

The Role of Forms of Family Capital in Children's Engagement with Primary School: Implications for Poverty Alleviation through Education in Tanzania.

Children's engagement with primary school has been a central strategy for poverty alleviation in Tanzania since the country gained independence. Notwithstanding this emphasis and the government's initiatives to promote universal primary education, disengagement from school remains a problem. The National Poverty and Human Development Reports (2005, 2007) and the various basic educational statistics in Tanzania show that children from poor households constitute the largest group who disengage from primary school. Yet research to guide an understanding of primary schooling for these children remains sparse. Addressing this concern, the present study draws on Coleman's Theory of Family Social Capital and Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction to examine both the engagement with primary school and the quality of education for children from poor households. In particular, the study examines the role of family financial, human, social and cultural capital in relation to enrolment, attendance, commitment to school, dropout and parental support.

The study uses a qualitative research methodology, employing a multiple case study design. The study comprises six case study schools within which 25 parents, 2 District Education Officers, 6 Ward Education Officers, 6 head teachers, 6 class room teachers, 24 standard seven pupils and 9 children who have dropped out of school constitute the embedded units of analysis. The case study regions, districts, schools, families and children were selected through purposeful and theoretical sampling strategies. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, structured observations including video recording and photographs and document analysis. The data were analysed through audit, within and cross-case analysis, employing both case and variable oriented strategies.

Consistent with the theoretical accounts, the findings reveal that the families' financial, human, social and cultural capital are imperative in determining their children's engagement with school. However, contrary to theoretical expectations, some children, despite the availability or lack of these family resources, disengage from or engage with school respectively. A further scrutiny of the aspects of these four forms of capital provide an insight into how families' positive attitudes, values, and interest in their children's education contribute to parental positive support, which increases the pupils' commitment to school. Yet, there were unusual outcomes whereby the parents' positive attitudes, values, interest and support did not result in the pupils' commitment to school, and whereby, despite the families' negative attitudes, values, lack of interest and support, other children were committed to school. In the light of the key research findings, the implications for research and practice are discussed. The thesis concludes with suggestions about how the forms of capital owned by economically disadvantaged families can be strengthened in order to increase their children's engagement with school and so enhance the quality of their education.