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2014

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Posti-Ahokas , H & Palojoki , P 2014 , ' Navigating transitions to adulthood through secondary education: aspirations and the value of education for Tanzanian girls ' , Journal of youth studies , vol. 17 , no. 5 , pp. 664-681 . <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.853871>

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/232760>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.853871>

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# **Navigating transitions to adulthood through secondary education: aspirations and the value of education for Tanzanian girls**

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This is the final, accepted version. To cite the published article:  
Posti-Ahokas, H. & Palojoki, P. 2014. Navigating transitions to adulthood through secondary education: Aspirations and value of education for Tanzanian girls. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(5), 664–681.

A rapidly increasing proportion of youth in developing countries pursue their transition to adulthood through post-compulsory education. Studies on the role of formal education in youth transitions tend to focus on the structural constraints to successful transitions and less attention is given to the voices and reflections of young people, particularly in-school youth. Qualitative data gathered among 100 female students enrolled in the third year of lower secondary school depict the educational aspirations and future orientation of Tanzanian girls. The focus of the analysis is on how girls see the value of secondary education in their transition to adulthood. Students' future-oriented assessment of their education and the value they attach to it illustrate why girls pursue schooling beyond primary level despite the meagre opportunities for higher education and employment. The findings demonstrate that girls want to study to develop themselves, to advance in life and to help others. Besides the instrumental value of education, students emphasise the intrinsic value of being educated. Supporting the

aspirations of youth by providing feasible skills and strategies is a challenge to education systems. Student perspectives provide valuable insights into the discussion on the role of secondary education in youth transitions.

**Keywords:** transitions; educational aspirations; student perspectives; secondary education; Tanzania

## **Introduction**

The global discourse around the value of school education for defining successful youth transitions has led to increasing proportions of young people in developing countries to pursue post-primary education. Still, it is widely recognized that the universal value of education is not matched by universal opportunities for post-compulsory education and professional employment in developing countries (Crivello 2011; Camfield 2011; Lloyd 2005; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004). Based on actor centred research on Indian youth, Morrow (2012) argues that many of the assumptions underpinning the international transition discourse fail to match the realities of young people's everyday lives. The multiple facets of transitions to adulthood in developing countries have been explored through studies focusing on transition through education and migration (Crivello 2011), transition through achieving economic independence (Morrow 2012), schooling and domestic transitions (Arnot et al. 2012), and transition through migration (Azaola 2012). All these recent studies (see table 1) provide valuable perspectives on the global discourses around transitions and analyse the value of schooling by highlighting the contextual, socio-cultural particularities that influence youth realities.

In this context, less attention has been given to the views of (urban) youth currently enrolled in secondary education who have actively pursued transition through education. Although in school and therefore privileged, these youth are a heterogeneous group and opportunities to continue in further levels of education are only available for a few. Therefore, a majority of youth enrolled in Tanzanian lower-secondary schools can be considered as the so-called ‘missing middle’ (Roberts 2011), whose relative success may result in them being overlooked by both policy and research. Being aware of the mismatch between aspirations and opportunities, this expanding group of young people is making significant investments in terms of time and money to acquire further education. In this paper we aim to provide perspectives on how female secondary school students see the value of secondary education in relation to their future orientation. This article analyses the *educational aspirations* and *future orientation* of Tanzanian girls enrolled in Form 3 in lower secondary school. Special attention is paid to how students make sense of secondary education and deem its value in bringing about a better future. The insights gained through an analysis that draws on the developmental concepts of aspirations and future orientation are discussed with regard to existing multi-disciplinary literature on agency, transitions and future perspectives among African youth, so as to further contribute to understandings of the role of formal secondary education in youth transitions in the global South.

### **Educational aspirations and future orientation in supporting transition**

Ambiguities in the concept of agency and its use have become evident both in research and practical interventions among youth in Africa (Bordonaro and Payne 2012). In educational research, the focus has been on secondary education structures, and the agency of African youth has been found to be bounded by the structural constraints (Ansell 2004; Helgesson

2006; Al-Samarrai and Reilly 2008). In contrast, studies drawing on youth experience have explored the relational nature of agency in education (Warrington and Kiragu 2012), and the role of culture and context in the creation of hopefulness and a sense of agency (Nalkur 2009). While recognising the evident structural constraints on individual agency within the context of Tanzanian secondary education, this study follows Pells's (2012) call to challenge the current constructions of vulnerability and agency in Africa by privileging the experiences and perspectives of young people.

A positive future orientation and a sense of agency are crucial for youth development and planning for future. Although inner in nature, aspirations, future orientation and **the sense of agency** are socially and culturally influenced (e.g. Malmberg 1998; Pollard and Filer 2007). Youth construct personal meaning in their interactions within and between homes, schools, peer groups and wider political and cultural discourses (Pollard and Filer 2007). Future orientation, defined as the image individuals have about their future, is particularly relevant in times of developmental, personal and cultural transitions that require preparations for what lies ahead (Seginer 2008). Furthermore, the formation of one's future orientation is a contextual process (Malmberg 1998) and therefore the concept of future orientation supports the idea that youth development should be understood in a particular context. Finally, the developmental value of the concept of future orientation is in prompting and facilitating the exploration and pursuit of prospective trajectories (Seginer and Schlesinger 1998).

Young peoples' greater investments in education bring about heightened aspirations and raising expectations about what education can deliver in terms of one's future career (Biggart 2009). Schoon's (2006) extensive work in the UK has demonstrated the importance of aspirations as predictors of educational attainment and social mobility. McWhirter and McWhirter (2008) and Schoon (2006) have recognized aspirations and

positive future orientations as protective factors that moderate social risks caused by socio-economic background. Thomson, Henderson and Holland (2003) also verify the importance of a 'can do' attitude to successful transitions, particularly for middle-class youth.

Several studies of youth in developing countries have criticized the controversial role of secondary education in both heightening aspirations and then creating a sense of failure when the goals and aspirations are not fulfilled due to structural constraints (Morrow 2012; Crivello 2011; Ansell 2004; Stambach 2000). Based on studies in Ghana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, Arnot et al. (2012), Ansell (2004) and Stambach (2000) have critically discussed the changing ideas of adulthood brought by secondary education to rural girls. Education redefines adulthood, and paid employment becomes central instead of marriage, childbearing and setting up a home. In the absence of realistic opportunities for continuing education, heightened educational aspirations may lead to a sense of failure in the transition to adulthood.

Recent research conducted in Africa also suggests the importance of aspirations for school retention and transitions. In their analysis on the school retention of Kenyan girls, Warrington and Kiragu (2012) have recognized the role of aspirations and future dreams in setting goals to pursue education despite the structural constraints. Similarly, a study conducted in northern Tanzania (Nalkur 2009) showed that in-school youth were more hopeful and felt more responsible about gaining a better future than their out-of-school peers. What was also notable in both studies was the confidence of students in their own potential to attain higher levels of education, followed by a strong sense of responsibility in terms of seeking success. Nalkur (2009) argued that the vulnerable street youth relied on external sources of hope, while school youth perceived themselves as primary sources of hope. Similarly, studies by Helgesson (2006) and Posti-Ahokas (2012) have shown that Tanzanian young people perceived education as a shelter against the difficulties that are beyond their

control. Therefore, the sense of agency and the common cultural understanding of a ‘difficult life’ (*maisha magumu*) seemed very different among in-school and out-of-school youth<sup>i</sup>.

Even though often overlooked (Biggart 2009) and overrun by the emphasis on structural constraints to attainment, seeing aspirations as contributing to educational attainment and agency allows for an analysis that highlights the potential of young people. Instead of depicting the role of school education as essentially defining the ‘failure’ or ‘success’ of young adults (see Crivello 2011 for discussion) or considering leaving school before originally expected as a ‘failed transition’ (Ansell 2004), we have adopted an actor-centred approach that provides a student perspective on the study of youth transitions through secondary education in Africa.

### **Experienced and expected value of education for youth in the global South**

Qualitative research on the future perspectives of youth, school retention and transitions through education often touches upon the experienced and expected value of education. Research findings related to the value of education for young people in developing countries are presented in table 1 to provide a reflective framework for the analysis of the future-oriented assessment of the value of education reported in this article.

Table 1. Examples of research findings on the value of education for students

Instrumental value of education	Intrinsic value of education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Education opens up career opportunities and professional employment</i> (Warrington &amp; Kiragu 2012 [Kenya]; Crivello 2011[Peru]; Nalkur 2009 [Tanzania]; Helgesson 2006[Tanzania &amp; Mozambique]; Ansell 2004 [Lesotho &amp; Zimbabwe]; Stambach 2000 [Tanzania]).</li> <li>• <i>Education brings independence</i> (Warrington &amp; Kiragu 2012; Posti-Ahokas 2012 [Tanzania]; Ansell 2004; Stambach 2000)</li> <li>• <i>Education provides an opportunity to give something back to family and community</i> (Warrington &amp; Kiragu 2012; Nalkur 2009; Helgesson 2006 Ansell 2004)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Education makes me become someone of value</i> (Crivello 2011)</li> <li>• <i>A sense of self as an educated person</i> (Helgesson 2006)</li> <li>• <i>Empowering knowledge</i> (Arnot et al. 2012 [Ghana])</li> <li>• <i>Education as a form of cultural distinction</i> (Jeffrey et al. 2007[India], Helgesson 2006)</li> <li>• <i>Education can transform my life</i> (Posti-Ahokas 2012, Warrington &amp; Kiragu 2012)</li> </ul>

A review of studies focusing on youth transitions in developing countries illustrates a solid faith among youth of the power of education to provide a better future. The instrumental value of education in providing opportunities for employment, independence and an opportunity to help others is strongly emphasized by the young people studied in different parts of the world. Increased opportunities for education bring about heightened aspirations regarding one's future profession and living standards. Particularly secondary education encourages youth to aspire to a work-centred adulthood (Ansell 2004) and opens up the prospect of having an independent adulthood sometimes far away from home (Crivello 2011;



Stambach 2000). In the context of poverty, young people also want to use their education to help their family and the society at large (Warrington and Kiragu 2012; Nalkur 2009; Helgesson 2006; Ansell 2004). Besides the instrumental role of education, youth also consider the intrinsic value of being educated. Life as an educated person is considered valuable as such, and education is seen to have transformative power (Posti-Ahokas 2012; Warrington and Kiragu 2012; Crivello 2011; Helgesson 2006; Jeffrey et al. 2007). The emerging theme of the value of education is often found in the form of clues within an overall analysis focusing on the structural constraints to advancement in education. This led us to conduct an inquiry focusing on the experienced and expected value of formal secondary education<sup>ii</sup>, as seen by young people in a context where it is hard to realize one's educational aspirations.

### **Tanzanian research context**

The Tanzanian education system consists of seven years of primary education (Standards I–VII), followed by four years of lower secondary education (O-level, Forms I–IV) and two years of upper secondary education (A-level, Forms V–VI). In 2010, the net enrolment (NER) was 95.4% in primary education and 30.8% in lower secondary education, decreasing to 1.9% at the upper secondary level (United Republic of Tanzania [URT] 2010). Tanzania has made remarkable progress in achieving universal primary education. The NER in lower secondary education has increased from 8.4% in 2004 to 30.8% in 2010, and has increased from 0.5% to 1.9% in upper secondary education, indicating pressure on upper secondary education to absorb an increasing number of O-level graduates (URT 2010a). Compared with other countries in the region, the public expenditure on education beyond the primary level and the provision of upper secondary and higher education are remarkably low (URT and UNESCO 2012). Despite limited government funding, the provision of public

secondary education is relatively high compared to other countries in the region. this can be attributed particularly to the recently introduced public community schools (URT and UNESCO 2012). The uneven growth of community schools and private secondary schools has exacerbated regional inequalities in access to secondary education (Wedgwood 2007). In 2011, 86% of O-level students were enrolled in government schools and 12% were enrolled in private schools, although private provision was more widespread in urban areas<sup>iii</sup> (URT 2010b; 2011). Generally, private schools and established government schools have lower pupil teacher ratios and a higher proportion of qualified teachers, both of which contribute to higher examination performance of these schools (URT and UNESCO 2012). Furthermore, recent analyses have raised concerns over the significantly lower performance of community schools compared to private schools and established government schools throughout the country; consequently, issues of quality and relevance of the existing secondary education provision have become critical (Makombe et al. 2010; URT and UNESCO 2012).

The changing role and position of lower secondary education and the transition from lower secondary school to further levels of education are critical policy concerns, and will have a significant impact on the lives of Tanzanian youth. For Tanzanian students, the transition to further levels of education or to the world of work after completing lower secondary education is primarily determined by success in the national Form 4 examinations. The academic stream continues with two additional years in advanced level secondary education, followed by another set of national examinations that serve as the basis for access to higher education. In 2009, the pass rate in Form 4 examinations was 72.5% <sup>iv</sup>(URT 2010a; URT and UNESCO 2012). Of the candidates who took the examinations, only 6.3% achieved high enough scores to proceed to upper secondary education<sup>v</sup>. The proportion who passed the Form 4 examinations but did not achieve high enough scores to transit to Form 5 was 66.3%. Enrolling in teacher education is an option for students who have gained adequate results in

the Form 4 examinations. The provision of technical and vocational education is also increasing slowly. For the significant proportion (27.5% in 2009) that does not achieve the lowest pass rate in the examinations, there are even fewer options. Therefore, many students end up repeating the Form 4 in public or private institutions and resitting the examinations — sometimes several times — in order, eventually, to reach the goal they have set themselves.

Youth living in Dar es Salaam, the largest city in Tanzania, are enjoying expanding opportunities for secondary education, but are simultaneously struggling within a competitive environment and facing high rates of unemployment<sup>vi</sup>. The population of this vibrant city is 4.4 million, comprising 10% of the country's population (URT 2012). In Tanzania, unemployment is largely an urban phenomenon, particularly affecting the youth and young adults (Kondylis and Manacorda 2008). The most recent labour force survey, conducted in 2006, showed an unemployment rate in Dar es Salaam of 34.9% and 21.2% for women and men, respectively, who had secondary-level education or above, which suggests that there are major difficulties getting employed within the city even for educated women<sup>vii</sup> (URT 2006). Statistics further show that in 2006, only 1.9% of Tanzanian women were employed in government or parastatal organisations, and 4.8% were employed in the private sector, while a great majority was involved in agricultural activities or the informal sector (URT 2006).

### **Data collection and analysis**

Female students were selected to participate in the study because of their generally disadvantaged positions in the education system, in terms of access and learning outcomes at the post-primary level. In addition, the number of women participating in higher education is

significantly smaller than that of men, and very small in comparison with other countries in the region (see Al-Samarrai & Reilly 2008).

One hundred female students enrolled in Form 3<sup>viii</sup> in lower secondary schools in Dar es Salaam participated in the study in December 2008. To include the perspectives of girls representing a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, students were selected from five different schools representative of both public and private providers and varying in types of enrolment and performance. In order to characterise the schools, they were given the labels of 1) 'new community school', 2) 'established community school', 3) 'high performance government school' 4) 'established private school' and 5) 'NGO education centre'<sup>ix</sup>. Schools 1-3 are classified as public and schools 4-5 as private<sup>x</sup>. Regardless of their ownership, all schools followed the national secondary education curriculum.

Twenty voluntary students from each school filled a semi-structured questionnaire with qualitative questions on their background, immediate plans for continuing education and their future visions/aspirations together with questions on the importance of education. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings of previous studies on the socioeconomic and sociocultural factors impacting girls' educational attainment in Tanzania (Tumbo-Masabo 1994; Stambach 2000; Helgesson 2006). The questionnaire was administered to students within the school compounds outside class time.

The study was introduced to the students as an opportunity to reflect on their future plans and opportunities. After the study was introduced both orally and in writing, with an emphasis on the fact that participation was voluntary, the students signed consent forms assuring them of their anonymity in participating. The questions were provided to the students in hard copy in the Kiswahili language, which is the first or second language of most students and the *lingua franca* in Dar es Salaam, and their answers were then translated back into English for analysis<sup>xi</sup>. The students were generally curious about the study and were willing to

participate once its purpose had been explained and they had been assured of the confidentiality of the research. Several students mentioned that it was a valuable opportunity for them to reflect on their short-term and long-term plans.

Owing to the future-oriented approach of the study, the focus of analysis was on the students' plans, aspirations and the value of education in realising them. First, descriptive statistics were used to depict the immediate plans and future orientation of students and to frame the qualitative analysis. Second, the students' reasons for wanting to educate themselves further were coded and grouped. Finally, the future-related responses to questions concerning personal plans and on the importance of education were drawn for a thematic analysis<sup>xiii</sup> on the value of education in relation to future orientation. In the following section, the findings are presented in an order similar to the analysis and discussed against the background of previous studies. Pseudonyms and the school types are used to identify individual responses quoted in the findings section.

### **Students' plans, future orientation and reasons for pursuing education**

Out of the 100 respondents, 88 indicated that their primary intention was to continue their studies in Form 5, upper secondary school (A –level). Continuing to A –level was indicated as the only option by 44 respondents. The other half mentioned alternative strategies, of which 25 mentioned either going to college or vocational training. Nineteen (19) students included the option of going to work or doing other things in case they failed to enter an educational institution. The twelve students who did not plan to apply for Advanced level studies all wanted to continue education in teacher training college (8) or other vocational colleges (4). Out of them, eight (8) did not give any alternative strategies apart from enrolling in further education.

Students were also asked to reflect on their reasons for continuing education.

The 110 reasons provided were grouped to self-related (23%), future-related (58%) and social (19%) reasons for pursuing post-primary education. The self-related statements considered studying as something pleasurable and agreeable *'I very much like to study'* (Salome, NGO education centre) or as means for self-development *'I want to become more skilful and be capable of upgrading myself'* (Amina, NGO education centre) and *'I want to develop the scope of my knowledge'* (Lilian, new community school). A majority of the reasons were strongly future-related, portraying education as a key to a better future: *'I want to study for the benefit of my future life'* (Musra, established private school). Having employment and a profession *'I need to study to secure a good job'* (Jane, high performance Government school) and independence *'When one acquires higher education, she obtains a decent independent life'* (Fadhila, NGO education centre) were considered as essential features of a good life. Beside the expected individual outcomes of secondary education, students emphasised the value of education in bringing about a better future for their families and for society at large.

Being able to help one's family and society at large were also given as reasons for pursuing education: *'I want to free my family from their current state of poverty'* (Helena, established community school), *'I will educate my younger siblings who are still schooling'* (Beatrice, established community school) and *'To assist the society in which I live'* (Monica, established community school). Strong social responsibility and the financial and emotional interdependence of extended family members have been previously identified as crucial motivating factors for Tanzanian youths' pursuit of education (Helgesson 2006; Nalkur 2009). The articulations of students participating in this study further emphasise the relational nature of educational aspirations in the Tanzanian context<sup>xiii</sup>.

In the last part of the questionnaire, students were asked to reflect on their visions for future in 10 years' time in terms of work, family and place of residence. Seventy-

four per cent (74%) indicated a specific profession that they would like to have or field in which they would like to be engaged. For 15%, obtaining employment or having a good job in general was a goal as such. Five per cent (5%) did not mention either employment or a specific profession but stated they wanted to have a good life and to be able to take care of their (extended) family or to have some knowledge and skills for making a living. Six per cent (6%) did not give any response to the questions regarding their future livelihood. When envisioning their future, two thirds (69%) of the respondents saw themselves living in a city, due to the increased availability of jobs, services and facilities. One fifth (22%) wanted to settle in the countryside because they wanted to work with rural communities or because that is where their families reside. The rest (9%) stated that they would live anywhere, depending on their future profession and success in obtaining employment. Eighty eight per cent (88%) made explicit statements about wanting to live with family, either by stating they would live with a spouse or other relatives or by saying they would like to have children. Eleven per cent (11%) said they were not sure, or had not thought about having a family.

To summarise, students' future orientation is strongly linked to advancing in education beyond the level they have already reached. Over half (52%) of these students saw only one straight path forward in education. The other half were also considering alternative strategies in case their primary option to proceed to upper secondary education failed to be realized. Education provides opportunities for self-development and for helping others but it is primarily seen as a key to a better future. Envisioning the future in ten years' time, 89% saw themselves employed and in a profession (ranging from secretaries and nurses to bankers and Ministers). A majority (69%) would prefer to settle in a city and most (88%) would like to live in a family. Some found it hard to envision the future in terms of future work, family and residence; 11% did not provide any ideas regarding a future family and 6% did not do so regarding a livelihood.

Contrasting the professional aspirations of the participants with the labour market situation shows that aspirations correspond weakly with Tanzanian realities. The generally low levels of professional employment, combined with high unemployment rates of secondary school graduates in Dar es Salaam, further suggest major challenges for the participants in fulfilling their aspirations and gaining employment as professionals. Therefore, this study accords with previous findings on the aspiration gap related to employment in Tanzania (Mukyanuzi 2003; Helgesson 2006; Al-Samarrai and Reilly 2008) and calls for realistic counselling of lower secondary school students.

The absence of school disaggregated data on examination performance in 2009 does not allow a comparison of learning outcomes in the five schools and the realised transitions of the individual students studied here<sup>xiv</sup>. To examine the differences between schools in students' levels of certainty regarding the realisation of their plans, students' own assessment of their opportunities were analysed in relation to their school type. These findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Female students' level of certainty regarding the realization of their plans

Level of certainty	Public			Private		All (N=100)
	New community school (N=20)	Established community school (N=20)	High performance Government school (N=20)	Established private school (N=20)	NGO education centre (N=20)	
'Very certain'	8 (40%)	6 (30%)	7 (35%)	5 (25%)	8 (40%)	34 %
'Quite certain'	4 (18%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	10 (50%)	6 (30%)	29%
'Little uncertain'	4 (18%)	7 (35%)	11 (55%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)	28%
'Very uncertain'	4 (18%)	-	-	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	8%
Total	20 (100%)	20 (100%)	20 (100%)	20 (100%)	20 (100%)	100%



Students enrolled in the ‘new community school’ and the ‘NGO education centre’ were most certain about being able to realise their plans to move forward in education. Combining the students who were ‘very certain’ and ‘quite certain’ shows that female students in the ‘established private school’ represented the generally highest levels of certainty. In contrast, students from the high performance government school were least optimistic about their future in education. A loose school-level relationship between Form 4 examination pass rates and secondary school unit costs<sup>xv</sup> identified in a national analysis of learning outcomes further points to the importance of pedagogical management for a school’s success (URT and UNESCO 2012). Therefore, reasons that could explain the differences in the female students’ levels of certainty may be attributed to the different approaches to pedagogy and counselling used in the schools. In this present study, the reasons given for the expressed level of certainty were examined to provide a qualitative analysis of the differences identified in female students’ certainty levels.

Students who were ‘very certain’ or ‘quite certain’ about realising their plans either referred to their own capability and self-initiative or parental support as a source of their certainty: *‘It is because I do study with full effort, I have self-initiative, and I pray to God for help’* (Rehema, New community school), and *‘Because even (my) guardians are asking me over and over again to study (hard) so as to succeed, and particularly not to turn my back on education because they themselves have fallen short of formal education - that is why they want me to be the liberator to our family’* (Eva, NGO education centre). All students who were uncertain about their future explained this by the economic difficulties in their families: *‘The certainty is little because my mother does not have sufficient economic capacity, and I also have a sister and a brother who are schooling as well at the same time. Moreover she (mother) does not have access to any other support’* (Joyce, high performance Government school). Two students enrolled in the ‘NGO education centre’ mainly serving for exam

repeaters mentioned competition due to a rapidly expanding enrolment as a threat to fulfilling personal goals: *‘There are many of us [studying] in Form Four. Therefore, it is the person who will manage to pass that will be able to further his/her education’* (Fadhila, NGO education centre) and *‘There is very stiff competition in [the] education [sector] nowadays, so, in fact I am not certain whether I will attain my dream’* (Farida, NGO education centre).

With regards to the socio-economic background of students enrolled in the different types of schools, 31% of the 100 female students had parents or guardians<sup>xvi</sup> with upper secondary education or above. Parents’ and guardians’ educational levels were slightly higher in the ‘established community school’ and the ‘NGO education centre’ than in the other three schools<sup>xvii</sup>. The parents of students enrolled in the ‘high performance government school’ had completed upper secondary education rather than higher education and many of them were government employees. Twenty-eight per-cent of students mentioned economic status of the family as an obstacle to fulfilment of their personal aspirations. As an exception, economic problems were proportionally less prevalent among the families of students enrolled in the ‘established private school’. However, these findings are suggestive of only minor differences in the students’ socio-economic backgrounds between the five schools and cannot, therefore, be used to explain the differences in certainty levels. To summarise, the relatively minor differences in the certainty levels and in the socio-economic background of students enrolled in the different types of schools in the city of Dar es Salaam point to the importance of out-of school factors, particularly family support and self-initiative, in creating female students’ sense of agency.

## Value of education in relation to future orientation

*Upon my successful schooling, my future life is going to be a decent one*

(Mariam, established private school)

The strong emphasis on future-related reasons for acquiring education encouraged a further analysis on the perceived value of education in relation to aspirations and future orientation. Future-related statements on reasons for acquiring further education (N=64) and statements regarding the importance of education in relation to the future (N=29) were further analysed to find out how students saw the value of secondary education in relation to their aspirations for future. In the process of thematic analysis, the 93 statements were grouped and condensed into four themes (see Braun and Clarke 2006 for a detailed description of the method). The themes related to the experienced value of secondary education, and their occurrence in the data is presented in table 3.

Table 3. Themes and their distribution in the data

Theme	Times mentioned	%
a) Education brings a decent life	40	43%
b) Education helps one to encounter life	34	37%
c) Education liberates one's life	11	12%
d) Education is the key to life	8	9%
Total	N= 93	100%

The first theme, 'education brings a decent life' mainly represents the instrumental value of secondary education in providing opportunities for a better livelihood. The second, 'education helps to encounter life' consists of statements related to strategies;

setting goals and realizing them to succeed in life. The last two themes, consisting of 21% of the statements refer to the intrinsic value of education. They are named as ‘education liberates one’s life’, and ‘education is the key to life’.

**a) *Education brings a decent life***

Hopes of a professional career play a central role in the respondents’ future orientation discussed above. Schooling is strongly linked to securing employment in the future in twenty-two (22) statements:

*I want to study up to university level so that I can have a good job, since without an education it is difficult to get a meaningful job.* (Anna, established private school)

*Because right now it is all about Education – where will you secure a good job without Education?* (Amina, NGO education centre)

Some have lower expectations regarding a profession but they still see secondary education to assisting them in making a living. One girl, who wanted to proceed to A-level but was uncertain about her chances of getting there, considered vocational training in tailoring as a second option: ‘*Because in case I fail in my schooling, I would still have something to earn me an income*’ (Aziza, NGO education centre). In these responses, the instrumental role of education in securing employment is highlighted.

Fifteen respondents expressed their aim to have a ‘decent’ life (*maisha mazuri*) on a more general level. Decent life is further characterized as ‘good standard life’, ‘an independent life’, ‘a life within society’ and ‘a pleasant living’. Education also enables a

decent life for others: *'I want to assist my parents get a decent life'* (Monica, established community school). In the analysed statements, a 'decent' life is seen as a result of schooling:

*I will have no choice but to study further to have a decent life* (Dorothea, NGO education centre)

*For you to lead a decent life, you are required to strive hard at school.* (Roza, new community school)

*When one acquires higher education, she obtains a decent independent life; even if one fails to obtain employment, she remains with the education which she can utilise in some other areas of life.* (Fadhila, NGO education centre)

The way decent life is characterized reaches beyond the instrumental role of education. Pursuing education beyond O-level is seen as providing a sense of independence and a firm position in society. An educated person is also able to help one's family, community and the wider society.

#### ***b) Education helps one to encounter life***

The second theme focuses on the role of secondary education in providing strategies to encounter or 'tackle' life and to meet goals successfully. The respondents emphasised the importance of setting personal goals. Plans give direction and they assist in meeting the goals set for the future.

*I cannot do a thing without a goal or plans because it is these that enable me to succeed in my endeavours.* (Itika, established private school)

*I have decided to have plans so that I have a direction concerning the things that I will do in my life.* (Suzy, NGO education centre)

*I have laid down my plans in such a way that they lead me to what I want to undertake in my life.* (Emmy, high performance Government school)

*I have decided to have these plans for the benefit of my future life.* (Musra, established private school)

Students see that schooling has assisted them in formulating goals and strategies: ‘*I have learnt to set goals driven by future expectations*’ (Asha, new community school), (I Have learnt) ‘*to set for myself effective strategies for the future*’ (Amina, NGO education centre). Furthermore, education is considered important in encountering life and bringing about success in the future:

*I have learnt how to tackle my future life.* (Anna-Maria, new community school)

*I have learnt how to successfully approach life.* (Anna, established private school)

*I have attained an education that enables me to encounter life.* (Aziza, NGO education centre)

*Education is the criterion that can help me to realise my future expectations.* (Perpetua, NGO education centre)

This analysis confirms the previous findings on the experienced, instrumental value of secondary education in increasing opportunities for a better future, particularly employment (Stambach 2000; Helgesson 2006; Warrington and Kiragu 2012). According to the respondents, a good life is linked to a profession, employment, a sense of independence and

being able to help others. What is emphasized by the students is the value of secondary education in assisting them to formulate strategies to succeed in life. Students see that they have learnt to set future-driven goals and to cope with life and all its challenges.

Our data do not directly reflect the findings of other researchers' on the controversial role of secondary education in relation to future family life of **rural** African girls (Stambach 2000; Ansell 2004; Arnot et al. 2012). **These studies suggested that attending secondary education might change females' preferences towards independent life and nuclear families. Still, as the majority of females will remain in the rural areas, their opportunities for marriage within their communities will reduce due to their changed role and position as educated persons. In this present study, the urban female students** were confident that they would be able to combine professional ambitions and family life in the future. Many of them were being looked after by their mothers or other female family members who were professionals with employment. These role models more prevalent in the city might also have encouraged the respondents to aim for a similar arrangement. This can be seen as the 'crafting of new kinds of adult gender relations' (Arnot et al. 2012, 182), for which schooling opens up opportunities.

### *c) Education liberates one's life*

Statements under the two themes of 'education liberates one's life' and 'education is the key to life' primarily reflect the importance of education as an intrinsic, foundational value in lives of human beings. For some respondents, the education they had gained so far had already given them a strong sense of self-liberalisation:

(I have learnt) *how to take self-initiative and liberate myself*. (Maria, high performance government school)

*I have been able to feel the sense of freedom, by virtue of the fact that I too now have secondary school education, as opposed to the initial situation when I felt lonely, weak and worthless in society*. (Lydia, established community school)

The reasons given for continuing schooling beyond the current level were also drawn from the belief in the potential of education to liberate one's life:

*I would widen my education even further and to know how to liberate myself with respect to my future life*. (Asteria, new community school)

*I have decided to have these plans so as to free myself and move on as a woman*. (Eva, NGO education centre)

**d) *Education is the key to life***

A commonly used slogan: 'education is the key to life' (Elimu ni ufunguo wa maisha) was used by the respondents to underline the importance of education<sup>xviii</sup>. The following statements that '*the whole living process is dependent on education*' (Suma, established community school) and '*education is the instrument for development*' (Anjelina, NGO education centre) reflect a similar understanding. A good life can be built upon education, and education has no end.



*Education is both the foundation and key to life.* (Roza, new private community school)

*The educated life is a life of hope.* (Hilda, NGO education centre)

The expressions used in the statements under the last two themes are mainly variations of commonly used Tanzanian slogans: ‘Education is the key to life’, ‘Education for liberation’ and ‘Education has no end’. These can all be seen written on school walls, street banners and in other visible places. Going back to the history of education in Tanzania, the slogans can be traced back to the early days of Tanzania’s independence in the 1960s. The first national leader, Julius Nyerere, put a strong emphasis on educating the whole nation. In his view, education was a means for liberating people from poverty, ignorance and dependency (Mushi 2009). *‘Education has to liberate both the mind and the body of man. It has to make him more of a human being because he is aware of his potential as a human being, and is in a positive, life-enhancing relationship with himself, his neighbour and his environment’* (One of Nyerere’s speeches from 1974 in Mbilinyi 2004). For many respondents, learning to liberate oneself and one’s (future) life has been a key experience. Similarly, the belief in the transformative power of education among secondary school students is also recognized by Warrington and Kiragu (2012).

Interestingly, the common nation-building slogans from the early years of independence are used in our data as individualistic statements to express the importance of education for oneself. Further, although Nyerere’s teachings were not particularly sensitive to gender differences (Mbilinyi 2004), the idea of education as a liberator was later adopted by women activists. Similarly, some respondents reflect on the empowering impact of secondary education for women:

*We have learnt to be girls with a firm stand.* (Hilda, NGO education centre)

*Education helps eliminate the illiteracy and ignorance we had in the past; it enables us (women) to become a segment that is respected by society.* (Lulu, new community school)

In summary, this article indicates how students themselves perceive and express the instrumental and intrinsic value of secondary education in providing opportunities for a better future. Findings suggest that female students analyse the value of secondary education in detail and on various levels beyond the formal credentials. They considered that schooling had assisted them in setting goals and had provided them with tools to encounter future life. They argued that plans give them direction and that diligent studying can bring good results and a better life. Beyond the potential value of secondary education in bringing opportunities for employment, they also recognized its value in helping them to be generally strategic about their plans and decisions and to encounter life as it comes. These may be considered as more general life skills, which can be essential if initial plans are not realized. When referring to the intrinsic value of education, respondents drew on common slogans but also explained further how they saw the potential of education to transform and liberate their life.

The inclusion of the perspectives of both current and former students would significantly contribute to analysing the value of secondary education. As shown by previous research on Tanzanian youth, the perceptions on the role of secondary education of in-school youth and young people who had dropped out from school (Stambach 2000), and the views of current and former child domestic workers (Klocker 2012) were in contrast with each other, and the current students and workers were more optimistic about the value of education. A follow-up study including young people from the present study and women enrolled in higher

education reported on elsewhere will complement the picture provided by this study of the value of secondary education for Tanzanian females<sup>xix</sup>.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study among Tanzanian female secondary school students reflect the universal belief in the key role of education in forging successful transitions to adulthood among youth in developing countries. The analysis of the value attached to education in relation to personal aspirations and future orientation illustrate the multiple roles that secondary education holds for students. Apart from the instrumental value of education in providing the essential credentials for continuing to higher education and increasing the probability of a future as an employed professional, education is appreciated for its ability to assist in developing feasible goals and strategies. Finally, education is given a significant intrinsic value by the students. The life of an educated person is ‘a life of hope’.

We argue that the concept of the life of an educated person as ‘decent’ and ‘meaningful’ *per se* may provide constituents for a positive future orientation that can in turn help young people to pursue education despite the challenges they will face. A positive future orientation and holding on to the ideas that education is ‘a key to life’ can protect and assist young women to achieve what they want. Instead of creating false aspirations, education should assist in creating realistic plans and provide strategies to realise them. Like school retention (Warrington and Kiragu 2012), transition through schooling is a process. In a challenging environment where opportunities are limited, students’ resources for navigating through the transition should be recognised and further developed as part of the educational programmes offered.

In Tanzania, the existing differences between learning outcomes in different types of schools and particularly the alarmingly low performance of community schools encourage further comparisons of different school types within regions. However, findings of the present study indicate only minor differences between schools in female students' certainty levels and are therefore suggestive that out-of school factors play a major role in creating students' sense of agency. Yet, absence of reliable information on the performance of individual schools and private exam candidates further emphasises the need for a more detailed, carefully contextualised analysis to verify and understand the causes and differences in the learning outcomes between different types of schools. In urban areas, the quality of the fast growing private provision should be studied to understand how the increased variation in provision impacts quality and equity both in terms of access and outcomes in secondary education.

Focusing on the perspectives of in-school youth in studying transitions complements the structural approaches to transitions and research done on marginalised youth in developing countries. The voices and perspectives of the 'missing middle' (Roberts 2011), the seemingly privileged youth who are enrolled in post-compulsory education, highlight the resourcefulness of young women and their commitment to building better futures through education. The gap between their future aspirations and actual available opportunities portray the female secondary students as vulnerable in the face of structural constraints. This study challenges the notions of agency and vulnerability within the group of urban female secondary school students and points to the importance of carefully contextualised analysis in the study of youth agency. As gaining a secondary education does not evidently guarantee access to higher education and employment in the future, the role of secondary education in providing more general, strategic skills becomes essential. Further research is required to

understand how students can utilize secondary education in navigating towards their own goal  
- a ‘decent life’.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> See also Perullo (2005) for a discussion of the notion of *maisha magumu* (difficult life).

<sup>ii</sup> While it is recognised that learning also occurs outside formal school contexts, the focus of this study is on analysing the experienced value of formal secondary education. This was also made explicit in the questionnaire used for data collection.

<sup>iii</sup> In 2010, 28% of O-level students in the city of Dar es Salaam where this study was conducted were enrolled in private schools.

<sup>iv</sup> Ranging from 68% in community schools to 89% in seminary schools owned by faith-based organisations

<sup>v</sup> The pass rates decreased from 91.5% in 2004 to 50.4% in 2010. Similarly, the percentage of candidates gaining high enough scores to proceed to the A-level decreased from 13.2% in 2004 to 4.3% in 2010 (URT 2011). These decreasing results can be explained by the deteriorating quality of lower secondary education, due to rapid expansion. One of the areas of focus of the current Secondary Education Development plan is to revise the examination system. Access and quality, culminating in Form 4 examinations, will be discussed in more detail by the authors in a forthcoming article.

<sup>vi</sup> See Moyer (2003) and Perullo (2005) for accounts of vulnerable youth and youth culture in Dar es Salaam.

<sup>vii</sup> The unemployment rate for women with secondary level education or above was 21.3% in other urban areas and 10.4% in rural areas (URT 2006).

<sup>viii</sup> The official age of enrolment in Form 3 is 16-17 years. In this study, comprehensive data on the age of participants were not collected. However, national education statistics from 2008 (URT 2011) show that 67.4% of O-level students were enrolled at the right age, indicating that one-third of students were actually older. The follow-up interviews conducted with some of the participants 1.5 years later showed that some students were up to 10 years older than the official age of enrolment. Factors contributing to repetition and drop-out include poverty and financial constraints, lack of teaching and learning facilities, lack of qualified and competent teachers, and parental attitudes that all result in nonlinear and sometimes interrupted educational paths (Carr-Hill and Ndalichako 2005; Lewin 2009). In Tanzania, the increased (private) provision has enabled repeaters and drop-outs to re-enrol in secondary education, resulting in higher gross enrolment (Wedgwood 2007; Lewin 2009).

<sup>ix</sup> run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

<sup>x</sup> In 2010, there were 127 government and community schools and 105 private schools providing O-level education in Dar es Salaam (URT 2010b).

<sup>xi</sup> See xxxx (removed for anonymity) (2012) for further discussion of language choice and translation

<sup>xii</sup> See Brown and Clarke (2006) for a detailed description of the method.

<sup>xiii</sup> The role of family in motivating, enabling and constraining the educational advancement of Tanzanian girls and women is a focus of a separate, forthcoming study by the first author.

<sup>xiv</sup> The largest government and private schools serve as examination centres, whereas students from small community schools take the examinations as private candidates in the designated centres.

<sup>xv</sup> The analysis of the relationship between Form 4 examination results and the cost of teacher salaries and textbooks showed a correlation level of 0.042 (see URT & UNESCO 2012, p.35-36 for more information)

<sup>xvi</sup> To reflect the variety in the participants' living arrangements, the word *guardian* was used in the questionnaire to characterise the parents and other relatives who primarily took care of the girls. The findings show that only 53% of the female students were living with one or both of their biological parents. The rest were taken care of by more wealthy relatives, grandparents, siblings, etc.

<sup>xvii</sup> In these two schools, 40% of parents/guardians had completed upper secondary education or above while the rates in the other schools were 20% (new community school), 20% (established private school) and 35% (high performance government school).

<sup>xviii</sup> See also Billings (2011) for discussion of this general slogan.

<sup>xix</sup> A follow-up study on the realised transitions of selected students beyond lower secondary education and on women enrolled in higher education will be reported in a separate article.

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