In urban areas, within the secondary school-age population, single orphans were approximately 1.5 times more likely to be out of school than non-orphans, and double orphans were almost twice as likely to be out of school as non-orphans. These data suggest that orphanhood appears to be a determinant of lower school attendance for older children but not for younger children.

Due to the abolition of school fees at the primary level, expectations are that all primary-aged children gain access to schooling. However, the reality can be somewhat different. This is because most orphans still do not attend school. The idea is that, while recognizing the government's effort to abolish school fees in primary and secondary education, orphans still need to be supported further to ensure that they benefit from free access to education (Koda, 2015). Studies by Christopher and Mosha (2021), Vedasto et al. (2023), Mchau (2010), and Makuu (2029) have documented the challenges facing orphans' access to education. However, in the case of Tanzania, there is a dearth of research on support by the government and other education stakeholders specifically for orphans so that they can be able to access education like other groups of vulnerable children. Therefore, the key question for this study is as follows: What support mechanisms can help orphans enhance their academic achievement in primary education in Tanzania? To answer that question, the main aim of this study is to explore support mechanisms used to help orphans access education. This research can contribute to the effort to attain SDG #4 which focuses on realizing quality education for all groups in society. Also, the findings of the study should contribute to the government's effort to ensure equal access to education as described by the Tanzania Development Vision 2025. The remainder of the article includes literature review, study methodology, results, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations (Haki Elimu, 2024).

Literature Review

There are studies which describe various mechanisms in different parts of the world to support orphans' access to education. According to Reupert et al. (2013), stakeholders have a significant role in the academic development of all pupils. Different nations have adopted several support mechanisms to help orphans access and adjust to primary education well for their academic achievement. Among these support mechanisms, many African countries have abolished fees for compulsory education (Pillay, 2016). Further, Pillar (2016) argues that the attainment of the Education for All goal requires that the abolition of school fees needs to be a general intervention for all children, including orphans. In support of this idea, Oleke (2007), in Nigeria, investigated the initiatives to support the education of vulnerable children. That study found that abolishing school fees in primary education was a significant initiative adopted by the Nigerian government to serve children from low-income families. The study also found that abolishing school fees increased enrolment, especially for children who would otherwise struggle to access primary education.

Other countries, such as Uganda, adopted the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, which included abolishing the payment of fees for the first four children in a family. The implementation of that policy significantly increased enrolment of children from low-income families and orphans within a year when compared to enrolment of children from middle-/low-income families (Tumushabe et al. 1999). Similarly, Malawi abolished school fees as a means of improving the academic achievement of all pupils, and experienced a rise in enrolment, specifically for children from low-income families and orphans (Kadzamira et al., 1999). Another study (Pillay 2014) examined the effect of the abolition of school fees in Indonesia and Kenya. The study found that, enrolment increased by about 40% following the abolition of primary school fees for all children. What is more, most of the enrolled pupils were children in difficult circumstances (Pillay, 2014). Therefore, abolition of tuition fees stands as a significant support mechanism which helps most children from low-income families and orphans to access and adjust to primary education.

Adato, Coady, and Ruel (2000) argue that one of the most common supportive mechanisms used by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to overcome or reduce challenges facing orphaned children from low-income backgrounds in accessing primary education is to reduce or eliminate some of the school costs. Such interventions help those children to cover the costs of books, stationery, and school clothing (uniform and shoes). They further argue that the best means to successfully implement such a policy is to send the required school materials directly to orphans and children from low-income families, or to send them directly to the school. The materials to be sent include textbooks, uniforms, pens and other related materials. Apart from providing free materials to orphans, Adato, Coady, and Ruel

(2000) suggested that materials should also be made available through textbook rentals, or sold at subsidized rates.

Globally, various countries have subsidized school related costs to help orphaned children from low-income families to access or adjust to primary education. For instance, in Brazil, it was observed that school attendance of children from low-income families increased when the Bolsa Escola program was introduced. The program aimed at providing cash grants to low-income families with children age 7 to 14 years who need access to compulsory primary school (Guilherme, et al., 2000). In Latin American countries, some local authorities provide school subsidies and funds to educate children from low-income families and orphans (Subbarao et al., 2001).

Another supportive mechanism that has been used to improve access and adjustment of orphans to primary education is increasing coverage so that schools are available to children living outside the formal education system (Sumra, & Rajani, 2006). More community schools are being established by the local community and sometimes supported by NGOs. These schools do not charge fees nor require children to wear uniforms (Ntozi et al., 1999). Community schools implement the same curriculum used in the public primary schools, though modified. This support is implemented to help orphans to access and adjust to primary education most easily. A report by the World Bank (2002) revealed that, in Zambia, more than 200 community schools had been opened in remote faraway areas where there are no government schools and where most orphans live. For this reason, most orphans gained access to education in Zambia. While this strategy boosted school attendance and adjustment for orphans, it remained to be seen whether this approach could be successfully replicated in Tanzania.

Palmer and Maramba (2011) conducted a study in the US which investigated the experience of orphan access to education, up through to the highest level of education. The study found that cost remained the major barrier to equal access to education for orphans compared to their non-orphan counterparts. To overcome the cost barrier, the study by Hepburn (2001) in Zimbabwe found that, to improve accessibility and adjustment of primary education for orphans, government and NGOs need to procure donated materials and supplies on the condition that they are delivered to schools which admit a certain quota of orphans. In Zimbabwe, some schools were guided to admit 20% of orphans in their catchment area, while the government and other NGOs would provide school materials to the admitted orphans, such as uniforms, exercise books, shoes, and food.

Tanzania is among the developing countries with a high number of orphans as a percentage of the youth population. In many cases, orphaning is due to poverty and the higher death rate of parents from HIV/AIDS and malaria. Other factors that are noted as leading to vulnerability include family dissolution, obesity, and lack of occupational skills (Ainsworth et al.,

2002). In Tanzania, the Ministry of Education and Training Policy 2014 (revised in 2023), and the National Strategy on Inclusive Education 2009-17 identified goals based on the most vulnerable children, including expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education. To ensure that, by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete free, quality primary education, the government has implemented several interventions and support measures, as discussed next.

Similar to some other countries in Africa, Tanzania has eliminated school fees to increase the attendance of children in primary education. However, the additional cost of uniforms, supplies, and special assessments remain substantial (Human Rights Watch, 2004). This raises several questions: Should orphans be allowed to attend school without uniforms to ease the burden of meeting school requirements? Are uniforms truly necessary, or should the government subsidize schools to make it easier for more orphans to attend school? What alternative measures could be introduced to help orphans who are at risk of dropping out overcome these barriers?

According to Boyle (2002), the cost of education, both monetary and nonmonetary, continues to be a burden on households and a barrier to education. They argue that the barriers of uniforms as well as indirect costs in accessing education make households opt not to send their children to school. As a result, orphans are more likely to miss some or all of the compulsory primary education compared to other school-age youth. Further, it has been found that orphaned children find it hard to attend school due to the extra costs of school uniforms, books, and stationery, and because they have family responsibilities, such as earning income to support the household, or caring for younger siblings.

The review of the literature shows that school lunch programs are among the more valuable support mechanisms in various countries. The government of Tanzania has also continued to expand the School Feeding Programme to promote attendance and retention of the most vulnerable students. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), expanded the School Feeding Project from 13 Councils of Bahi, Longido, Iramba, Manyoni, Kondoa, Chamwino, Karatu, Simanjiro, Kiteto, Ngorongoro, Mpwapwa, Singida (R), and Monduli (2000) to 16 Councils in 2011/12 to include Kishapu, Shinyanga, and Meatu. As of 2013, the feeding programme had reached 600,000 pupils in 1,000 schools across 16 drought-prone and pastoralist councils in five regions, namely, Singida, Dodoma, Manyara, and Arusha (Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2013).

In addition, the Tanzanian government has plans to expand the school lunch program for all schools throughout the school calendar. In that regard, the government has continued to

sensitize parents and other stakeholders to contribute resources, including grain, to ensure the sustainable provision of meals to children at school, so that attendance and retention of students in school is seen as a community effort. Nationally, up to August 2010, out of a total of 16,331 schools, 5,424 (34.2%) were providing subsidized meals for students. Out of these, 1,167 schools were supported by the WFP (BEST, 2012).

Despite various efforts made by the government to ensure access to primary education, orphans often face different challenges. This gap in coverage has led to the adoption of some strategies to improve access to primary education for the most vulnerable groups. This effort is still in progress and, thus, it is important to periodically review the progress toward universal access to primary education for orphaned children in Tanzania.

Study Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach. A case study design was used for the qualitative data collection. Creswell (2009) states that a case study allows the enquirer to generate knowledge based primarily on multiple meanings of individual experience, which are socially and historically constructed for developing a theory or pattern. Structured questionnaires and sample survey were used for the quantitative data collection. Davies (2007) states that a descriptive survey involves a study of a representative sample of individuals to allow the systematic gathering of enough information about a phenomenon to permit some level of generalization about phenomena in society.

The current study was conducted in Dodoma District of central Tanzania. According to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2011), Dodoma is the district with the highest number of orphaned pupils in Tanzania, and most of these children are used by elders for begging and carrying people's luggage at the market place (MOEVT, 2011). A related focus of the study examined the dynamics of the beggar population, especially those who use children as part of the beggar labor force. That focus can help clarify the challenges orphan children face in accessing primary education and meeting the obligations which elders impose on them. The study involved four primary schools in Dodoma District including Nzuguni, Mpunguzi, Mkonze, and Chamwino Primary Schools. In each school, the researcher selected head teachers, teachers, and pupils. Data were also collected from the city council of Dodoma's Department of Education. The distribution of the sample respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Categories

Educational Institution	Head Teachers	Teachers	Orphan pupils	Education Officer	Total
Department of Education, Dodoma City Council				1	1
Nzuguni Primary School	1	8	24		33
Mpunguzi Primary School	1	8	24		33
Mkonze Primary School	1	8	24		33
Chamwino Primary School	1	8	24		33
Total	4	32	96	1	133

Source: Author (2024)

As presented in Table 1, the sample in this study was 133 respondents, including 96 orphans from four schools. Further, the education officer from Dodoma Municipal Council, 32 teachers from four schools (two urban, two rural), and four head teachers from the sampled primary schools participated. The majority of the sample is the orphans themselves in order to provide their perspective on their situation and coping strategies to enhance access to primary education and pursue their aspirations for further schooling. Teachers were involved because of their role within the school. Apart from classroom instruction, the teachers are expected to guide pupils and serve as academic advisors. A total of 32 teachers with different educational levels and experience working with orphans in schools was involved. Head teachers were also selected to be among the key informants because of their position and responsibilities within the school. The head teachers are expected to provide insights regarding educational coping strategies adopted by orphan pupils. Further, the District Education Officer (DEO) was also selected to participate in this study because of their position and responsibilities of supervising and guiding the schools and overseeing the well-being of pupils in schools. The DEO also has statistics regarding orphan pupils and support offered by the government.

Data were collected by administering a survey questionnaire with pupils and teachers. Personal interviews were used to collect data from head teachers and DEO, and for those students who could not complete the written questionnaire themselves. Moreover, document

review was used to collect data from secondary materials. The thematic approach and descriptive approach were used in analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, respectively. The thematic approach involved data transcription, data cleaning, developing codes, developing themes and sub-themes, and synthesizing these findings in a report. Codes developed include “orphans,” “mechanism,” “academic,” and “achievement.” The quantitative data were analyzed using a descriptive statistic (e.g., frequencies, percentages, etc.) SPSS (version 20).

Results

While the primary focus of this study was the support mechanisms for enhancing access to education among orphans, the analysis revealed a need for collaborative effort between the government, NGOs, and the community to help orphans achieve their educational potential. The data collected through interviews from head teachers as well as the DEO reflect the necessity of the government, NGOs, and the community to collaborative in enhancing academic achievement of orphans. All four head teachers reported that the government must allocate more funds to support orphans in school, and these funds should be in addition to the general financial support for schools. The head teachers argued that if the government allocates more budget for orphans, all schools are then obligated to provide school materials per term to each enrolled orphan. The needed material support includes exercise books and school uniforms for each term. Further, head teachers said that this support could reduce the pressure on orphans to seek part-time work on the street, which often obstructs their ability to attend school. In the words of one of the head teachers: The capitation grant offered to a school is not enough to cater for the needs of schools and orphans at the same time. This is because all schools receive the same share. Thus, it becomes difficult to get extra money to buy different materials to support the orphans unless you use your own money (Interview with a female head teacher from School C). Given this contention, it can be argued that all teachers and pupils see the necessity of the government to provide support to orphan pupils. While pupils see that the government should buy for them directly, heads of schools view that each school should register the number of orphans present at school, and the government should allocate budget to schools in proportion to the needs of orphans to buy school materials.

On the other hand, the DEO was of the view that different NGOs can help in supporting the needs of orphans so that they may complete their primary education. The DEO argued that the support to be provided may be in the form of materials, such as school uniforms, stationery, food parcels, etc. The NGOs could also advocate for the exemption of school fees and being legitimately declared ‘indigent’ by the municipality. He also argued that some organizations are running aftercare centers for orphans and vulnerable children, where these children are provided with meals, psychosocial support, and school work assistance, while their elder siblings

concentrate on their own school work. Therefore, if NGOs can play a more active role, that would help minimize the burden of orphans' access to schooling needs.

Furthermore, the interviews with head teachers also revealed that counseling is still very necessary for helping orphan children cope with their daily lives. Head teachers argued that orphans at school face the challenge of negative stigma, loneliness, and inferiority. Furthermore, they are psychologically wounded by the difficult situation they are living in. Therefore, many orphans require counseling to help them develop self-knowledge, emotional acceptance, emotional growth, and personal resources. The head teachers observed that a family is the first point of provision for socialization, which is very important for growing children. Therefore, the heads of households with orphans need to help the orphans develop good socialization skills, and engage in socially-acceptable behavior and activities.

a. Government Support

Most of the respondents (64.5%) were of the view that the government should take responsibility for helping them in accessing different school materials, such as exercise books, school uniforms, pens, and other materials, such as school bags and shoes. Not only that, but also pupils revealed that the provision of food at school would help them focus on their studies at school rather than focusing on many things at once. The orphans expressed that if the government could reduce their burden by providing school materials and food, it would be easier for them to achieve their academic goals, as the lack of school-related materials was the most significant challenge they identified. One of the interviewed orphans had this to say:

“The orphans expressed that if the government could reduce their burden by providing school materials and food, it would be easier for them to achieve their academic goals, as the lack of school-related materials was the most significant challenge they identified.” (Interview with a female pupil from School D)

The pupil's statement reveals that orphans believe they could learn as effectively as their peers if the government provided them with school materials. They felt that, with that assistance, they would be able to do the classroom exercises assigned by teachers, submit the work done, and receive feedback from teachers, reducing any disadvantage they might have with the other non-orphan students.

b. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) Support;

The interview with pupils revealed that NGOs' intervention is important for assisting orphan pupils to meet their educational needs. Pupils argued that, as advocates, NGOs should act as intermediaries between children and other social systems to protect the children's rights.

Pupils further argued that the support orphans receive from their neighbors does not sustain them for very long; usually, they must make ends meet without help from neighbors and relatives. This is where NGOs are needed to bridge the gap by providing support related to school materials as well as home requirements. Furthermore, pupils reported that NGOs should support them by reaching out to them, involving them in income-generating projects, involving them in a peer education support group, and offering psychosocial support. In the words of one orphan from School C:

“NGOs should continue visiting and helping my grandmother with different needs such as food in order that we may be able to go to school. Sometimes I have to skip school to find food for myself and my grandmother.”
(Interview with a female Orphan Pupils from School C).

The excerpts indicate that these children, although they are heading the households on their own and taking care of their grandparents, still need outside support, especially from NGOs.

c. Community Support;

About two out of five of the pupils (39.5%) perceived that people in their communities (especially neighbors and friends) had sympathy for the orphaned children. Pupils reported that they often receive support, such as food and other educational material by neighbors and friends. This indicates that the community’s response to the needs of orphaned children is not only promising but also reflects a level of acceptance of the children after the death of their parent(s). However, pupils reported that not all community members are ready to support them and, therefore, argued that it is important that society be educated on the importance of helping orphans in whatever way they can to help them reach their educational destination. The following excerpt indicates the desire to have support in the form of community or family intervention:

“I want one of my relatives to come stay with us, especially when grandmother is too weak or sick so that we go on with studies because we can’t go to school while our grandmother is sick at home. (Interview with female Orphan Pupils from School B).

The above quotation indicates that some orphans also wish that their family members would come to their aid in cases when the grandmother is terminally ill. This will help them to finish their compulsory education and become an independent and productive member of society.

Furthermore, orphan pupils reported having a good relationship with their neighbors. Some reported that they did not go to neighbors for material support, while others reported that

they depended on their neighbors when they needed help. The findings reveal that some neighbors are of assistance to orphan children as they are helping them with material and emotional support, and play the role of the extended family, while others are not. The following are excerpts from the interviews with pupils about different forms of children's relationship with their neighbors:

“It is good. Neighbors also help me with food. It is good because they are the ones who always assist us. My relationship with our neighbors is good even though they are busy with their lives.” (Interview with a male Orphan Pupil from School C).

Another orphan pupil revealed that:

“We don't go to them asking for food or anything because they will gossip about us. We just keep our problems to ourselves, despite that we suffer a lot and we feel talking to them.” (Interview with female Orphan Pupil from School D).

From the pupils' expressions, it is noted that, although the relationships between orphans and neighbors are good, some orphan pupils indicated that they do not go to their neighbors and ask for help for fear of being gossiped about or for reasons of pride. Some of the children indicated that their neighbors assist them with food, although not on a daily basis. The neighbors can be viewed as a support mechanism to the children since their extended families are not always available to play this role. Therefore, the role of neighbors should be advocated for, given their potential importance of helping the orphans.

Additionally, the findings revealed that counseling is still very necessary for helping orphan children cope with their daily lives. This was evidenced by the orphan pupils who were not happy with the situation they found themselves in. The researcher saw the need for psycho-social counseling, particularly to those who became very emotional during the interview. Some of the research questions opened up old wounds. Through counselling, orphans can be given an opportunity to explore and discover ways of living more productively, despite their challenges, as counselling assists them with addressing and solving these challenges and making some informed decisions. The below extracts indicate the need for counseling for these orphans:

“Sometimes our neighbor only provides us with food and encourages us not to feel bad. He tells us that we will live a good life if we study hard. We are happy today you are also encouraging us to study hard”. (Interview with male orphan pupil from School C).

Another pupil said:

“Sometimes I feel so down and I don’t see my future. I ask myself why my parents died. This happens often, especially when I don’t have food to eat at home, lack school materials, or feel segregated by people around me. But I thank my pastor for advising me at church and home at times” (Interview with female orphan pupil from School D).

Based on these statements from the pupils, it can be argued that counseling as a coping tool can help orphans manage their unresolved emotional problems more effectively. The counseling may also open up opportunities to cope more effectively with psychological challenges that may affect their academic achievement. This is because some orphans need to be instilled with hope to handle their circumstances.

d. The Head Teacher and DEO

The data collected through interviews with head teachers and the DEO showed the necessity of the government, NGOs, and the community to take part collaboratively in enhancing the academic achievement of orphan students. All four head teachers reported that there is a need for the government to allocate more funds to orphans, above and beyond the funds allocated to the school for all students. They argued that if the government allocates more budget for orphans, those schools will feel an obligation to provide school materials per term to each registered orphan. Among the materials that the head teachers mentioned were exercise books and school uniforms, and new ones for each term or school year. Furthermore, the head teachers stated that additional support could reduce the pressure on orphans to seek part-time work on the streets, which often hinders their regular school attendance. One of the head teachers explained:

“The capitation grant provided to schools is insufficient to meet the general needs of schools and the specific needs of orphans. This is because they all receive the same share. Therefore, getting extra money to buy different materials to support orphans becomes difficult unless we use our own money.” (Interview with a female head teacher from School C).

It can be argued that all teachers and pupils see the government's necessity in supporting orphan pupils. While pupils see that the government should subsidize them directly, the heads of schools believe each school should register the orphans enrolled in their institution. The government should allocate budget to schools in proportion to the number of enrolled orphans to ensure that all the needs are met.

On the other hand, the DEO was also of the view that different NGOs can help support the needs of the orphans so that they may complete their primary education. The DEO argued

that the support may be in the form of material support, such as buying school uniforms and stationery, and delivering food parcels. They can also advocate for the exemption of school fees and for being declared indigent by the municipality. The DEO also argued that some organizations are running aftercare centers for orphans and vulnerable children, where these children are provided with meals, psychosocial support services, and schoolwork assistance while their elder siblings concentrate on their schoolwork. Therefore, if the role of NGOs in this endeavor can be strengthened, it can help minimize the burden of orphans meeting their school needs.

Furthermore, the head teachers observed that counseling is essential for helping orphan children cope with their daily life. Head teachers argued that orphans at school are facing the challenges of stigmatization, loneliness, and inferiority. Further, they are psychologically affected by the difficult situation they are living in. Therefore, they require counseling to help them develop self-knowledge, emotional acceptance, emotional growth, and personal resilience. The head teachers felt that the immediate family is the first point of provision for a child's socialization, which is very important for orphans. Therefore, those families with orphans should ensure that they help the child develop good socialization and engage in socially-acceptable behaviors and activities.

Discussion

The current study identified certain support mechanisms that can be sufficient to help orphans access their primary education. The government plays the central role of ensuring that orphan children can access their necessary school needs. Social work intervention, counseling, family/community support, provision of food at school, and a good relationship with neighbors were also reported as efficient support mechanisms that can be adopted to help orphan pupils meet their school needs. The joint effort by the government, schools, and the community is essential in ensuring that orphan pupils experience their primary education constructively. The findings suggest that, without joint effort among different stakeholders, it will be difficult for only one sector (i.e., the government) to accommodate the needs of the orphans. Therefore, foster parents must play their part, as well as the school but on top of the government. The findings revealed that the government should provide a separate budget for orphans to schools so that they ensure that all students are adequately equipped for learning. Furthermore, community members should also play a role in providing assistance to orphans and protecting them from negative influences.

A study by Adato, Coady, and Ruel (2000) support these findings by arguing that one of the most common supportive mechanisms the government uses to overcome or reduce the challenges facing orphaned children from low-income families in accessing primary education is

reducing or eliminating some school costs. Such interventions help orphaned children from low-income families cover the costs of books, stationery, and school clothing (uniform and shoes). Adato, Coady, and Ruel (2000) further argue that the best method is to send the needed materials directly to the schools or request that the schools buy materials for orphans and children from low-income families. Similarly, Subbarao, Mattimore, and Plangemann (2001) found that, in Latin American countries, some local authorities provide school subsidies and fund to educate children from low-income families and orphans.

A school meal supplement program is another supportive mechanism revealed by the current study that can help orphans apply adequate effort their studies. When pupils are properly fed, they can focus on their studies instead of worrying about the lack of food at home. Mwoma and Pillay (2015) support the study findings, arguing that, when children suffer food scarcity and have to walk for long distances to school, the effect on cognition, short-term memory, verbal fluency, and ability to concentrate is negative. Therefore, the provision of subsidized meals at school is an efficient mechanism to help maximize student performance. Furthermore, Janke (2001) believed that the provision of food at school serves the purpose of reducing the dropout rates among orphans, but also increases enrolment and attendance of orphans at school.

Miller (2003) also reported that school meal programs are a strategy to support orphans in several African countries, including Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana. Those programs are reported to have a significant impact on primary education enrolment, reducing dropout, and enhancing classroom performance, specifically for orphans. The programs have encouraged parents to send their children to school despite poverty, and they may also improve health and performance at school for orphans (Mitchell, Irvine, 2008). These suggest that if this strategy is adopted in Tanzania, it can help serve the challenges facing orphans.

Additionally, participants in this study reported that they were not happy with the situation in which they found themselves. Some feel emotionally wounded, lonely, segregated, or inferior. Therefore, counseling is necessary to help them cope. Van Dyk (2008) found that, through counselling, youth in AIDS orphan-headed households were allowed to explore and discover ways of living more fully, despite their challenges, as counselling assists them with addressing and solving these challenges and making informed, constructive decisions in daily life. Therefore, counselling, as a coping tool, helped AIDS orphans to manage their unresolved emotional problems more effectively, and discover untapped opportunities to cope more effectively.

Family support, community support, as well as neighbors' help are other support mechanisms that most of the participants agreed were mechanisms that can help orphan pupils to enhance their academic achievement. People in communities (especially neighbors and family friends) need to be sympathetic to the orphaned children. This should involve supporting

them with food and other educational materials such as lessons books. Such findings were also revealed by the study conducted by Woldeyohannes (2010) who argued that the community's response to the needs of orphaned children is critical since it helps the level of acceptance of the children after the death of their parent(s).

Schor (2003) found that support by the family, community, and neighbors are the most central and enduring influence in the lives of children. Schor (2003) emphasized that, although schools provide formal education, families teach children to become socially-productive adults. The family is the primary unit in society to teach children the difference between right and wrong. Due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, family unity has been disrupted in many communities. Consequently, the socialization process of the child is also undermined in those places (Dalen, 2009). As a result, children may develop unwanted or different behaviors from what is expected in a particular society. Therefore, the family and the surrounding community should ensure that there are no obstacles for orphans to access compulsory education. Based on these findings, it can be argued that, for effective schooling of orphans, different agencies must work collaboratively. These include the government, NGOs, the school, and the community at large. Each group should play an active role in making sure that orphans get the required school materials as well as home needs, so that they can focus on academics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Academic achievements for orphans are still critical in most developing countries, specifically Tanzania. This study suggests that orphans should receive support from the government, NGOs, and the home community. Although these entities have demonstrated potential to improve the situation, more effort is required to solve the problem. This study suggests that the government should continue educating society on the significance of education for its orphans, and expanding schools, hostels, and student counseling at schools. This will attract vulnerable youth to enroll or re-enter school. This can be done by allocating a budget that will enhance the implementation of these strategies. Again, NGOs should continue raising awareness among community members, providing necessary financial support for orphans so they can attend school. Moreover, community support, such as caring for and encouraging orphans is highly recommended. To realize that, the author recommends that the government continue allocating enough budget for orphan programs and increasing enrollment. Again, the community at large should work together to help orphans achieve their academic potential in primary education and beyond. This requires collaboration of foster parents and neighbors, and all individuals should play a parenting role in helping orphans access education resources and/or social services to help them succeed, at least through compulsory education.

Moreover, NGOs must set budgets and establish programs that will give orphans equal access to education, just as non-orphan children enjoy.

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