

The Unethical Behaviours of Community Secondary School Students Living in Street-rented Houses in Tanzania

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Abstract

This cross-sectional design study sought to investigate the unethical behaviours of community-based secondary schools students living in street-rented houses in Nanyumbu District, Mtwara region, in Tanzania. The study used a simple random sampling method to get a total sample size of 107 respondents from Mikangaula and Mangaka secondary schools. Primary data were gathered through key informant interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions; and were analysed through the lenses of the virtue ethics theory. The finding revealed that street house-renting exposed students to a lack of parental upbringing and guidance, excessive and uncontrolled freedom, influence of peer groups, and unhealthy domestic activities. Students living in street-rented houses had several unethical behaviours, such as dropping out, truancy, engaging in sexual activities, alcohol consumption, arriving late at school, smoking marijuana and cigarettes, drug abuse, and having early pregnancies and/or marriages. The study, therefore, recommends that the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) should build school hostels in community secondary schools. In addition, the administrations of community schools should effectively implement rules and regulations in community secondary schools. Lastly, students who misbehave should be punished to shape them in developing good behaviours in the society, in line with the virtue ethics theory.

Keywords: *unethical behaviour, street-rented houses, community-based secondary schools, behaviour change, education in Tanzania*

Introduction

In the global context, the development of students' behaviours in secondary schools depends on environments, parents, teachers, communities, peers and other stakeholders (Ngwokabuenui, 2015). These play a significant role in students' attitudes and ethical behaviours in society (Belle, 2017; Paccaud et al., 2021). It is almost universally accepted that, the responsibilities of schools—and therefore teachers—are to ensure that students attend school, behave ethically and perform better in examinations; while parents are responsible for taking ethical care and supporting students socially and materially so that they can attend school and demonstrate good ethical behaviours. The school environment and home are areas where students' ethical behaviours are demonstrated. Therefore, both school and home environments can influence students' behaviours (Campbell, 2003; Đurišić & Bunjevac, 2017; Sattah et al., 2022).

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In contrast, unfavourable environments can contribute to unethical behaviours among students (Arifin et al., 2018). Such unethical behaviours includes truancy, engaging in sexual activities, arriving late at school, and involvement in other misconducts such as smoking and drinking alcohol contrary to the national education policies. Secondary school students can change their behaviours due to internal and external factors, including socio-economic and environmental factors. Belle (2017) argued that changes in students' behaviours are an outcome of changes in students' lifestyles and poor environmental conditions. Unfriendly environmental conditions contribute to students' unethical behaviours, which later constrains effective learning among students, and endangers peace and harmony in schools. Dupper (2010) identified different forms of unethical behaviours of secondary school students in New York, such as late coming from school and outings, drug and alcohol abuse, improper dress code, possession and use of mobile phones, smoking cigarettes and marijuana, and involvement in sexual affairs. According to Campbell (2003), all these threaten students' performance by constraining the academic endeavours as per findings of a study of secondary school students in the UK.

In the African context, sexual affairs and arriving late at school are rampant behaviours among secondary school students; and girls are more involved in sexual intercourse than boys due to their inferiority complex and loss of self-esteem (Adegunju et al., 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, Maile and Olowoyo (2017) reported different unethical behaviours among secondary school students. Such behaviours includes absenteeism and arriving late at school. Each year about 15,000 secondary school students were reported for unethical behaviours. Furthermore, Kenya has not been spared from the abuse of drugs and alcohol among secondary school students (Okari, 2018). Secondary school students have indulged in the consumption of drugs and alcohol due to peer pressure, media influence and poor guidance. Okari (2018) found that teenagers between the ages of 15–20 years have used drugs and alcohol, followed by smoking marijuana, cigarettes and tobacco.

In Tanzania, since the year 2000, many community-based secondary schools were constructed without dormitories or students' hostels (Malekano, 2018). Tanzania's Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2007) reported that about 1,050 community secondary schools were built throughout the country between 2004 and 2006. However, this increase did not match with an increase in the number of school hostels since most of the schools were built with no hostels. This shortage of hostels forced students who could not attend schools while living at their respective homes to stay in street-rented houses (Hekela, 2014). As Kiwele (2016) has advanced, controlling the ethical behaviours of students who live in street-rented houses is a great challenge. This is because students living in street-rented houses are often surrounded by unsuitable environments which may prompt unethical behaviours. This is corroborated by Mhiliwa (2015) who, in exploring the effects of school distance on students' academic performance, established that living in street-rented houses may influence students' ethical behaviours in community secondary schools.

Moreover, Tanzania like other African countries, has been taking several measures, from the ministry level to the school level, to shape and control the behaviour of secondary school students (Bakuza, 2019). In moulding students' behaviours in secondary schools, the government—under the Ministry responsible for education—established school rules and regulations to guide students behavioural conduct. Students stand by a code of conduct in secondary schools such as being punctual; not leaving school without permission during class hours; not using mobile phones during school hours, and specifically in classrooms and examination rooms; and wearing proper school uniforms (URT-MoEVT, 2007). In addition, dodging classes or school (truancy) is a serious wrongdoing. Consequently, these school rules and regulations are the basic principles that guide students' behaviours in secondary schools. However, as Arifin et al. (2018) pointed out, unfavourable environments contribute to unethical behaviours among secondary school students, and living in street-rented houses could be one of such environments (Mhiliwa, 2015). Therefore, this study sought to find out the unethical behaviours—and their causes—of community secondary schools' students living in street-rented houses in the Nanyumbu district, Mtwara, in Tanzania.

Theoretical Perspective Underpinning this Study

The virtue ethics theory explains virtues as the characteristic trait of an individual that is based on a sense of honesty that enables people to act accordingly (Aristotle, 1999). It is different from both deontology ethics which emphasizes duties or rules, and consequentialism which emphasizes the consequences of an action. The virtue ethics theory focuses on human characteristics rather than the consequences of their actions (Hursthouse, 1991). Aristotle (1999) states that the theory is based on character rather than action. A virtue is a characteristic attribute of a human person. According to Hursthouse (2007), an act is right if the virtuous agent will act by character. The virtue ethics theory is a perceptual ability that identifies how one ought to act. Virtues are specialized perceptively to a range of reasons for acting (McDowell, 1979). These include how virtues are acquired, and how they are applied in real life. This theory is relevant to this study since it emphasizes the character-building of students through setting good acts.

According to the theory, character traits are not innate (we are not born honest or liars), but we repeatedly become that through behaviour (Aristotle, 1999). The common unethical behaviours practised by students in secondary schools include truancy (illegal staying off school), drug abuse, robbery, theft, sexual activities, smoking, drinking alcohol and intentionally arriving late at school (Okari, 2018). If students who live in street-rented houses engage in, and continue to practice, the aforesaid unethical behaviours, they will ultimately adopt new practices forming new behaviours that may affect their academic performance and distract their future. The choice of the virtue theory is important because it helps in explaining how environmental conditions influence changes in human behaviour. Also, it helps to explain the relationship between the environment and the behaviour change of secondary school students living in street-rented houses. Also, the theory provides a framework for developing ethical characters and habits.

Methodology

The mixed method research approach was used in gathering data. A cross-sectional design was found suitable for collecting information from the different respondents at a single point in time. The study was conducted in Nanyumbu District, Mtwara region, Tanzania (Figure 1). Mtwara is a region that has been consistently performing poorly in education in comparison with others (*The Citizen, 2021*). The Nanyumbu district is in Mtwara, and had a number of schools that had no hostels; thus, a large number of students were day-scholars; with many of them staying in street-rented houses (Malekano, 2018). The target population included teachers, parents, the district secondary education officer (DEO), ward education officers (WEOs), community members living nearby students' street-rented houses, owners of the street-rented houses, and those who live in school compounds and homes. Using simple random sampling method, a sample of 54 students living in street-rented houses, and 53 students living in school hostels and homes, were selected from two secondary schools: Mikangaula and Mangaka. The two schools were purposively selected to represent both schools that had no hostels and those that had insufficient hostels. Data were collected using questionnaires; key informant interviews with students, teachers, the DEO and WEOs; and focus group discussions with students and parents around the street houses where students were living. With the help of the SPSS, version 20, quantitative data were analysed to identify patterns, trends, and relationships between variables. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

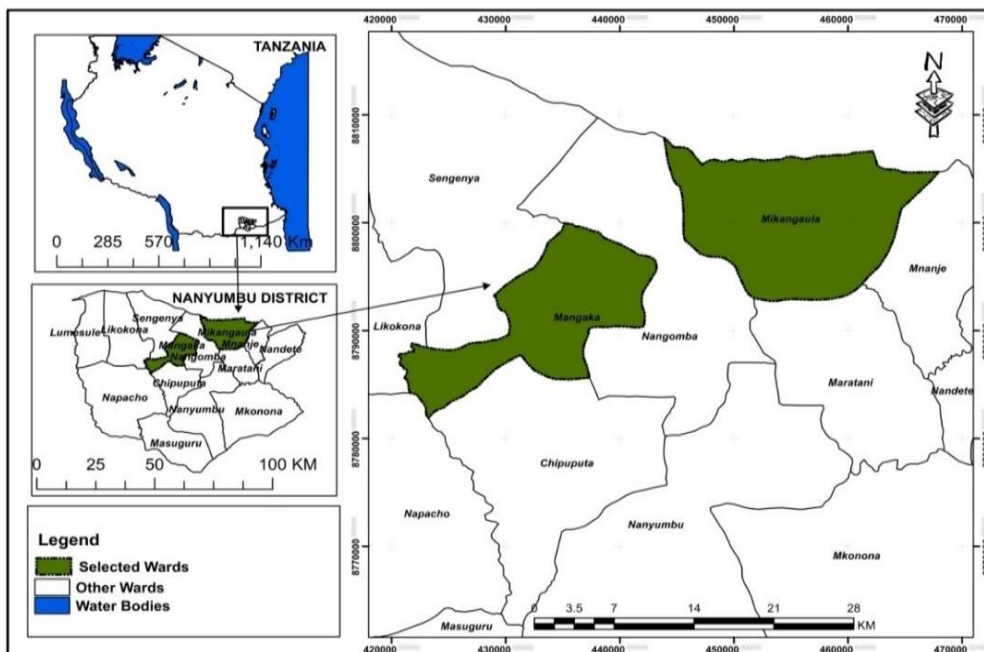


Figure 1: A Map of Nanyumbu District Showing Study Area

Source: Cartographer, 2022.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed at finding out the unethical behaviours among students living in street-rented houses, and see if these unethical behaviours could be attributed to the staying in street-rented houses.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study comprised of demographic information of 107 respondents from the two secondary schools in Nanyumbu district. The demographic characteristics of the respondents included age, sex and level of education. The age, sex and levels of education of the respondents were important in the study because they helped in acquiring unbiased views about the effects of street-rented houses on ethical behaviours of students of community secondary schools.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sex:		
Male	62	(57.9%)
Female	45	(42.1%)
Age:		
12–15 years	32	(29.9%)
15–18 years	67	(62.6%)
18–21 years	8	(7.5%)
21 and above	0	(00%)
Levels of Education		
Form One	25	(23.4%)
Form Two	10	(9.3%)
Form Three	39	(36.4%)
Form Four	33	(30.8%)

The results in Table 1 shows that 62 (57.9%) of the respondents were males, while 45 (42.1%) were females. Most respondents (66 (62.2%)) were aged between 15–18 years. Other students were in the age group of 12–15 years, 26 (29.9%), or 18–21 years of age 11 (7.5%). However, the study targeted respondents from all classes (students from Form One up to Form Four). The results in Table 1 show that 39 (36.4%) respondents were from Form Three, 33 (30.8%) respondents were from Form Four, 25 (23.4%) respondents were from Form One, and 10 (9.3%) respondents were from Form Two.

Unethical Behaviours of Students Living in the Street-rented Houses

Primarily, the respondents were asked what influenced the unethical behaviours that existed among secondary school students living in street-rented houses, and if there was any connection between the behaviour of those students and their living in street-rented houses. The results are as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2: Factors Influencing Unethical Behaviours of Secondary School Students Living in Street-rented Houses

Influencing Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lack of parents' upbringing and guidance	107	100
Excessive freedom	100	93.5
Peer pressure groups	95	88.8
Domestic activities	71	66.4

First, all 107 (100%) respondents agreed that there were unethical behaviours among the secondary school students living in street-rented houses. These behaviours were identified as sexual activities, arriving late at school, misuse of mobile phones, truancy, alcohol consumption, smoking marijuana and cigarettes, and drug abuse. The respondents also agreed that these unethical behaviours among community secondary school students were a result of living in street-rented houses. The results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that all respondents (107 (100%)) asserted the lack of parents' upbringing as the primary factor that influences unethical behaviours among secondary students living in street-rented houses. It was argued that most of the students were involved in unethical behaviours because they lacked close parental monitoring and guidance to cope with life in rented houses. Nearly all students received only dismal parental support from their parents or guardians since many parents left them alone in their rented rooms without visiting them to know their progress. A key informant interviewee (the headmaster of one of the secondary schools) said that students lacked basic needs in their rented rooms such as food, oil and rent from time to time, which affected their behaviour when they were in, and outside, the school compound.

During FGDs with parents in Mikangaula Ward, one elder member living nearby students staying in rented houses in a street, expressed this lack of parental upbringing as follows:

“Students who live in street-rented houses fail to concentrate on their studies because they lack the basic needs. Sometimes, they have no food in their rented rooms, and when they request this from their parents, they are told to wait for two days or so. So, they opt for unethical behaviours such as engaging in sexual affairs with bodaboda riders to get money to meet their basic needs and manage life” (Parent, Mikangula, 23 January 2021)

Hekela (2014) is in agreement with this finding: that the lack of parental care and supervision negatively affects students' behaviours. Likewise, a key informant (the DEO) said that the problem was not street-rented houses, but the lack of supervision of the students living in street-rented houses. Therefore, street-rented houses would be okay if parents were to manage and monitor their children.

Furthermore, the findings show that 100 (93.5%) respondents mentioned excessive freedom as a factor influencing unethical behaviours among students living in street-rented houses. It was argued that the lack of parental control and monitoring lead to undue freedom for students living in street-rented houses to do whatever they want.

During FGDs in Mangaka ward, it was established that students who live in street-rented houses have immoderate freedom compared to those who live at home or in school hostels. This excessive freedom influenced them to be involved in various forms of unethical behaviours. It was found that students living in street-rented houses were attending disco halls, movie houses, night traditional dancing, and nightclubs: doing all these instead of using their time to study. In support of these findings, Taskin (2014) found similar outcomes by noting that excessive freedom of secondary school students influences unethical behaviours such as truancy, arriving late at school, involvement in sexual affairs and smoking marijuana and cigarettes.

On the other hand, 95 (88.8%) respondents argued that peer groups in the streets where students live influenced the behaviours of students living in street-rented houses. These peer groups pressurize students into negative behaviours. A key informant interviewee (the headmaster of one of the secondary schools) confirmed that most of the students' unethical behaviours were a result of peer pressure from the streets. The interviewee said that peers influence students living in street-rented houses in school dropout, engagement in sexual affairs, drinking alcohol, and smoking marijuana and cigarettes. In the long-run, these behaviours affect students' academic performances. This finding is similar to that of Okari (2018), who established that most secondary school students who misbehaved had friends outside the school who were involved in different forms of unethical behaviours such as the use of drugs, engaging in sexual activities, truancy and school dropouts.

Students living in street-rented houses were engaged in various domestic chores such as preparing and cooking food, cleaning houses in the morning before going to school, and fetching water and firewood. It was asserted by 71 (66.4%) respondents that such domestic responsibilities led students to arrive late at school or be absent; and sometimes even drop out of school altogether. During FGDs in Mangaka ward, one parent said that students living in street-rented houses had a lot of domestic chores compared to those living in school boardings, or in homes with their parents. For example, it was pointed out that students who stay in street-rented houses wake up early in the morning to clean toilets, mop houses, cook food, or fetch water, which was at times far from their rented rooms. As such these students go to school already tired; and when they come back, they are supposed to prepare food and wash their uniforms, instead of doing academic work.

Traditional initiation rites known as '*jando*' (for boys) and '*unyago*' (for girls) were also mentioned as contributing to unethical behaviours of secondary school students living in street-rented houses. Traditional dances in these rites were said to intensify students' truancy and dropout from schools as they had songs and dances that were sexually arousing. An interview with the DEO established that young girls were taken to initiation ceremonies while still young. The DEO further advanced that young girls in fact knew little, if any anything at all, about the purpose of those initiations. According to the DEO, the initiations rites influenced some of the girls to engage in early sexual activities and early marriages.

This was supported also by findings obtained through FGDs in Mikangaula ward indicating that cultural traditions of 'jando' and 'unyago', which were common among the Wamakonde and Wamakua ethnic groups, influenced the engagement in sexual activities. One old man in Mikangaula said that during *unyago*, girls were taught how they were supposed to behave in marriage. They were also taught about sex and reproductive health. The training was done in secret places, and no non-participant was allowed to hear or even see what was happening. These findings concur with a study by UNICEF (2005), which revealed that many girls stayed out of school after such initiation ceremonies as they were presumed to be ready for marriage.

Others influences of unethical behaviours among students in street-rented houses were poverty, polygamy, divorce, long-distance and aspiration. The DEO affirmed the same, saying:

"Poverty and poor conditions are the economic factors influencing students' unethical behaviours such as engaging in sexual activities. Most parents are poor; they do not have enough money to support their children who live in street-rented rooms without facilities such as tables and chairs" (DEO, Mikangula, 26 February 2021).

The findings of this study are in line with Aristotle's virtue ethics theory, which emphasizes the importance of character building in moulding good behaviour. Repeated acts build a character; a habit. Also, acts spring from the environments in which people live in. A repetition of good acts makes a virtuous person; while a repetition of bad acts results into a vicious person. Street-house renting can make students acquire bad habit or good habits, depending on what they do. As it is, the findings show that students living in street-rented houses are without supervision; and, thus, are acquiring bad habits. However, the streets-houses where these students live are also inhabited by other parents who could act as guardians to these students and help them build good characters by rewarding good acts, and punishing bad ones. But with the new trend of focusing only on the care towards nuclear families, away from the traditional extended family, children no longer belong to the society; and this makes it difficult for persons other than the parents to discipline a child.

Conclusion

In the light of the results recounted above, this article concludes that living in street-rented houses has a detrimental effect on the behaviours of students attending community secondary schools. This has been contributing to unethical behaviours such as engaging in sexual affairs, truancy, arriving late at school, smoking marijuana, dropping out of school, drinking alcohol and drug abuse. Students who misbehave were also found to be in the company of bad peers in the streets; and had extreme freedom that led to an increased likelihoods of indulging in unethical activities.

Recommendations

This article recommends that the President's Office, Public Service Management and Good Governance and other stakeholders (such as community personnel,

parents, businesspeople, donors, etc.) build school hostels in community secondary schools to help students get rid of the bad environment they face living in street-houses. In school hostels, students will stay under the supervision of superintendents and teachers, allowing for close monitoring and controlled of their behaviours. Also, in addition to building good social life behaviours, living in school hostels will raise the chances of students performing better in academics as this will avail them more time for private studies.

The administrations of the community schools are also called to effectively implement rules and regulations in community secondary schools. School rules and regulations help address the unethical behaviours of secondary school students living in street-rented houses since they make it easy to control discipline, as well as to prepare students grow up as good citizens. Furthermore, schools should identify students who stay in street-rented houses and design regular meetings to advice and counsel them. School authorities should also carry out regular inspections to find and punish students who use mobile phones during class sessions, and manifest similar misbehaviours. There is a need to learn from the former times of Ujamaa when children belonged to the society, making every adult responsible for the behavioural upbringing of the young ones, and thus could punish them when they misbehaved to deter others doing the same. Punishment in schools and away from school is not a bad thing, it is a way of shaping students to develop good behaviours in the society, which is in line with the virtue ethics theory.

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