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SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL IN TANZANIA: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

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Abstract: Transition to secondary school is a problem internationally. Tanzanian students face an additional challenge as the medium of instruction changes from Kiswahili to English. An 18-item questionnaire ($N = 383$) and focus groups (primary standard 7, secondary forms 1 and 3, and primary and secondary teachers) were used in this study. Most students started secondary school with high expectations. These were qualified by experiences of bullying and punishment. Teachers recognised students losing hope as an explanation for truancy. However, they lacked both the training to teach English and knowledge of alternatives to punishment. Peer mentoring potentially addresses these challenges during transition. © 2017 The Authors Journal of International Development Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Keywords: education; primary; secondary; Tanzania; teachers; transition; barriers

1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, in the Tanzanian education system, the medium of instruction (MoI) shifts from Kiswahili to English as learners transition between primary and secondary schools. This is one of the many challenges faced by learners as they move and has already been the focus of much research and discussion. However, it is by no means the only challenge. This paper explores these challenges, drawing both on existing research in Tanzania and on research on transition in the UK and US contexts. The results explore the extent to which learners face similar challenges to those in other contexts as well as challenges unique to the country.

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Questionnaires completed by students and focus groups conducted with groups of teachers and groups of learners from primary and secondary schools explore issues from bullying and disruption to the language of instruction and corporal punishment. The data presented are taken from four community (state) schools in rural settings in Tanga Province, Tanzania. This study builds on another study from the same project, which explores cyber bullying and attitudes to mobile phone use by secondary students (forms 1 and 3) and the attitudes of secondary school teachers to these issues (Joyce-Gibbons *et al*., 2017).

For a number of years, researchers at Durham University have worked with two partner institutions, Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU) and St Rock College of Early Education (SRCEE). Both are located in Tanga Province in the north-east of Tanzania. Both have a strong focus on teacher education. In addition, we partner with COCO, a UK educational charity with projects across Tanzania (www.coco.org.uk). During collaborative conversations in the course of our work with these partners, teachers and teacher educators repeatedly emphasised the move from primary to secondary schools as the most difficult period for learners in the school system. Once in secondary school, learners found coping very difficult and the rate of truancy and dropout rose sharply through the first and second forms of secondary school. The explanation, teachers felt, was straightforward: throughout the primary years, children were taught in the medium of Kiswahili, but in secondary schools, all teaching used English as a medium.

Although English was taught from the first year of primary school, many children had not acquired sufficient competence to cope with an English medium instruction by the start of secondary education. The change in the MoI between primary school (Kiswahili) and secondary school (English) is a key issue, well theorised and explored in the Tanzanian context. However, the researchers were aware of research showing that motivation in the period of transition has been shown to dip in the UK and US educations systems where there is no such language shift (Eccles & Midgeley, 1989; Galloway, Rogers, Armstrong, & Leo, 1998). Therefore, this paper will explore issues related to the MoI, specifically with reference to the Tanzanian context, but also explore whether challenges to learner motivation, present in the UK and US education systems, are at work as well.

1.1 Medium of Instruction

Despite Kiswahili being the national language and the MoI in primary school and some higher education, English remains the MoI for secondary school in Tanzania (Brock-Utne, 2001). The reasons for and repercussions of the elevated status of the language of the British Empire (and now considered to be a ‘global’ language) are embedded deeply within Tanzanian society (Brock-Utne, 2002). The shift from Kiswahili to English will be considered in relation to the function of education in society, the impact on the learners and the impact on the teachers.

Kiswahili is not usually the mother tongue of learners in Tanzania. Rather, it is a language that is widely spoken and understood throughout the country (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2003). Since Julius Nyerere first addressed the first post-colonial parliament in Kiswahili, it has been the *de facto* language of debate in the country. However, this prominence has never implied hegemony (Rubagumya, 1991). English is still the language of written laws and of commerce. It is perceived widely as the pathway to prosperity by many who are anxious that their children are able to communicate in a ‘global’ language

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rather than only in a 'national' language. English has been promoted in schools as the general MoI since colonial rule precisely because it is seen as the more useful and international language tool (Brock-Utne, 2001). Sufficient competence in English is a barrier to entry into the cultural and professional elite in the country, a barrier parents are anxious for their children to surmount (Sumra & Katabaro, 2016). Doing so is difficult in the current system, with wealthy parents paying for private tuition in English-language primary schools (Lin & Martin, 2005). While Qorro (2009) points out that there are clear benefits to communicating in English in some circumstances, this is a convincing argument for English to be taught in schools but not for it to be the MoI (Brock-Utne, 2007).

The structural preference for English leads to exclusion and a lack of social mobility, leading many to call for a change in the education system towards more instruction in Kiswahili (Clegg, 2007). Supporters of this change argue that Kiswahili is a versatile and comprehensive enough language to employ to describe the necessary academic and scientific concepts. Using Kiswahili will allow teachers to evaluate learner's understanding in the subject being taught rather than just in English. It will also unshackle struggling teachers from the constraints of teaching in an unfamiliar language in which they may themselves struggle, allowing them to concentrate on teaching the subject knowledge, which is of greater interest and familiarity to them (Qorro, 2013).

English could be taught by specialist teachers as a specialist subject. This, it is argued, would enable greater progress to be made in the teaching and learning across the curriculum and in English (Clegg & Afitska, 2011). Other voices have argued for a recognition of the inherent unfamiliarity of Kiswahili, moving to a three-language model that would transition learners through the education system from the local to national languages and then to the international language as MoI. In this model, the MoI would be in the child's mother tongue in early education, in Kiswahili in upper primary or secondary education and in English in tertiary education (Brock-Utne, 2002; Canagarajah, 2005; Rubagumya, Afitska, Clegg, & Kiliku, 2011).

The effect on the learner of the privileging of English as the MoI over either Kiswahili or (where different) their mother tongue is profound. Learners not already growing up within the cultural elite are unlikely to have had the opportunity to attend an English-medium primary school. Consequently, upon beginning secondary school, they find the languages in which they have competence devalued by the new institution (Rubagumya *et al.,* 2011). Indeed, perhaps as many as half of all learners leaving primary school in standard 7 are unable to read English at a standard 3 level (Uwezo, 2010). Not only is proficiency in English associated with overall educational attainment, but it is also associated with future life success both economically and culturally (Brock-Utne, 2002). The impact demotivates learners who already lack a strong and well-founded sense of self-efficacy in English.

Teachers charged with teaching effectively in an English MoI classroom face a very difficult task. Competence in English is far from uniform and far from sufficient in many classrooms. Lack of appropriate proficiency in English may limit a teacher's ability to develop students' understanding of the core content knowledge of their subject and limit their ability to deploy appropriate pedagogical strategies (Qorro, 2013). As they try to work around the challenges of English-language communication in an effort to teach the content of their subject, three common teacher strategies have been observed in classrooms. Firstly, a process of 'safe talk' may take place, particularly used by teachers whose own competence in English is not strong. Learners are asked to fill in gaps in speech with words relating more to standard communication in English rather than to the content

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of the subject they are studying. The main medium for this is whole class call and response. This method supports minimal communication or construction of knowledge on the part of the learner (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2003).

The final two observed behaviours are code mixing and code switching. At first glance, these appear to be similar; both involve blending Kiswahili and English to communicate. However, there is a key difference (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2003). The former blends words from both languages in the same sentence; the latter uses whole sentences in both languages. While code mixing is regarded as the less pedagogically effective of the two, it has the merit of scaffolding or checking the learner's understanding of key concepts or vocabulary. Code switching is seen as more pedagogically effective because it allows for the construction and discussion of more complex ideas by both learner and teacher. The teacher can model how to phrase these in English once they are secure in Kiswahili in the mind of the learner (Clegg & Afitska, 2011).

The political landscape may change, and the preference for English as MoI for secondary education may change. However, the underlying message of the research is one of the need for robust and effective pedagogy, which allows teachers to make the best use of the resources they have available—such as their own command of language and subject knowledge—within the constraints of the classrooms and education system in which they have to work. This study explores some of these challenges and will propose a possible way forward that seeks to address them in a constructive and pedagogically effective manner.

There have been statements at the highest level of government in Tanzania that the MoI will be standardised as Kiswahili for primary and secondary schools (Lugongo, 2015; Mohammed, 2015). At the time of writing, official policy is still awaited from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology. However, although the MoI presents a significant barrier to learning in secondary school for some students, it is far from the only one. Should this policy be put into effect, the relevance of the present study will only increase given that removing the MoI barrier will not address other structural, pedagogical and personal barriers that learners will still have to overcome.

1.2 Student Attrition in Tanzania

Attrition, the loss of students throughout the four forms of secondary school, is a serious problem in Tanzania. Increasing numbers of students beginning secondary school were reported between 2007 and 2011, with an estimated 50.2 per cent of the total eligible population enrolled in secondary school. However, attrition rates bring the proportion of children entering form 4 down to 35.8 per cent. Three main reasons are given for this attrition: truancy, pregnancy and economic hardship (Mkumbo, 2011). Truancy is attributed to economic causes as boys are often absent in order to participate in economic activity and girls to help out domestically. Government sources cited in Cresce (2007) attribute this truancy to attitudes at home where parents place a low value on education compared to more immediate economic priorities. Pregnancy is the second biggest cause of dropping out among female students. Early sexual activity has been attributed to a lack of sexual education and awareness but also to reasons of economic necessity (Kitomary, 2016). Pregnant girls are commonly expelled or suspended from school if they do not drop out of their own volition (Hattori & Larsen, 2007).

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1.3 Additional Challenges during Transition

While learners in Tanzania face significant challenges that are specific to their education system (in particular, change in the MoI) and more generally those experienced in low-income countries (e.g. truancy for economic reasons and dropout through teen pregnancy), research conducted in the UK and USA suggests that learners in more economically developed education systems also have to deal with challenges during transition. These challenges may also impact learners in the Tanzanian context. Students in the UK and USA may experience falls in attainment, in motivation and in self-concept measures following a transition between schools (Wigfield *et al*., 1991; Seidman *et al*., 1994; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005). Explanations for the frequently noted problems in the first year of secondary school can be characterised as systemic, personal and pedagogical.

(a) *Systemic*. In adolescence, young people seek greater autonomy, but the school environment becomes more controlling, causing feelings of resentment and alienation from the institution (Eccles & Midgeley, 1989). The school environment expands in size and complexity, which can leave students feeling bewildered and dislocated (Hammond, 2016).
(b) *Personal*. Some learners experience a deep sense of loss for familiar people or surroundings in their previous schools (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Topping, 2011). New subject curricula bring increased expectations and new pedagogic learning styles compared to those in primary school (Galton, Morrison, & Pell, 2000). The difference in the level of personal independence required between primary and secondary schools may disconcert some learners (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Finally, the transition is a ‘step up’ in institution but a ‘step down’ in status (Measor & Wood, 1984). While younger children may equate ability with effort, adolescents begin to doubt that effort and outcome are correlated (Nicholls, 1989). The development of fixed self-concepts of ability or self-efficacy can lead to the development of self-worth protection measures, which might encourage alienation and possible truancy or dropout (Dweck, 2000; Covington, 1992).
(c) *Pedagogical*. There is a dissonance between the socially focused priorities of learners during transition and the performance-focused priorities of teachers (Measor & Wood, 1984; Lucey & Reay, 2000). Learners are initially seeking to build social networks and resolve inter-personal, short-term issues. Teachers focus on developing curriculum competence to meet the requirements of future assessments and high-stakes examinations (Topping, 2011; Bailey & Baines, 2012). Teaching in separate subject groups also leads to greater variety in teaching style and discipline-specific pedagogies. These can cause learners to vary in their level of comfort with the teaching styles they experience and increases the possibility of potential inter-personal difficulties with individual teachers (Galton *et al*., 2000; Galton, Gray, & Rudduck, 2003).

During the early years of secondary school, many learners experience bullying, in one form or another. Bound up with ideas of social identity and status, bullying can be a way adolescents in transition to a new learning environment manage peer and dominance relationships (Topping, 2011; Zeedyk *et al*., 2003). Bullying is certainly a challenge encountered in Tanzanian schools, with one in four students at secondary schools in Dar es Salaam reporting that they had experienced some form of bullying in the previous 30 days (Wilson, Dunlavy, & Berchtold, 2013). However, this is roughly on a par with more developed countries such as the USA and France. The same study reported no

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statistically significant difference in experiences of bullying between the genders and suggested that experience of bullying decreased as adolescence progressed. A study of six sub-Saharan countries identified bullying as a contributory factor to adolescent suicide and suicidal thoughts (Arat, 2016).

Taken together, the potential factors at work in the experience of learners beginning their secondary education in Tanzanian schools are complex. Some factors relate specifically to the experience of Tanzanian schools such as the MoI switching from Kiswahili to English. Others present challenges that are common to a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa such as economic pressures or behaviours that risk pregnancy. Finally, there are some factors identified in the literature on transition in the UK and USA that have not been explored in detail but that might also be faced by learners in Tanzanian secondary schools in the region studied. These are a range of overlapping systemic, personal and pedagogical issues. The current study explores in greater detail what students and teachers perceive to be the key challenges to be overcome if transition to secondary school is to be successful.

The aims of the research were therefore to answer four questions:

1. With what expectations do students begin their secondary school careers?
2. What challenges do learners in the first and third forms of secondary school experience after making the transition between primary and secondary schools?
3. How do teachers experience and respond to the challenges they perceive in the process of transition?
4. Do the data suggest ways of reducing the challenges students face on transition?

2 METHODS

2.1 Questionnaire

Secondary school students completed a short exploratory questionnaire on their school experiences (N = 383). This survey was translated into Kiswahili and delivered by partner staff members from SEKOMU and SRCEE who were fluent Kiswahili speakers. Responses to closed questions were on a 4-point scale, and items covered several aspects of school experience that might contribute to difficulties in transition, such as bullying and noise or disruption in classes, or that might be the consequence of difficulties in transition such as truancy. The four response options were YES, yes, no and NO. The font and layout made clear that the options ranged from an emphatic ‘YES’ to an emphatic ‘NO’. Six open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire invited respondents to give further information to support their answers to the closed questions on the areas of anxiety about school, attendance and bullying. All items were written in English and Kiswahili, but most students wrote replies to the open-ended questions in Kiswahili.

2.2 Participating Schools

The four secondary schools participating in the questionnaire are located in the Tanga Region. All were located in rural settings, several miles from a large town, and all were

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community schools. These schools were built to absorb the considerable increase in numbers of students enrolled in secondary education during the implementation of the Primary Education Development Plan beginning shortly after the millennium (United Republic of Tanzania, 2001). Students in community schools have historically performed less well in standardised assessments than those at older, more established institutions because of the difficulties experienced in their establishment (Sumra & Katabaro, 2014). Three of the schools were of approximately similar size, and one, the most remote, was smaller, although this was hard to establish because of a lack of accurate student records (school 1: $N = 88$, school 2: $N = 43$, school 3: $N = 111$, school 4: $N = 141$). All schools reported shortages of resources, rooms and furniture necessary to accommodate their students adequately. Because of limitations on the time and resources of the team, extended answers were only translated from questionnaires taken from the two largest secondary schools, one in each of the two districts in which data were collected. A limitation of the study is that gender data are incomplete for one of these schools.

2.3 Focus Groups

Researchers from Durham University facilitated all focus groups in conjunction with researchers from SEKOMU and SRCEE. Focus group interviews were conducted in English for teachers but with Kiswahili translation where deemed necessary. Focus groups with students in primary and secondary schools were conducted in Kiswahili, with all utterances by Durham University researchers translated into Kiswahili and all responses translated into English in real time by researchers from SEKOMU and SRCEE. One feeder primary school for each secondary school also participated in the study. The children interviewed in these, if they expected to go to secondary school at all, expected to go to the community school nearest to them. These schools were also in rural settings, several miles from the nearest town. In primary schools, focus groups were conducted with mixed groups of students currently in standard 7 (three male and three female participants in each group). Focus groups were also conducted with primary school teachers. These groups of teachers were selected by the head teacher in each case and varied in gender balance and age range.

The primary groups invited responded to questions about what students were looking forward to in secondary school and what worried them. When necessary, prompts were given about friends, work, teachers, support from parents, the possibility of bullying and punishments. Group members were asked to elaborate when discussion slowed or a response was not clear. The focus groups with teachers followed the same approach, but from the perspectives of teachers.

Focus groups were held with students in forms 1 and 3 in the two secondary schools (three male and three female participants in each group) as well as with teachers in each school. However, in a similar manner to the primary interviews, teachers were selected by the head teacher, apparently on the criteria of availability, and therefore did not have equal gender balance or age range. The groups with secondary students and teachers followed a similar structure as in primary schools. Participants were asked about their recollections of their expectations of secondary school and about their experiences since transferring, what they liked about secondary school and what they found difficult. Interviews with the teachers focused on their perceptions of the challenges students faced

in transition, their needs as they underwent this process and what aspects of curriculum, pedagogy and institutional organisation met these needs or exacerbated the problem.

2.4 Ethical Consent

Consent for the project was obtained directly from senior members of the local authority administration; in the case of one school, this was from the District Commissioner in person and in the other from the Deputy District Commissioner for Education. Collaborators from SEKOMU and SRCEE obtained informed consent from staff and students by presenting the project (including introducing the participating institutions, the purposes of academic research, the area of study and the likely outcomes of the study) in Kiswahili. All participants were aware that their involvement was voluntary, anonymous and confidential and that they could either choose not to answer a specific question or withdraw at any time. With students, these assurances were given in the presence of teachers, but teachers were not present during the focus group session.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Students' Ratings of Experience of School

Table 1 shows mean and standard deviations for each item in the questionnaire. In the two right-hand columns, the two positive responses to each item have been combined and, likewise, the two negative responses. Item means and standard deviation were computed from the 307 pupils (80.16 per cent) who completed all 18 items. Thirteen items were completed by over 98 per cent of respondents. The remaining five were all completed by between 94 and 98 per cent. The figures in the two right-hand columns are based on the percentage of valid responses to each item.

3.1.1 Enjoyment of school and attendance

It is striking from the table that a large majority of pupils (over 93 per cent) claimed to like being in their school, to enjoy lessons, to want to go to school and to never to stay away when they could have attended. A marginally higher number admitted to having stayed away when they could have attended, compared with the number replying that there had been days when they did not want to go to school. This may be due to pupils remaining at home for economic reasons, to help in the fields or with household chores. However, this positive picture is qualified by the number of students reporting that there were things that had worried them both before going to secondary school (53 per cent) and since starting (50.3 per cent).

3.1.2 Specific challenges in forms 1 and 3

The most disturbing figures are on bullying and cyber bullying. Bullying was defined in the questionnaire as follows:

> Bullying is when a pupil is hit, kicked or pushed by another pupil. It is also when a pupil is teased or called names, or when a pupil is not allowed to join in with others —when he or she is isolated by the others.

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Table 1. Responses to questionnaire items

	N	Mean[a]	Standard deviation	YES or yes (%)	NO or no (%)	Missing
1. Do you like being in this school?	383	1.04	0.206	94	4	2
2. Do you enjoy the lessons?	383	1.01	0.102	97	1	2
3. Pupils in my class usually help each other when they need help.	383	1.06	0.238	91	6	3
4. I usually help another pupil when he or she needs help.	383	1.01	0.088	97	1	2
5. When you heard you were going to secondary school, were there things that worried you?	383	1.47	0.491	51	45	4
6. Have there been things that worried you since starting in secondary school?	383	1.5	0.496	49	49	2
7. Have there been days this term when you didn't want to go to school?	383	1.91	0.285	9	89	2
8. This term, have you ever stayed away when you could have gone to school?	383	1.9	0.299	10	86	4
9. There is too much noise and disruption in my classes.	383	1.51	0.486	46	48	6
10. I am sometimes noisy and disruptive.	383	1.79	0.402	20	78	2
11. Do you sometimes feel sad or unhappy at school?	383	1.53	0.496	46	53	1
12. Do you sometimes feel sad or unhappy where you live during the school term?	383	1.76	0.425	24	75	1
13. Have you been bullied by other pupils?	383	1.56	0.494	43	56	1
14. Have you been bullied by teachers or other adults?	383	1.59	0.491	41	58	1
15. Have you bullied other pupils?	383	1.66	0.47	33	65	2
16. Have you been bullied in this way by other pupils? [cyber bullying]	383	1.67	0.469	32	67	1
17. Have you heard of it happening to other pupils? [cyber bullying]	383	1.46	0.497	53	46	1
18. Have you bullied other pupils in this way? [cyber bullying]	383	1.69	0.46	31	68	1

[a]Lower mean ratings denote more positive experience.

Cyber bullying was defined as follows:

> Another sort of bullying is using mobile phone text messages or computers or social media (e.g. Facebook) to make another pupil frightened or embarrassed.

A limitation in the questionnaire is that it did not specify a time limit within which bullying had occurred. Even allowing for this, it was a matter for concern that 46 per cent of pupils reported that they had been bullied by other pupils and 43 per cent by teachers. Moreover, 32 per cent admitted to having bullied other pupils. Cyber bullying appeared to be widespread, with 55 per cent of pupils admitting to having heard of it. In addition,

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32 per cent said they had been bullied in this way by other pupils and 29 per cent admitted to having bullied other pupils in this way.

A principal component analysis was carried out in order to throw further light on the grouping of responses to the questionnaire. When varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation is used, the most interpretable clustering of items was the three-factor solution shown in Table 2. This solution contained 17 of the 18 items. The first factor, labelled *bullying*, does not distinguish between being a victim or perpetrator and seems to reflect a generalised concern about bullying. The second, labelled *well-being*, contains items of both generalised worry about transition to secondary school and specific concerns subsequent to transfer. The inclusion in this factor of an item about being sad or unhappy at home may reflect the emotional impact of experience at school on experience at home, or vice versa. The third factor, labelled *enjoyment of school*, contains two items about attendance. It is clear from data in Table 1 that a large majority of pupils replied that they wanted to attend and seldom stayed away. These replies are therefore consistent with those of items asking about liking school and cooperation between pupils. It is important to note that principal component analysis identifies clusters of items that respondents tend to answer in similar ways. Hence, there is no inconsistency in the three factors revealing enjoyment of school and concerns about school.

Table 2. Sub-scales derived from the exploratory questionnaire

Questionnaire items	Loading	Communality
Factor 1: bullying		
Eigenvalue	3.857	
Percentage of total variance	21.399	
13. Have you been bullied by other pupils?	0.69	0.48
14. Have you been bullied by teachers or other adults?	0.75	0.58
15. Have you bullied other pupils?	0.88	0.78
16. Have you been bullied in this way by other pupils? [cyber bullying]	0.90	0.83
17. Have you heard of it happening to other pupils? [cyber bullying]	0.70	0.45
18. Have you bullied other pupils in this way? [cyber bullying]	0.88	0.81
Factor 2: well-being		
Eigenvalue	2.775	
Percentage of total variance	15.01	
5. When you heard you were going to secondary school, were there things that worried you?	0.59	0.39
6. Have there been things that worried you since starting in secondary school?	0.68	0.47
9. There is too much noise and disruption in my classes.	0.61	0.42
10. I am sometimes noisy and disruptive.	0.58	0.33
11. Do you sometimes feel sad or unhappy at school?	0.69	0.45
12. Do you sometimes feel sad or unhappy where you live during the school term?	0.56	0.33
Factor 3: enjoyment of school		
Eigenvalue	1.691	
Percentage of total variance	9.84	
1. Do you like being in this school?	0.64	0.48
2. Do you enjoy the lessons?	0.54	0.41
3. Pupils in my class usually help each other when they need help.	0.64	0.40
7. Have there been days this term when you didn't want to go to school?	−0.48	0.36
8. This term, have you ever stayed away when you could have gone to school?	−0.44	0.32

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The high Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.79) justified use of these factors as sub-scales. For comparison between groups, the three sub-scales were the dependent variables. Independent variables were the pupils' form in the school (form 1 or 3), their sex (boy or girl) and the length of their daily journey to school (less than 15 min, 15–60 min and over 1 h). The *t*-test was used to test for difference in mean between two samples on each independent variable, for example boys and girls, and a one-way analysis of variance when there were more than two independent variables. The results are shown in Table 3. Form 3 students reported significantly less bullying than form 1 student and also fewer concerns on the well-being factor. Boys reported less enjoyment of school than did girls. Students with a journey to school lasting 15–60 min reported fewer concerns in the well-being factor than students with a shorter journey.

3.2 Students' Responses to Open-ended Questions

Pupils responded to the open-ended questions mainly in Kiswahili. Extended responses have been analysed from participants in school 3 (N = 54 responses from form 1, N = 57 responses from form 3) and school 4 (N = 28 responses from form 1). Responses from the remaining questionnaires were not available for a variety of reasons including lack of time for students to complete these items, evidence of collusion between students and difficulty in arranging translation. Not all students replied to the open-ended questions. By far the largest number of replies was to the questions about students' concerns when they heard they would be going to secondary school and things that had worried them since starting school.

3.2.1 Expectations on starting school: retrospective concerns

Responses were received from 137 students in one of the two schools. Responses were grouped under four headings: punishment, difficulty with subjects (almost invariably English), no concerns and miscellaneous or could not be coded. The total number of concerns coded was 158, exceeding the number of students because some students listed more than one area of concern. By far the largest number of concerns was about punishment, almost invariably corporal punishment (104, 65.8 per cent of the total). The following are examples:

Table 3. Difference between selected groups in mean responses to sub-scales

Sub-scale	Form	Gender	Gender by age	Journey time
Test	Independent-sample *t*-test	Independent-sample *t*-test	Independent-sample *t*-test by (i) form and (ii) gender	One-way analysis of variance
—	a = form 1 b = form 3	a = boys b = girls	a = form 1 boys b = form 1 girls c = form 3 boys d = form 3 girls	a ≤ 15 min b = 15–60 min c ≥ 60 min
Bullying	$p < 0.01$, b < a	NS	$p < 0.01$, a < c, a < d, b < c, b < d	NS
Well-being	$p < 0.01$, b < a	NS	$p < 0.01$, a < c, a < d, b < c, b < d	$p < 0.01$, b < a
Enjoyment of school	NS	$p = 0.01$, a < b	NS	NS

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> I heard the school has harsh teachers and when you fail they punish you.
> … I heard there is a tree where we will be severely beaten.
> I was afraid of being beaten and learning in English because I never knew English.

This was followed by concerns about English or, in two cases, unspecified subjects (30 responses, 19.0 per cent of the total). The following is an example:

> I was afraid of speaking English.

Fourteen students (8.9 per cent of coded response) said they had felt no worries about going to secondary school:

> I never worried about anything since I like studying.
> I was not worrying about anything.

The 10 miscellaneous responses (6.3 per cent) were mostly unclear, but two students mentioned the distance they lived from school and punishment for lateness, and one mentioned bullying.

3.2.2 Challenges faced after transition to secondary school

One hundred forty-six responses were coded from 138 students. Again, punishment was the biggest concern (105 comments, 71.9 per cent of responses coded), followed by 19 who wrote that they had no worries (13.0 per cent of coded responses), 12 students who expressed concerns about English or other subjects (8.2 per cent) and 11 responses that were miscellaneous or could not be rated (6.9 per cent). Two students implied that they had heard 'threats' about what might happen, but these had not materialised. In contrast, other comments expressed resentment:

> There is unnecessary punishment.
> Students are too noisy in the class; we've been given heavy punishment due to small mistakes.

3.2.3 School attendance

Five response categories were derived from 82 students responding as follows: never absent (40.2 per cent), miscellaneous and/or ambiguous response (26.8 per cent), sick (19.5 per cent), punishment (8.5 per cent) and funeral (4.9 per cent). Many responses were categorised as miscellaneous because they were ambiguous, for example one-word answers saying 'yes' or 'nothing'. Only one student gave an excuse implying disinterest in school:

> I never felt like going, because I was tired.

While they were a small proportion, responses related to punishment were vivid:

> I saw my sister was beaten until her fingers swelled.
> I was threatened to be given a harsh punishment.

3.2.4 Reasons for not wanting to go to school

Only 67 students replied to this question, suggesting either that it was a relatively minor concern or that it was a topic students were reluctant to talk about. Again, the largest percentage was happy to attend (41.8 per cent):

> I like and I feel happy to attend the school every day.

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The miscellaneous category (32.8 per cent) contained ambiguous replies and a few replies implying poverty:

> Because I didn't have shoes, school fee or exercise books.

Illness or attending funerals accounted for 14.9 per cent of replies, a wish to avoid punishment or a particular teacher for 7.5 per cent and bullying for only 3.0 per cent.

3.2.5 Bullying

Fifty per cent of the 93 students responding claimed to have been bullied by other students (23.4 per cent) or by teachers or, in a small minority of cases, other adults (26.6 per cent). It should be noted, though, that despite an explanatory clarification in the questionnaire defining bullying as a process involving peers rather than teachers ('Bullying is when a pupil is hit, kicked or pushed by another pupil. It is also when a pupil is teased or called names, or when a pupil is not allowed to join in with others—when he or she is isolated by the others'), some students included punishment by teachers as examples of perceived bullying. Representative comments are as follows:

> I've been given a punishment of sweeping the ground.
> I've never mistreated anyone but our teachers are mistreating us.
> I have been mistreated by teachers by being beaten.
> Yes, I was … insulted by elders.
> Being called embarrassing names.
> Yes, some students like to joke; others like calling names like chimpanzee.

Only one student gave a response suggesting that he or she might have been involved in bullying, writing 'Yes, because they're troublesome'. Of the responses, 5.3 per cent could not be coded because of lack of clarity, but 43.6 per cent of students said they had never experienced bullying.

3.2.6 Cyber bullying

Of the 73 responses to this open-ended question, 63 per cent said they had never experienced it. Eleven per cent said they had been bullied in this way, and 13.7 per cent had heard of it happening to others. Replies from two students (2.7 per cent) suggested the possibility that they had been involved as perpetrators.

> Yes, I heard some girls start to fight for boys and put it on social media.
> I have been mistreated by my fellow students by phone.
> M. insulted me through a message in the phone.

Of the 9.6 per cent of responses that could not be coded, some were clearly based on a misreading of the question, for example 'Our teachers beat us a lot'. In spite of this, nearly a quarter of students said that they had experienced cyber bullying or had heard of it happening to someone else.

3.3 Focus Groups

Twenty-two focus groups were held, eight with teachers (four with teachers in the feeder primary schools and four with teachers in the secondary schools) and 14 with students (five primary standard 7, five secondary form 1 and four secondary form 3).

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The interviews were transcribed and varied in length from less than a page of A4 to over five pages. The transcripts were read repeatedly to identify common themes and sub-themes. This led to selection of four groups for reporting purposes: primary school students; primary school teachers; secondary school students, with forms 1 and 3 combined; and secondary school teachers. The decision to combine forms 1 and 3 in secondary schools was based on the common ground in their experience of transition to secondary school.

3.3.1 Primary schools: students

The five groups with primary school students were the least productive of the focus groups, probably because the students found the situation unfamiliar, with the presence of a European researcher and the need for an interpreter. Five themes were evident in the transcripts. *Looking forward to secondary school* was mentioned in three groups. Group members said they were looking forward to studying and/or that they thought their performance would improve. *Friends*, or rather concerns about losing them, were mentioned in two groups:

> I am worried that I might find that I have passed the examination and then maybe my best friend has not passed. And then when going to secondary school I might feel unhappy or sad because of not being close to my best friend.

Siblings were seen as a helpful source of information about secondary school in two groups. Awareness of *punishments* was a dominant theme in three of the five groups:

> Because we are very close to the secondary school we can see … them making bricks as a punishment.

By far the most consistent theme, though, was *English language*, discussed by students in all five groups: ‘The biggest change will be the language’. One student said:

> I am worried more and more about the lessons, the subjects that might be different from here (i.e. primary school), and also the language is going to be different.

3.3.2 Primary schools: teachers

Three themes were extracted from the four focus groups with the primary school students’ teachers. *Positive expectations* were mentioned in two groups. Students wanted a good educational foundation; both they and their parents felt pride at them going to secondary school. *Punishment* in secondary schools was a major theme in three groups.

> Yes, they are all worried (about punishments).

A member of another group, in contrast, insisted that although the punishments in secondary schools were ‘stronger’, this did not worry the children. As with the primary school students, the dominant theme, mentioned in all four groups, was problems arising from *English as the MoI*:

> Of course the English language is a barrier at the secondary school, so it makes them worry … because in primary school they are taught in Kiswahili.

Two sub-themes emerged in other groups. The first was *preparation for secondary school*. After talking about the language barrier, a teacher argued:

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> When they enter (secondary school) they meet with a number of barriers, so the only problem here (in primary school) is how we prepare those students (to move) from primary school to secondary school.

While other members of the group agreed, there were no suggestions as to what form the preparation should take apart from more effective teaching of English. The primary school's role in preparing students was mentioned in only one other group, in terms of talking to children about secondary school. The second sub-theme, mentioned in more detail by secondary teachers below, was *disillusionment with secondary school*. According to teachers in one group, students were happy to go to secondary school but, faced with studying in an unfamiliar language,

> They fail to cope and sometimes they 'disappear' [i.e. drop out or truant].

3.3.3 Secondary schools: students

Three recurring themes were apparent from analysis of the nine focus groups with students in secondary schools. First, students in six groups talked about starting secondary school with *positive expectations*, for example feeling happy on their first day, mixing with students from different places, being with friends from primary school, hoping to learn new things and having help from their parents. In two of these groups, students talked about receiving advice—or warning—from older siblings. Unsurprisingly, the positive expectations were mixed with concern:

> The first day I was feeling happy, but since I could not know the rules … you weren't knowing quite what to expect.

The second theme was *English language*. The challenge of learning in an unfamiliar language was widely recognised. One student explained with help from an interpreter:

> In primary school we were taught about English. After reaching secondary school we must be taught in English. So it becomes difficult to talk with our fellow students and even to negotiate with teachers becomes a problem.

Yet members of five of the nine groups made positive comments about learning in English. One student agreed that English was not an easy language but added:

> I was very happy (on my first day) because I came to learn more things apart from (what we learned) at primary school and I was happy to start knowing English.

Members of two groups had been punished for not speaking in English. This appeared to be seen as a consequence of breaking the rule of 'No English, no service'. The third theme, *punishment*, was prominent in five of the nine groups. In addition to 'sticks' (in one school, we noticed no fewer than four in one classroom), push-ups, digging channels or fish ponds, farm work and brick making were mentioned. The most frequent reasons for punishment were lateness to school, missing school and failing tests or examinations. The difference between primary and secondary schools for one student was as follows:

> When you have done the wrong things in secondary school they punish you. In primary school, there are some teachers, when you have done wrong things, they give forgiveness.

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3.3.4 Secondary schools: teachers

Although bullying featured quite prominently in students' replies both to questions requiring rating on a 4-point scale and to the open-ended questions, that was not the case in the focus groups with teachers. Four clear themes emerged from these groups. *Losing hope and motivation* was a striking feature of three groups:

> when they join secondary school they (are) always happy … but when they face the variation from what they were used to in primary school, some of them are disappointed and you find that within two or three months they like to (stay) at home instead of be in secondary school. So maybe I can say they lose what we call interest to learn.

In all four groups, the *English language* was seen as the central—and sometimes the overwhelming—challenge. As one teacher explained:

> they do lose hope, especially when they meet with this language, I mean the English language …. In primary school they speak Kiswahili, so when they meet with English it will be a hindrance to them. It will hinder them (in understanding) what the teacher is talking about and … it suppresses their capacity to learn.

The problem, though, was that teachers had a rather narrow range of strategies for coping with students who found the MoI difficult. This is illustrated as follows:

> When you are teaching in English … you have to translate some words so that the children can understand the lesson. If you don't do that they stare back at you; they don't understand anything. So the main problem is the language. And also, here in our school, you have to speak in English and (the children) are not allowed to speak in the Kiswahili language. So if they speak in Kiswahili or (a local) language, they have to be punished.

Although this was not made clear in the response, it appears that the teacher is referring to a code-mixing strategy (using individual words within an English-language sentence) rather than a code-switching one. The overwhelming impression was of frustration caused by the challenge of English-medium teaching. More important, though, was the frustration at the lack of strategies for teaching English and, in particular, for dealing with students who found the language difficult. Teachers recognised that students were losing hope and that traditional punitive solutions were not working.

This leads to the third theme in the focus groups with teachers. Teachers in three of the four groups saw the *home environment* as a contributory factor in the students' difficulties. Some students dropped out because their parents were unable or unwilling to pay the school's fees, but the problem was deeper than that:

> Sometimes the parents contribute to students dropping out because they do not work together with teachers in forcing students to come to school. … We can force the children to come to school by punishing them … but our school isn't a boarding school. We treat them during school hours … when they go back home, the parents do not support them as we do at school.

A combination of some students losing hope and motivation, largely because of the challenge of English-medium learning, and an unsupportive home environment led to the final theme of *truancy and dropout*. Teachers in all four focus groups were concerned about this.

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> In our school we face the problem of truancy. Some (students) leave the school for different reasons, like buying things, especially food, we never know what reasons. Others just (leave) to work (near) their home and when they are returned by their parents they refuse to stay in school.

Teachers gave 13 reasons for students' absence from school or dropping out altogether: lack of encouragement from parents or grandparents (cited in three groups), working in the fields or at home, being orphaned, influence of other students, inability to pay the fees, avoiding punishment (all cited in two groups), distance from home, sexual harassment on way to school, pregnancy (most commonly for girls but it was cited as a cause of some boy's absence as they were ashamed of their role getting a girl pregnant), football team playing at home, English language, cheating in exams and being unable to cope with the curriculum due to having cheated in the national entrance exam for secondary school (all cited in one group).

Teachers were in a difficult position. They recognised that some students lived with grandparents who needed the students' help with household chores or in the fields. They recognised, too, that some parents could not afford even the modest fees of state-run schools and that they might not be able to afford the time off work for a journey to school—as much as 5 km—to visit the school. Further, some parents were illiterate and would not be able to provide a note explaining their child's legitimate absence, for example illness or a family funeral. Yet without evidence that absence had been legitimate, punishment was seen as the school's only possible response.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 With what expectations do students begin their secondary school career?

The focus groups with both primary and secondary teachers provided evidence that students were eager to go to secondary school and started with high expectations. In their last year in primary school, punishments at secondary school and English-medium teaching were the students' biggest concerns about moving up to form 1. On arrival, they appear to have found that these concerns were fully justified. Table 1 suggests that many students made the transition successfully; they were not affected by bullying and gave positive replies to the well-being items in factor 2. For a large minority, however, the transition was more difficult. The open-ended replies to the questionnaire suggest a pervasive concern, and even resentment, at the amount of punishment they experienced. To understand this, we need to look at the teachers' perspective.

4.2 What challenges do learners in the first and third forms of secondary school experience after making the transition between primary and secondary schools?

The evidence presented here confirms that transition to secondary school in Tanzania presents a challenge not only for students but also for their teachers. One interpretation of the data is straightforward: students received an insufficient grounding in the English language in their primary schools, creating the inevitability of problems when faced with English-medium teaching in secondary schools. It would be absurd to underestimate the

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extent of this challenge. Nevertheless, a closer look suggests that the problems both for teachers and for pupils are more complex. If so, the solutions will also be more complex than simply changing to Kiswahili-medium teaching in secondary schools. That may well be desirable but is a matter for national policy. Our argument here is that, even if Kiswahili-medium teaching was to be adopted nationally, achieving successful transition to secondary school would remain a major challenge.

The data in Table 1 show overwhelmingly positive replies from students to questions about fundamental aspects of school and school attendance (questions 1–6). Students claimed to like their school, enjoy their lessons and help each other. And they wanted to attend. At first sight, this appears inconsistent with the disturbingly high levels of bullying reported in questions 13–18. While direct comparisons are not possible owing to variations in the wording of items about bullying in different surveys, the prevalence of bullying is not inconsistent with reports from other countries in Africa (Burton & Leochut, 2013; South African Council of Educators, 2011). The positive replies to fundamental questions about school and school attendance appear inconsistent with the number of students expressing concern about day-to-day experience in school (questions 6–11). Over 50 per cent claimed to have had worries since starting school and that they had sometimes felt sad or unhappy at school (questions 6 and 11), and 45 per cent that there was too much noise or disruption in their classes (question 10). The principal component analysis in Table 2 helps to explain the apparent inconsistency. It seems that students start secondary school with high expectations (factor 3: enjoyment of school). They retain a belief in the overall positive aspects of school, but they encounter bullying (factor 1), and the anxiety they felt before starting secondary school is not relieved by their day-to-day experience (factor 2: well-being). The environmental challenges in the day-to-day experience of school relate to the experiences of transition reported in the UK (Hammond, 2016).

4.3 How do teachers experience and respond to the challenges they perceive in the process of transition?

Teachers and students had different views on the principal challenges on transition to secondary school. Students were concerned about bullying, but teachers tended to underestimate its prevalence. Students and teachers were both concerned about the transition to English-medium teaching, but whereas teachers were concerned with the fact of many students making poor progress, students' main concern was with the consequences. This divergence in priorities echoes the work of Topping (2011) in the UK.

A striking feature of focus groups with teachers in forms 1 and 3 was their recognition that some students were losing hope and motivation. They attributed this in part to students struggling with English-medium teaching and in part to lack of cooperation from parents or caregivers. The central point, though, is that teachers recognised that their current solutions were not working. The evidence was not simply that some students appeared to be losing hope in school; it was also evident in attendance figures. At one school we visited, teachers claimed that 40 per cent of students were absent (although this was very difficult to corroborate because sufficiently accurate records were not available). In other words, not only were students at risk of losing hope and motivation, so were teachers—and for very sound and understandable reasons.

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It was notable that although teachers talked at length about the problems created by English-medium teaching, they seldom talked about how the problems could be addressed. Their comments echoed the sense of helplessness reported by Mkumbo and Amani (2012) and by Semali and Mehta (2012). Quite legitimately, lack of resources was mentioned, but there was no discussion of pedagogy and teaching methods. The methods for English-medium teaching to students for whom English was their second or third language were simply not part of the discourse. The lack of effective pedagogy supports the earlier findings of Clegg and Afitska (2011) who argue for the development of the already common but unconscious pedagogical strategy of code switching to be developed into a consistent and constructive practice.

4.4 Do the data suggest ways of reducing the challenges students face on transition?

It is tempting to see this as a problem of English-medium teaching, but that would miss the wider point that a large minority of students—estimates range from 20 to 30 per cent —experience significant problems with the curriculum when taught in their *first* language (e.g. Department of Education and Science, 1978; Galloway & Goodwin, 1987). The implication is that if pedagogy and teaching methods were not part of the discourse in relation to the dominant problem of English-medium teaching in Tanzania, transition problems would not be solved if Kiswahili were to become the MoI. Teachers would still find that a substantial majority of students were not making the expected progress and, in the absence of other solutions, would still have to resort to punitive methods that, they recognise, frequently lead directly to students losing hope and motivation.

Regardless of issues relating to the MoI, learners and teachers in Tanzania both appear to be locked into a cycle of 'learned helplessness' described by Dweck (2000) in her research in the USA. For learners, their failure to make the required progress attracts punishment; they find that further effort does not bring success. This results in demotivation and more punishment; eventually, they lose confidence in their own ability and give up. Teachers find themselves in an equally impossible position. They recognise that some students are not making progress, but they have not been trained adequately in a range of pedagogic strategies to teach in the medium of their students' second or third language. Moreover, even if they had been trained, their schools would not have the necessary resources to make the curriculum more attractive to students who were finding the language a problem. In this situation, the only resort is to well-established sanctions, including punishment for failing tests or for misbehaviour, even though the prevalence of such punishments suggests that they do not work. Teachers, in other words, are in a similar position to their students.

It is not the intention of the researchers in this study to offer judgement on the appropriate MoI in secondary schools. That is a matter for the government and people of Tanzania. However, three conclusions may be drawn from the data:

1 There is an urgent need for well-developed pedagogical strategies for teaching English as a second or third language. Although a change in the MoI to Kiswahili might be helpful both for teachers and for their students, that would not ensure that all students make the desired levels of progress; transition would continue to present students and teachers with a challenge, as it does in Western countries.

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2 Transition to secondary school cannot be seen in isolation from the question of relationships between students. The data show high levels of bullying, with little evidence of cooperative relationships between students; this is likely to contribute to the problems of truancy and dropout.
3 Nor can transition to secondary school be seen in isolation from the question of relationships between students and teachers. The data show high levels of corporal punishment, and we have argued that this is as much a problem for teachers as for students.

It follows that attempts to reduce the problem of transition to secondary school in Tanzania should adopt an integrated approach that combines improvements in pedagogy, improvements in relationships between students and improvements in relationships between students and teachers.

One possible way forward is suggested by peer mentoring programmes. In these, an older pupil voluntarily gives their time to mentor one newly starting in the school. Positive results have been reported in the USA and UK (Parsons *et al*., 2008). Cross-age peer mentoring has had a positive effect in reading and mathematics on the learning of both the mentee and the mentor, provided the age gap between the two is at least 2 years (Topping *et al*., 2011; Tymms *et al*., 2011). Subject-specific mentoring has been shown to function as a useful buffer to the more general challenges faced by those in transition to secondary school (Thurston *et al*., 2010). The positive impact of cross-age peer mentoring has been reported to be more pronounced among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and among girls (Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo, & Miller, 2003). Peer mentoring focused on academic outcomes has also been shown to indicate improved social and self-concept outcomes (Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck, & Fantuzzo, 2006).

In the context of schools participating in this study in the Tanga Region, and perhaps more widely in the context of rural schools in Tanzania, the implementation of peer mentoring programmes may address some of the problems that contribute to transition:

1 It is a low-cost strategy and therefore particularly relevant in a low-income country.
2 Although it is a school-led and school-directed initiative, some external input is required in training the teachers who support the peer mentors. This training would have three aims:

- To equip teachers with pedagogic subject-focused strategies to pass on to the peer mentors. These could be as simple as discussing concepts in Kiswahili that form 1 students may not be able to explore adequately in English; allowing students to 'code switch' has potentially positive results (Clegg & Afitska, 2011). This could be adapted by encouraging mentors to respond in English to mentee questions in Kiswahili.
- To establish a cooperative relationship between peer mentors and their supervising teacher, thus reducing the currently heavy reliance on punishment. This would involve a grounding in more general child-centred pedagogy and behaviour management strategies with a shift in focus from the prevailing pedagogic strategies in schools. Potentially, this could have further benefits in the way teachers approached teaching and learning in their regular lessons.
- To develop a cooperative relationship between peer mentors and their mentees, thus reducing the amount of bullying that currently occurs in many schools in both high-income and low-income countries.

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5 CONCLUSIONS

Our data confirm that the MoI in English presents both pupils and teachers with a major challenge. Teachers lack the resources and the strategies to address the problems that pupils face. For pupils, bullying by other pupils and what they perceive as excessive punishment by teachers add to the challenge of learning in English. A substantial minority gives up the unequal challenge and stop attending.

While peer mentoring has been to shown to have a beneficial impact in Western countries, there have been fewer systematic attempts to evaluate its impact in a low-income country such as Tanzania. We recognise that Western initiatives do not transfer easily to other contexts. Specifically, peer mentoring could be thought to require an approach to pedagogy and interpersonal relations that is firmly grounded in Western education and psychology. We do not believe that to be the case. Throughout Africa, older children still look after their younger siblings. By looking after them, they also teach them and that can be seen as informal peer mentoring. We are suggesting that the long-standing, chronic and complex problem of transition to secondary school in Tanzania could be addressed by a more systematic and structured form of peer mentoring, with benefits for teachers as well as for students.

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