Applauding or Criticising the Announcement of the Best School and Student in the National Examination: Which Way to Go?

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ABSTRACT

On 29th January 2023, the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) stopped announcing the best-performing schools and students. The announcement drew mixed reactions (some applauding or criticising) among education stakeholders. Using a descriptive survey design, this quantitative study specifically identified reasons for the applause or criticism; compared statistically the identified reasons; and the private and public education stakeholders on the announcement. The questionnaires were used to collect data from 500 stakeholders who were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique in Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Mbeya, and Dodoma cities. The collected data were analysed using Descriptive Statistics and Independent t-tests. The findings indicate that, the applauding reasons include different study environments; no longer motivation for studying, improved understanding and restoring original logic of schooling. Other reasons are the announcement served no good purpose; the announcement marketed the schools; and it was not fair to compare schools using the British and NECTA systems. Contrarily, the criticism reasons are the Government escapism from under-investment in public schools; denying of information to education researchers; suppressing information and putting society in the dark; removing the incentives for students; cause unforeseen consequences; leader's in-charge subjectivity/selfishness move and the Council ignores the foundational reason for the announcement. Furthermore, there is a very minimal statistically significant difference between the reasons for applauding (M=3.611, SD=.825) and the reasons for criticising (M=3.645, SD=.829) the announcement. The t-test results portrayed no statistically significant difference between the private and public education stakeholders on the announcement. Therefore, none is more powerful than the other between the applause and criticism of the announcement. The private and public education

stakeholders should look for an alternative approach to improving results in the national examinations than depending on the announcement of the best schools and students.

Keywords

Applauding, criticising, best school, best student, national examination

INTRODUCTION

School academic performance has attracted the attention of several researchers and education practitioners as it is used to sanction or reward schools (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). The given performance is always reflected in school's performance rankings which is typically useful as the foundation for accountability systems (Cilliers et al., 2019). Therefore, the school performance ranking has recently become a common feature of numerous education systems in the world, attempting to measure and compare the relative performance of individual schools (Njiru et al., 2020). The study argues that critics of school performance rankings are keen to compare oranges to apples and tend to significantly overstate the difference.

The critics are endorsed by Neves et al. (2014) who argue that the school performance rankings and comparisons between schools are problematic from both technical and methodological perspectives. Njakululu (2015) notes that the obsession with mean scores has driven some schools to employ some unorthodox ways of ensuring acceptable mean scores against the guidelines of Kenya's education ministry. In addition, Ouma (2023) discusses the implications of ranking students nationally in examinations from which they conclude that, the Ministry of Education in Kenya is on the right path in discarding academic rankings to enhance the quality of curriculum delivery to its students. Susilowati (2020) highlights the complexities and shortcomings of ranking students and schools based on academic performance regardless of the national examination being an integral part of a

system implemented to improve the quality of national education. Furthermore, the given ranking is said to have different implications (depending on either high-stakes or low-stakes) such as encouraging unintended behaviour (e.g. gaming, teaching to the test, neglecting unrewarded tasks); focusing only on publicizing information about school performance; creating sufficient or insufficient reputational pressure for higher-level education administrators or school staff and parents' willing or reactions on the rankings (Andrabi et al., 2017; Camargo et al., 2018; Cilliers et al., 2019). The history of school academic performance ranking is traced back to 1990 when NECTA announced national primary and secondary school examinations every year (Ngalomba, 2023).

The ranking was strengthened when Tanzania introduced "Big Results Now in Education," an accountability programme which published national and district school rankings (Cilliers et al., 2019). The ranking has always become the key national debate among students and parents in which they often use the ranking in determining school choices (Ngalomba, 2023). Specifically, while announcing the results of the 2022 Certificate of Secondary School Examination, the NECTA did not provide school rankings for the first time in decades. In addition, on Sunday, January 29, 2023, the NECTA announced that it will no longer announce the best-performing school and student (The Chanzo Reporter, 2023). The announcement has drawn mixed reactions among Tanzania's education stakeholders from which some were either applauding or criticising the decision. Supporting the NECTA's decision, the minister for education, science and technology said that, the rankings had become controversial because they determined performance based on only one factor-the final examination while other factors at play were not taken on board (Ngalomba, 2023). He added that the announcement of the ranking has not considered a number of candidates in schools, teacher-student rations, and this can

translate to longer working hours for teachers as well as poor student supervision, thereby compromising quality. In addition, NECTA's acting executive secretary said the council will no longer announce the best-performing school and student in the examinations when he was announcing the 2022 Certificate of Secondary Education Exam (CSEE) results (The Chanzo Reporter, 2023). He said that, announcing best performing schools and students is technically marketing the schools, something which is not productive since students have different study environments. The announcement drew mixed reactions among Tanzania's education stakeholders from which some were either applauding or criticising the decision. At the moment, there is scarce statistical comparison concluded on which reasons are more powerful among the education stakeholders who have applauded or criticised this decision. Therefore, this study statistically compared the reactions (reasons) among education stakeholders regarding the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination. It specifically identified the reasons for the applause or criticism of the announcement, compared statistically the identified reasons of the two groups, and compared statistically between the private and public education stakeholders on the decision made by the NECTA.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach due to the nature of the main objectives. This approach enabled the collection of data from a larger population of surveyed education stakeholders (Vijayendra, 2023). The approach facilitated the study to obtain objectivity and generalize findings to other situations (Lee, 2006). It as well enabled the study to quantify the performance of study variables i.e. power of applauding or criticising the announcement of best school and student in the national examination (Wu & Little, 2011). This study applied descriptive cross-sectional survey design as it facilitated studying individual education stakeholder stakeholders as a unit of analysis. It

assisted in covering a large geographical area while measuring the individual education stakeholder's views, attitudes, and characteristics. It also produced the easy way of analyzing the information from the surveyed education stakeholder stakeholders regarding the power of applauding or criticising the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination (Doyle et al., 2020). This study was conducted in five Tanzanian cities: Mbeya, Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Dodoma, and Arusha in Tanzania. These cities were selected because cities they are among big cities in Tanzania the country which and absorb many education stakeholders. They have numerous zonal headquarters of private and public education organizations. They have more TVET institutions compared to many towns. Principally, they represent the major zones of Tanzania.

The study involved public and private schools' administrators, representatives from the Education Commissioner office in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, some representatives from NECTA, representatives from Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) dealing with education issues, some representatives from faculty of education in universities, public and private schools' students and graduates, education journalists, education researchers and analysts. A total of 500 respondents were involved in this study i.e. 75 public and private schools' administrators, 20 representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 20 representatives from NECTA, 120 representatives from Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) dealing with education issues, 50 some representatives from faculty of education in universities, 80 public and private schools' students and graduates, 20 education journalists, 20 education researchers and analysts and 95 teachers from public and private schools. The multi-sampling technique was used in this study in which the population was identified purposively, randomly stratified and eventually conveniently approached for data

collection. The purposive sampling technique facilitated to identify the education stakeholders who best suited to attend the research objective of this study. In other words, it enabled the identification and selection of information-rich education stakeholders related to the objective of the study at hand. The respondents who were selected using this sampling technique include education journalists, school administrators, education researchers and analysts, education faculty members, representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and NECTA. Furthermore, the stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the purposively and other selected education stakeholder into strata of their background information in ensuring that almost every case of the education is included in the study. These education stakeholders particularly included representatives from Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) dealing with education issues, public and private schools' students and graduates, and teachers from public and private schools.

Finally, the convenience sampling technique was used to win all the mentioned education stakeholders who were readily available and willing to participate in the study. The absence of a sampling frame of education stakeholders at the moment of study dictated the use of convenience sampling technique from which it allowed to gather data that could not have been possible otherwise. Being that the case, the convenient sampling technique yielded to 500 respondents. The main variable of this study is power of criticising or applauding on the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination. The given variable is operationalized using reasons for either criticising or applauding the announcement (Neves et al., 2014; Njakululu, 2015; Andrabi et al., 2017; Camargo et al., 2018; Cilliers et al., 2019; Susilowati, 2020; Ngalomba, 2023; Ouma, 2023). The reasons for applauding are different study environments; no longer motivation for studying, improved understanding and restoring original logic of

schooling. Other reasons are the announcement served no good purpose; the announcement marketed the schools; and it was not fair to compare schools using the British and NECTA systems. The statement items regarding such reasons were prepared and tested using five points Likert Scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree). Contrarily, the reasons for the criticism of the announcement are the criticism reasons are the Government escapism from under-investment in public schools; denying of information to education researchers; suppressing information and putting society in the dark; removing the incentives for students; cause unforeseen consequences; leader's in-charge subjectivity/selfishness move and the Council ignores the foundational reason for the announcement. The statement items regarding such reasons were prepared and tested using five points Likert Scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

In this study, the data were collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires were used as they offered a fast, efficient, and inexpensive means of collecting large amount of data regarding power of either criticising or applauding the announcement of best school and student in the national examination. The validity and reliability of the used questionnaire were ensured through pre-testing (expert assessments of the items), pilot study, literature review from which the items were adopted, ensuring correlation analysis using Pearson product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), and Cronbach Alpha Coefficient formula. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and independent t-tests. The descriptive statistics method were used by following some procedures. These procedures include data preparation to ensure the dataset was clean, consistent, and ready for analysis; using descriptive statistics to analyze and describe the data using frequency and percentage; measures of central tendency and dispersion (mean and standard deviation) for distribution analysis. The descriptive statistics was used to quantify and describe the

background information of the respondents and their data set at general about power of either criticising or applauding the announcement of best school and student in the national examination. This method was also used to identify the reasons for either applauding or criticising the announcement of best school and student in the national examination. On the other hand, the independent t-test was used to compare the reactions of the private and public education stakeholders on stopping the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination. The test was performed by establishing mean scores of both groups, compare the mean score, interpreting the outputs in the tables and present and discuss the results. The data analysis using both methods was performed by a computer using the IBM SPSS Statistics i.e. Version 26. The descriptive statistics results were presented using frequencies and standard percentages, mean scores, standard deviations, and standard t-tests results.

Findings and Discussion

Among the surveyed education practitioners 53% were male while 47% were female (**Table 1**). The majority of the surveyed education stakeholders were the male though with insignificant difference with female number. This implies that, both male and female were involved in this study as the education stakeholders who could respond on the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination. The range of ages of surveyed education stakeholders were between 20 and 50 and above years. The results of surveyed education stakeholders indicate that, 23% of the stakeholders had the age between 20-29 years, 28% between 30-39 years, 39% between 40-49 years, and 10% between 50 and above years (Table 1). The majority of the surveyed education stakeholders had therefore the age between 40 and 49 years old. Nevertheless, almost every category of age is taken into account in the study when exploring on the power of either

criticising or applauding the announcement of best school and student in the national examination. Since the unit of analysis of this study was two categories of education stakeholders in Tanzania, the stakeholders were asked to identify the particular category they belonged to. The public education stakeholders included public schools' administrators, representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, some representatives from NECTA, some representatives from faculty of education in public universities, public schools' students and graduates, public education journalists, public education researchers and analysts. On the other hand, the private education stakeholders involved private schools' administrators, representatives from Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) dealing with education issues, some representatives from faculty of education in private universities, private schools' students and graduates, private education journalists, private education researchers and analysts.

In so doing, 52% of the stakeholders belonged to public institutions while 48% belonged to private institutions (**Table 1**). The majority of the surveyed education stakeholders belonged to public institutions though with minimum difference between the two institutions was noted. This implies that, there was good representation of education stakeholders from both public and private institutions in this study. Regarding education level of the surveyed stakeholders, the results display that, 53% of the stakeholders had undergraduate level while and 47% of the stakeholders had postgraduate level of education (**Table 1**). The majority of the surveyed education stakeholders had undergraduate education level though with minimum difference with postgraduate level of education. This implies that, there was good representation of education stakeholders with both undergraduate and postgraduate level of education in this study.

Table 1: Background Information of the Respondents

Information	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Sex	1. Male	265	53.0
	2. Female	235	47.0
	Total	**500**	**100.0**
Age	1. 20-29 years	115	23.0
	2. 30-39 years	195	28.0
	3. 40-49 years	140	39.0
	4. 50 and above years	50	10.0
	Total	**500**	**100.0**
Institution	1. Private	260	52.0
	2. Public	240	48.0
	Total	**500**	**100.0**
Education Level	1. Undergraduate	265	53.0
	2. Postgraduate	235	47.0
	Total	**500**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data, July (2023)

Reasons for Applauding or Criticising the Announcement of Best School and Student

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the reasons for either criticising or applauding the ceasing of announcing the best school and best student in the national examination in Tanzania. The results in Table 2 of this study portray that, the reasons for applauding the announcement of the best school and student were different studying environments among the candidates for national examination (*M=4.357, SD=.641*), announcing is no longer the motivation (*M=3.849, SD=.892*), the stopping announcement will improve understanding and restoring the original logic of going to school (*M=3.568, SD=.807*), the announcement served no good purpose i.e. hooliganism of meritocracy (*3.509, SD=.712*), it was not fair to compare schools that taught using the British system with those using the NECTA system (*M=3.247, SD=.917*) and marketing the schools (ranking was a capital in the business of education) i.e. modern-day education calls for more collaboration than competition (*M=3.129, SD=.983*). Contrarily, the reasons for criticising the stopping of announcing the best school and

student in the national examination include the Government is trying to escape from under-investment of public schools (*M=4.383, SD=.650*), it challenges education researchers to analyse the education system and recommends scientific solutions (*M=3.741, SD=.879*), it is suppressing information and putting society in the dark i.e. still there was something to learn from the same questionable ranking (*M=3.520, SD=.813*), it removes the incentives that existed for students to work harder in their lessons and removing the announcement has unforeseen consequences (*M=3.610, SD=.717*), it is just subjective move of someone who is in charge to look for one's leadership difference i.e. selfishness (*M=3.572, SD=.932*) and the Council either doesn't know, forget or ignore the foundational reason for the announcement (*M=3.045, SD=.983*).

These results imply that, the education stakeholders have strong reasons for either criticising or applauding for stopping the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination in Tanzania. These reasons are likewise supported previously by different researchers (e.g. Neves et al., 2014; Njakululu, 2015; Andrabi et al., 2017; Camargo et al., 2018; Cilliers et al., 2019; Susilowati, 2020; Ngalomba, 2023; Ouma, 2023). However, most of such researchers criticised the ranking of schools and students in examination.

Table 2: Reasons for Applauding/Criticising the Announcement of Best School and Student

Reasons	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reasons for Applauding			
different study environments	500	4.357	.641
no longer motivation for studying	500	3.849	.892
improved understanding and restoring the original logic of going to school	500	3.568	.807
the announcement served no good purpose (hooliganism of meritocracy)	500	3.509	.712
it was not fair to compare schools that taught using the British system with those using the NECTA system	500	3.247	.917
marketing the schools (ranking was a capital in the business of education) i.e. modern-day education calls for more collaboration than competition	500	3.129	.983
Reasons for Criticising			
The Government is trying to escape from under-investment of public schools	500	4.383	.650
It challenges education researchers to analyse the education system and recommends scientific solutions	500	3.741	.879
it is suppressing information and putting society in the dark i.e. still there was something to learn from the same questionable ranking	500	3.520	.813
it removes the incentives that existed for students to work harder in their lessons and removing the announcement has unforeseen consequences	500	3.610	.717
It is just subjective move of someone who is in charge to look for one's leadership difference i.e. selfishness	500	3.572	.932
The Council either doesn't know, forget or ignore the foundational reason for the announcement	500	3.045	.983

Source: Field Data, July (2023)

Statistical Comparison of the Reasons between the Critique and Applauders

This study mean of mean scores to statistically compare the reasons for criticising and applauding stopping announcement of the best school and student in the national examination in Tanzania. Using the mean of mean scores in Table 3, it is noted that the reasons for applauding the stop of announcing the best school and student in the national examination had the mean of mean score of (M=3.611, SD=.825) while the reasons for criticising the stop of announcing the best school and student in the national examination had the mean of mean score of (M=3.645, SD=.829).

These results imply the very minimal statistically significant difference between the reasons for applauding and the reasons for criticising the announcement by the NECTA. In other words, there is minimal difference of the reasons on announcing or not announcing the best school and student in the national examination by the NECTA. This is the new contribution to the body of knowledge as the previous studies (e.g. Neves et al., 2014; Njakululu, 2015; Andrabi et al., 2017; Camargo et al., 2018; Cilliers et al., 2019; Susilowati, 2020; Ngalomba, 2023; Ouma, 2023) could establish this statistical comparison.

Table 3: Statistical Comparison of the Reasons between the Critique and Applauders

Reasons	Sample Size	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean of Mean	Std. Dev.
Reasons for Applauding					
different study environments	500	4.357	.641	3.611	.825
no longer motivation for studying	500	3.849	.892		
improved understanding and restoring the original logic of going to school	500	3.568	.807		
the announcement served no good purpose (hooliganism of meritocracy)	500	3.509	.712		
it was not fair to compare schools that taught using the British system with those using the NECTA system	500	3.247	.917		
marketing the schools (ranking was a capital in the business of education) i.e. modern-day education calls for more collaboration than competition	500	3.129	.983		
Reasons for Criticising					
the Government is trying to escape from under-investment of public schools	500	4.383	.650	3.645	.829
it challenges education researchers to analyse the education system and recommends scientific solutions	500	3.741	.879		
it is suppressing information and putting society in the dark i.e. still there was something to learn from the same questionable ranking;	500	3.520	.813		

it removes the incentives that existed for students to work harder in their lessons and removing the announcement has unforeseen consequences	500	3.610	.717		
It is just subjective move of someone who is in charge to look for one's leadership difference i.e. selfishness	500	3.572	.932		
The Council either doesn't know, forget or ignore the foundational reason for the announcement	500	3.045	.983		

Source: Field Data, July (2023)

Statistical Comparison of the Private and Public Stakeholders on the Announcement

This part presents the comparison between reasons' mean scores of two different group of private and public education stakeholders i.e. are private education stakeholders more reactive (criticising/applauding) than public education stakeholders on stopping the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination in Tanzania? Is there a significant difference in the mean criticising/applauding scores for private and public education stakeholders? The reference here was one categorical independent variable (i.e. Private/Public Education Stakeholders); and one continuous dependent variable (e.g. reasons for criticising or applauding). The two variables used were education stakeholders (with private coded as 1, and public coded as 2) and RCA, which is the total score that education stakeholders recorded on a five-item reasons for criticising/applauding scale. Checking the information about the assessed groups, Table 4 provides correct mean and standard deviation for each of groups (Private/Public Education Stakeholders). The number of stakeholders in each group (N) is also right and no data is missing.

Table 4: Group Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total RCA Private Public	240 260	35.02 34.17	5.91 5.11	.37 .37

Source**:** Field Data, July (2023)

In meeting required assumptions, the results in Table 5 indicate that, the significance level for Levene's test is 0.06 which is larger than the cut-off of .05. This implies that, the assumption of equal variances has not been violated hence the t-value reported used the one provided in the first line of the table.

Table 5: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total RCA	Equal Variances Assumed	3.508	.064	1.624	408	.109	.85	.52	-.19	1.89
	Equal Variances Not assumed				396.359	.099	.85	.51	-.17	1.87

Source: Field Data, July (2023)

In finding out whether there was a significant difference of RCA between Private and Public education stakeholders, the column labelled Sig. (2-tailed) under t-test for equality of means was used.

Table 5 then indicates that, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is .109. This implies that, there is no a statistically significant difference in the mean RCA scores for Private and Public education stakeholders. Additionally, it was important to calculate the effect size for independent-samples t-test in order to provide an indication of the magnitude of the differences between Private and Public education stakeholders in RCA. The eta squared statistics was used in this study representing the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent (group of education stakeholders) variable i.e.

Eta squared = $t^2/t^2 + (N1 + N2 - 2)$
$1.62/1.62^2 + (240+260-2)$
$1.62/2.6244+498$
$1.62/500.62$
Eta squared = .003

With reference the guidelines by Cohen (1988) for interpreting this eta value (i.e. *.01=small effect, .06=moderate effect, .14=large effect*); the effect size is very small i.e. .003 (.3%). This implies that only .3 % of the variance in RCA was explained by education stakeholders. Summarily, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the RCA scores for Private and Public education stakeholders. There was no significant difference in scores for Private Education Stakeholders (M=35.02, SD=5.91) and Public Education Stakeholders [M=34.17, SD=5.11; t (408) =1.62, p=.11]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small (eta squared=.003). With reference to all above results, it is concluded that there was no a statistically significant difference in the level of RCA between Private and Public education stakeholders in Tanzania. The Private and Public education stakeholders were noted to have no difference in RCA particularly on the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination in Tanzania.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study statistically compared the reactions (reasons) among education stakeholders regarding the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination. It specifically identified the reasons for the applause or criticism of the announcement, compared statistically the identified reasons of the two groups and compared statistically between the private and public education stakeholders on the announcement made by the NECTA. It is found that, the reasons for the applause of the announcement include different study environments; no longer motivation for studying, improved understanding and restoring the original logic of going to school; the announcement served no good purpose (hooliganism of meritocracy); it was not fair to compare schools that taught using the British system with those using the NECTA system; marketing the schools (ranking was a capital in the business of education) i.e. modern-day education calls for more collaboration than competition. Contrarily, the reasons for the criticism of the announcement include Government is trying to escape from under-investment of public schools. It challenges education researchers to analyse the education system and recommends scientific solutions. It also suppresses information and put society in the dark. It removes incentives that existed for students to work harder in their lessons and removes the announcement that has unforeseen consequences.

Furthermore, the mean scores indicate very minimal statistically significant difference between the reasons for applauding and the reasons for criticising the announcement by the NECTA. The t-test results portrayed that, there was no statistically significant difference between the private and public education stakeholders on the announcement of the best school and student. It is concluded that, none is more powerful than the other between applauding or criticising the announcement of the best school and student in the national examination. The private and public education stakeholders should therefore look for the alternative approach of improving results in the national examinations rather than depending on the announcement of the best school and student.