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School readiness and home environments: comparison study of naturalized citizens and majority groups in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

For more than six decades, Tanzania has been hosting more than three million refugees, of whom more than 300,000 have been naturalized as citizens. Traditionally, there have been learning and developmental disparities between children from refugee backgrounds and those from local majority communities. This study compared the school preparedness of children from self-settled and in-settlement naturalized citizens with that of children from urban and rural majority groups in Tanzania. Four hundred pre-primary children, aged between 57 and 68 months, were randomly selected to undertake a contextualized version of the Bracken's Basic Concept Scale-Receptive. Further, 120 parents were recruited – 30 from each community group. Findings indicated that children of self-settled naturalized citizens were as well prepared as urban children and substantially more than of those from the rural majority group. Parents' practices, beliefs and expectations were possible factors in the better school readiness of children from this group. Parents from this group considered education for their children as essential for upward social mobility. These findings draw attention to the importance of the developmental and learning potential of children from minority and disadvantaged groups.

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School readiness; pre-primary education; naturalized citizens; family SES; home learning environment

Introduction

School readiness for children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds entails the preparedness of schools and communities to accommodate and appropriately enhance their smooth transition into primary schooling and is, therefore, of foremost importance in most educational systems and programmes (Black et al. 2017; McCoy et al. 2017; Ndijuye, 2020a). Kokkalia et al. (2019), Williams and Lerner (2019) and Emig (2000) establish that school readiness can be conceptualized in three levels: i) the child's readiness – physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, language and speech development, general knowledge and cognition are crucial for optimal performance in school; ii) the school's readiness – school policies and practices to welcome and educate children at various stages of development in multiple domains and iii) family and community readiness to support optimal early child development from

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before birth until a child enters kindergarten or pre-primary education (PPE) as this is known in Tanzania. This study will exclusively focus on the first and third level of readiness – the child and family and community readiness.

Successful attainment of children's school readiness is dependent on various factors (Brown 2017; McCoy et al. 2017; Ndijuje, 2020a). Brown (2017) identifies the factors as the attributes of the child; family; previous child-care environments; the nature of relationships between the child, teachers and peers; early signs of cognitive ability and maturity; children's work- and learning-related social and self-regulatory skills and, to a lesser extent, the age of the child. While the factors identified by Brown (2017) are crucial for facilitating the attainment of learning and teaching goals that could be said to influence child readiness positively, researchers in developing countries identify different factors impacting child readiness (Hu and Pattugalan, 2018; Ndijuje and Rao 2018; Pekdogan and Akgul 2016). Pekdogan and Akgul (2016) mention family, teachers, environment and school facilities as being critical to readying a child for primary schooling. Hu and Pattugalan (2018) go further, identifying other factors which impact child readiness: marginalized children (e.g. those impacted by civil wars and who become refugees in other areas), living with severe disabilities, ethnic minorities, immigrant children and children living in poverty.

Disparities in children's development and school readiness

Empirical evidence from both developed and developing countries has consistently indicated disparities in children's school preparedness and development (Black et al. 2017; McCoy et al. 2017; Ndijuje and Rao 2018; Ndijuje, 2020b). The gap is more nuanced for children from refugee and immigrant backgrounds (Murphy, Yoshikawa, and Wuermli 2018; Ndijuje and Rao 2019). Available educational reports from the sub-Saharan region indicate that while pre-primary enrolment has significantly increased in recent years, there are still large disparities in children's school preparedness across countries, caused by differences in urbanicity, gender and family SES and civil status (Ndijuje and Rao 2018; RTI International 2014; UIS 2020).

The effects of these disparities are said to continue even in later learning outcomes and income during adult life (Heckman 2011) unless the other elements of school readiness, school and community, collaborate (Williams and Lerner 2019). Access to quality PPE, especially for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, has been found to be an effective means of mitigating these inequalities (Patrick et al. 2016), reducing early learning deficits, fostering children's holistic development (Black et al. 2017; Weiland and Yoshikawa 2013) and reducing vulnerability to poverty (Heckman 2011).

In the sub-Saharan region, sometimes, learning disparities are associated with socio-cultural reasons such as religious beliefs (Ndijuje, 2020b) and gender preferences (Kassahun and Kedir 2006; Beatrice and Chansa-Kabali 2017). Among the coastal communities of Kenya, for instance, parents reported to preferring to send sons to school over daughters, with the hope of higher financial returns and future family stability (Piper, Merseth, and Ngaruiya 2018).

The context of naturalized citizens of Burundian origin in Tanzania

Historically, Tanzania has been hosting more than three million refugees from various neighboring countries (Ministry of Home Affairs, MoH, 2014; UNHCR 2020). They come from Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Somalia, Mozambique and South Sudan. After independence in 1961, the then Tanganyika received the first wave of refugees from Burundi, commonly known as ‘the first caseload’, in 1972 (Center for the Study of Forced Migration – CSFM, 2008). The group was settled in the Kigoma region, and later some of them were relocated to Ulyankulu, Mishamo and Katumba settlement areas in the Tabora and Katavi regions as ‘in-settlement areas refugees’. Those who remained in the Kigoma region were left on their own living in separate villages alongside the rural local majority, as ‘self-settled refugees’ (CSFM, 2008; UNHCR 2020).

Until 2020, the in-settlement refugee population had risen to 340,000, while the self-settled population had grown to about 125,000 (UNHCR, 2013, 2014) of whom about 90% were born in Tanzania (MoH, 2020). The second wave of refugees (or second caseload) came to Tanzania throughout the last decade of the 20th century and was settled in camps in north-western Tanzania (UNHCR, 2014). However, some moved illegally from those refugee camps to urban areas across Tanzania and beyond (Chaulia, 2003; CSFM, 2008). In 2007, Tanzania announced its readiness to naturalize those who wanted to stay (CSFM, 2008). Until 2015, about 300,000 of in-settlement and self-settled Burundian refugees and their children were naturalized as Tanzanian citizens. After their formal naturalization, they continued to live and work in their respective self-settled villages and in-settlement areas as naturalized citizens. This study compared the school preparedness of children of these new Tanzanian citizens with children from the local rural and urban majorities. It is important to note that while the mother tongue of self-settled and in-settlement naturalized citizens of Burundian origin is Kirundi (Kuch, 2016), the medium of instruction for pre-primary and primary school levels in Tanzania is Kiswahili (URT, 2014).

Theoretical underpinning of the study

This study is grounded on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, which establishes that human development takes place in very complex and extremely dynamic contexts with interactions between close and distant environments (Cross, 2017). In human development and learning, the comprehensive definition of ‘context’ refers to a rich, thick and multi-dimensional construct (Bronfenbrenner and Morrison, 1998; Cross, 2017). Accordingly, children’s development occurs when they are immersed in interrelated nested structures or ecological sub-systems. These interactions shape the children’s holistic development. However, this study considered only the home and school learning environments. This theoretical framework is grounded in the understanding that children’s learning and development are influenced by interrelated human and environmental factors.

Effects of home learning environments and family socioeconomic status on children's school readiness

Poverty (when the income of families and schools is insufficient to sustaining domestic and school needs, respectively) emerges as the crucial driver of other factors like the community failing to build and furnish enough classrooms to accommodate the number of enrolled children and to pay teachers adequately. Consequently, child and school readiness are impacted by other factors (Hu and Pattugalan, 2018). Family income is a major influence on whether children participate in out-of-home activities with peers (Ferguson and Mary 2007).

Poor family socioeconomic status (SES) has adverse effects on a child's participation and achievement in learning outcomes. For instance, a systematic review by Cooper and Stewart (2020), reveals that household income has a positive causal effect on children's outcomes, including their cognitive and sociobehavioural development and their health, particularly in households with low income. Explicitly, Ferguson and Mary (2007) note that poverty decreases a child's readiness for school through effects on health, home life, schooling and neighborhoods. While it is well-known that the income of most families in developing countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, depends on agriculture, spatial location (urban or rural) is another major factor in the level of a child's preparedness for school as results indicate higher rates of poverty and exclusion among children living in urban regions of developing countries (UNICEF 2002).

Displacements caused by unstable civil conditions, like wars (as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, etc.) or natural disasters, cause people to become refugees or immigrants to other places, disturbing their social and economic life. Consequently, parenting styles and the consistency of children's schooling are impacted, jeopardizing preparedness for a smooth transition into schooling. Low family SES impacts a child's attainment in core cognitive and social-emotional skills that have been demonstrated to be important aspects of school readiness (Blair and Raver 2015).

Practically, there is an association between family SES and children's developmental outcomes as it affects opportunities for adults to make relevant decisions. Policy interventions to improve immediate and long-term outcomes (Zeraatkar et al. 2020) are common practice to ensure that refugee children have access to a good start to learning. While studies from other parts of the world have consistently demonstrated the relationship between home learning environments, family SES and preparation for school among children of immigrants and refugee backgrounds, little is empirically known from the sub-Saharan region, which is home to more than 40% of them. This study was designed to assess this relationship in the Tanzanian context. Specifically, the following two research questions guided the study.

- (1) Are there differences in school readiness between children of self-settled and in-settlement naturalized citizens and those of the local urban and rural majority populations in Tanzania?
- (2) How do differences in family SES and home environments among these four groups influence children's school readiness?

Methods

Sample selection

In Tanzania, 75% of naturalized citizens of Burundian origin – who were the focus of this study – live in two rural regions of Katavi and Kigoma (National Bureau of Statistics-[NBS], 2012; UNHCR 2020) – the two regions were purposively selected. In the Kigoma region, Kasulu and Buhigwe districts were purposively selected, while in the Katavi region, Mpanda and Tanganyika districts were selected. Kasulu and Mpanda districts were selected as urban centers closest to the population of naturalized citizens. Tanganyika and Buhigwe districts were selected for their high population of naturalized citizens of Burundian origin.

From the four districts, 16 primary schools (four from each district) were randomly selected to enable administration of the Measuring Early Learning Environments (MELE) instrument. The MELE is used to measure the quality of pre-primary classrooms using three tools: a classroom observation and inventory, teacher interview and head teacher interview (UNICEF 2017). This was done to broadly control for the quality of education services across groups. Based on comparable MELE scores, four primary schools – one representing each population group in this study, were selected.

From the selected pre-primary classes, 400 children (100 from each group) were randomly selected. Children's ages ranged between 57 and 68 months, and 202 of them were boys, while 198 were girls. It is important to note that Tanzanian pre-primary classes are characterized by overcrowded classes averaging between 120 and 150 children (MoEST 2020). Further, 120 parents – 15 fathers and 15 mothers from each group, were recruited. Parents were selected based on the following criteria: (i) being a member of the specific group being studied, (ii) having a pre-primary child registered in that school and (iii) for naturalized citizens, having a first-generation child after formal naturalization.

Data collection instruments

School readiness

Children's school preparedness was measured using the Bracken Basic Concept Scale – Receptive, specifically a contextualized version of the School Readiness Composite (SRC). The SRC included subtests for colors, numbers/counting, sizes/comparison, shapes and direction/position. This tool measures children's knowledge of concepts in various foundational and academic domains. It is developmentally sensitive to children's basic concept acquisition and receptive language skills (Bracken, 2006). The tool has been used in other contexts within low- and middle-income countries (see Ndijuye 2017; Ndijuye and Rao 2018; Rao et al. 2013). This tool was modified and contextualized to reflect the Tanzanian context by deleting, substituting and testing some items to fit the mental schemas of typical Tanzanian children.

More specifically, in the identification of colors subtest, two items were redrawn by hand. The yellow and brown blobs were replaced with drawings of a ripe yellow banana and a cup of brown coffee, respectively. Given that Tanzania's pre-primary curriculum dictates that vowels and consonants be individually taught, they were separately redrawn on pieces of papers. Letters C and V replaced letters Q and X, which do not exist in Kiswahili – the medium of instruction. Tanzania's pre-primary curriculum instructs that children be taught number concepts up to 10. However, in this study, we included number concepts up to 20 to identify exceptional children. Numbers beyond 20 were either omitted or replaced with subsequent tens. For example, 27 was replaced by 30 and 53 was replaced by 50.

Among early childhood education scholars, it is a common practice to contextualize a global instrument developed elsewhere to meet the needs of a study conducted in a specific sociocultural context (Aboud 2006; Mwaura, Sylva, and Malmberg 2008; Ndijuje and Rao 2018). However, one of the limitations of using this tool was adaptation to fit into the specific context of this study. This tool was developed in a western country; hence, its use in this study may have some reliability implications. The instructions on how to administer and score the tool were translated into Kiswahili by the first author and independently back-translated by pre-primary education experts and English-Kiswahili linguists. There were insignificant discrepancies between the original and back-translated versions. For all items, the scoring was NR (no-response), 1 (correct response) or 0 (incorrect response). After contextualization of the tool, the calculated internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha (α) value, was 0.94.

Family characteristics and the home environment

The Parents' Questionnaire, developed by Rao and colleagues (2013), was used to collect data about family socioeconomic status and home learning environments. Specifically, the section on home environments addressed such issues as sociodemographic information – gender, home address, refugee status, language spoken at home, children's health and nutrition habits, parent-child interactions and number of years lived in the area. The section of family SES assessed issues related to ownership of assets considered basic for survival in rural and urban contexts of developing countries (e.g. number of people in the home, ownership of bicycle, land, radio and livestock) and parental education.

The questionnaire was modified to allow asking follow-up questions if appropriate, which generated highly informative qualitative data. The follow-up questions generally focused on issues related to language spoken at home, parental beliefs and expectations, and the existing home and school collaboration. It was vital to ask follow-up questions which specifically targeted these areas because responses would help to clarify and enrich the quantitative findings of the study.

Procedure

This study recruited four research assistants with bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education. They were trained for ten days during the designing, development and piloting of instruments. In the course of their practical training, which was conducted in a nearby pre-primary class, the trainers closely observed their competence in conducting

child assessments and interviews. During the data collection phase, to establish rapport while maintaining objectivity, which is necessary in qualitative research (see Patton 2009), the first author spent the first two days of field work visiting families and schools to introduce the objectives and importance of participation in this study.

Children were individually and independently assessed by the first author and research assistants. Interrater reliabilities between the first author (0.88), the second author (0.90) and each of the two assistants (0.90 and 0.89) were assessed before starting data collection. While child assessments were individually administered at school after lessons, the order of assessment was counterbalanced. Children were given question booklets, while researchers kept the scoring sheets. Parents were visited and interviewed at home, which allowed development of mutual trust, respect and rapport between the research team and families. This proved to be necessary and fruitful given security concerns and issues associated with illegal immigration in northwestern Tanzania.

Ethical issues and consents

Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant authorities in Tanzania. Given the current difficult research environment in Tanzania, the authors applied for and obtained ethical clearance from the Ministry for Local Government Authorities and the National Bureau of Statistics. Further, we asked for and obtained parental consent to administer the SRC child tests and parents and teachers were individually asked for their consent to participate in the study. During data collection, for their safety, privacy and confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms. Collected data were entered into password-protect software, so that unauthorized persons could not access them. It was extremely important to observe ethical practices to ensure that the aims of this research – to expand knowledge, truth and avoidance of errors – were achieved and to ensure a sense of fairness and mutual respect, given that empirical research depends wholly on collaboration between researchers and participants.

Data analysis methods

Preliminary tests were conducted with demographic variables such as children's gender, age and grade with learning attainment as the dependent variable. The aim of these tests was to determine whether there were any significant differences among pupils from self-settled naturalized citizen families, in-settlement naturalized citizen families, rural majority and urban majority groups. To identify covariates for the final analyses, frequencies, means and correlations for groups were used. The final analyses used an ANCOVA to examine the differences in SRC mean scores among the four groups (Table 1).

With the controls for children's age, gender and family SES, which was indexed by family wealth and parental education, hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to determine the variables which would predict the relationships between children's social group and school preparedness. Qualitative data analyses followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) approach in that they were reduced, coded and described to develop themes and sub-themes. Given the focus of the study, we did not analyse school principals and teachers' interview data. To find out the interrater reliability, 25% of the follow-up field notes were individually and independently coded

by two researchers and the first author. In this process, the interrater reliability was calculated by the percentage of agreement among the three raters. Finally, the researchers reached a 95% consensus agreement.

Results

This section is divided into two parts – gender and group mean differences among the investigated population groups, and descriptive qualitative and quantitative information about home learning environments and family socioeconomic status.

Differences in school preparedness by population group

To determine mean differences of children's school preparedness, an ANCOVA was conducted with four social groups (*self-settled naturalized citizens, in-settlement naturalized citizens, rural majority and urban majority*) and gender (boy and girl) as in-between variables. Results indicated a significant main effect for gender ($F(2, 130) = 106.04, p = 0.012$ and $d = 0.592$) and social group ($F(2, 145) = 110.05, p = 0.013$ and $d = 0.522$). We conducted a follow-up test and found that children of self-settled naturalized citizens ($M = 40.47, SD = 11.4$) significantly outperformed children from the rural majority group ($M = 23.56, SD = 10.5$). While boys from the urban majority group ($M = 44.12, SD = 10.23$) were more prepared for school than boys from other groups, girls from the self-settled naturalized citizens group ($M = 37.55, SD = 09.45$) were more prepared for school than girls from other groups. Detailed findings are as indicated on [Table 1](#).

Table 1. School Readiness Competence (SRC): Mean scores for population groups.

	Group Mean (SD)	Boys Mean (SD)	Girls Mean (SD)
1. Self-settled citizens	36.7 (9.4)	44.12 (10.23)	28.42 (07.34)
2. In-settlement citizens	35.50(10.13)	33.46 (11.25)	34.60 (11.15)
3. Rural majority	25.4 (12.62)	34.40 (09.56)	14.40 (05.12)
4. Urban majority	40.47 (11.40)	43.60 (11.28)	37.55 (09.45)

Predictors of children's school preparedness across social groups

We conducted hierarchical regressions to find predictors of children's school preparedness across social groups in three blocks. In block one, control variables of gender and age were entered. Parental education and family wealth – proxies for family socioeconomic status, were entered in block two. In the third block of the regression model, the social group (urban majority, rural majority, self-settled or in-settlement) was entered ([Table 2](#)).

Findings indicated that, in block one, the contribution to the regression model of age and gender ($F(2, 40) = 162.573, p = 0.000$) accounted for 55% of the variance. The second block, variables related to family socioeconomic status, was very significant, explaining an additional 28.4% of the variance ($F(4, 41) = 164.503, p = 0.000$). Finally, the third block, which added the social group, explained an additional 1.34% of the variance ($F(4, 40) = 133.435, p = 0.062$). This change of R^2 was statistically insignificant. Further, it was found that important predictors of school readiness were age ($\beta 0.07, p = 0.012$), gender ($\beta 0.062, p = 0.023$), parental education ($\beta 0.431, p = 0.015$) and family wealth ($\beta 0.322,$

Table 2. Hierarchical linear regression analyses predicting SRC scores across groups.

Predictor	Predicting data			Model data		
	B	β	R ²	Δ R ²	Δ F	t
Block 1: Demographic variables						
Age	3.807	0.572*	0.550	0.550	12.413	4.153
Gender	2.458	0.106 *0.838				
Block 2: Family SES						
Parental Edu	3.759	0.401**	0.834	0.284	23.018	4.143
Family wealth	2.115	0.424**				3.137
Block 3: Final model						
Social group	0.647	0.046*	0.775	0.0134	0.111	0.333

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Source: Field data, (2020)

$p = 0.021$). Children's social group was an insignificant predictor of their school preparedness. In total, the five predictors accounted for 84.7% of the school readiness variance. Detailed findings are as indicated on Table 2.

Family sociodemographic characteristics and home learning environment

This section presents descriptive findings about family sociodemographic information, home learning environments and children's health and nutrition.

Family size across social groups

On average, a typical family in urban areas consisted of 5 members – who were parents and 3 children. Among naturalized citizens, the average family size was about 9 members – parents, 6 children and 1 one or two senior members. A typical self-settled family included about 7 members – parents, four children and at least one senior citizen. Among rural majorities, a typical family consisted of about ten members – parents, seven children and one senior citizen.

Children's health and nutritional practices

From all groups in the study, parents reported on their children's health and nutritional practices such as under-5-year immunizations, regular checkups and regular provision of a balanced diet (see Table 3). Findings indicated that among rural majorities, about 65% of children were reported to have received all required immunization at the appropriate times, while among the urban population, 90% were reported to have received them. Few of the children in rural areas, whether naturalized citizens, self-settled or rural majority, reported to have received health checks for hearing, speech and vision. While there were plenty of vegetables and fruits in rural areas, only one out of three parents in rural areas, regardless of the social group, reported to have given their children a balanced diet in the past five days. Other findings are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Reported children's health and nutritional practices across social groups.

	Naturalized refugees	Rural majority	Urban majority	Self-settled
Immunization	67%	53%	87%	71%
Regular checkup	13%	07%	13%	07%
Vision h/checkup	07%	00%	33%	07%
Hearing checkup	07%	07%	27%	07%
Speech checkup	07%	07%	33%	00%
Chronic illness	13%	00%	07%	00%
Eat vegetables	07%	20%	00%	13%
Eat fruits	20%	27%	72%	27%
Brush teeth	87%	60%	93%	82%
Eat balanced diet	30%	28%	27%	28%

Source: Field data, (2020)

Parental involvements in children's learning and development across social groups

One of the questions in the parents' questionnaire asked about their involvement in children's learning activities at home. It included any adult, be it mother, father or other family member aged at least 15 years. The learning activities were those considered socioculturally pertinent and crucial for learning in a context of a developing sub-Saharan country. They included fire-place storytelling, singing, reading children's books, playing games, naming of common things around and outside of the home, counting and drawing. Due to the large volume of collected data, we calculated the mean, standard deviation and median for how frequently adults were engaged in children's learning and development activities across the past three days.

Findings, shown in Table 4, indicate that parents from the naturalized refugee group seem to be more involved inhome learning activities. For instance, the involvement mean for naturalized refugee mothers ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 2.33$) was higher than that for self-settled ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 2.14$), rural majority ($M = 2.38$; $SD = 1.36$) or urban majority ($M = 3.56$; $SD = 1.37$). Children from the rural majority group were more likely to be supported by 'other family members' such as senior family members. This is a common role in extended families in the sub-Saharan region where this study was conducted.

Table 4. Parental involvement and family support across social groups.

	N/Refugees	R/majority	U/majority	S/settled
Father				
Mean	3.20	2.53	2.87	3.08
SD	0.86	0.92	1.38	1.02
Median	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Range	3.5–4.2	2.2–3.0	2.6–3.1	3.2–4.0
Mother				
Mean	6.53	2.38	3.56	4.22
SD	2.62	1.36	1.37	2.14
Median	4.00	2.00	3.00	3.00
Range	3.7–4.4	2.3–3.0	2.3–3.0	3.3–4.1
Others				
Mean	2.11	3.43	2.99	2.73
SD	0.33	0.76	0.64	0.44
Median	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
Range	2.8–3.2	2.6–3.0	2.8–3.0	2.9–3.1

Source: Field data, (2020)

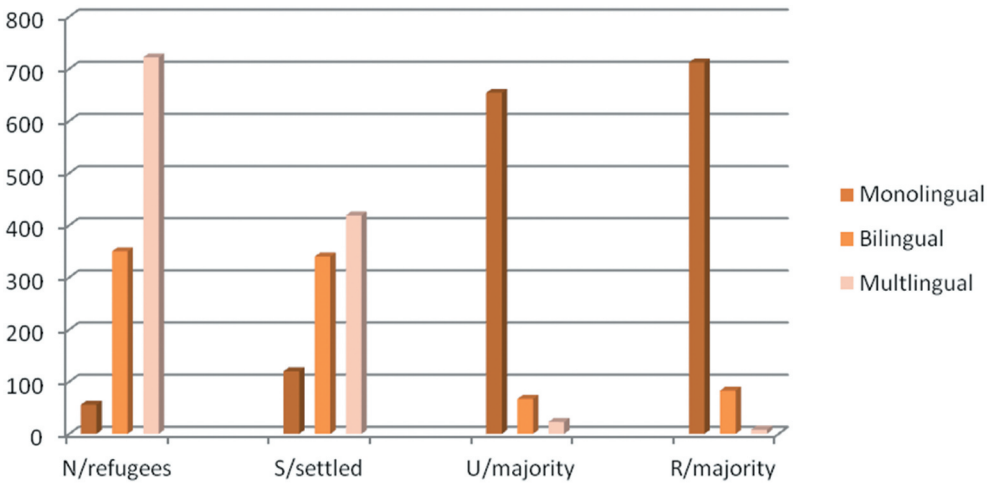


Figure 1. Languages spoken at home across social groups.

Languages spoken at home across population groups

While Kiswahili is the official medium of instruction for all public pre-primary and primary schools, regardless of urbanicity, the languages spoken most widely at home are vernaculars. In this study, the first language of about 75% of children was not Kiswahili. Only about 13% of children were native Kiswahili speakers. About 18% of the children were multilingual – they spoke Kiswahili and at least two vernacular languages – Kirundi and Kiha. The detailed findings can be observed in [Figure 1](#).

More than two third of the naturalized refugee children (67%) were bilingual – reported as speaking Kiswahili at school and another vernacular language at home. However, a significant number of them, 33%, were multilingual. For children from urban and rural majority groups, 86% were either monolingual or bilingual, speaking one vernacular language and/or Kiswahili.

Family socioeconomic status (SES)

i Parental education across groups

Findings indicated that parents from the urban majority group were more educated than parents from the other groups. As a whole, all parents had at least basic primary education, while most from the urban group (56%) had education qualifications between or beyond secondary school levels. Rural majority group parents were the least educated group overall, with 29% of mothers and 12% of fathers having no formal schooling. Fathers were generally more educated than mothers. Detailed findings are presented in [Table 5](#).

ii Family wealth across social groups

Findings indicated that urban majority families were generally richer than any other social group. While naturalized refugee families were found to have relatively more assets than the rural majority group, self-settled refugees were poorer than families from the

Table 5. Parents' education across social groups.

	Naturalized refugees		Rural majority		Urban majority		Self-settled	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
1.None	03(10%)	00 (0%)	10(33%)	06(20%)	0(0%)	00 (0%)	03(10%)	01(03%)
2.Primary	10(33%)	08(27%)	04(13%)	05(17%)	10(33%)	02(6.7%)	04(13%)	03(10%)
3.Secondary	02(07%)	05(17%)	01(03%)	03(10%)	02(07%)	12(47%)	06(20%)	08(27%)
4.Dip/grad	00(00%)	02(07%)	00(0%)	01(03%)	03(10%)	01(03%)	02(6.7%)	03(10%)

Note: Some columns do not add to 100, due to rounding-up

Source: Field data, (2020)

urban majority group. However, 90% of naturalized refugee families and 85% of rural majority families reported owning a house, compared to only 70% in the urban areas. Given the pervasive poverty in Tanzania, this could be attributed to the high cost of buying or building houses in urban areas. In rural areas, regardless of the social group, all families reported owning a piece of land for farming. Most parents from the urban majority group (67%) reported having a bank account, while only 50% of naturalized refugee families, 15% of rural majority families and 45% of self-settled refugees had a bank account. More findings are presented in [Table 6](#).

Reported family roles, parental beliefs and work for mothers across social groups

Follow-up interviews with parents revealed distinctive differences across the population groups with respect to mothers' work and family roles. For instance, in urban areas, mothers were more educated and independent to the extent that some were even professionals. However, when we checked the section on family wealth, mothers from this group were relatively poorer than those from the naturalized refugees group, who seemed to either own or have significant control over the family resources. Unlike the urban majority group, mothers from the rural majority group were mostly housewives tasked with child-rearing and care.

While they were not exclusively considered to be family heads, naturalized refugee mothers were equal bread-winners in providing for the family's daily needs and managing the household resources. One parent from this group revealed that

Table 6. Family wealth and asset ownership across social groups.

	N/refugees	R/majority	U/majority	Self-settled
1. Electricity	6.7%	6.7%	80%	6.7%
2. Radio	100%	60%	100%	95%
3. Television	6.7%	0	80%	0%
4. Mobile phone	100%	93.3%	100%	93.3%
5. Refrigerator	0%	0%	53%	0%
6. Watch	93.3%	60%	100%	77%
7. Bicycle	86.7%	73.3%	86.7%	93.3%
8. Motorcycle	46.7%	26.7%	66.7%	27%
9. Animal-drawn cart	86.7%	60%	100%	67%
10. A car	6.7%	0%	40%	6.7%
11. Own a farm	100%	100%	60%	100%
12. Own livestock	100%	73.3%	80%	100%
13. Own bank account	50%	10%	66.7%	45%
14. Own a house	93.3%	86.7%	73%	67%

Source: Field data, (2020)

Things have changed these days. Joint efforts between parents pay high dividends as you can see here at my home. I work on the farm; she sells products at the market place. The collaboration has been very helpful when it comes to family economy and development”

It was found that there were variations across social groups in parental beliefs, views and attitudes to education. While among naturalized refugees education was a very important stepping stone for a better future, self-settled refugees considered education as important for a career in business. Among the urban majority group, education was highly regarded as one of the children’s rights – to them, all children should be sent to school. Parents from the rural majority group reported that their children were sent to school to avoid trouble with the government. In Tanzania, basic education is free and compulsory – failure to send your child to school may result in a fine and/or imprisonment. One mother from the rural majority group said the following:

“We are here very busy working to feed our families, it is quite complicated these days to meet their needs especially food. It is very important that they stay back to help with household chores, but we cannot keep them long before we get arrested”

Discussion

Differences in school preparedness across social groups

This study had hypothesized that children from the relatively rich urban majority group would outperform those from relatively impoverished rural refugee backgrounds. Contrary to this hypothesis, however, findings indicated that children from the self-settled naturalized citizens group were as well prepared for school as those from the urban majority group. In a context with huge disparities in allocation of educational resources, with urban public schools receiving more educational resources than rural schools (MoEST 2020; UNESCO, 2020), these findings require in-depth empirical investigations. The unexpectedly strong and differential showings of the two groups of immigrant children indicate the importance of the role of home learning environments, family socioeconomic status and parental beliefs and expectations about education.

In the sub-Saharan region, other studies have reported similar findings (See Ndijuye and Rao 2018, 2019; RTI International 2014; Uwezo 2020). However, from the same region, there are also some contradictory findings (EQUIP Tanzania, 2014; Lewin and Sabates 2012). Accordingly, urban children were better prepared for school than their rural counterparts due to disparities in available educational resources, family SES and improved home learning environments. However, in this region, these findings are contrary to those of Mbagaya (2020) who revealed that urban children were more prepared for primary school than rural children in all the domains of learning examined in that study

Consistent with other studies (Guhn, Milbrath, and Hertzman 2016; Ndijuye and Rao 2018; Reardon and Portilla 2016), we observed a gender divide in school preparedness among and across social groups. Boys significantly outperformed girls even though girls from the urban majority group demonstrated higher school readiness than boys from the rural majority group. While urban children outperformed other population groups, boys

from the self-settled group demonstrated higher school readiness than any other gender group. Although they were from a similar social group and enrolled in the same schools, there was a relatively large difference in school preparedness between boys and girls from the self-settled naturalized citizen group. We were unable to find empirical evidence to explain this disparity.

In the sub-Saharan region, the gender differences in school preparedness could be attributed to existing sociocultural and religious beliefs and practices according to which, given a choice of whom to send to school, parents would rather send boys than girls (Kassahun and Kedir 2006). Further, there is a concern about child labour in most African homes where, after school hours, girls had to assist with domestic chores (Beatrice and Chansa-Kabali 2017) instead of working on their take-home assignments and revision of their school work.

Home and family environments and children's school preparedness

While parents from the urban majority group appeared to be the most supportive, parents with less education among the self-settled naturalized citizens were equally supportive. Compared to children from the urban majority group, children from the self-settled naturalized citizens group were from poorer households, but their school readiness was relatively comparable. These findings indicate the vital role of supportive family and home learning environments in improving children's learning attainments in a context with limited school resources and less qualified teachers (Black et al. 2017; Matafwali and Chansa-Kabali, 2017; Ndiujye, 2020a). This can be critically important for children from immigrant and refugee backgrounds whose language of instruction might be different from their mother tongue (Busch, Buchmüller, and Leyendecker 2021; Nikiema 2011).

The study revealed the decisive role of mastery of language of instruction in children's preparedness for formal schooling. While most of the children from urban and rural majority groups were either monolingual or bilingual, those from self-settled and in-settlement groups were predominantly multilingual. Children from the urban majority group whose first language was Kiswahili, the medium of instruction, demonstrated higher school readiness than their rural counterparts whose mother tongue was a vernacular language. Empirical evidence indicates that children learn better in a language spoken at home (Busch, Buchmüller, and Leyendecker 2021; Nikiema 2011). In a context with limited educational resources, as is the case in Tanzania, children of immigrants and refugees may need to learn and adopt another language as a medium of instruction (Ndiujye and Rao 2018, 2019).

Children from both the self-settled and in-settlement groups, as a combined single group, were significantly more prepared for school than those from the combined urban and rural majority groups. This is an interesting finding given that the urban and rural majority groups were more advantaged than the naturalized citizens groups. However, interview findings revealed variations in parental beliefs and expectations among and across these groups. Available empirical evidence from both developing and developed countries has consistently indicated the critical role of parental beliefs and expectations in children's learning and development (Lahaie 2008; Ndiujye and Rao 2018).

Conclusion and recommendations

Having children in the classroom does not guarantee that they are learning. It could therefore be concluded that children in the self-settled families would continue to face differences in learning attainment unless there are deliberate initiatives to improve their early stimulation and support from parents. Second, parenting programmes for the marginalized groups could make a significant contribution to government and global expectations regarding equity in access and quality of learning experiences for children. While most of the sub-Saharan countries have made very impressive gains in broadening access to PPE services, little is known about the quality of these services and this may be more acute for children of refugee and immigrant backgrounds. This study recommends an intensive analysis of learning attainments for children from various existing groups to find out the extent to which they are receiving quality pre-primary education.

At a pre-primary level, joint efforts by various stakeholders are important for enhancing optimal children's development. We recommend building strong parent-school partnerships, especially among rural, immigrant and refugee populations. The partnership may specifically focus on handling the key issues and challenges faced by children, families and the schools serving these children. We also recommend that more research should focus on cultural practices and parental beliefs especially among immigrant and naturalized citizens. This will inform the development of evidence-based early years policies, which foster child development and learning.

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