



Teachers' Causal Attributions for Academic Underachievement in Public Secondary Schools in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Human beings have a tendency of explaining success as a product of their personal factors while associate failure to situational factors. This is what Heider (1958) termed as attribution theory. Success in academics is a socially desirable event while failure is socially undesirable. The presence of massive failure in national examinations such as that of form four 2010 in Tanzania stimulated educational actors. Teachers were blamed for massive failure; this study intended to investigate how teachers would explain that massive failure whether internalizing or externalizing. The study found that teachers attribute students' failure to factors external to them significant at $p=.000$, the external factors included issues to be solved by the government, students and parents. Based on academic qualifications there was significant difference at $p=.021$ in externalization, teachers with no bachelor degree externalized more than teachers with bachelor degree. Furthermore, the study found out that no difference in attributions between male and female teachers, long and short experienced teachers and academic qualification in internalization. Lastly, school managements blamed more the ministry of education and students. This study concluded that teachers denied being the ones who cause students' massive failure instead the ministry concerned and students were the root cause. The ministry of education has to set implementable plans and the students invest time in learning that is supported by parents.

Key words: attributions, motivations, Tanzania and academic performance

INTRODUCTION

Teachers and parents have a power related to the future society, and they share the power. Then who to blame when students underachieve in their examinations? Greatly, teachers have been blamed. What do teachers say? Or

how do teachers explain this phenomenon? This question is central in this study.

The Relationship between Students' Performance and Teachers' Effectiveness in Teaching

Simply, one may quickly claim that students' performance reflects teachers' effectiveness and competence in teaching. If students perform well in their examinations then teachers are labeled as good and competent but if students fail in their examinations, teachers are labeled as poor and incompetent, this is a mere community assumptions, not necessary a fact. Several studies revealed that the relationship between teachers' effectiveness and students' academic performance is debatable. Ofoegbu (2004) argued that poor academic performance of students in Nigeria has been linked to poor teachers' performance in terms of accomplishing the teaching task, negative attitude to work and poor teaching habits which have been attributed to poor motivation. Either observed conditions that would result to effective teaching such as availability of resources to teachers, general conditions of infrastructure as well as instructional materials in public secondary schools in Nigeria were poor (Oredein, 2000 in Akiri & Ugborugbo, 2009).

Although teachers' strong effect would significantly influence students academic achievement, other factors such as socioeconomic background, family support, student's intellectual aptitude, personality, confidence, and previous instructional quality have been found to also influence students examination score (Starr, 2002) either positively or negatively. Teachers condemned the use of students' achievement as indication of teachers' competence, performance or effectiveness. Therefore, other ways of evaluating teachers' effectiveness need to include students rating of the teachers' effectiveness, self evaluation, and school administrators' observations.

Generally in Tanzania, teachers are assessed in either Confidential Way or in Open Performance and Review Appraisal System (OPRAS). According to Kavishe (2010) in her study that intended to assess the effectiveness of OPRAS in measuring teachers' performance, she reported that teachers had negative perception towards Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS). Explaining further Kavishe (2010) reported that teachers reported that, for teachers, the OPRAS to be effective, the government has to ensure the availability of teaching and learning resources, improve teachers' working conditions as well as the issue of adherence to teachers' rights and obligations. Therefore, it can be concluded that assessment of teachers' performance still suffers as both Confidential System and Open Performance and Review Appraisal System were condemned by teachers that were not effective systems. Thus, teachers presupposed that their performance is influenced by various factors including students, parents, school administrators, government commitments to education and the environment surrounding them. Furthermore, Venkateswara (2004) commented that the

performance appraisal system for teachers (PAST) attempts to assess each teacher in four areas: learners' achievement, teachers' competence, teachers' personality and human relations. **First, learners' achievement refers to** functions of teachers being set jointly by supervisors and teachers in the beginning of the year, and then assessment based on the set functions. Second, teachers' competence includes efforts to create national consciousness among students, also whether the teacher developed her/himself professionally, whether she/he does community services and whether she/he manages the records. Third, teachers' personality and human relations assessed based on personal qualities like morality and integrity. Performance results should be agreed by both the teacher and supervisor.

The Student's Academic Achievement Trend in Tanzania

The issue of poor performance in Tanzanian secondary schools has been a subject of debate for a long time. This is because the importance of education in general cannot be underestimated. There has been a trend of mass failure in the certificate of secondary education examinations, despite the fact that students enrolled for secondary education are a minority of the population of school age cohort (UNICEF, 2001). Also for students who joined secondary education only a small percentage of students manage to pass at divisions one, two and three in their form four national examination while majority scores division four and zero which are interpreted as poor performances. Pass rate in form four examinations has been fluctuating from year to year, Table 1 shows the trends in overall performance in Tanzanian secondary schools from 1999 to 2010, with the percentage of students who scored divisions four and zero being very high as compared to passes of divisions one, two and three. This is gross underachievement as over 60% of the students literally fail. Therefore, one gets division four by one credit pass or two 'D' grades that range from 26 to 33 points (Omari et al., 2009).

Table 1: Form IV Examination Results in Percentage by Divisions: 1999-2010.

Year	Divisions				Underachievement:		Number of candidates
	I	II	III	IV	Fail	Division 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
2009	1.9	4.4	11.6	54.7	27.5	82.2	248,336
2010	02	03	07	39	50	89	354,042

Sources: URT (2009:62; 2010:71).

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This is not a case for Form IV examinations only, but rather, it applies in other levels of education, including Standards IV, VII, Forms II and VI. For instance, the failure rate has increased from 8.14% in 2007 to 24.4% in 2008 (URT, 2009). It should be noted that the passing score average is 30 percent, according to Circular Number 2 of 2002 (URT, 2002b) that was then amended by education Circular Number 5 of 2008 that was rectifying the circular number 2 of 2002 that students who will not pass the form two national examination by an average of 30 percent should not repeat a class, instead continue to form three as opposed to previously that failures were supposed to repeat the class, for a year if not pass then were terminated from school. Table 2 shows Form II national examination results from 2004 to 2008, in which 258,907 (22.3%) of candidates failed.

Table 2: Form II Secondary Examination Results: 2004-2008.

Year	Pass		Fail		Number of candidates Examined
	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)

It is this serious underperformance of the majority of students that has been difficult to explain. Teachers are often the first to be blamed, just because they are the main actors in the teaching and learning processes in schools. However, teachers alone might not give sufficient explanation of the cause for students' failures. Myers (2005) reported that even teachers themselves might be in dilemma in explaining students' underachievement. A teacher may wonder whether a child's underachievement is due to lack of motivation and ability, which is a dispositional attribution, or due to physical or social circumstances, which is a situational attribution. The dispositional attributions refer to internal causes while situational attributions refer to external causes (Fincham & Hewstone, 2001; Myers, 2005).

Focusing on Form II national examinations of 2009, the examination results were reported to be worse where among 364,957 students who sat for the examinations, 126,131 (34.6%) students failed, females were 61,374 and males were 64,757. While 238,267 (65.3%) students passed the examinations.

Explanations for Academic Underachievement in Tanzania

There are several studies conducted in Tanzania related to students' academic underachievement. Mbwambo (2005) found out that teachers' salary being low and late paid affects students' performance. Availability of teaching-learning materials and accommodation for teachers influences students' performance together with commitment of teachers, furthermore good leadership, students discipline then attractive and conducive environment. Together with these factors, the study did not consider other factors especially home environment and background of the students, this had been extension of other factors noted by Nyamubi (2003). In addition, Mvungi (1974) reported that poor teacher training, poor methods of teaching, shortage of textbooks, frequent change of syllabi appear difficult for teachers to cope as not prepared for those changes while Moshi (1982) reported that teachers' low level of competence in English language and inadequacy of teaching and learning materials. Most of the factors reported as causes of poor academic performance among students in Tanzania focus much on external factors and underestimate internal causes.

Therefore, explanations of school academic underachievement in Tanzania vary from parties such as mass media, the government, charity institutions, activists, the parents, the teachers and students. When releasing national examinations results either standard seven, form two, four or six, it is experienced that the official government calls for the press to report the analysis of the results including other things, pass and fail percentages are reported, best students are publicly identified, best and worse schools with regard to academic underachievement magnitude are also labeled, the government official either the executive from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT) or National Examination Council (NECTA), tend to explain reasons for underachievement, this is what is called attributions. Normally, the government has been explaining academic underachievement by using factors like incompetence among teachers, shortage of laboratories for science subjects, libraries, teaching and learning materials, laziness among teachers to the extent that some teachers had once been canned by the district commissioner in Kagera region just because of being considered irresponsible (Nkonya, 2009, June 22). Another is poor foundations students get in Mathematics, Sciences and English language from the beginning of their studies (Moshi, 2009, December 28; Mwendapole, 2010, January 14; Joseph, 2009, December 11). On the other part, mass media when explaining students' underperformance normally directs blames to the government because it is concerned with preparation of teachers, development of curriculum, policies, provision of teaching and learning materials and paying salaries.

Furthermore, students are blamed for truancy, being not serious in their academic assignments lack of confidence among themselves to the extent of cheating in their examinations. For example in releasing form two national examinations 2009, it was reported that 671 students' results were withheld

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due to cheating (Mwendapole, 2010, January 14). In addition to that, on the part of teachers, it has been experienced that teachers direct their blame to the government basing their claims on the fact that they are lowly paid, given poor or no houses at all and overloaded due to insufficient number of employed teachers. On the part of parents, blame directed to the government, teachers and students.

Therefore, no consensus on explaining students' academic underachievement, the government blames teachers, students and parents while teachers blame the government, students and parents. While students blame teachers, parents and government, the parents blame teachers, government and students while mass media place blame much on the government. Therefore, it seems as if no part is ready to accept blame, or guilty, thus it can be argued that no education actor is accepting the responsibility and accountability for students' academic underperformance in Tanzania. According to attribution theory, perceivers can make attribution biases due to motivation related to needs or cognitive related needs basing on the information available (Fincham & Hewstone, 2001). This was clearly reported by Rodriguez and Tollefson (1981) while discussing attribution theory and its effects in teachers' attitude towards students' performance, the attribution is made to low ability and insufficient efforts which are regarded as internal or dispositional factors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers explain secondary school students' academic underachievement as either internalizing or externalizing. This study was guided by the following objectives: first, to examine whether teachers' causal attributions for students' academic underachievement would vary based on their gender. Second, to determine if there are variations in causal attributions based on teachers' academic qualifications. Third, to determine whether teachers' teaching experience led to causal attribution differences in students' academic underachievement. Fourth, to assess whether teachers with school administrative responsibilities attribute for the students' academic underachievement differently.

METHODS

Sample Selection Procedures

First sampling was randomly made to seven public secondary schools in which then seventy teachers who were available in those schools during data collection were involved in the study. It was done purposely.

Attribution Scales

Generally in psychology, researchers prefer to observe behaviour directly rather than rely on participants' reports of how they behave, feel, or felt on. However, when feelings, past experiences, and attitudes have to be assessed, self reporting is appropriate. Therefore, in investigating how teachers explain students' academic underachievement among public secondary school students in Tanzania, the study adapted a Likert scale for data collection. Therefore 40 attribution items were made to the scale derived from various sources like; official speeches, mass media quotes and study findings attributional statements composed the scale.

The 40 attribution items were in three parts, which included external and internal. External attribution occurs when teachers blame their students while internal attribution if teachers accept blame and the third part included attributional items which were external to teachers that blame directed to government, parents, fortune or situations.

Structured Interview

A structured interview was administered to the school managements including heads of schools and academic masters/mistresses. The interview was intending to find the causal attributions of school managements in explaining students' academic underachievement, with possibility of playing a role of either a teacher or manager by blaming either the ministry of education, parents, students or their fellow teachers.

RESULTS

Participants

A total of 70 teachers participated, 42 (60%) were males and 28 (40%) were females. Among the teachers, 32 (46%) were bachelor degree holders while 29 (41%) had diploma in education, and 9 (13%) included teachers who had teaching license and just form six leavers that means not professional teachers. Teachers' age ranged from 21 years to 58 years. Teachers who participated in this study rated themselves in teaching performance as very good 25 teachers (35.71%), good 40 teachers (57.14%) and average only 5 teachers (7.14%); this reflects how teachers perceived themselves in teaching, that is about 93% of teachers perceive themselves as performing well in teaching. The question is why students underachieve in their examinations?

Teachers Attributions for Students Academic Underachievement

The study was intending to determine if teachers differentially use internal or external attributions for students’ academic underachievement in secondary schools. Generally based on attribution theory, it was anticipated that teachers would explain students’ academic underachievement by using factors external to teachers. Therefore, it was anticipated that teachers’ externalization would outperform internalization in explaining students’ academic underachievement. Table 3 shows the responses of the teachers on attribution items which were intending to measure the level of externalization and internalization among teachers for students academic underachievement. Items 1-17 measured the level of teachers’ internalization of attributions. In a form of a Likert Scale, teachers were asked to indicate their agreement rate to each statement. The agreement levels were Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. For purposes of analysis, these categories of levels of agreement were collapsed into two only, **Agree** and **Disagree**. If teachers agreed with these items, it would signify internalization for them as they accept the blame.

Table 3: Teachers Internalization Responses.

The Stimuli:	Teachers			
	Agree		Disagree	
Students academic underachievement is attributable mainly to:	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Unfair marking of scripts by teachers	28	40	42	60
Examinations are often difficult	18	26	52	74
Invigilators are often biased	8	12	62	89
Time given not enough to finish examinations	14	20	56	80
Poor instructions given to students on what to do	17	24	53	76
Difficult words used to set examination questions	17	24	53	76
Poor timing of examinations	18	26	52	74
Teachers conflicts with government on salaries	54	77	16	23
Incompetence among teachers results in failure	46	66	24	34
Poor teaching strategies among teachers	40	57	30	43
Examinations not based on taught syllabus	30	43	40	57
Teachers lack job satisfaction	48	69	22	31
Examinations on what they did not teach	22	31	48	69
Most teachers are lazy	20	29	50	71
Teachers get drunk during working hours	18	26	52	74
Teachers involvement in corruption	35	50	35	50
Teachers have a tendency of missing classes	43	61	27	39
AVERAGES	28	40	42	60

It can be concluded that in Table 3 the data found were as anticipated that only 28 (40%) teachers agreed to signify that they were accepting the blame while 42 (60%) disagreed with the items that is externalizing, although not to specified items. Therefore, the responses of teachers were in a predicted direction, thus confirming the hypothesis that teachers would externalize more than internalizing. It can thus be concluded that the average of 28 (40%) teachers accepted the blame that means internalization while 42 (60%) disagreed the blame that means denying internalizing the factors which were heaping blame to them.

Table 4: Teachers Externalization by Blaming Students .

The Stimuli:	Teachers			
	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Students underperformance is attributable mainly to:				
18. Students too worried of examinations	41	59	29	41
19. Students' poor vision of schooling	47	67	23	33
20. Students' low expectations of themselves	42	60	28	40
21. Students don't study hard enough	60	86	10	14
22. Most students are generally lazy	49	70	21	30
23. Students lack of positive work spirit	60	86	10	14
24. Students' lack of self control	54	77	16	23
25. Students lack of confidence in themselves	60	86	10	14
26. Students born unintelligent	16	23	54	77
27. Students' cheating in examinations	56	80	14	20
28. Students regular absenteeism	55	79	15	21
29. Students' poor relationship with their teachers	43	61	27	39
30. Students' lack of interest in schooling	61	87	9	13
31. Psychological problems that students have	48	69	22	31
32. Students often fall sick during examination	17	24	53	76
33. Students do not care much about their school work	60	86	10	14
34. Many students believe will fail anyway	31	44	39	56
AVERAGES	47	67	23	33

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It can also be concluded that, findings were as anticipated. About 47 (67%) teachers agree to signify externalization that the blames are directed to students. Therefore, the responses of teachers were in the predicted direction. Generally, it can be concluded that 47 (67%) teachers attribute to factors external to them specifically blaming students. The mean scores in attributions were computed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15 through transformation where 17 internal attribution items were selected and commanded for mean scores the same applied to external attributions; mean scores were 23 items including the six neutral items which measured external attributions were selected and commanded for mean scores for all teachers. Then, the test was performed through one sample test to see if there were significant differences between responses which externalize and those internalize. Table 4 shows the mean scores obtained for internalization and externalization. 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 teachers internal attributions scores were added up and then divided by the number of teachers (N=70). This was the same to external attributions where the scores in attributions were added up and then divided by the number of teachers included in the study. The obtained lowest and highest mean scores for teachers in internalization and externalization were 38.76 and 65.10 respectively.

In testing the difference in mean scores between internal attributions and external attributions of teachers, it was found that teachers mean score in externalization was higher than that of internalization. The tests of significance of the differences in mean scores were conducted through t-test and the mean scores in internal attributions yielded the p-values significant at $p \leq .001$ levels. Therefore, since the obtained $p = .000$ then it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores for internal attributions of teachers (M=38.76; SD=7.91) and external attributions for teachers M=65.10; SD=11.11, $p \leq .001$.

The results reveal that teachers tend to use external attributions in explaining students' underachievement more than internal attributions. Since mean score of external attributions was higher than that of internal attributions this means that teachers use external factors in explaining students' underachievement in academic. The hypothesis was thus accepted, that teachers externalize more in their attributions for students academic underachievement as anticipated.

Teachers Level of Attributions in Neutral Items

In an attempt to check teachers' attributions, the instrument administered to teachers had items which were testing how divergent the attributions among teachers would be in externalizing students' underachievement on items which had nothing to do with either the students or teachers circumstances. Table 5 shows those results in the six neutral items, these items termed as neutral since they were not directing blames to teachers, either the ministry

concerned with education (government) or parents were responsible for neutral items.

Table 5: External Attributions Responses for Teachers in Neutral Items (N=70).

The Stimuli: Students' academic underachievement is attributable mainly to:	Teachers			
	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Poor Parents socioeconomic circumstances	59	84	11	16
Frequent syllabi changes	63	90	7	10
Doing examinations on empty stomach	35	50	35	50
Frequent changes of text books	59	84	11	16
Poor environment for teaching and learning	58	83	12	17
AVERAGE	55	78	15	22

It should be noted that the six items which were presumably external to teachers, were meant to measure the extent to which teachers externalize even to neutral stimuli. Factors like poor parents socioeconomic circumstances, frequent syllabi changes, poor environment for teaching and learning, frequent changes of text books were included. Teachers do not agree that students fail examinations due to bad luck. The scores for each item were added up, then total scores for all six items of all 70 teachers were divided by the number of teachers (N=70). The maximum possible score was 24 while the minimum possible score was 6 for each teacher and the mean scores were the summed scores in all six items divide by the number of teachers. The aim of these items was to find how teachers would vary in externalization based on neutral items. Surprisingly the averages have shown that teachers externalized more by considering the averages where 55 (78%) teachers agreed with the neutral items, while only 15 (22%) disagreed. The response for bad luck did not support the pattern then it was excluded. The findings were similar to those obtained in the previous items which were intending to find whether teachers would externalize more than internalizing. It was found that teachers externalized more as it was in neutral items. Therefore it can be concluded that teachers externalize more when explaining students' academic underachievement.

Teachers Academic Qualifications and Attributions for Academic Underachievement

The distribution of teachers in this study based on their reported academic qualifications consisted of 32 (46%) degree holders, 29 (41%) diploma in education and 9 (13%) were not professional teachers. The findings obtained when T- test was computed for significant differences in the mean scores of

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attributions of teachers based on their academic qualifications, it was revealed that there was no significant difference between teachers with bachelor degrees and those without bachelor degrees in internal attributions, as opposed to external attributions, where there was a significant difference at $p \leq .05$ level between teachers with degrees ($M=62$, $SD=11.42$) and teachers without degrees $M=68$, $SD=10.18$, $t(68) = -2.368$ with an obtained $p=.021$, that academic qualifications of teachers brought a difference in external attributions but not in internal attributions. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers who had no bachelor degrees attributed students' underachievement to external causes higher than teachers with bachelor degree qualification.

Teachers' Teaching Experiences and Attributions for Students Underachievement

Teachers who participated in this study were also differing in their teaching experiences. The researcher grouped them into two categories to compare their mean scores in attributions. The categories were for, teachers with teaching experiences of above five years, and those with five or less years in teaching. Apparently, there was no statistically significant difference in attributions between the two categories of teachers. That means teaching experience was not among variables that affect teachers attributions for students academic underachievement.

Teachers Sex and Attributions for Students' Poor Academic achievement

One of the objectives of this study intended to investigate whether female and male teachers would explain academic underachievement differently. It was hypothesized that female teachers would more attribute underachievement to internal factors, while male teachers would attribute to external factors. It was found that male teachers attributed academic underachievement to external factors by a mean score of 64.71 ($SD=10.839$), while that of female teachers was 65.68 ($SD=11.694$). The mean score of female teachers was thus a bit higher than that of males. On the other hand, male teachers scored a bit higher ($M=39.31$, $SD=7.543$) against that of 37.93 ($SD=8.511$.) for female teachers in internal attributions. These differences were not significant at $p \leq .05$ level since the obtained p values ($p=.725$ and $p=.478$) were above $p \leq .05$ that was considered as a cut off point for significant difference; As found, male and female teachers did not differ significantly in either externalization or internalization. Therefore, for teachers, sex was not a factor to affect their attributions for students' academic underachievement.

Teachers with Managerial Responsibilities Explaining Academic Underachievement

Interviews were conducted to school management to find out explanations for the perpetual students' poor academic performance. It was found that teachers with managerial roles directed blame to the ministry of education and vocational training by 49.09% followed by students as cause their failures by 28.18% and lastly teachers were reported to be last causer of students' underachievement by 23.36%. School managements are parts of teachers and therefore in explaining students underachievement has attributed higher percentages to the ministry and students while serving themselves with low percentages. This is a good example of application of self serving hypothesis in attributions.

DISCUSSIONS

Teachers Internalization and Externalization of Attributions for Underachievement

The findings of this study revealed that teachers used external factors to explain students' underachievement. Therefore, teachers' externalization has psychological implications; the findings of this study supported other studies that suggested teachers most frequently attributed low achievement to low efforts, and students' acquired characteristics like low motivation and poor work habits (Tollefson, Melvin, & Thippavajjala, 1990).

Sex and Attributions for Students Academic Underachievement

This study reported that there was no significant difference between female and male teachers in their attributions. This means that female teachers believe that external factors to them lead to students' academic underachievement while male teachers outperformed female teachers that they contributed much to students' academic underachievement. Underlying assumptions is women had been victimized on the basis of culture. On the other hand the studies of attributions may differ base on the research area where culture perceived to be different for example the study by Fox and Ferri (1992) found that women make weaker internal attributions than men do, although significant. Contrary to external attributions where sex difference is greater than, that, women make significantly stronger external attributions than men do. Therefore, sex differences in attributions perceived to be debatable as Sohn (1982) argued that the direction of sex differences between women and men in external explanations of causality is debatable, as also Frieze (1982) argued that there was no strongly supported sex difference in attributions.

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These findings were similar to those found by Rusillo and Casanova (2004); that female students were taking more responsibility to their failures whereby female students attribute failures to internal factors to a greater extent than males do, who attribute it to external factors. This can be explained in relation to the position of males in societies, in most societies, males are favoured and therefore males perceive that favour and intend not to lower that esteem, and therefore neglecting women may lead to learned helplessness, hence perceive unchangeable, but if culture appraise both women and men, a substantial competition spirit is obvious. As it was found in this study that no noticeable difference in teachers' attribution based on sex. Through socialization, prejudice and discriminations mostly directed to women this can explain why female students scored higher in internal attributions as found by Lyakurwa (2010) where female students were found to internalize more than male students $p=.000$ while male students externalize more than female students $p=.031$ but this was not a case to teachers; that means in teaching, sex had not influenced their attributions for students academic underachievement.

According to Woolfolk (1998) if people feel they are not in control of their own lives; their self esteem is likely to be diminished, thus women had been victims of this dogma especially in developing countries including Tanzania. Although this should not be the fact everywhere, cultural contexts matters a lot. It was also reported that low self concept rather than lack of ability may well be the reason why girls do not elect to take courses in mathematics and science; the gender differences were consistent with previous research, with boys having significantly higher self concept scores than girls, except in English (Ireso, Hallam & Plewis, 2001). Thus it is not that girls have low ability but rather they experience low self concept. The question, one may ask, why girls experience low self concept as reported by various studies. Though cultural factors have been greatly applied to respond to this, more factors need to be investigated to justify the argument.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The explanations for students' academic underachievement seem not owned by anybody as each party tries to attribute to the other party. Externalization reflects the use of interpersonal attribution in which individuals' actions and affectively laden consequences, where the actor accounts for students' underachievement with some excuses and justifications (Austin, 1962; Scott & Lyman, 1968, as cited in Forsyth, 1980). Therefore, the explanations given by the government, teachers, students and school management may be taken as having the intention of maintaining an image of poise and competence, therefore not supposed to be blamed for failure but credit them for success. Attributions reveal one's motivation that may reflect how one would perform in the future. The findings reflected also the most popular function of

interpersonal attributions that provides communication of social identity information to others (Forsyth, 1980).

Reflecting on collectivism philosophy of Tanzanians, the issue of academic underachievement becomes a concern of everyone in the community and not heaping blame on to teachers. Since the attributed factors are controllable thus change is anticipated, this study recommends that all concerned parties to cooperate to rectify the situation. The ministry has to consider teachers and students when planning policies, circulars, projects or programs by ensuring the practicability of all plans since teachers tend to be great implementers. Either contradicting circulars should be observed and rectified promptly, such as form two national examinations circulars.

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