

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS IN ADDRESSING
PRIMARY SCHOOL DROPOUTS: A CASE OF MBEYA MUNICIPALITY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
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2025

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certifies that they have read and hereby recommends for acceptance by the Open University, a dissertation titled: **“The Role of Social Work Interventions in Addressing Primary School Dropouts: A Case of Mbeya Municipality”**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Work of the Open University of Tanzania.

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DECLARATION

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. This dissertation is the result of their sacrifice and commitment to supporting my education and career.

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Primarily, I express my gratitude to the Almighty God for bestowing upon me the strength and fortitude to complete my education and undertake this research.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality, Tanzania, and assesses the role of social work interventions in addressing this issue. The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a purposively selected sample of 15 at-risk pupils, 10 parents or guardians, and 5 social workers engaged in educational interventions. Participants were selected using predefined criteria to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the dropout phenomenon. Data were analyzed using NVivo software, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which enabled systematic coding and in-depth exploration of underlying causes, including poverty, family instability, and lack of educational support. The study highlights the pivotal role of social work interventions—such as counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy in mitigating dropout rates and improving retention in primary education. Ethical approval was obtained from the Open University of Tanzania's Research Ethics Committee, with informed consent secured, confidentiality upheld, and data security ensured. The study contributes to the discourse on educational access and retention, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and social workers in formulating strategies to enhance school retention. It further recommends longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of social work interventions on educational outcomes in Tanzania and beyond.

Keywords: *Primary School Dropout, Socio-Economic Factors, Cultural Factors, Social Work Interventions, Qualitative Research, Tanzania.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEFF	United Nations Children's Fund
URT	United Republic of Tanzania

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Chapter one introduces the research problem, objectives, significance, and scope of the study. It explores the link between primary school dropouts and social work interventions, emphasizing the need to address dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality through effective social work strategies.

1.2 Background to the Problem

Globally, primary education is recognized as a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development. However, school dropout remains a persistent challenge in both developed and developing nations, albeit with differing magnitudes and causes. In developing countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and Uganda, high dropout rates are often linked to poverty, child labor, and cultural norms like early marriages (Ananga, 2020; Kimani et al., 2021). Social work interventions, including counseling, resource coordination, and community advocacy, have proven instrumental in reducing dropout rates by addressing these socio-economic and psychosocial barriers. For instance, in Kenya, school-based counseling programs have reduced absenteeism and improved academic engagement by helping pupils build resilience and cope with stressors related to poverty and family instability (Kimani et al., 2021).

Similarly, in Ghana, community-level advocacy and parental involvement facilitated by social workers have enhanced retention, especially among girls vulnerable to

early marriages (Ananga, 2020). In developed contexts, social work interventions are more institutionalized and integrated into educational systems. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom, school social workers provide comprehensive counseling services, coordinate access to learning resources, and advocate for policy changes that promote inclusivity and equity in education (Reamer, 2018; Payne, 2014). These interventions have been particularly effective in supporting marginalized groups, including children from immigrant families, those with learning disabilities, and pupils from low-income households. Evidence shows that early intervention programs and systemic support mechanisms significantly reduce dropout rates, underscoring the universal relevance of social work in promoting educational retention.

In Tanzania, despite commendable progress in expanding access to primary education achieving a gross enrollment rate of 96.91% in 2020 (URT, 2021) the issue of dropouts remains pressing, with only 58% completing primary school and 34% transitioning to secondary education. Economic hardships compel children to engage in domestic labor or informal work to support their families, while entrenched cultural practices such as early marriages and gendered household responsibilities disproportionately hinder girls' education (Twaweza East Africa, 2019). Structural challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of sanitary facilities for girls, and long walking distances to schools, further exacerbate the problem (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010). Mbeya Municipality reflects these national patterns but also faces unique localized challenges. Limited parental awareness of the value of education, combined with high rates of subsistence farming

and informal employment, perpetuates cycles of poverty and educational disengagement (Komba & Mgaya, 2015). Social work interventions have shown promise in this context. Counseling programs have helped children overcome emotional and psychological barriers to schooling, while resource coordination initiatives, such as linking families to school feeding programs and financial support, have alleviated the economic pressures driving dropouts. Moreover, advocacy efforts targeting harmful cultural practices and inadequate policy enforcement have started to shift community attitudes and improve retention.

Despite these efforts, the integration of social work into educational systems in Tanzania remains limited. There is a need for evidence-based, localized strategies that not only address the immediate needs of at-risk pupils but also tackle systemic barriers to education. By examining the role of social work interventions in Mbeya Municipality, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how targeted, context-sensitive approaches can support retention and foster educational equity, ultimately advancing the goals of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite significant strides in improving access to primary education in Tanzania, dropout rates remain alarmingly high, undermining efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on inclusive and equitable quality education. National statistics indicate that while primary school enrollment reached 96.91% in 2020, only 58% of pupils completed their studies, with transition rates to secondary education

falling to 34% (URT, 2021). This situation is particularly critical in Mbeya Municipality, where socio-economic challenges, cultural practices, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to persistent dropout rates (Komba & Mgaya, 2015). These dropouts not only deprive children of their right to education but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality within communities.

Existing interventions to address dropout rates often focus on increasing access to education through policy reforms and infrastructural development. However, these measures have largely overlooked the potential of social work interventions, such as counseling, advocacy, and resource coordination, to mitigate dropout rates by addressing the underlying socio-economic and psychosocial barriers faced by at-risk pupils (Payne, 2014; Reamer, 2018). Social work, with its emphasis on empowering individuals and communities, provides a unique framework to bridge the gap between educational policies and the lived realities of vulnerable families.

Despite evidence from other regions indicating the effectiveness of social work strategies in reducing dropout rates, there is limited research exploring their role within the Tanzanian context, particularly in Mbeya Municipality. Most existing studies on school dropouts in Tanzania focus on macro-level factors such as national policies or infrastructural inadequacies, with little attention given to localized, community-driven approaches (Sabates et al., 2010). This lack of research leaves a critical gap in understanding how social work can be effectively utilized to address the dropout crisis in specific settings like Mbeya Municipality. This study, therefore, sought to fill this gap by investigating the role of social work interventions in

reducing primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality. It aimed to provide evidence-based insights that could inform more holistic and context-sensitive strategies to enhance educational retention and achievement in the region.

1.4 Main Objective

To assess the role of social work interventions in addressing primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality.

14.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To explore the impact of social work counseling services on reducing primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality
- ii. To examine the effectiveness of social work resource coordination in supporting at-risk pupils to remain in school
- iii. To analyze the role of social work advocacy in addressing systemic issues contributing to primary school dropouts

1.4.2 Research Questions

- i. How do social work counseling services influence the retention of pupils in primary schools in Mbeya Municipality?
- ii. What role does resource coordination by social workers play in mitigating the socio-economic barriers to primary school retention in Mbeya Municipality?
- iii. How does social work advocacy address structural factors contributing to primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a critical educational challenge in Tanzania: the high rate of primary school dropouts. By focusing on Mbeya Municipality, the research provides localized insights into the socio-economic, cultural, and systemic factors driving this issue. These findings will contribute to the broader understanding of how targeted interventions can enhance educational retention, complementing national efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education (URT, 2021).

Second, the study highlights the pivotal role of social work interventions an area often overlooked in discussions about improving educational outcomes. Social work's emphasis on empowering individuals and communities through counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy offers a holistic approach to addressing dropout rates. The findings of this study will provide empirical evidence to guide policymakers, educators, and social work practitioners in designing context-sensitive strategies that tackle both immediate and structural barriers to education.

Additionally, the study holds theoretical significance by enriching the discourse on the intersection between social work and education in the Tanzanian context. While existing research on primary school dropouts often emphasizes macro-level factors such as policy or infrastructure (Sabates et al., 2010), this study explores micro-level interventions, bridging a critical gap in literature. The findings will also inform academic programs in social work, offering practical applications for future professionals in the field.

Finally, the research is expected to benefit various stakeholders, including local governments, schools, and non-governmental organizations. By identifying effective social work practices, it will provide actionable recommendations to address dropout rates and enhance educational equity. For families and communities in Mbeya Municipality, the study has the potential to foster sustainable change by improving access to education and breaking cycles of poverty and exclusion. This study is, therefore, not only a response to an immediate educational crisis but also a contribution to the long-term socio-economic development of the region and the nation as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

Chapter Two explores existing literature on primary school dropouts and social work interventions, critically analyzing key studies, identifying research gaps, and framing the study within relevant theoretical perspectives.

2.2 Conceptualization of Terms

2.2.1 Primary School Dropout

A primary school dropout refers to a student who discontinues their education before completing the prescribed level of primary education. According to Sabates et al. (2010), school dropout is influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors that create barriers to educational continuity. In the context of this study, dropout is primarily caused by socio-economic hardships, lack of educational resources, and family instability, which affect students' ability to complete primary education in Mbeya Municipality.

2.2.2 Social Work Interventions

Payne (2014) defines social work interventions as strategic actions taken by social workers to improve the well-being of individuals and communities. These interventions are designed to address socio-economic vulnerabilities and promote social justice. In this study, social work interventions focus on counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy to support at-risk students and minimize primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality.

2.2.3 Counseling Services

Counseling services refer to professional interventions aimed at providing emotional, psychological, and social support to individuals facing challenges that affect their well-being and development. According to Geldard and Geldard (2017), counseling involves a structured process in which trained professionals assist individuals in understanding their problems, exploring potential solutions, and developing coping strategies. In the context of this study, counseling services provided by social workers play a crucial role in addressing the psychological and social barriers that contribute to primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality. These services focus on supporting at-risk pupils by helping them navigate personal challenges such as family instability, peer pressure, and academic struggles. Social workers employ counseling techniques to enhance pupils' resilience, motivation, and emotional well-being, ultimately contributing to improved school retention.

2.2.4 Resource Coordination

Resource coordination involves linking individuals with necessary support systems, such as financial aid, healthcare, and educational resources, to enhance their well-being (Sabates et al., 2010). This study investigated how social workers facilitate access to these resources to reduce economic barriers that force children out of school in Mbeya Municipality.

2.2.5 Advocacy

Advocacy refers to the process of influencing policies and societal structures to create systemic changes that benefit vulnerable populations (Reamer, 2018). In the

context of this study, social work advocacy is aimed at improving school infrastructure, influencing policy implementation, and addressing socio-cultural norms that contribute to school dropout.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. This theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human development by emphasizing the dynamic interactions between individuals and their surrounding environments. Bronfenbrenner's work revolutionized developmental psychology by shifting the focus from isolated individual traits to the interconnected systems that shape human experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory posits that an individual's development is influenced by multiple environmental systems, each exerting direct or indirect effects on their growth, behavior, and opportunities.

At the core of the Ecological Systems Theory is the idea that individuals exist within a network of interconnected systems that shape their development. The microsystem represents the immediate environment in which an individual interacts daily, including family, school, peers, and social workers. For a child at risk of dropping out, the nature of these interactions whether supportive or neglectful can significantly influence their educational engagement. The next level, the mesosystem, refers to the interconnections between these microsystems, such as the relationship between a pupil's home and school. When social workers effectively engage with teachers and parents, they enhance the child's learning environment, reinforcing positive behavior

and academic persistence. Beyond these direct influences, the exosystem encompasses external environments that indirectly affect a child's education.

For instance, parents' workplaces, local governance structures, and social welfare programs may determine whether a child has the necessary resources to attend school regularly. Economic hardships at the parental level, dictated by this system, may force children into labor instead of education. Extending further, the macrosystem includes overarching societal and cultural influences, such as national education policies, poverty levels, and gender norms, which shape educational access and equity. The existence of discriminatory practices, weak policy enforcement, or cultural biases against educating girls can be understood within this system. Lastly, the chronosystem incorporates the element of time, recognizing how life transitions, historical events, and policy changes over time impact school dropout rates and interventions aimed at mitigating them. For example, national policy reforms, shifting socio-economic conditions, or the introduction of new education programs may influence dropout trends over time.

2.3.1 Application of the Theory in Related Studies

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory has been widely applied in studies on education, child welfare, and social interventions. Research by Sabates et al. (2010) demonstrated that school dropouts result from a combination of immediate household conditions (microsystem), interactions between school and home (mesosystem), and broader socio-economic constraints (macrosystem). Similarly, Ananga (2020) applied the theory to examine dropout rates in Ghana, emphasizing

how inadequate community support and economic hardships create educational barriers. In Tanzania, Komba and Mgaya (2015) used this framework to assess the role of family instability in school retention, reinforcing the idea that dropout is influenced by multi-level interactions rather than a single factor. These studies support the argument that social work interventions must address not only individual pupil needs but also family dynamics, school policies, and broader societal structures.

2.3.2 Relevance of the Theory to the Study Objectives

The Ecological Systems Theory aligns with this study's objectives by providing a multi-layered perspective on the role of social work interventions in reducing primary school dropouts.

2.3.3 Social Work Counseling and School Retention

Counseling services play a critical role in addressing the psychological, emotional, and social challenges that contribute to primary school dropouts. Operating within the microsystem, counseling involves direct interactions between social workers, pupils, parents, and teachers, all of whom influence a child's ability to remain in school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the context of this study, social work counseling seeks to provide emotional support, enhance self-esteem, and address behavioral issues that may lead to disengagement from school. Pupils at risk of dropping out often experience family instability, financial stress, peer pressure, and emotional distress, all of which negatively impact their academic performance and school attendance (Sabates et al., 2010). Counseling interventions, therefore, serve as a

preventive measure by identifying and addressing these challenges before they escalate into full dropout cases.

Social workers in schools provide individual and group counseling sessions aimed at helping pupils navigate personal difficulties. Individual counseling allows for a tailored approach where social workers assess a pupil's specific concerns and work on personalized strategies for coping and problem-solving (Kilonzo & George, 2021). Group counseling, on the other hand, creates a supportive environment where pupils can share experiences and learn from one another, fostering a sense of belonging that enhances school engagement (Ananga, 2020). By creating a safe space for pupils to express themselves, social work counseling builds resilience and promotes positive self-concept, both of which are essential for academic success.

Beyond the individual pupil, the mesosystem highlights the importance of interactions between different stakeholders in a child's life, such as the relationship between home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Effective counseling improves communication between parents and teachers, ensuring that families are actively involved in their children's education (Epstein, 2011). Parents who receive guidance on how to support their children academically and emotionally are more likely to create a home environment conducive to learning (Komba & Mgaya, 2015). Moreover, when teachers are equipped with insights from social workers on a pupil's psychological and emotional well-being, they can adopt more supportive teaching strategies that encourage student retention.

Research conducted in Kenya by Kimani et al. (2021) found that counseling programs in primary schools significantly reduced absenteeism and behavioral issues among at-risk pupils. The study demonstrated that children who received counseling exhibited increased motivation to attend school, improved interpersonal relationships, and a stronger sense of responsibility toward their education. Similarly, research in Tanzania by Mwaikambo et al. (2020) revealed that school-based counseling programs were instrumental in addressing the impact of poverty, family conflicts, and societal pressures that contribute to school dropouts. The study emphasized that pupils who received regular counseling support were more likely to complete their primary education compared to those who lacked access to such services.

Additionally, social work counseling extends beyond the school setting to address external factors that may hinder a pupil's educational progress. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds often face psychosocial barriers such as domestic violence, child labor, and lack of parental support (Reamer, 2018). Through home visits and community engagement, social workers can assess the conditions contributing to a child's vulnerability and provide necessary interventions, such as connecting families with social welfare programs or advocating for child protection measures (Twaweza East Africa, 2019). These proactive measures help ensure that pupils remain in school despite external hardships.

Despite its benefits, social work counseling faces several challenges, including limited resources, stigma surrounding mental health services, and insufficient trained

personnel (Kilonzo & George, 2021). Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack dedicated counseling offices or trained social workers, making it difficult for pupils to access the support they need. Additionally, in some communities, seeking counseling is viewed as a sign of weakness, discouraging children and parents from participating in available services (Namutebi et al., 2019). Addressing these barriers requires increased investment in school-based social work programs, awareness campaigns to destigmatize counseling, and policy reforms that integrate mental health services into the education system.

In conclusion, social work counseling is a vital intervention in promoting school retention among at-risk pupils. By operating within the microsystem and mesosystem, counseling services create a holistic support system that addresses emotional, psychological, and social challenges. The success of counseling in reducing school dropouts has been demonstrated in various studies across Africa, reinforcing its importance in educational interventions. To maximize its effectiveness, policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize the expansion of counseling services in schools, ensuring that all pupils, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to the emotional support necessary to complete their education.

2.3.4 Social Work Resource Coordination

Social work resource coordination plays a crucial role in mitigating the economic and structural barriers that contribute to school dropout rates, operating within both the exosystem and microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the microsystem,

resource coordination directly supports pupils by ensuring they have access to essential school materials, transportation, and health services. At the exosystem level, social workers engage with external structures, such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based programs, to mobilize resources that support at-risk pupils (Sabates et al., 2010).

One of the most significant aspects of resource coordination is financial aid and material support, as economic hardships remain a leading cause of school dropouts (Twaweza East Africa, 2019). Social workers facilitate scholarships, school fee waivers, and donations of school supplies to reduce the financial burden on families, enabling children to continue their education. Additionally, school feeding programs are a vital intervention, as studies have shown that providing meals at school increases attendance and improves academic performance, particularly among children from low-income households (Kimani et al., 2021).

Moreover, access to healthcare through resource coordination helps address chronic illnesses and disabilities that may otherwise prevent pupils from attending school. Social workers advocate for school-based health services, immunization programs, and referrals to healthcare providers to ensure pupils remain physically and mentally healthy (Mwaikambo et al., 2020). By integrating these multi-sectoral resources, social work resource coordination enhances school retention and reduces the likelihood of children engaging in labor or other survival activities, ultimately fostering sustainable educational outcomes (Reamer, 2018).

2.3.5 Social Work Advocacy and Policy Influence

Advocacy primarily operates within the macrosystem, where social workers engage with policymakers, community leaders, and legal frameworks to influence systemic change. This study investigates how social work advocacy challenges harmful cultural practices, secures educational funding, and strengthens policy enforcement to reduce dropout rates. Additionally, the chronosystem is relevant, as advocacy efforts contribute to long-term policy shifts that enhance educational access and retention. By employing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this study situates the issue of school dropouts within a broader socio-ecological framework. It recognizes that interventions must be multi-layered, addressing individual counseling needs, strengthening home-school relations, securing economic and health resources, and advocating for systemic reforms. This theoretical perspective ensures that social work interventions in Mbeya Municipality are not only responsive to immediate pupil needs but also contribute to sustainable, long-term educational retention strategies.

2 4 Empirical Literature Review

Empirical research highlights the multidimensional role of social work interventions in mitigating primary school dropout rates, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts such as Tanzania. The dropout phenomenon is often attributed to a confluence of socio-economic, cultural, and systemic factors, which align closely with the study's specific objectives: evaluating the impact of social work counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy.

2.4.1 The Impact of Social Work Counseling on Reducing Primary School Dropout Rates

Social work counseling plays a critical role in addressing the psychological, emotional, and social challenges that contribute to school dropouts. Counseling services focus on enhancing pupils' emotional well-being, building resilience, and fostering positive relationships within their microsystem, which includes families, peers, and schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Studies have consistently shown that counseling interventions help improve school retention by addressing personal struggles, academic difficulties, and behavioral issues that may lead to disengagement from education (Sabates et al., 2010).

Research conducted in Kenya by Kimani et al. (2021) found that school-based counseling significantly reduced absenteeism and improved academic engagement among at-risk pupils. Pupils who received counseling exhibited increased motivation to attend school, better coping mechanisms for stress, and enhanced social skills, all of which contributed to their continued enrollment. Similarly, Ananga (2020) examined dropout rates in Ghana and revealed that emotional distress and lack of parental support were major contributors to school disengagement. The study emphasized that integrating counseling services within the school system provided pupils with the necessary psychological support to navigate personal and family-related challenges.

In Tanzania, Mwaikambo et al. (2020) investigated the role of social work counseling in improving school retention among disadvantaged children. Their study

highlighted that pupils who accessed counseling services were more likely to remain in school, as counseling helped them process trauma, resolve conflicts, and build self-confidence.

Additionally, Komba and Mgaya (2015) found that counseling services that involved parental engagement led to improved home-school communication, fostering a supportive learning environment that encouraged school persistence. Despite its effectiveness, challenges such as limited trained personnel, stigma around mental health services, and inadequate school-based counseling facilities hinder the full implementation of counseling programs (Namutebi et al., 2019). Addressing these barriers through policy reforms, increased funding, and awareness campaigns can further strengthen the role of social work counseling in reducing primary school dropout rates.

2.4.2 The Effectiveness of Social Work Resource Coordination in Supporting At-Risk Pupils to Remain in School

Social work resource coordination plays a crucial role in mitigating school dropout rates by addressing socio-economic barriers that hinder educational access and retention. By linking pupils and their families to essential resources such as financial aid, healthcare services, school feeding programs, and educational materials, social workers help create a more supportive learning environment (Sabates et al., 2010). Resource coordination operates within both the **microsystem** and **exosystem**, as it involves direct interactions with pupils while also engaging external stakeholders such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and

community support systems to mobilize necessary assistance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

One of the most significant aspects of resource coordination is financial aid and material support. Economic hardship remains a leading cause of school dropout, with many children forced to leave school to contribute to household income (Twaweza East Africa, 2019). Research by Kimani et al. (2021) in Kenya found that pupils who received school fee waivers, scholarships, or material support such as uniforms and books were more likely to complete their education compared to those without such assistance. Similarly, Komba and Mgaya (2015) in Tanzania demonstrated that financial assistance programs significantly reduced dropout rates, particularly among children from low-income families. Social workers play a crucial role in ensuring that these resources reach the most vulnerable pupils, helping them stay in school and focus on their studies.

Another key component of resource coordination is school feeding programs, which have been widely recognized as an effective strategy for increasing school attendance and improving academic performance. Studies have shown that hunger and malnutrition contribute to absenteeism and reduced concentration in class, particularly among children from economically disadvantaged households (Mwaikambo et al., 2020). Research conducted by UNESCO (2021) revealed that the provision of free school meals in low-income regions resulted in a 30% increase in school attendance and improved cognitive performance. Similarly, a study by Kilonzo and George (2021) in Tanzania found that pupils who benefited from school

feeding programs exhibited better retention rates, as they were more motivated to attend school regularly.

Healthcare access is another critical factor influencing school retention, particularly for children suffering from chronic illnesses or disabilities. Social workers coordinate with health service providers to ensure that pupils receive medical checkups, vaccinations, and necessary treatments, thereby reducing health-related absenteeism (Reamer, 2018). In a study conducted by Namutebi et al. (2019) in Uganda, it was found that schools with integrated healthcare support had lower dropout rates, as pupils were better able to manage their health conditions and remain engaged in their studies.

Despite its effectiveness, social work resource coordination faces several challenges, including limited funding, bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of awareness among families about available resources (Twaweza East Africa, 2019). Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack sufficient financial support to sustain resource coordination efforts. Additionally, social workers often struggle with high caseloads, making it difficult to provide individualized support to all at-risk pupils (Komba & Mgaya, 2015). Addressing these challenges requires increased investment in school-based social work programs, strengthened partnerships between schools and community organizations, and policy reforms that prioritize educational equity.

In conclusion, social work resource coordination is a vital intervention in supporting at-risk pupils and reducing primary school dropout rates. By addressing financial

constraints, ensuring access to nutrition and healthcare, and mobilizing community support, resource coordination creates a more stable and enabling educational environment. However, for this intervention to be more effective, systemic challenges such as funding limitations and bureaucratic barriers must be addressed through policy enhancements and increased stakeholder engagement.

2.4.3 Advocacy for Structural and Systemic Change

Advocacy is a fundamental component in addressing the systemic factors that contribute to school dropouts. It goes beyond the individual challenges faced by students and targets broader social, economic, and policy-level issues that perpetuate educational disengagement. Social workers are at the forefront of these advocacy efforts, as they possess the skills and knowledge to influence policy, raise awareness, and push for structural reforms within the education system. By engaging with policymakers, local government authorities, and community leaders, social workers can advocate for changes that create more inclusive, supportive, and equitable educational environments. These efforts are crucial in combating the multiple barriers that children face in accessing and completing their education, particularly in marginalized communities.

Several studies have shown that advocacy campaigns targeting specific aspects of the school system, such as infrastructure and gender-sensitive policies, can lead to significant improvements in student retention. For instance, a study by Twaweza East Africa (2019) demonstrated that community-driven advocacy initiatives in Tanzania led to improvements in school environments. These initiatives focused on ensuring

that schools were better equipped to meet the needs of all students, including providing adequate classroom facilities, sanitation, and safe learning environments. In addition, advocacy efforts aimed at promoting inclusivity through gender-sensitive policies helped ensure that girls, in particular, had equal opportunities to access education and succeed academically. This is particularly important in contexts where girls face significant barriers to education due to societal expectations, early marriages, and gender-based violence.

Advocacy efforts also extend to challenging deep-rooted cultural norms and practices that hinder educational access for vulnerable groups. One of the most significant challenges in many African communities is the persistence of cultural practices such as early marriages and child labor, which disproportionately affect girls and contribute to high dropout rates. Mtey and Sulle (2020) argue that interventions aimed at addressing these cultural norms can lead to substantial improvements in educational access. For example, advocating for the elimination of early marriages and promoting community awareness about the importance of education can create a more supportive environment for girls to stay in school. These advocacy campaigns often involve engaging with community leaders and influencers, as they hold significant sway over local cultural practices and can help drive change.

In the context of Mbeya Municipality, advocacy initiatives could have a profound impact on addressing both gender disparities and infrastructure inadequacies within the educational system. As the municipality struggles with economic hardships and the lack of adequate educational facilities, social workers can advocate for more

equitable resource distribution, improved school infrastructure, and policies that cater to the specific needs of marginalized groups. For instance, advocating for gender-sensitive school facilities, such as separate sanitation facilities for girls, can reduce the barriers that discourage girls from attending school. Furthermore, advocating for community-based programs that address the specific needs of at-risk populations, such as orphans, children with disabilities, and those from low-income families, can promote greater educational retention and inclusion.

Empirical evidence consistently underscores the effectiveness of social work interventions in addressing the complex factors that contribute to school dropouts. These interventions include counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy, each of which targets a different level of intervention in the educational system. Counseling addresses the emotional, psychological, and social challenges that students face, which often lead to disengagement and dropout. Resource coordination helps mitigate the economic barriers to education by connecting students and their families with essential support services such as financial aid, healthcare, and nutritional programs. Advocacy, on the other hand, targets the structural inequalities within the education system, including gender disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and harmful cultural practices. These interventions, when combined, provide a comprehensive approach to tackling the multiple factors that contribute to school dropouts, creating a more supportive and inclusive educational environment.

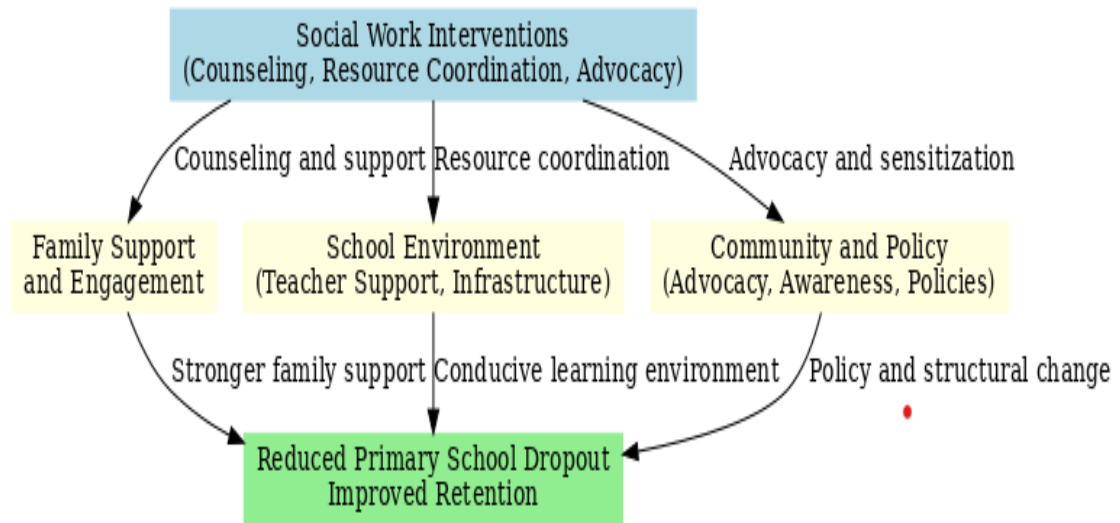
2.5 Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework diagram below illustrates how social work interventions (SWIs) influence the reduction of primary school dropout rates in Mbeya

Municipality by operating through interconnected systems: the family, the school environment, and the community and policy level. At the center of the framework are social work interventions, which include counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy. These interventions form the core drivers of change and act simultaneously on multiple levels of the child's environment.

Firstly, through counseling, social workers engage directly with pupils and their families to provide emotional and psychosocial support. This enhances family support and engagement, leading to stronger home environments where children are motivated and supported to remain in school. Secondly, resource coordination strengthens the school environment by ensuring pupils have access to learning materials, nutritional programs, and healthcare, while also fostering supportive relationships with teachers. A positive and resource-rich school environment enhances attendance, participation, and performance. Thirdly, advocacy efforts target the community and policy levels, raising awareness of harmful cultural practices, challenging systemic barriers, and influencing policy reforms to create more inclusive and equitable educational opportunities.

All these levels converge toward the ultimate outcome: reduction in primary school dropout rates and improved retention. By simultaneously addressing individual, familial, institutional, and systemic barriers, the framework underscores the multi-layered and interconnected nature of effective social work interventions. This systems-based approach is aligned with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which explains that sustainable change occurs when interventions address multiple layers of a child's environment.



2.6 Research Gap

Existing studies on primary school dropouts in Tanzania, such as those by Komba and Mgaya (2015) and Twaweza East Africa (2019), primarily focus on macro-level factors like poverty, infrastructure, and policy gaps. However, these studies often overlook the micro-level role of social work interventions, such as counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy, in addressing the socio-economic and psychosocial barriers faced by individual pupils. Furthermore, while international studies by Sabates et al. (2010) and Ananga (2020) demonstrate the effectiveness of similar interventions, their findings are based on contexts with distinct cultural and economic dynamics, limiting their direct applicability to Mbeya Municipality.

Additionally, the role of advocacy as a social work intervention in education remains underexplored, particularly in the Tanzanian context. There is insufficient empirical evidence on how social workers influence educational policies, improve school infrastructure, or challenge harmful cultural norms that perpetuate dropouts. This study addresses these gaps by examining the localized role of social work

interventions in Mbeya Municipality, offering insights into context-specific strategies to reduce dropout rates and promote educational equity.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the research design, study area, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analysis procedures, ensuring alignment with the study objectives.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study adopted an interpretivist philosophy, emphasizing the understanding of subjective meanings and social contexts. Interpretivism aligned with the study's focus on exploring the role of social work interventions counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy in addressing primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality. Rooted in the belief that social realities are socially constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018), this philosophy justified the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, to capture participants' lived experiences. As Bryman (2016) noted, interpretivism prioritized context-specific insights, which were crucial for understanding localized challenges and perceptions of interventions. This approach ensured that the findings were deeply contextual and relevant to Tanzania's educational issues.

3.3 Research Design

This study adopted a case study research design, which is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena within real-life contexts. Case study research provides an in-depth examination of a specific setting, allowing researchers to

analyze intricate relationships between social, economic, and cultural factors (Yin, 2018). Since the aim of this study was to investigate the role of social work interventions counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy in addressing primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality, a case study approach was the most appropriate research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A case study design is especially useful for answering “how” and “why” questions, making it well-suited for this study’s objectives (Yin, 2018). Given that school dropout is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, the case study approach allowed for a detailed exploration of social work interventions in supporting at-risk pupils. The study utilized multiple data collection methods, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, to capture the perspectives of social workers, teachers, parents, and students, ensuring a rich and contextual understanding of the problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Furthermore, Stake (1995) emphasizes that case study research is particularly beneficial when the objective is to understand a phenomenon within its specific setting rather than to generalize findings. Since Mbeya Municipality experiences socio-economic challenges that contribute to high dropout rates, the case study approach provided a localized and context-sensitive understanding of the problem. By focusing on a specific community, this research was able to generate insights that are directly applicable to social work interventions in similar environments (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The flexibility of the case study method also allowed for an iterative research process, where data collection and analysis were continuously refined to ensure depth and accuracy. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), case study research is particularly useful in social work and education because it allows for a holistic exploration of institutional and community-based interventions. By employing this design, the study was able to assess the real-world application of social work strategies in reducing school dropout rates and identify key areas for improvement. The findings from this case study can further inform policy recommendations and future research in addressing dropout rates in primary schools in Tanzania (Yin, 2018).

3.4 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which was appropriate for exploring the complex and subjective experiences of individuals affected by primary school dropout in Mbeya Municipality. Qualitative research is particularly useful for understanding social phenomena within their real-life contexts and for capturing in-depth insights that cannot be fully quantified (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given that this study aimed to examine the role of social work interventions counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy in addressing school dropout, a qualitative approach was best suited to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of these interventions from the perspectives of pupils, parents, and social workers (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

A qualitative approach enables researchers to study participants' lived experiences, behaviors, and perspectives through direct interaction, making it particularly relevant

for research involving vulnerable populations (Bryman, 2016). This study relied on methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed participants to share their experiences in a natural and flexible manner. As Yin (2018) suggests, qualitative research is ideal when seeking to answer “how” and “why” questions, making it particularly relevant for investigating the mechanisms through which social work interventions influence school retention rates.

Furthermore, qualitative research allows for the exploration of social contexts and cultural influences that shape educational experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In Mbeya Municipality, where socio-economic and cultural factors significantly impact school dropout rates, a qualitative approach provided the necessary depth to understand these influences. By focusing on narratives and thematic analysis, this study captured the diverse and context-specific challenges that contribute to school dropouts while highlighting the impact of social work interventions. Thus, qualitative research not only facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the issue but also ensured that findings were grounded in the lived realities of affected individuals.

3.5 Study Area

Mbeya Municipality was selected for this study due to its unique socio-economic and educational challenges, which made it a relevant and critical context for investigating primary school dropouts and the role of social work interventions. Mbeya, located in the southern highlands of Tanzania, faced significant educational barriers, including high dropout rates linked to socio-economic factors such as poverty, long distances to schools, and inadequate infrastructure (Komba & Mgaya, 2015). These challenges

were compounded by cultural practices, such as early marriages and gender norms that disproportionately affected girls' education (Twaweza East Africa, 2019).

Data from the United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2021) indicated that while Tanzania had made progress in improving primary school enrollment, regional disparities persisted. In Mbeya, the dropout rate remained high due to these socio-economic and cultural factors, with many children leaving school before completion, particularly in rural areas. According to the Ministry of Education, the average dropout rate for primary schools in Mbeya was above the national average, underlining the urgency of addressing this issue in the municipality.

Selecting Mbeya Municipality allowed the study to focus on a region where social work interventions, such as counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy, could have had a significant impact. It provided an opportunity to explore how these interventions could address both immediate challenges and long-term systemic issues in a region that represented many of the broader educational challenges faced in Tanzania. This context made Mbeya an ideal site to investigate effective strategies to reduce primary school dropouts and promote educational retention.

3.6 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

3.6.1 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised primary school pupils at risk of dropping out, their parents or guardians, and social workers involved in educational interventions within Mbeya Municipality. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), a study

population refers to the total group of individuals from which a researcher draws conclusions. The selection of this population was guided by the study's focus on understanding the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to school dropouts and the role of social work interventions in mitigating these challenges. Recent data highlights the pressing issue of school dropouts in Tanzania. In 2022, the country witnessed 193,605 primary school dropouts, which decreased by 18.19% to 158,372 in 2023 (The Citizen, 2023). While specific dropout rates for Mbeya Municipality are not readily available, the region has been identified among areas with a significant number of out-of-school children, with over 85,000 reported (UNICEF, 2018). This underscores the need for targeted interventions in regions like Mbeya to address the dropout crisis.

The inclusion criteria for this study involved selecting primary school pupils in Mbeya Municipality who were at risk of dropping out due to socio-economic challenges, family-related issues, or high dropout rates within their communities. Participants were required to be between the ages of 7 and 14, aligning with the typical age range for primary school pupils in Tanzania. Additionally, parents or guardians who were actively engaged in their children's education and capable of providing relevant insights into the factors influencing school retention were included. Social workers offering counseling, resource coordination, or advocacy services in the schools also participated, as their direct involvement with these pupils was essential for understanding the impact of social work interventions. The exclusion criteria ensured that the study remained focused on the most relevant participants. Pupils, who were not at risk of dropping out, such as those from stable

socio-economic backgrounds or those who had already completed their primary education, were excluded from the study.

Additionally, parents or guardians who were not directly involved in their child's education or who could not provide informed consent were not included. Social workers who were not actively involved in school-based interventions or who did not have direct experience with at-risk pupils were also excluded. These criteria ensured that the study focused on individuals who were most relevant to understanding the specific factors contributing to school dropouts and the impact of social work interventions. By defining a targeted population and establishing clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study aimed to generate meaningful insights into the role of social work interventions in reducing primary school dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality.

3.6.2 Sample Size

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, where the goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences rather than to generate statistically generalizable results. The sample size of 30 participants comprising 15 primary school pupils at risk of dropping out, 10 parents or guardians, and 5 social workers was determined based on the principle of data saturation, a key concept in qualitative inquiry (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data saturation occurs when additional data no longer yield new insights or themes relevant to the research objectives, ensuring that the information collected is rich, comprehensive, and representative of the study context.

In determining the number of participants, the study also considered established scholarly guidance on qualitative sampling. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend a sample size of 20 to 30 participants for studies employing in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, as this range often achieves saturation while maintaining manageability in data collection and analysis. Additionally, the inclusion of different participant groups pupils, parents or guardians, and social workers allowed for triangulation of perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Patton, 2015).

The decision to include 15 pupils was guided by the need to capture diverse experiences across varying socio-economic, gender, and school contexts within Mbeya Municipality. The 10 parents or guardians were included to provide complementary insights into family and household dynamics influencing school retention and dropout. The 5 social workers were purposively selected because of their active involvement in school-based interventions, ensuring that the study captured expert perspectives on the role of counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy. Overall, the sample size was scientifically justified as sufficient to meet the study objectives by enabling a deep, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon under investigation while adhering to established qualitative research standards (Guest et al., 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

3.6.3 Sampling Procedure

This study adopted a purposive sampling procedure to ensure the selection of participants with the most relevant experiences concerning school dropouts and

social work interventions. Purposive sampling, as described by Patton (2015), allows researchers to select participants who can provide rich and in-depth data on the research topic. This technique was chosen to ensure that information-rich cases were included, maximizing the study's ability to explore the research problem comprehensively.

The selection process involved identifying primary schools within Mbeya Municipality that had a high prevalence of dropout cases. From these schools, 15 pupils who were at risk of dropping out were purposively selected based on criteria such as absenteeism records, socio-economic background, and referrals from teachers and social workers. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), purposive sampling is particularly effective in qualitative research when selecting participants based on predefined characteristics relevant to the study objectives.

Additionally, 10 parents or guardians of at-risk pupils were selected based on their availability and willingness to discuss the challenges of school retention. Parental involvement in education is a critical factor in school retention, and their perspectives provided valuable insights into household challenges and support mechanisms (Epstein, 2011). Furthermore, 5 social workers who were actively engaged in school dropout intervention programs were selected to provide professional perspectives on the effectiveness of social work strategies.

The inclusion of social workers was crucial, as they possess firsthand knowledge of the structural and systemic factors influencing dropout rates (Bryman, 2016). By

employing a purposive sampling approach, this study ensured that the selected participants were well-positioned to provide meaningful insights into the factors contributing to school dropout and the role of social work interventions in addressing these challenges.

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 In depth Interview

This study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) as primary data collection methods. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), in-depth interviews are effective in qualitative research as they allow for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, motivations, and perspectives. These interviews were used to gather detailed personal accounts from pupils, parents, and social workers regarding the challenges and interventions related to school dropouts.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to complement individual interviews, allowing participants to engage in dialogue and share collective perspectives. Krueger and Casey (2014) assert that FGDs are useful in qualitative research as they enable researchers to observe group dynamics and consensus-building processes among participants. FGDs were particularly valuable in capturing community-based perspectives on dropout issues and the role of social work interventions. By using these data collection methods, the study ensured that both individual narratives and collective insights were captured, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data collected from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. NVivo facilitates the systematic organization, coding, and thematic analysis of qualitative data, enabling researchers to identify key patterns and relationships within the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which involves familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report. This approach ensured a rigorous and structured analysis of participants' narratives, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing school dropout rates.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study to ensure the protection and rights of all participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Open University of Tanzania's Research Ethics Directorate before data collection commenced. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parents or guardians providing consent for pupil participants, in line with ethical guidelines for research involving minors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with all identifying information removed from transcripts and reports. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, (Israel & Hay, 2006). These ethical safeguards ensured compliance with international research ethics standards while respecting the rights and well-being of the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the study findings, guided by the research objectives. It explores how social work interventions counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy address primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality, integrating insights from respondents' narratives to provide a comprehensive analysis.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

4.2.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the respondents is essential for contextualizing the findings of this study. The research involved 30 participants, comprising 15 primary school pupils at risk of dropping out, 10 parents or guardians, and 5 social workers within Mbeya Municipality. The distribution of these participants reflects the diversity of experiences and backgrounds influencing school dropout and the effectiveness of social work interventions.

Among the 15 pupils, 8 were boys and 7 were girls, with ages ranging from 10 to 14 years. Most of these pupils were in Standards Four to Seven, representing the upper primary classes where dropout risks are often heightened due to academic pressure, socio-economic demands, and cultural factors. The inclusion of both boys and girls ensured that gendered dimensions of dropout and retention were adequately captured. The 10 parents or guardians comprised 6 mothers and 4 fathers, aged between 32 and 55 years. A majority of them were engaged in informal economic activities such as

small-scale trading, subsistence farming, or casual labor, reflecting the socio-economic challenges that characterize households in Mbeya Municipality. This diversity provided insights into how economic constraints and household responsibilities shape decisions related to schooling.

The 5 social workers were professionals actively engaged in educational and child protection interventions. Their ages ranged between 28 and 40 years, and they possessed at least a diploma in social work or community development. These respondents provided expert insights into how counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy are operationalized in efforts to reduce dropout rates in the municipality. This demographic profile highlights the heterogeneity of the participants and underscores the relevance of the purposive sampling approach. By including respondents from different social, economic, and professional backgrounds, the study was able to capture multiple perspectives on the role of social work interventions in mitigating primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality.

4.3 The Impact of Social Work Counseling Services on Reducing Primary School dropout Rates

The findings reveal that social work counseling services significantly address the emotional, psychological, and social challenges faced by at-risk pupils, contributing to their ability to remain in school. Counseling sessions offered pupils a safe space to share their struggles, gain insights into their issues, and develop coping strategies for challenges that threatened their educational journey. Respondents shared numerous examples illustrating the effectiveness of counseling in improving pupils' resilience, focus, and school engagement.

Pupils expressed how counseling made them feel understood and supported during difficult times. One pupil noted:

“The social worker comes to school and listens to us when we are struggling with things at home. It makes me feel like someone cares, and it becomes easier to concentrate in class.” KII/BOY/PUPIL/17YRS/MBEYA 10 JAN, 2025

Another explained:

“I used to feel like no one at home understood me. But the counselor helped me talk to my parents, and now they support my studies. That’s why I’m still in school.” KII/BOY/PUPIL/15YRS/MBEYA 10, JAN, 2025

Such experiences highlight how social work counseling bridges communication gaps between pupils and their families, addressing the root causes of disengagement. Parents echoed these sentiments, describing the impact of counseling on both the children and themselves. A mother shared:

“My son stopped attending school because we were having problems at home. After the social worker spoke with him and later with us, he started going back to school regularly, and now his performance is much better.” KII/PARENT/MALE/55YRS/MBEYA 17, JAN, 2025

Another parent remarked:

“The counselor helped us understand how to support our children without making them feel pressured or neglected. We didn’t realize that our constant arguments at home were

affecting their education.” KII/PARENT/ MALE/43YRS/ MBEYA 17, JAN, 2025

These narratives underscore the role of counseling in strengthening family dynamics, enabling parents to provide a more conducive environment for learning.

Social workers elaborated on the interventions they implemented to support pupils.

One social worker explained:

“Many children in this community experience neglect, abuse, or extreme poverty. These issues affect their self-esteem and performance at school. Through counseling, we address their emotional wounds and rebuild their confidence.” Another added, *“Sometimes, children feel hopeless about their future because of their family situations. Counseling allows us to give them encouragement and show them the importance of education in changing their lives.”* KII/SOCIALWORKER/ MALE/MBEYA 17, JAN, 2025

Social workers emphasized that counseling sessions often include follow-ups to ensure that the pupils and their families make lasting progress.

Teachers also observed the impact of social work counseling in the classroom. A teacher explained:

“Pupils who attend counseling sessions show noticeable improvements in behavior and performance. It’s as if a burden has been lifted from them, and they become more motivated.” Another stated, *“We’ve had pupils who were about to drop out come back to class and even become more active after receiving support from the social worker. Counseling works wonders for children who feel lost or overwhelmed.”* KII/TEACHER/MBEYA 17, JAN, 2025

Teachers also appreciated the collaborative role of social workers in addressing challenges beyond the classroom, which they felt they could not handle alone.

Despite its benefits, social workers highlighted several challenges in delivering counseling services effectively. A social worker explained:

“There are too many children who need help, but we don’t have enough staff or resources to reach all of them. Some cases need long-term support, which can be difficult to manage.” Another noted, *“In some communities, there’s still stigma around seeking counseling. Families might see it as unnecessary or shameful, which makes it hard to engage them.”* KII/SOCIALWORKER/ MALE/MBEYA 17, JAN, 2025

These limitations, however, did not diminish the overall positive outcomes of counseling interventions.

Pupils were particularly vocal about how counseling transformed their perspectives on education. A pupil explained:

“Before, I wanted to quit school because of problems at home. But the counselor helped me realize that staying in school could change my future.” KII/STUDENT/ GIRL/16YRS/ MBEYA 15, JAN, 2025

Another stated:

“When I talk to the counselor, I feel like my problems matter. It gives me hope that I can finish my studies and achieve something.” KII/PUPIL/GIRL/17YRS/ MBEYA 18, JAN, 2025

These findings underscore the transformative role of social work counseling in reducing primary school dropouts. By addressing pupils' emotional and psychological challenges, counseling fosters resilience and builds a sense of hope. It also bridges communication gaps within families, improving their ability to support children's education. Furthermore, the collaborative efforts between social workers and teachers create a supportive network for pupils, ensuring that they have the resources and encouragement they need to stay in school. The narratives from respondents vividly illustrate the necessity of counseling as an integral intervention in tackling dropout rates in Mbeya Municipality.

4.4 The Effectiveness of Social Work Resource Coordination in Keeping At-Risk Pupils in School

Resource coordination by social workers emerged as a crucial intervention in reducing school dropout rates among primary school pupils in Mbeya Municipality. This strategy involved linking pupils and their families to essential services, such as financial aid, healthcare, nutritional programs, and other community-based resources. Respondents consistently highlighted how coordinated efforts alleviated the socio-economic challenges that frequently forced children to abandon their education. These interventions addressed both immediate needs, such as school supplies, and systemic barriers, including poverty and health-related issues.

4.4.1 Linking Pupils to Financial and Material Support

A key theme identified was the provision of financial aid and school materials to vulnerable pupils. Many respondents noted that families often could not afford basic

necessities such as school uniforms, books, or even meals, which led to frequent absenteeism and eventual dropout. One pupil shared:

“Before the social worker helped me get a school uniform, I felt ashamed to go to class. Now I have everything I need, and I feel comfortable staying in school.”
KII/PUPIL/GIRL/15YRS/MBEYA 22, FEB, 2025

Another explained:

“My family couldn’t buy exercise books, and my teacher was always angry when I didn’t have them. The social worker gave me books, and now I can follow the lessons.”
KII/PUPIL/BOY/14YRS/MBEYA 21, FEB, 2025

Parents also acknowledged the impact of resource coordination. A mother stated:

“We struggled to provide even the smallest things for our child, but the social worker brought help. They gave us uniforms and stationery, which we could not afford.”
KII/PARENT/FEMALE/46YRS/MBEYA 15, FEB, 2025

Another parent commented:

“I used to think about pulling my son out of school because we had no money for his needs. But the support from the social worker made it possible for him to continue his studies.” KII/PARENT/MALE/50YRS/MBEYA 18, FEB, 2025

Social workers emphasized their efforts to secure these resources through partnerships with local NGOs, community groups, and government programs. A social worker explained:

“We work with organizations that provide school materials or financial aid. These partnerships are crucial because families here are struggling to make ends meet.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MALE/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another noted:

“Even small contributions, like a pair of shoes or a bag, can make a big difference for a child who feels excluded because they lack basic items.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ / MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.4.2 School Feeding Programs and Nutritional Support

Another essential component of resource coordination was linking pupils to school feeding programs. Respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that pupils had access to adequate nutrition, which directly influenced their attendance and concentration in class. A pupil described the challenge of attending school without food, saying:

“Sometimes, I couldn’t come to school because there was no food at home. But now, we get lunch at school, and it helps me to stay and learn.” KII/PUPIL/ BOY/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Teachers observed significant improvements among pupils who benefited from feeding programs. One teacher noted:

“Children who were coming to school hungry are now more attentive and active in class. The meals keep them energized and ready to learn.” KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 11, FEB, 2025

Another added:

“The feeding program has reduced absenteeism because pupils know they will get something to eat when they come to school.” KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Parents also appreciated the relief brought by these programs. A father stated:

“The school feeding program means my children can go to school even when there’s no food at home. It’s one less thing for us to worry about.” KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

A mother shared:

“Before the feeding program, my child used to skip school to help me look for food. Now she goes every day because she knows there’s lunch.” KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers underscored the importance of coordinating with local stakeholders to sustain these programs. One social worker explained:

“We work with community organizations and government agencies to make sure these feeding programs are consistent. If they stop, many children would stop coming to school.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 15, FEB, 2025

4.4.3 Healthcare Access for Pupils and Families

Health-related issues were identified as significant barriers to school attendance. Social workers played a pivotal role in linking pupils to healthcare services, addressing illnesses that often kept children out of school for extended periods. One pupil described their experience, saying:

“I used to miss school because I was sick a lot. The social worker took me to the hospital, and now I feel better and don’t miss classes anymore.” KII/PUPIL/ MBEYA 12, FEB, 2025

Parents also highlighted the impact of health-related support. A mother shared:

“My child was always unwell, and we couldn’t afford to take her to the doctor. The social worker arranged for her treatment, and now she is healthy and back in school.” KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another parent remarked:

“We are grateful for the support because it’s hard to think about school when your child is sick, and you have no money for medicine.” KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers described their strategies for ensuring access to healthcare services.

One stated:

“We collaborate with health clinics and mobile health services to provide checkups, vaccinations, and treatment for common illnesses among pupils.”

Another noted:

“Sometimes, we organize health camps at schools so that children can be treated without having to travel far or miss class.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.4.4 Addressing Structural Barriers to Education

Beyond immediate needs, resource coordination also tackled structural issues that disproportionately affected vulnerable pupils. Long distances to school, lack of

transportation, and inadequate school facilities were common challenges. Social workers advocated for community-driven solutions to these barriers, ensuring that pupils could attend school consistently.

One pupil described how resource coordination addressed transportation issues, saying:

“I used to walk for hours to get to school and was always late. Now, the social worker arranged transport, and I can get to school on time.” KII/PUPIL/MBEYA 13, FEB, 2025

Teachers also noted the impact of such interventions. A teacher explained:

“The support with transportation has made a big difference, especially for children from remote areas who struggled to attend regularly.” KII/TEACHER/MBEYA 16, FEB, 2025

Parents shared their relief at seeing these barriers addressed. A father stated:

“Before, my daughter had to cross a dangerous river to get to school. The social worker helped arrange for her to join a nearby school. It has made her life much easier.” KII/PARENT/MBEYA 16, FEB, 2025

Social workers described their role in advocating for improved facilities, with one noting,

“We push for changes like better classrooms and sanitary facilities because these things make a difference in whether children stay in school or drop out.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.5.5 Challenges in Resource Coordination

Despite its successes, social workers reported significant challenges in coordinating resources for at-risk pupils. Limited funding and resources were recurring obstacles.

One social worker explained,

“The demand for help is overwhelming, but we don’t always have enough resources to meet everyone’s needs. We have to prioritize the most critical cases.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another noted,

“Sometimes, the aid we secure is temporary, and it’s hard to sustain long-term support for these children.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Stigma and lack of awareness among families also hindered effective resource coordination. A social worker shared,

“Some parents are reluctant to accept help because they feel ashamed or don’t understand the importance of education. It takes time to convince them.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another added,

“Cultural beliefs can be a barrier. In some cases, parents see no value in sending their children to school, especially girls, so they don’t cooperate with our efforts.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.4.6 Respondents' Reflections on the Impact of Resource Coordination

Despite these challenges, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that resource coordination was essential in supporting at-risk pupils. A pupil summarized its impact, saying,

“Without the help from the social worker, I would have dropped out. They gave me what I needed to stay in school and believe in myself.” KII/PUPIL/ MBEYA 26, FEB, 2025

A parent echoed this sentiment, stating,

“The support we received changed everything for us. My child can now go to school without worrying about anything.” KII/PARENT/MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers reflected on the broader significance of their efforts. One noted,

“Resource coordination is not just about giving material aid. It’s about empowering families and communities to support their children’s education.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another added,

“When we help one child stay in school, we’re contributing to breaking the cycle of poverty for their entire family.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

The findings demonstrate that social work resource coordination is a powerful tool in addressing the socio-economic barriers that lead to school dropouts. By linking pupils and their families to financial aid, nutritional support, healthcare, and

improved school infrastructure, resource coordination fosters an environment that enables children to remain in school and thrive academically. The testimonies from pupils, parents, teachers, and social workers underscore its transformative impact, despite the challenges faced in sustaining these efforts. These insights highlight the need for continued investment in resource coordination initiatives as a cornerstone of educational retention strategies in Mbeya Municipality.

4.5 Social work Advocacy and Systemic Issues on Primary School Dropouts

Social work advocacy emerged as a critical intervention in tackling the systemic and structural barriers leading to primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality. Through advocacy, social workers engaged with communities, schools, and policymakers to address challenges such as inadequate school infrastructure, harmful cultural practices, economic inequities, and limited enforcement of supportive policies. Respondents emphasized that advocacy efforts bridged gaps between vulnerable pupils, their families, and systemic reforms, creating environments more conducive to educational retention.

4.5.1 Advocacy for Improved School Infrastructure

A recurring theme in the findings was the role of advocacy in improving school infrastructure, which directly impacted pupil attendance and retention. Respondents noted that poor facilities, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of sanitation, and inadequate learning materials, discouraged pupils from staying in school. One teacher explained,

“Many pupils don’t attend school regularly because the classrooms are overcrowded, and they feel neglected. The social worker fought to have new classrooms built, and it has made a big difference.” KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 14, FEB, 2025

Parents also observed the impact of improved infrastructure. A mother shared,

“My daughter didn’t want to go to school because there were no proper toilets. After the social worker advocated for better facilities, she feels more comfortable and attends every day.” KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another parent remarked,

“The roof of the classroom used to leak, and children couldn’t sit inside during the rainy season. Thanks to the social worker’s efforts, the school received funding to repair it.” KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers highlighted their advocacy strategies, which included engaging local authorities and mobilizing community resources. One social worker stated,

“We conducted meetings with parents and community leaders to highlight the urgent need for better classrooms and toilets. Together, we lobbied for support from the municipal council.”

Another noted,

“Advocacy is about showing stakeholders the long-term benefits of investing in education. When schools improve, the entire community benefits.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.5.2 Addressing Harmful Cultural Practices

Advocacy efforts also targeted cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender disparities and educational inequities. Early marriage, child labor, and traditional gender roles were identified as significant factors contributing to dropout rates, particularly among girls. Social workers actively engaged with families and community leaders to challenge these practices.

One pupil explained,

“Some of my friends were forced to stop school to get married. The social worker came to talk to their parents and convinced them to let the girls continue studying.”

Another pupil shared,

“I was staying at home to help with chores, but the social worker spoke to my parents and told them I needed to go to school. Now I am back in class.” KII/PUPIL/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Parents reflected on how advocacy influenced their perceptions. A father noted,

“We used to think that it was better for girls to marry early, but after the social worker spoke to us, we realized the importance of education for our daughters.”

A mother added,

“The social worker helped us see that sending our children to school would benefit the whole family in the future.” KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers described the challenges and strategies involved in combating harmful practices. One stated,

“Changing deep-rooted beliefs is not easy. We organize awareness campaigns and engage respected elders to help shift community attitudes.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another emphasized,

“We use success stories of girls who completed school to inspire families to value education over early marriage or child labor.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.5.3 Advocacy for Economic Equity

Economic barriers, such as poverty and lack of access to social safety nets, were consistently identified as systemic issues contributing to dropouts. Social workers advocated for policies and programs that provided financial support to families, enabling children to remain in school.

A pupil shared,

“I was about to leave school because my family couldn’t afford the fees. The social worker spoke to the school and arranged for a fee waiver. That’s why I’m still here.”

Another pupil noted,

“My parents were struggling to pay for my uniform. The social worker helped us get support from a local charity.” KII/PUPIL/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Parents expressed gratitude for these efforts. A mother stated,

“We didn’t know there were programs to help families like ours until the social worker told us. Now my children can stay in school.”

A father explained,

“The social worker helped us access a cash transfer program. It has made a huge difference because we don’t have to choose between food and education anymore.”
KII/PARENT/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers detailed their advocacy for economic support. One explained,

“We push for the inclusion of vulnerable families in government aid programs and collaborate with NGOs to provide scholarships and school supplies.”

Another noted,

“Our advocacy focuses on ensuring that no child is left behind because of financial constraints. Education is a right, not a privilege.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.5.4 Advocacy for Policy Implementation and Enforcement

Respondents highlighted the role of social workers in advocating for the enforcement of policies aimed at improving educational outcomes, such as compulsory education laws and gender equality measures. Advocacy efforts ensured that existing policies translated into tangible benefits for at-risk pupils.

One teacher noted,

“The social worker pushed the school to enforce rules against expelling pregnant girls. Instead of leaving, these girls were supported to continue their education.”
KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another teacher explained,

“When pupils drop out, the social worker ensures that the school follows up with their families to bring them back.”
KII/PARENT / MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Parents also recognized the importance of policy advocacy. A father remarked,

“We didn’t know about the law that allows pregnant girls to return to school until the social worker explained it to us. It gave our daughter a second chance.” KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

A mother shared,

“The social worker made sure that my son, who was being bullied, was protected by school policies. Now he feels safe and wants to stay in school.” KII/PARENT / MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers described the challenges of policy advocacy. One explained,

“Policies exist on paper, but implementation is often weak. We have to remind schools and authorities of their responsibilities.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 11, FEB, 2025

Another added,

“Advocacy involves holding stakeholders accountable, whether it’s ensuring fee waivers are applied or making sure schools have gender-sensitive facilities.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 13, FEB, 2025

4.5.5 Collaboration with Community Stakeholders

Advocacy efforts were most effective when social workers collaborated with various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, local leaders, and NGOs. These partnerships amplified the impact of advocacy and fostered a sense of collective responsibility for addressing systemic issues.

A teacher emphasized the importance of collaboration, stating,

“The social worker doesn’t work alone. They bring together parents, teachers, and community leaders to find solutions. It’s a team effort.” KII/TEACHER/ MBEYA 16, FEB, 2025

A local leader shared,

“The social worker involved us in discussions about keeping children in school. Together, we were able to stop some early marriages in our village.” KII/LOCAL LEADER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Social workers highlighted the benefits of partnerships. One noted,

“When we involve everyone families, schools, and organizations the solutions are more sustainable. Advocacy

becomes a shared responsibility.” KII/LOCAL LEADER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another explained,

“Community leaders play a big role in changing attitudes. When they support our advocacy, people are more likely to listen.” KII/LOCAL LEADER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

4.5.6 Challenges in Social Work Advocacy

Despite its successes, advocacy was not without challenges. Social workers faced resistance from communities, resource constraints, and limited support from policymakers. One social worker explained,

“Advocacy takes time because people are resistant to change, especially when it involves cultural practices.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 13, FEB, 2025

Another added,

“Sometimes, we don’t have enough funding or staff to sustain our efforts. It’s frustrating to see progress stall because of resource limitations.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/ MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Pupils also noted the slow pace of change. One shared,

“The social worker is trying to help, but some families don’t want to listen. It takes a long time to see results.” KII/PUPIL/ MBEYA 13, FEB, 2025

Parents echoed this concern, with one mother stating,

“We appreciate the advocacy, but sometimes it feels like not enough is being done to support poor families.”
KII/PARENT/MBEYA 17, FEB, 2025

4.5.7 Respondents’ Reflections on the Impact of Advocacy

Despite these challenges, respondents were unanimous in recognizing the importance of advocacy in addressing systemic barriers. A pupil explained,

“If the social worker hadn’t fought for us, many of us would have dropped out. They make sure we are not forgotten.”
KII/PUPIL/MBEYA 16, FEB, 2025

A parent remarked,

“Advocacy is not just about helping one child it’s about changing the system so all children can stay in school.”
KII/PARENT/MBEYA 16, FEB, 2025

Social workers reflected on the transformative power of advocacy. One stated,

“Advocacy is about creating opportunities where none existed before. It’s about making the system work for the most vulnerable.” KII/SOCIAL WORKER/MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

Another added,

“When we see children staying in school because of our efforts, it reminds us why this work is so important.”
KII/SOCIAL WORKER/MBEYA 10, FEB, 2025

The findings illustrate that social work advocacy is pivotal in addressing the systemic issues contributing to primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality. Through advocacy, social workers have improved infrastructure, challenged harmful cultural practices, ensured economic support, and strengthened policy implementation. These efforts, although met with challenges, have created lasting change for vulnerable pupils and their families. The testimonies highlight the transformative potential of advocacy in fostering educational equity and retention, emphasizing its essential role in addressing the root causes of school dropouts.

4.6 Summary of the Findings Chapter

This chapter presented the findings aligned with the study's three specific objectives, shedding light on the critical role of social work interventions in addressing primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality. The findings highlighted the impact of counseling services, resource coordination, and advocacy in mitigating the challenges that contribute to school dropouts.

Social work counseling services emerged as a transformative intervention in addressing the emotional and psychological barriers faced by pupils. Through personalized support, counselors fostered resilience, rebuilt confidence, and bridged communication gaps between pupils and their families, enabling children to remain engaged in school. Testimonies from pupils, parents, and teachers underscored the positive behavioral and academic changes brought about by counseling. However, challenges such as stigma and limited resources were noted, underscoring the need for sustained investment in this intervention.

Resource coordination proved essential in addressing the socio-economic barriers that often force children out of school. By linking pupils and their families to financial aid, healthcare, school feeding programs, and improved infrastructure, social workers alleviated immediate and systemic challenges. The provision of school materials, transportation, and nutrition significantly boosted attendance and retention rates, while advocacy for economic equity ensured that vulnerable families could access necessary support. Despite resource constraints, the collaborative efforts of social workers and community stakeholders demonstrated the effectiveness of this intervention.

Advocacy efforts targeted systemic issues, such as inadequate infrastructure, harmful cultural practices, and policy enforcement gaps. Social workers successfully mobilized communities and engaged policymakers to improve school facilities, challenge early marriage and child labor, and promote the enforcement of education policies. Advocacy also facilitated partnerships with stakeholders, amplifying the impact of these efforts. Respondents highlighted the transformative potential of advocacy in creating lasting systemic change, although resistance and limited resources remained challenges.

In conclusion, the findings revealed that social work interventions collectively addressed the multi-faceted causes of school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality. Counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy each contributed uniquely to fostering educational retention, highlighting the need for integrated and sustained efforts to ensure every child has the opportunity to complete their education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the preceding chapter, relating them to the study's objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. It provides a comprehensive conclusion that synthesizes key insights, highlighting the implications of the findings. Finally, recommendations are proposed to guide policy, practice, and further research aimed at reducing primary school dropouts.

5.2 The Impact of Social Work Counseling Services on Reducing Primary School Dropout Rates

The findings revealed that social work counseling services play a pivotal role in addressing the emotional and psychological challenges experienced by at-risk pupils. These services help to foster resilience, build confidence, and enhance engagement with school activities, enabling pupils to remain committed to their education despite the challenges they face. By addressing the root causes of emotional distress, such as family conflicts, neglect, and peer pressure, social work counseling empowers pupils to navigate these difficulties effectively.

These findings align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which underscores the importance of immediate environments, such as the family and school, in shaping a child's development. Social work counseling plays a bridging role between these microsystems by facilitating meaningful communication and providing emotional support. This approach helps to repair strained relationships

within families and fosters a positive and nurturing school environment. Pupils who participated in counseling sessions reported a renewed sense of motivation and commitment to their education, with some stating that these interventions gave them hope and helped them overcome thoughts of dropping out.

Existing literature strongly corroborates these findings. Studies conducted by Ananga (2020) and Olufemi and Adebayo (2022) demonstrate that counseling interventions are highly effective in reducing school dropout rates. These interventions address psychological and socio-emotional barriers, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and the impact of poverty, which often hinder educational retention. Similarly, the current study in Mbeya Municipality confirms that counseling services create a supportive environment where pupils feel valued, understood, and encouraged to continue their education.

However, despite the evident benefits, challenges such as societal stigma and limited availability of resources remain significant obstacles. Stigma surrounding counseling prevents some pupils and families from seeking help, while inadequate resources, including a shortage of trained counselors, limit the reach and effectiveness of these interventions. These challenges highlight the critical need for scaling up counseling services to ensure that more pupils can access the support they need. Expanding these interventions would involve not only increasing the availability of counselors but also addressing societal perceptions about counseling to create a more accepting and supportive environment for its use.

5.3 Effectiveness of Social Work Resource Coordination in supporting at-risk Pupils

Resource coordination proved to be a highly effective tool in addressing the socio-economic barriers that hinder pupils' access to education, demonstrating its ability to connect pupils and their families to critical support services. These services included financial aid, school feeding programs, access to healthcare, and improvements in school infrastructure, all of which played a significant role in reducing dropouts and promoting educational retention. By mitigating the challenges posed by poverty and limited resources, resource coordination directly addressed the fundamental needs of at-risk pupils, ensuring they had the necessary support to remain in school.

The findings align closely with existing literature. Studies by Sabates et al. (2010) and Munishi and Rugumamu (2019) emphasize the transformative potential of coordinated resource provision in enhancing school retention, particularly in underserved communities. These studies underline how the integration of multiple support mechanisms helps to alleviate the socio-economic challenges that often force children to leave school. The findings from the study reaffirm this perspective, demonstrating that resource coordination not only addressed immediate needs but also created an enabling environment for sustained school attendance.

The study underscores the critical importance of addressing basic needs to reduce absenteeism and improve academic performance. For instance, school feeding programs were found to alleviate hunger among pupils, which directly impacted their ability to focus and learn. These programs also acted as a significant incentive for

regular school attendance, as children and their families saw immediate benefits. Similarly, healthcare services played a vital role in ensuring pupils' physical well-being, enabling them to remain healthy and capable of attending school consistently. By addressing these interconnected needs, resource coordination contributed to better educational outcomes for vulnerable pupils.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for these findings. The theory highlights how interactions between microsystems, such as family and school, and exosystems, including community services, significantly shape a child's educational experiences. Resource coordination serves as a bridge between these systems, ensuring that pupils and their families benefit from an integrated support network. This holistic approach helps to strengthen the linkages between home, school, and community, creating a stable and supportive environment conducive to learning.

Despite its notable successes, resource coordination faces several challenges that limit its effectiveness. Inadequate funding emerged as a significant barrier, with social workers often struggling to secure consistent resources to meet the growing demand for support. Furthermore, many of the programs relied on temporary funding or one-time contributions, which made it difficult to sustain long-term impacts. These limitations highlight the need for more sustainable and comprehensive resource coordination strategies, particularly in marginalized communities where the need is most acute. The findings suggest that long-term programs prioritizing educational equity are essential to overcoming these challenges. By investing in

sustainable resource coordination initiatives, stakeholders can ensure that at-risk pupils have continuous access to the support they need to thrive academically. This would involve building partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities to secure stable funding and expand the reach of these programs. Ultimately, resource coordination must evolve into a reliable and scalable intervention that addresses both immediate and systemic barriers to education.

5.4 Role of Social Work Advocacy in Addressing Systemic Issues Contributing to Primary School Dropouts.

Social work advocacy emerged as a pivotal strategy in addressing the structural and systemic barriers that contribute to school dropouts. These barriers included inadequate school infrastructure, entrenched harmful cultural practices, pervasive economic inequities, and gaps in the enforcement of education policies. Advocacy efforts by social workers focused on confronting these macro-level challenges, consistent with Bronfenbrenner's concept of the macrosystem. This layer of influence encompasses broader societal elements, such as cultural norms, public policies, and institutional frameworks, which shape the educational experiences of children. By targeting these structural issues, social workers sought to create an environment that supports educational equity and retention.

One of the primary ways advocacy achieved its goals was through collaboration with key stakeholders, including community leaders, school authorities, policymakers, and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships were instrumental in influencing community attitudes and mobilizing resources to improve school

conditions. For example, social workers worked closely with local leaders to challenge cultural practices that discouraged girls' education, such as early marriage and child labor. They also partnered with educational institutions and government agencies to secure funding for better infrastructure, such as classrooms, sanitation facilities, and learning materials, ensuring that schools were more inclusive and conducive to learning.

The findings align with existing research, including studies by Mtey and Sulle (2020) and Twaweza East Africa (2019), which highlight the transformative potential of advocacy in driving systemic change. These studies demonstrate how targeted advocacy initiatives can address deep-rooted issues, such as gender inequality and resource disparities, by engaging communities and influencing policy decisions. In the context of Mbeya Municipality, advocacy efforts led to tangible improvements, including the construction of new school facilities, the provision of gender-sensitive sanitation amenities, and a broader awareness of the value of education, particularly for marginalized groups like girls. These achievements illustrate the effectiveness of advocacy in tackling the structural barriers that contribute to dropout rates.

However, the findings also reveal significant challenges associated with advocacy. Resistance to change was a recurring issue, particularly in communities where traditional beliefs and practices are deeply entrenched. For example, convincing families to abandon practices like early marriage required persistent efforts and culturally sensitive approaches. Social workers also faced constraints due to limited resources, which restricted the scope and sustainability of advocacy initiatives. These

challenges underscore the need for sustained and strategic advocacy efforts that involve a wide range of stakeholders to build momentum for systemic reforms.

Addressing these issues effectively requires long-term commitment and broader partnerships. Social workers must continue to engage policymakers, community leaders, and international organizations to secure the necessary support for systemic changes. This includes advocating for increased funding for education, stricter enforcement of inclusive education policies, and community-driven initiatives that promote the importance of schooling. By fostering collaborative efforts and ensuring sustained advocacy, social workers can continue to address the structural and systemic barriers that hinder educational access and equity.

Overall, the findings highlight the interconnected challenges that contribute to school dropouts, emphasizing the need for an integrated approach. Social work interventions address these issues on multiple levels: counseling focuses on immediate emotional and psychological needs, resource coordination alleviates socio-economic barriers, and advocacy targets systemic change. Together, these interventions align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which underscores the importance of multi-level support systems in creating sustainable solutions for educational retention.

While the study reinforces the pivotal role of social work in reducing school dropouts, it also identifies key areas for improvement. These include scaling up interventions to reach more at-risk pupils, ensuring the long-term sustainability of

programs, and addressing societal stigma that may hinder access to support. The insights gained from this study contribute significantly to the broader discourse on educational equity, offering valuable implications for policy and practice in comparable contexts.

5.5 Conclusion

This study examined the role of social work interventions in addressing primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality, focusing on counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the dropout issue, revealing that social work interventions are not only impactful but also essential in mitigating the complex challenges faced by pupils. These interventions, grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, demonstrate the importance of multi-level approaches that address immediate, structural, and systemic barriers to education.

Social work counseling emerged as a crucial tool for addressing the emotional and psychological challenges experienced by pupils, fostering resilience, confidence, and renewed engagement with education. The study revealed that counseling services bridged communication gaps within families and provided emotional support to pupils, enabling them to navigate difficulties and remain in school. However, challenges such as stigma and limited resources suggest the need for expanded access and increased investment in counseling services to maximize their impact. Resource coordination proved highly effective in addressing socio-economic barriers to education. By linking pupils and their families to essential services, such as

financial aid, school feeding programs, and healthcare, social workers alleviated immediate needs and created an enabling environment for academic success. These efforts reduced absenteeism and incentivized school attendance, yet the reliance on temporary funding and limited resources highlights the need for sustainable, long-term support mechanisms.

Advocacy played a pivotal role in tackling systemic barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, harmful cultural practices, and policy enforcement gaps. Social workers collaborated with stakeholders to influence community attitudes, improve school conditions, and promote educational equity. Despite resistance to change and resource constraints, advocacy efforts achieved tangible improvements, such as better school facilities and increased awareness of the importance of education, particularly for girls. Sustained advocacy and broader partnerships are necessary to build on these successes.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the critical role of social work in reducing primary school dropouts through integrated and multi-dimensional interventions. While the findings highlight significant progress, they also underscore areas for improvement, including scaling up services, ensuring program sustainability, and addressing societal stigma. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and provide valuable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to create inclusive and supportive education systems in similar contexts.

5.6 Recommendations

To address the challenges of primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality, several key recommendations emerge from the study findings. First, enhancing access to social work counseling services is essential. Schools should integrate counseling programs into their systems and increase the number of trained social workers to meet the demand. Awareness campaigns targeting pupils, parents, and communities should also be conducted to reduce the stigma associated with seeking counseling. By fostering a culture where emotional and psychological support is valued, more pupils can benefit from these vital services.

Strengthening resource coordination mechanisms is another priority. Sustainable funding models for school feeding programs, healthcare, and educational materials should be established to alleviate the socio-economic barriers pupils face. Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities is critical to ensuring that these resources are distributed effectively and reach the most vulnerable groups. This approach will address immediate needs and create an enabling environment for pupils to remain in school.

Community awareness and engagement play a pivotal role in tackling harmful cultural practices such as early marriage and child labor, which disproportionately affect girls. Social workers must collaborate with local leaders, religious institutions, and community groups to challenge these norms and promote the value of education. Sharing success stories and emphasizing the long-term benefits of schooling can help shift attitudes, fostering a community culture that prioritizes children's education.

Advocacy for policy reforms and effective implementation is equally important. Social workers and policymakers should work together to strengthen the enforcement of existing education policies, such as those mandating compulsory education and facilitating the reintegration of pregnant girls into schools. Additionally, reforms should focus on ensuring gender-sensitive school facilities, equitable resource distribution, and fee waivers for vulnerable families to remove barriers to education.

Building partnerships among schools, government bodies, community leaders, and development organizations is essential to addressing systemic challenges like inadequate infrastructure and limited resources. Collaborative initiatives that leverage diverse expertise and funding sources can lead to sustainable improvements in school conditions and educational access.

Investing in the capacity building of social workers is another critical recommendation. Continuous training programs should be implemented to equip social workers with skills in advocacy, resource mobilization, and culturally sensitive counseling. These efforts will enhance the effectiveness of their interventions and ensure they are prepared to address evolving challenges in the educational landscape. Monitoring and evaluation of social work interventions are necessary to assess their impact and guide improvements. By tracking the progress of pupils and evaluating the outcomes of counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy efforts, stakeholders can refine strategies and scale up successful initiatives.

Finally, fostering inclusive education policies is essential to accommodate marginalized groups, including children with disabilities and those from remote or

disadvantaged communities. Tailored interventions must address the specific challenges these groups face, ensuring that all children have equitable access to quality education. Implementing these recommendations will build on the successes of social work interventions, promoting sustainable and inclusive education systems. These efforts will ultimately reduce primary school dropouts and enhance educational equity in Mbeya Municipality.

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APPENDICES

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

APPENDIX 1: AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide for the Study on "The Role of Social Work Interventions in Addressing Primary School Dropouts: A Case Study of Mbeya Municipality"

This interview guide is designed to explore the factors influencing primary school dropouts and the role of social work interventions in addressing this issue in Mbeya Municipality. The questions are open-ended to allow participants to share their personal experiences and insights. The guide is divided into sections based on the participants' roles: pupils, parents/guardians, and social workers.

Section 1: Demographic Information (For all participants)

1. What is your age?
2. What is your educational background (for pupils: current grade level)?
3. For parents/guardians: What is your occupation?
4. For social workers: How long have you been working in the education sector?

Section 2: Pupils' Experiences (At-risk of Dropout)

1. Can you tell me about your experience at school? What do you enjoy most about attending school?
2. Have you ever thought about dropping out of school? If so, why?
3. What challenges do you face at school that make it hard for you to stay?
4. How does your family support your education? Are there any specific challenges at home that affect your schooling?
5. Do you have any support at school (e.g., from teachers, social workers)? How does it help you?

6. What do you think would help you stay in school and finish your education?

Section 3: Parents/Guardians' Perspectives

1. Can you describe your involvement in your child's education?

2. What challenges does your family face that affect your child's ability to attend or stay in school?

3. Have you been approached by any social workers to help with your child's education? What kind of support did you receive?

4. What role do you think social work interventions (such as counseling or financial support) play in helping children stay in school?

5. In your opinion, what could be done to improve the situation of children at risk of dropping out in your community?

6. How do you think the school or community could support families like yours in keeping children in school?

Section 4: Social Workers' Perspectives

1. How long have you been working as a social worker in the education sector, and what is your role in relation to pupils at risk of dropping out?

2. What are the main reasons you have observed that lead to primary school dropouts in Mbeya Municipality?

3. Can you describe any social work interventions (such as counseling, resource coordination, or advocacy) that have been implemented to address school dropouts?

4. How effective do you think these interventions are in reducing dropout rates? Can you share any success stories?

5. What challenges do you face in providing support to at-risk pupils and their families?

6. What additional support or changes would be helpful in reducing school dropouts in this area?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with school dropouts or social work interventions?
2. Do you have any suggestions for how the government or local authorities can support efforts to reduce school dropouts?

APPENDIX II: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide for the Study on "The Role of Social Work Interventions in Addressing Primary School Dropouts: A Case Study of Mbeya Municipality"

This Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide is designed to facilitate group conversations with different participant groups (pupils, parents/guardians, and social workers) to explore the key factors contributing to school dropouts and the role of social work interventions in addressing these challenges. The discussions aim to gather collective insights, identify common themes, and encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and perspectives.

Section 1: Introduction to the Discussion

1. Introduction and Purpose: "Thank you all for joining this discussion. Today, we will be talking about school dropouts and how social work interventions help in keeping students in school. This will help us understand the challenges faced by students, families, and the role of social workers in improving education retention."

2. Ground Rules:

- Everyone's opinion is valuable, and we encourage open and respectful discussion.
- There are no right or wrong answers, just different perspectives.
- Please speak one at a time.
- Your responses are confidential and will only be used for this research.

Section 2: Pupils' Experiences (At-risk of Dropout)

1. Challenges in School: "Can you describe the biggest challenges you face in school that make it difficult to stay in school?"

2. **Support at School:** "What kind of support do you receive from teachers, social workers, or classmates to help you stay in school?"
3. **Family Influence:** "How does your family support your education, and how do family circumstances affect your ability to attend school?"
4. **Peer Influence:** "How do your friends and classmates influence your decision to stay in school or not?"
5. **Role of Social Work Interventions:** "Have you ever interacted with a social worker? How did their support help you in staying in school?"

Section 3: Parents/Guardians' Perspectives

1. **Educational Barriers:** "From your perspective, what are the main reasons children in this community drop out of school?"
2. **Family Challenges:** "What are the main challenges your family faces that could make it difficult for your child to continue their education?"
3. **Role of Social Work Interventions:** "What type of help or support have you received from social workers or community services in supporting your child's education?"
4. **Perceived Effectiveness:** "Do you think the social work interventions in the community are effective in helping children stay in school? Why or why not?"
5. **Suggestions for Improvement:** "What do you think can be done by schools, social workers, or the community to reduce school dropouts in your area?"

Section 4: Social Workers' Perspectives

1. **Identifying At-risk Pupils:** "From your experience, what are the common factors that put children at risk of dropping out of school in this community?"

2. **Social Work Interventions:** "Can you describe any specific interventions you have been involved in to help reduce school dropouts?"
3. **Challenges in Interventions:** "What are the biggest challenges you face in providing support to students and families in preventing dropouts?"
4. **Collaboration with Other Stakeholders:** "How do you work with teachers, parents, and the community to address school dropout issues? What could improve this collaboration?"
5. **Effectiveness of Current Programs:** "In your view, are current social work interventions sufficient in reducing school dropouts? What additional support or programs would be beneficial?"

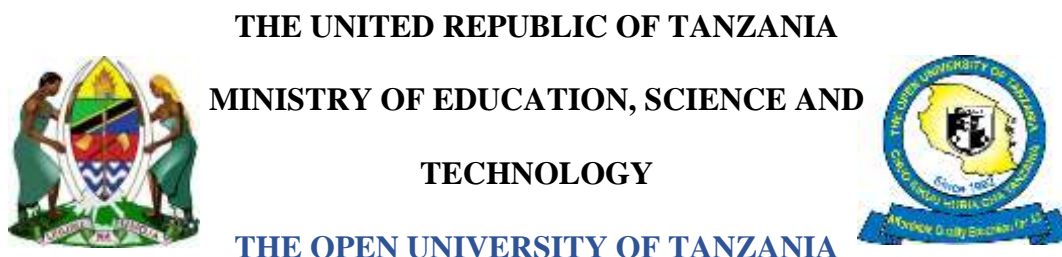
Section 5: Collective Discussion on School Dropouts and Interventions

1. **Contributing Factors to Dropouts:** "What do you all think are the biggest reasons that children drop out of school in this community? How do social, economic, and cultural factors play a role?"
2. **Role of Community in Education:** "What role do you think the community should play in helping children stay in school? How can community members support each other to reduce dropouts?"
3. **Improvement of Social Work Programs:** "How can social work interventions be improved to better address the needs of at-risk students? What specific services should be added or enhanced?"
4. **Collaboration and Support:** "How can schools, families, and social workers work better together to support students and reduce dropouts?"
5. **Suggestions for Change:** "What do you think should be the first step to make a significant change in reducing school dropouts in this community?"

Conclusion

1. **Final Thoughts:** "Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with school dropouts or how social work can help prevent them?"
2. **Closing Remarks:** "Thank you all for sharing your insights today. Your experiences and ideas are very valuable and will help in understanding how we can improve school retention through social work interventions."

APPENDIX III: DATA COLLECTION CLEARANCE LETTER



Ref. No OUT/PG202100255

8th January, 2025

City Director,
Mbeya City Council,
P.O Box 149,
MBEYA.

Dear Director

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MR. HITSON CHARLES MBUGA,

REG NO: PG202100255.

2. The Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17

of 1992, which became operational on the 1st March 1993 by public notice No.55 in the official Gazette. The Act was however replaced by the Open University of Tanzania Charter of 2005, which became operational on 1st January 2007. In line with the Charter, the Open University of Tanzania mission is to generate and apply knowledge through research.

3. To facilitate and to simplify research process therefore, the act empowers the Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania to issue research clearance, on behalf of the Government of Tanzania and Tanzania Commission for Science and

Technology, to both its staff and students who are doing research in Tanzania. With this brief background, the purpose of this letter is to introduce to you Mr. Hitson Charles Mbuga,

Reg.No: PG202100255, pursuing Master of Social Work (MSW). We here by grant this clearance to conduct a research titled “The Role of Social Work Interventions in Addressing Primary School Dropouts: A Case Study of Mbeya Municipality” He will collect his data at your area from 9th January 2025 to 27th February 2025.

4. In case you need any further information, kindly do not hesitate to contact the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) of the Open University of Tanzania, P.O.Box 23409, Dar es Salaam. Tel: 022-2-2668820. We lastly thank you in advance for your assumed cooperation and facilitation of this research academic activity.

Yours sincerely,

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA



Prof. Gwahula Raphael Kimamala

For: VICE CHANCELLOR



THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
MBEYA CITY COUNCIL



On reply please quote:

Ref. No. HB/385/387/2/329

19/02/2025

Ward Executive Office,
Mwakibete ward,
Mbeya City Council,
P.O.BOX 149,
MBEYA.

— Imepitishwa
naomba
cusacive
19/02/2025.
AFISA MTENDAJI
KATA YA MWAKIBETE
JIJI LA MBEYA

REF: PERMISSION FOR DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH WITH EFFECT
FROM 9th JANUARY TO 27 FEBRUARY, 2025

Kindly refer to above captioned subject.

2. I would like via this letter to introduce to you Mr. Hitson Charles Mbuga Reg. No. PG202100255, who is pursuing Master of Social Work (MSW) from the Open University of Tanzania whose main purpose is to collect data and Research at Mbeya City Council (Mwakibete Ward).
3. Given to their request, the Research titled "The role of social work interventions in addressing primary school dropouts".
4. Kindly give him support as per Research and data collection requirement.

George Magembe
For: CITY DIRECTOR
MBEYA CITY COUNCIL
CITY DIRECTOR
MBEYA CITY COUNCIL
MBEYA

Copy:

City Director,
Mbeya City Council

(to be seen in file)