

Community-based monitoring of truancy in public primary schools in Tanzania: Insights from Enduleni Ward, Ngorongoro District, Arusha

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ABSTRACT

The government of Tanzania, in ensuring every child attains primary education, introduced free primary education programs. But truancy has been a challenge in some communities. Engaging the communities in monitoring education service delivery improves understanding of the local people about the problem, and creates more viable solutions, fosters a sense of ownership, and maximizes learning opportunities for all children. This article explores mechanisms to create awareness of community-based monitoring of truancy, ways of engaging community members in monitoring truancy and examines the challenges of community-based monitoring of truancy in public primary schools. The study adopted a qualitative case study design guided by social accountability theory and participatory governance theory. The target population comprised education stakeholders and community leaders involved in primary education, attendance monitoring and responses to truancy in Enduleni Ward, Ngorongoro District, Arusha, Tanzania. Fifteen key informants were conducted include: three heads of schools, ten teachers, one village chairperson and one community development officer, were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through key informant interviews and analysed using qualitative content analysis, with codes grouped into categories and themes aligned with the study objectives. The findings show that village and school meetings, informal discussions and customary meetings are the mechanisms used to create awareness of community-based monitoring of truancy. The ways of engaging community members in monitoring truancy include: parent-teacher consultations, parent meetings, personal visit by parents and students' academic reports. Challenges such as poverty, child labour, the existence wild animals, negative attitude towards education, teenage pregnancies, child marriage and a strong patriarchal system were reported. Therefore, information should be provided on community-based monitoring methods through trainings and seminars from different educational stakeholders including teachers, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations and local government authorities.

Keywords: Community-Based Monitoring, Community Participation, Governance, Truancy, Quality Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Community-based monitoring (CBM) is recognised as a social accountability approach through which service users generate evidence and press for improvements in public services (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Molina et al., 2017). In education, community participation can strengthen school management and the material and social support that sustains attendance, although its effects depend on local knowledge, institutional responsiveness and the quality of participation (Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016; Balikoowa et al., 2023; Mogues et al., 2023). In this, CBM can provide locally grounded information for real-time action and feedback to education decision-makers. Community participation can produce appropriate solutions and reinforce accountability in education service delivery. Evidence from rural Malawi indicates that participation contributes to educational outcomes by improving school management (Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016), while in rural Uganda research shows that communities can support attendance through encouragement and material assistance (Balikoowa et al., 2023). These findings underline that collaboration among families, communities and schools is important, but its form and local context determine whether it becomes meaningful and sustained. Community-based monitoring may improve access to services, citizen involvement and accountability (Molina et al., 2017; Mogues et al., 2023). Parents, teachers and community members play roles in responding to school absenteeism. Low parent-school involvement may be a risk factor for absenteeism, while supportive family processes can be associated with lower risks of absenteeism and dropout (Gubbels et al., 2019; Marlow & Rehman, 2021).

The government of Tanzania in ensuring every child attains primary education, introduced free primary education programs. Although issues such as truancy, early pregnancy and long walking distance from home to school have been a challenge in some communities (The Citizen, 2021). Engaging the communities in monitoring education

service delivery improves understanding of the local people about the problem, and creates more viable solutions, fosters sense of ownership and maximizes learning opportunities for all populations (Kintz et al. 2011). Primary education services delivery must be monitored by the government, teachers, parents, guardians and community members. Parents and community participation in education ensures children are prepared to learn, the community provides financial or material support and frequent communication between teachers and the community. Swift-Morgan, (2006) observed that the community must participate in the construction of education centres, development of learning materials and school management. Community participation in education services delivery helps maximize of limited resources as well as identify and address limited challenges in attaining education (Kearney et al., 2022; Matlala, 2024).

Existing research has examined community monitoring and social accountability in public services, including the conditions under which citizen participation influences provider performance (Maru, 2010; Molina et al., 2017; Mogues et al., 2023). Education studies show that community engagement can strengthen school management, attendance related support and accountability, but participation may remain low when communities lack information (Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016; Balikooowa et al., 2023). Studies on school absence, identifies low parent school involvement, socioeconomic disadvantage and negative attitudes towards schooling as important risks (Gubbels et al., 2019; Sosu et al., 2021). However, limited attention has been paid to how pastoralist communities themselves create awareness, engage in monitoring and confront locally specific obstacles to monitoring truancy in Tanzanian public primary schools.

Research in Africa suggests that community participation is often concentrated in financial or material contributions rather than teaching, learning and sustained oversight (Swift-Morgan, 2006; Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016). In northern Tanzania, pastoralist households have been found to invest less in formal education than non-pastoralist households, reflecting livelihood constraints (Hedges et al., 2016). Studies among Maasai communities document mixed views of formal education and show that household responsibilities, school environments and distance constrain participation, for girls (Pesambili, 2020; Raymond, 2021). What remains as a gap is how these conditions shape community monitoring practices and the capacity to prevent truancy at primary school level.

Tanzania has introduced compulsory and fee free basic education, expanded school infrastructure and promoted programmes intended to improve enrolment and attendance. Yet removing tuition fees does not eliminate indirect schooling costs or household opportunity costs. Evidence links school meals with improved participation and attendance, while research in rural Tanzania shows that household wealth and pastoralist livelihoods influence educational investment (Cohen et al., 2021; Hedges et al., 2016). This study explores mechanisms for creating awareness of CBM, ways of engaging community members in monitoring truancy and challenges affecting CBM in public primary schools in Tanzania.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite introduction of compulsory fee-free basic education in Tanzania, truancy continues to undermine students participation and educational attainment. In this context, poverty, child labour, long distances, pregnancy, early marriage and negative attitudes towards formal education increase school absence (Hedges et al., 2016; Pesambili, 2020; Raymond, 2021). Although parents and community members are expected to support attendance, their participation in school monitoring is often irregular and poorly coordinated. Community-based monitoring can strengthen attendance oversight by enabling communities to collect information, engage schools and demand appropriate action (Molina et al., 2017; Mogues et al., 2023). However, limited evidence exists on how pastoralist communities in Tanzania understand and practise CBM, how community members are engaged in monitoring truancy, and what challenges constrain their participation. This study addresses this gap by examining awareness mechanisms, community-engagement practices and challenges affecting CBM of truancy in public primary schools in Enduleni Ward.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To explore mechanisms for creating awareness of community-based monitoring of truancy.
- ii. To identify ways of engaging community members in monitoring truancy.
- iii. To examine the challenges affecting community-based monitoring of truancy in public primary schools.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by social accountability theory, which explains how citizens use information, collective action and engagement with public institutions to demand improved service delivery. Social accountability depends on the interaction between citizen action and institutional responsiveness, supported by access to information, civic mobilisation and citizen provider interfaces (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015). In this study, parent meetings, consultations,

home visits and academic reports represent mechanisms through which local communities can obtain attendance information and local authorities to respond to truancy.

The study also draws on participatory governance theory, which emphasises the involvement of citizens in identifying problems, deliberating and influencing public decisions (Fung, 2006). In this, participation can strengthen citizenship, public accountability and institutional responsiveness, although its outcomes depend on who participates and whether institutions act on citizens concerns (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). This perspective helps explain how limited awareness, low meeting attendance, livelihood demands and unequal relations constrain meaningful community participation in monitoring truancy.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Community-Based Monitoring

Community entails a group of people sharing the same geographical area, interest, goals, culture, values, language, history and norms (Olumade & Olatoun, 2015). There are aspects of a community, one is a group structure which may be formal or informal structured in which members play roles that are integrated around common goals. Second, a community has collective identification and lastly local autonomy and responsibility. In this, a community is a social unit of people with a common place, norms, religion, values, customs and identity. They mostly share a geographical area or may also share a virtual space, as a network of people connected by social relations, and that relationship is important to their social identity and practice.

Community monitoring is a “system of measuring, recording, collecting and analyzing information and communicating and acting on that information to improve performance” (Grandvoinnet et al. 2015, p.295). In this, community-based monitoring is “a process where concerned citizens, government agencies, industry, academia, community groups and local institutions collaborate to monitor, track and respond to issues of common community concern” (Whitelaw et al. 2003, p.410). CBM is an organized way of collecting, analyzing and verifying information at the local level to be used by the local government, national government agencies, and non-governmental and civil society organizations for planning, budgeting and implementing local development projects. In CBM service users assess the effectiveness, accessibility and impact of the education programs and services they receive. It is any type of monitoring done by community members, whereby they decide what to monitor and act upon the collected data. In this, CBM is an organized way of assessing information on public services at the local level, to influence improvements in social services. Bollers et al. (2020) view community-based monitoring as a participatory tool used in the process of designing, planning, collecting and analysing information for decision-making. Through community-based monitoring methods of truancy, education stakeholders can be better informed with the challenges of truancy, hence can make informed decision to take immediate action in addressing the problem.

Kintz et al. (2011) recognized community monitoring in public social services as a vital force in the effort to remove barriers to achieving quality services for all. The involvement of the locals in monitoring public services will influence locally generated long-term solutions, increase accountability and ensure relevancy to the local environment (Sälzer et al. 2024; Kintz et al. 2011). Community monitoring fosters the willingness to contribute local resources which ensures community-owned initiatives towards the goal of attaining quality and sustainable services for all. CBM is useful in diagnosing the extent of the social challenge at the local level, formulating appropriate plans and programs to address problems, providing the basis for rational allocation of resources, identifying eligible beneficiaries for targeted programs and monitoring and assessing the impact of programs and projects.

The value of community-based monitoring is to include local and traditional community knowledge in the monitoring process which involves how the knowledge is transmitted in the community. Community-based monitoring is a tool for holding the government and service providers accountable and empowering the citizens at the same time. Through community-based monitoring process citizens who are service users can provide feedback on the status of the service they receive and demand improvements of the services. The government wants to see the transformation of schools and it can be achieved when significance, systematic and sustainable change has occurred resulting to improved outcomes to every student. And community-based participation in school management as one of strategies to achieve transformation of schools.

2.2.2 Community-Based Monitoring of Truancy

Community-based intervention in truancy involves collaboration among schools, families and community organisations to assist children whose attendance is at risk (Dembo & Gullede, 2009). Truancy refers to intentional, unexcused absence, whereas school absenteeism is the broader umbrella covering excused and unexcused absence and school refusal (Kearney et al., 2022). Persistent absence is consequential because it is associated with lower educational attainment and adverse longer-term outcomes (Dräger et al., 2024). Also, truancy is an absence without permission or a satisfactory explanation from the school, parent or guardian (Dalziel & Henthorne, 2005). Its causes are multi-level rather than individual. Meta-analytic and systematic review evidence identifies negative attitudes to school, weak parent

school involvement, socioeconomic disadvantage, family circumstances and poor academic performance among the major risks associated with absenteeism (Gubbels et al., 2019; Momo et al., 2019; Sosu et al., 2021). In pastoralist settings, these pressures may intersect with mobility, livestock responsibilities, distance and gender norms (Hedges et al., 2016; Pesambili, 2020; Raymond, 2021).

Sälzer et al. (2024) observed there are truancy model that show the most promise for reducing truancy, but also the one of the risk factors which include: sanctions for truancy, parents and community members engagement in truancy reduction strategy, incentives to students for school attendance, the law enforcement strategies, and other initiatives like school-based truancy reduction programs. In monitoring truancy, local communities can participate individually with their own management or in clusters under the umbrella of an organization in which they state clear roles and responsibilities, and members are involved by giving information and by assigning special monitoring tasks to specific groups (Bollers et al. 2020). For example, Stop Truancy and Recommend Treatment (START) is a community-based intervention programme designed to reduce truancy that also collaborates with various community agencies within large urban cities (Dembo & Gullledge, 2009).

Community-based monitoring can be through community-based organizations, people's movements, voluntary organizations and panchayat representatives. The aim is to give feedback about the functioning of public services offered at the local communities. In India, community-based monitoring process involve three-way partnership between educational providers and head of schools, the communities through community-based organizations (CBOs), NGOs and Panchayat Raj Institutions (National Secretariat on Community Action, 2010). Whereby the monitoring activities involves capacity building, identification of stakeholders, trainings of service providers, community meetings on the assessment of the services and evaluation of the status of the public services.

India has adopted the school management committee which is composed of parents, teachers, representatives from self-help groups, students and local government (Vivek et al. 2019). The main roles of the committee are monitoring, as part of community participation, the working of the school and the utilization of grants received from the government. In monitoring the working of the school, they use school score cards to monitor students and teachers' attendance, students' performance and provision of basic school infrastructure such as toilets. The score cards are in the form of observation description that allows both illiterate and literate society members to collect data in education delivery monitoring (Vivek et al. 2019). They also monitor finances, academic progress of the children and transparency in the school education system. Despite the fact that the committee consists of both literate and illiterate community members, the monitoring process is designed for equal community participation in education service delivery (Vivek et al. 2019).

2.2.3 Community Based Monitoring in Africa

Community monitoring of public primary schools through Parents Associations in Guinea known as PACEEQ (Participation 656communautaire à l'éducation due Base pour l'équité et la Qualité) (Kintz et al. 2011), involves the formulation and implementation of education plans intended to build capacity of parents' association in monitoring public primary schools. Also, Community-Organized Primary Education (COPE) program monitors access to primary education to girls in remote communities of Afghanistan (Kintz et al. 2011). The program enables the community to form Village Education Committee, where the community members get a space to monitor students' attendance and manage teachers' selection, as well as resolving students and teacher's problems. The Community School Initiative in Egypt monitors the hours of school session, school site, curriculum and activities reflecting local culture. The community members monitor both teachers and students. The initiative changes children perception on themselves, especially female students who begin considering themselves educated and capable. Community monitoring boosted students' confidence and hence led to an improvement in school attendance.

In improving public service, the government of Uganda established community forums known as barazas, where citizens receive information from government officials on public service delivery including education services, which give the community members the opportunity to be directly involved in the monitoring of public services (Mogues et al. 2023). Here the citizens directly engage with service providers and can demand accountability and proper utilization of resources. The effectiveness of the barazas at the sub-county level is that they increase positive outcomes in school enrolment and infrastructure (Mogues et al. 2023). Through Barazas, citizens share information with service providers, government leaders and development partners directly on the status of delivery of public services including teachers and students' attendance. Students pregnancies and truancy are monitored by both community members, the government and the education service providers.

School based governance at the community level is a focus on improving quality through localization of education delivery (Sulaiman & Uhuegbu, 2021). That is why Nigeria government in its efforts in repositioning the education sector has formed the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) initiative in ensuring effective participation of community members in school governance. It entails the decentralization of aspects of decision making

to the school level and it involves the management of human, financial and other resources depending on the governmental processes (Olumade & Olatoun, 2015).

In Zimbabwe, local community members in rural areas do not seem to have the capacity to monitor primary schools due to low morale and negative attitudes towards education for their children (Godfrey, 2016). Despite the fact that the government of Zimbabwe made a policy that facilitates community participation for improving quality of education provided. According to Godfrey (2016), the Education Amendment Act of 1991 in According to Statutory Instrument (SI) No. 87/92; section 4 directed that each authority responsible for education establishes a school development committee for all schools under their jurisdictions. Parents should assist in the operation and development of the school, and in advancing the morals, culture, physical and welfare of the school and the students. But the high cost of living, high unemployment rate and low morale have negatively affected the community participation in developing early childhood development education centres. In this, Chevedza et al., (2012) emphasize that poverty poses a serious challenge to rural people efforts to provide educational support resources for their children in the homes and schools.

Although children are guaranteed the right to education, absenteeism and dropout remain important concerns in Tanzania. Administrative data attribute dropout to economic activities, household responsibilities, illness, school conditions and other factors. Table 1 reports the number of enrolled pupils, total dropouts and dropouts attributed to truancy between 2012 and 2021 (URT, 2021).

Table 1

Primary-school enrolment, dropout and truancy-attributed dropout in Tanzania, 2012-2021

Year	Number of Enrolled Primary Students	Number of Drop Out	Number of Truants	Percentage of Truancy
2012	8,292,172	152,492	147,960	97
2013	8,231,913	97,669	94,336	96.5
2014	8,222,667	84,746	82,269	97
2015	8,245,382	125,228	120,246	96
2016	8,639,202	172,044	166,663	96.9
2017	9,317,791	171,039	163,395	95.5
2018	10,111,671	92,790	89,950	96.9
2019	10,605,450	167,834	163,595	97.4
2020	10,525,896	198,581	194,856	98.1
2021	11,196,788	204,450	197,658	96.6

Source: URT, 2021.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study design to examine community experiences, engagement practices and challenges associated with monitoring truancy in public primary schools. The case study design enabled an investigation of truancy within its social and cultural context. Enduleni Ward in Ngorongoro District was purposively selected because it is predominantly pastoral and is characterised by livelihood practices, social norms and traditions that may influence school attendance and community participation in education monitoring.

3.2 Study Area

Ngorongoro District is one of the seven districts in Arusha Region. It is bordered by Kenya to the west, Monduli District to the east, Longido District to the north, and Karatu District to the south. Ngorongoro is divided into three divisions Ngorongoro, Loliondo and Sale. Administratively, it is further divided into ten wards: Alalilelai, Arash, Digodigo, Enduleni, Enguserosambu, Kakesio, Maalon, Malambu, Nainokanoka and Nayobi.

Enduleni ward has three primary schools that are Enduleni, Indiani and Nainokanona, which were purposively selected for the study. The area is predominantly inhabited by Maasai communities whose livelihoods are largely based on pastoralism and nomadic practices. Although Enduleni primary school is located near the ward centre, students and other residents face life threatening risks associated with encounters with wild animals from the Ngorongoro crater area. These circumstances make Enduleni ward an appropriate study area. In addition, the area was purposively selected because pastoral communities are influenced by sociocultural norms and traditions, including patriarchal practices in which men are regarded as household heads and principal decision makers. Other factors include the nomadic lifestyle and geographical challenges, particularly encounters with wildlife from the surrounding protected areas. These factors may hinder community participation in addressing and managing truancy in public primary schools.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised education stakeholders and community leaders directly involved in primary education, school attendance monitoring and responses to truancy in Enduleni Ward. These included public primary school heads, teachers, a village chairperson and a community development officer. These groups were considered capable of providing relevant information about awareness of community-based monitoring, community-engagement practices and challenges affecting truancy monitoring.

3.4 Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents based on their positions, experience and knowledge of school attendance and community monitoring. The study involved 15 key informants: three heads of schools, ten teachers, one village chairperson and one community development officer. The respondents included 12 males and three females with different ages, educational qualifications and marital statuses, as presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Background information of key respondents

S/N	Key Interviewees	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Education Level
1	Head of School A	Male	30-39	Married	Bachelor Degree
2	Head of School B	Male	50-59	Married	Bachelor Degree
3	Head of School C	Male	40-49	Married	Bachelor Degree
4	Village Chairperson	Male	40-49	Married	O-Level
5	Community Development Officer	Female	30-39	Married	Bachelor Degree
6	Teacher A	Male	30-39	Married	Bachelor Degree
7	Teacher B	Male	20-29	Single	Diploma
8	Teacher C	Male	50-59	Married	Diploma
9	Teacher D	Male	40-49	Married	Bachelor Degree
10	Teacher E	Male	30-39	Married	Diploma
11	Teacher F	Male	40-49	Married	Diploma
12	Teacher G	Male	20-29	Single	Diploma
13	Teacher H	Male	30-39	Married	Diploma
14	Teacher I	Female	20-29	Single	Bachelor Degree
15	Teacher J	Female	40-49	Married	Diploma

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected through key-informant interviews with the selected respondents. The interviews gathered participants experiences and perceptions concerning mechanisms for creating awareness of community-based monitoring, ways of engaging community members and challenges affecting the monitoring of truancy. Secondary data were obtained from published research reports, journal articles and relevant education documents to contextualise and support the interview findings.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Interview data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Responses were organised and coded according to the study objectives, and related codes were grouped into categories and themes. The principal themes covered awareness mechanisms, forms of community engagement and economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges affecting truancy monitoring. Direct quotations from respondents were used to illustrate the findings while identifying participants by their institutional roles rather than personal names.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw at any time. All interview data were analysed and presented anonymously, and participants names and other identifying details were excluded. Direct quotations were reported without personal identifiable information to protect participants privacy and confidentiality.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Mechanism to Create Awareness on Community-Based Monitoring of Truancy

Meetings with parents, guardians and other stakeholders at the village level and schools have been the common ways of creating awareness among local community members. These meetings have been organized by school head teachers and local community leaders. Knowledge created by community interaction between the people themselves in a specific space and time is a core element of successful understanding of the programs or service offered. One of the respondents mentioned that:

"We always organize meetings and invite all parents and guardians to attend. In these meetings, we discuss strategies to manage truancy. We emphasize the importance of community-based monitoring in addressing school truancy. Without community involvement, efforts to combat truancy will face significant challenges" (Head of School C, 10th March, 2023).

These meetings represent an important face-to-face feedback channel, but their value depends on whether attendance information leads to joint decisions and follow-up. This interpretation is consistent with Taniguchi and Hirakawa (2016), who found that community participation improved outcomes primarily by strengthening school management, and with Mogues et al. (2023), whose Ugandan trial cautions that information and public forums do not automatically improve services when institutional response is weak.

Informal discussions, families and friends are also a part of increasing awareness of community-based monitoring of truancy. Citizens play a vital role not only in decision making but also in deliberation and discussions on the implementation of projects and programs affecting them. They increase trust in the methods and strategies and integrate people of diverse situations such as those who failed to get information on time. The finding highlights the importance of informal social networks for reaching people who do not participate in formal school structures. Balikooowa et al. (2023) similarly show that community members can encourage attendance and support learners beyond formally organised school activities. However, informal communication may circulate incomplete information, linking it to verified attendance records and clear referral procedures would strengthen its monitoring value.

"Informal social networks and dialogues between families, friends, and neighbours, are a potentially vitally important vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge and trust in the monitoring community of resources. They foster inclusiveness by engaging those potentially excluded from formalized processes of communication" (Village chairperson, 7th March 2023).

Informal gatherings such as baraza in pastoralist communities are trusted channels for information sharing and community decision making. Here elders, parents, young people, and community leaders meet a perfect spot for getting the word out about school attendance. In such sessions, facilitators explain the consequences of truancy on the future of the children and the progress of their community. They encourage collective accountability in checking of attendance through the open discussion. Message is supported by old leaders This message are favoured by old leaders to that effect acceptability increases. Involving *barazas* serves to discuss education matters in a culturally appropriate and powerful context, engaging the community to own and maintain their efforts to curb absenteeism in schools.

The use of customary barazas indicates that CBM is more likely to be accepted when it is embedded in locally legitimate institutions. Pesambili (2020) likewise argues for dialogue with different segments of Maasai communities rather than treating pastoralists as a homogeneous group. The present finding extends that argument by showing that respected elders can act as brokers between formal school expectations and community norms, although women and young people must also have meaningful opportunities to speak.

"Traditional venues, including the baraza, offer a culturally acceptable environment to discuss matters of education and have community members buy in to the process. When a respected elder speaks, the message carries meaning; these meeting are potent weapons to drive school attendance and accountability" (Village chairperson, 7th March 2023).

4.1.2 Engaging Community Members in Monitoring Truancy

This monitoring method involves a service provider directly informing an individual about the current situation of a certain student, which is effective in ensuring good academic performance and good class attendance for only one particular student or two. The teachers reported making phone calls to address either dropout, absenteeism or student pregnancy with the parents. However, the method has been ineffective in lowering the level of truancy in the community at large, although it has helped some of the students to keep attaining their primary education.

Parent-teacher contact corresponds with evidence that low parent school involvement is a strong risk factor for absenteeism (Gubbels et al., 2019). Experimental evidence also shows that timely attendance information directed to parents can reduce chronic absence (Robinson et al., 2018). In Enduleni, however, individual telephone calls appear to

benefit particular pupils without creating a community wide monitoring system, suggesting the need to combine case follow-up with aggregated attendance review.

"We usually call the parent or guardian of the particular student to consult us personally, so that we can advise each other on how to cooperate to keep the child in school" (Head of School A, 8th March, 2023).

There are chances for a parent and a student's teacher to talk about the child's progress in the classroom or any other issue that may be causing concern. There are parents who willingly visit the teachers for consultation on a child academic progress. Academic reports threaten the ability of a child to pass the standard seven exams, and for that they consult teachers for advice on how to improve the child's academic results.

The meetings provide awareness to the parents and the community members on the level of truancy at large, and further how to deal with truancy collectively. These meetings involve coming to an agreement, the formation of parents' teams and committees that will deal with truancy. The authorities and the teachers involve the community members in monitoring truancy in primary schools through parents-teacher meetings. These are the meetings aiming at sharing student academic progress and growth based on classroom observation, assessments and assignments. Students sometimes go to school because of being aware that his or her parent is going to attend the school meeting and are afraid of being punished for absenteeism if the parent will be informed on his or her behaviour in the meeting. Although, parents meetings are used as a method of managing truancy in public primary schools, they have not been effective as most of the parents do not attend the particular meetings as one of the respondents mentions:

Low turnout limits the representativeness of parent meetings. In this, Marlow and Rehman (2021), found that supportive family processes are protective against absenteeism and dropout, while Taniguchi and Hirakawa (2016), emphasise that participation must be active and oriented towards school improvement. Meetings should therefore be scheduled around livelihood calendars and should assign responsibilities, timelines and feedback actions rather than functioning mainly as one-way information sessions.

"Community and parent meetings are to alert people to truancy and to involve collective efforts to combat it, possibly through the creation of parent committees. These meetings are a time for teachers and administrators to review students' progress and also track attendance. Students also show up at times only because they know their parents could get details. The approach is however weak because of low parental turn-up at such meetings thereby making it less effective in addressing the problem of truancy at primary school level" (Community Development Officer, 7th March, 2023).

The teacher allow parents to personally visit when they have an issue with the academic situation of the student that they need clarification or cooperation from the teachers. Parents use this way of engagement to monitor not only truancy but also students behavior, relationship with other students and academic performance. Although most of the community members do not prefer this way of monitoring due to their economic activities and time, teachers mention this to be the most effective monitoring way, and the one used by very few community members. Personal visits can generate child understanding, but their time and travel demands may exclude poorer and more mobile households. This reflects the broader socioeconomic gradient in absenteeism observed Sosu et al. (2021). Treating non-attendance at school meetings as parental indifference would obscure the material constraints that shape participation.

"Parents from outside Enduleni are very more responsible than parents who are in Enduleni. They always respond to matters concerning the students by directly consulting the teachers and even sharing with us the ways we can manage the problems students are facing" (Head of School C, 10th March, 2023)

This monitoring method involves written documents of each students well-being, in terms of academic performance, ethics and one's relationship with others, including the fellow students and teachers. In public primary schools, these reports are provided to the parents annually. Although there are community members who find it challenging to follow up on these students reports as mentioned by the head of school. Academic reports provide a potential useful monitoring record, but the failure of some parents to collect them breaks the feedback loop. Robinson et al. (2018) demonstrate that concise and timely parent-facing information can reduce absence when it corrects misunderstandings about attendance. More frequent, accessible communication using appropriate channels could make attendance information more actionable than annual reports alone.

"We do have a bunch of academic reports, midterms, terminal and annual reports that we are forced to burn them when the parents do not appear for them. Sometimes we are forced to hand the children their own reports which is not the intention of the report" (Head of School B, 9th March, 2023).

The written documents are most preferred monitoring method in public primary schools. As the community members commented themselves on their level of engagement through following up the student's reports as a means of monitoring truancy.

4.1.3 Challenges of Community Based Monitoring of Truancy

Some of the community members do not engage themselves in monitoring truancy due to the belief that it is the duty of the government to manage truancy. *“The community is not aware of its ability to manage truancy and instead they highly believe in the responsibility of the government and the teachers to manage truancy”* (Head of school B, March 2023). But some members do not engage themselves in monitoring truancy due to several challenges. Community participation is most effective when roles, information and authority are clear; it should complement rather than substitute for the statutory responsibilities of schools and government (Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016; Mogues et al., 2023). Capacity building should explain both community roles and the response obligations of education officials.

Children are forced to work to make a contribution to the family income. The economic contribution in the family lowers the ability of the guardian or parent to monitor absenteeism and dropping out. Economic opportunities available in Enduleni and child labour are key drivers of increasing level of drop outs and absenteeism in primary schools. There are some community members who employ children in their agricultural activities and are the key hindrances to children's education. Children prefer earning money than education. This finding is consistent with the systematic review by Momo et al. (2019), which identifies household income and family background as important drivers of early school leaving, and with wider evidence connecting socioeconomic disadvantage to absenteeism (Sosu et al., 2021). It also reflects northern Tanzanian evidence that pastoralist livelihoods and household resources shape educational investment (Hedges et al., 2016). Child labour is thus both a cause of absence and a constraint on adults capacity to participate in monitoring.

“Children are frequently made to engage in labor to assist their families' income needs, which also undermines parents or guardians monitoring ability of children's attendance and dropout. In Enduleni, economic factors and child labour are major drivers of increasing absenteeism and drop-out from schools. There are certain villagers who send children to work at farms and those people have become the big hindrance for the education process. As a result, lots of children are tempted by the short-term gains of making money instead of the long-term rewards of learning” (Teacher D, 9th March, 2023).

The community members are not fully participating in school monitoring due to poor economy and low living standards. The inability to afford exercise books and school uniforms makes it a challenge to enroll children in primary education even when the primary education is free, according to the free education policy in Tanzania (Wambura, 2022). This is not only an influence on truancy, but also a challenge to community monitoring efforts, as the community cannot monitor enrolment and attendance, while they cannot afford school necessities for their children to fully attend classes as mentioned by the focus group discussion, that they cannot afford books, uniforms, payments for food at school, payments for the security and payments for remedial classes.

The finding confirms that fee free education does not remove indirect costs such as uniforms, learning materials, meals and transport. Sosu et al. (2021) show that socioeconomic disadvantage is consistently associated with higher absence, while Hedges et al. (2016) demonstrate that household wealth predicts educational investment in Tanzania. Attendance interventions should be connected to social protection, school feeding and support for essential learning materials rather than relying on monitoring alone.

This is proved by the findings as one of the respondents in interview mentions:

“Primary education is totally free, but the poor economy of the community members makes it hard for the children to attain school uniforms and exercise books, and other necessities. This forces children to drop out in search of money to attain such needs” (Head of school A, 8th March, 2023).

Wild animals in Ngorongoro are life threatening to children, hindering them from attaining their primary education at a comfortable environment. Hence, influencing not only drop outs and absenteeism as the respondents mention.

“Animals from Ngorongoro National Park like elephants, giraffe and others scares children away from school, something which they cannot control” (Teacher A, 9th March, 2023).

The wildlife related risk adds a place specific dimension that is rarely captured in general models of absenteeism. Research among Maasai girls nevertheless identifies distance, transport and unsafe or unsupportive environments as barriers to participation (Raymond, 2021). In Enduleni, human wildlife coexistence affects not only children journeys to school but also adults ability to attend meetings and conduct follow-up, making safe routes and locally adapted meeting arrangements part of an effective CBM design. This not only influences truancy but also hinders strategies to community monitoring such as animals creating a barrier to attend meetings, to undertake seminars and trainings and creating challenges in making follow up to students' attendance at school. This is mentioned by the interviewee:

“Parents cannot attend meetings sometimes because of elephants and rhinos who are always around, people are afraid of gatherings” Teacher A, 9th March, 2023).

In addition, during drought seasons, animals move from the national park to their farms in search for food, hence creating too many movements of wild animals within the ward, which makes the parent or guardian unable to allow the student to go to school and also limits monitoring efforts such as parents' visits or meetings. This seasonal pattern shows that attendance monitoring must incorporate ecological and livelihood calendars. Rather than interpreting absence only

as unwillingness, schools should record when wildlife movements and drought alter travel risks and household labour demands. Such contextual interpretation aligns with Pesambili (2020) call for education arrangements developed through dialogue with pastoralist communities.

“During droughts seasons, animals from the national park get out to the private farms on hunt of pastures, the situation causes fear and insecurity in the local community. This gives the parents and guardians the reason not to allow their children to go to school or parents participation in school activities such as parent meetings for fear of wild animals. The implication of this challenge is that it leads to poor school attendance on the part of students and the absence of community participation in monitoring truancy” (Teacher I, 10th March 2023).

The results have proven the negative attitude toward education and ignorance of the importance of education from the community members, believing education teaches the girl students to be rebels and go against Maasai traditions and customs. Despite the effort to improve quality education, the community members are not fully participating in school monitoring due to illiteracy. According to Chevedza et al., (2012) most parents have negative attitudes towards assessing and managing enrolment for better education for the children. Also, Godfrey (2016) argue that community participation in education is hindered by poor community attitude towards education. The results prove that parents are not ready to insist their children go to school. Local community members in rural areas do not seem to have the capacity to monitor primary schools due to low morale and negative attitudes towards education for their children.

The finding should not be reeported to a claim that pastoralist parents simply reject education. Here Pesambili (2020) reports heterogeneous and sometimes ambivalent Maasai perspectives, while Raymond (2021) finds that girls value education even when home, school and travel conditions restrict participation. Community sensitisation is necessary, but it should be accompanied by changes that make schooling safer, relevant and compatible with local livelihoods.

“It is surprising how Maasai children can walk miles to feed the cows, not afraid of anything, not by rain, nor animals. But when it comes to going to school, they are not ready for the sacrifices. I think parents are willing to force them to go and feed them but not to come to school. They don’t take education as seriously as their cattle” (Teacher B, 9th March, 2023).

The findings prove that parents and guardians fear being abandoned by the children when they get more opportunities that will force them to stay away from their families. Participants at the focus group discussion mentioned that they want the children to stay at home, to take care of the parents, the old people in the family and the cattle. In addition, argued that children are not likely to come back to visit after going to study to towns. The campaigns of Girls not bride show parents fear the shame and financial burden that unwanted pregnancy brings to the family. Pregnancy related withdrawal reflects interacting household, economic and institutional pressures rather than pregnancy alone. Jochim et al. (2021) found that poverty, grade repetition, unplanned pregnancy and limited information increased the likelihood that pregnant learners would leave school. The present findings support confidential early identification, referral and re-entry support while avoiding monitoring practices that stigmatise girls.

“You know, some of the parents just want them close, to ride herd on the cows and feed the old ones. They think, when they go off somewhere to learn in a town, they don’t come back. And they start to panic that the kids will forget about them. And what if the girls return pregnant? That’s bringing shame on the family and more problems. So, for them it’s probably preferable that they are at home where they can keep an eye on them” (Head school A, 9th March 2023).

Maasai customs and traditions hinder girls’ from attaining primary education. Girls love studying and they are good students, they learn faster and attain good grades, but the culture limits them. The campaigns of Girls not Bride show girls are forced to marry, especially to the man who made her pregnant whether they want to or not (Head school C). The custom of marrying off the girl child at a young age influences the drop out of girls from school. Girls are taught to be submissive as wives, but those who teach them that forget to teach them to be educated mothers as well.

This finding corresponds closely with Raymond (2021), who documents both the value Maasai girls attach to education and home, school and distance related constraints on their participation. It also supports Gubbels et al. (2019) conclusion that absenteeism emerge from interacting family, school and individual risks. Engagement with elders and parents should challenge early marriage while preserving girls safety, voice and educational continuity.

“Maasai cultural practices prevent girls from completing primary school. Sometimes, girls are eager to go to school and our history shows they normally do well, but cultural practices such as marrying the girl early, especially if the man is the one who impregnates the girl, sometimes force the girl out of school for marriage. Though girls are trained to be obedient wives, few are educated to be good mothers, which is the reason for the sustained gender disparities in education, leading to the widespread truancy in schools” (Head school C, 10th March, 2023).

Men dominated systems influence truancy and hinders the community monitoring efforts. Decision making process is dominated by the men in the family. Without understanding the challenges of early marriage practices to the

girl child, men often force their young daughters to get married instead of allowing them to attain their primary education. Patriarchal control over household decisions limits both girls attendance and women participation in CBM. Because community forums can reproduce existing power inequalities, cultural legitimate engagement should not be equated with inclusive engagement. The evidence from Maasai education suggests the need to create spaces in which girls and women can articulate the capabilities they value and influence attendance related decisions (Raymond, 2021).

“In our society, men make all decisions, and they have not always understood the harm that early marriage has for girls. Rather than urging their children, daughters to complete school, many fathers push them into early marriages thus forcing the girls to abandon school and thus difficult for us to trace their schooling” (Teacher J, 8th March 2023).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Community members had limited familiarity with CBM as a formal concept, although meetings, informal discussions and customary forums already performed some monitoring functions. Awareness was constrained by distance; livelihood demands and fear associated with wildlife. The findings suggest that an effective model should build on locally legitimate practices while clarifying how attendance information is recorded, verified, discussed and linked to action. Because this qualitative case study captures stakeholder perceptions rather than measured intervention effects, it does not establish that any one mechanism reduces truancy.

The monitoring practices identified like parent-teacher consultation, parent meetings, personal visits and academic reports, differ in reach, cost and intensity. Individual contact can support particular pupils, whereas meetings can enable collective action but are weakened by low turnout. Annual written reports often fail to close the feedback loop. A feasible CBM system should therefore combine regular attendance records, rapid parent communication, community review and documented follow-up, with schedules adapted to pastoral and farming activities. Evidence from the wider literature similarly indicates that information is most useful when communities possess the capacity to act and institutions respond to their concerns.

Economic hardship, child labour, wildlife related insecurity, negative attitudes, pregnancy, early marriage and patriarchal decision-making interact to constrain both attendance and community monitoring. These results support a multi-sector response such as essential schooling costs and food support, safe routes and flexible, seasonal monitoring arrangements, confidential pregnancy and re-entry support, and inclusive engagement with elders, women and young people. Parent teacher associations and school committees should review disaggregated attendance data and agree on responsibilities and timelines with village and education authorities.

5.2 Recommendations

Schools should record attendance daily, promptly notify parents or guardians of pupils' absences, and document all follow-up actions. Meetings and monitoring activities should be scheduled in accordance with pastoral and farming calendars while also addressing safety risks associated with wildlife. Future research should include pupils, parents, and out-of-school children, compare different pastoralist settings, and assess whether locally adapted community-based monitoring (CBM) reduces absenteeism over time.

Declaration of Interest

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