

‘Ukijianika Utaanuliwa’¹: Urban Refugees’ Self-identity Formation and Interpersonal Communication during Dar es Salaam Acculturation

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Abstract

The research being reported here examined the self-identity formation and communication in the acculturation of urban-based refugees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Because this refugees’ relationships with the host community are based on their principle of “Ukijianika Utaanuliwa” (If you show yourself, you will be exposed), urban refugees strive to hide their identities during the acculturation process. As they strive to survive in harsh living conditions outside the camps, individuals must work through their identities and develop positive interpersonal contact skills with the host to gain acceptance. Interviews with forty Congolese and Burundian refugees were conducted using targeted group discussions. The respondents acknowledge that establishing effective interpersonal communication mechanisms, individuals must negotiate their identities. The study found that urban refugees in Dar es Salaam grappled with issues of identity, including hiding their true identity, acculturation, social behaviour, and adaptability. Even media consumption helped inform the urban refugees, the present immigration policy does not assist their acculturation through personal communication, hence the need to revisit it and revise it accordingly.

Keywords: *self-identity, acculturation, interpersonal communication, urban refugees, Congo, Burundi*

Introduction

The widespread compulsion in today’s modern culture to personalise one’s life path and, therefore, one’s identity is progressively erasing the concept that collectivist civilizations, including African societies, have been employing to support individual developmental duties within the community. Indeed, as people are now at liberty to choose an increasing number of decisions to do with who they are and the directions their lives should take, they are generally and increasingly embracing their self-identity (Arnett, 2023). Additionally, Mitchell et al. (2021), contends that the development of identity, and by extension, cultural identity formation, have traditionally been individualistic processes allowing a person to navigate through a journey to self-discovery and identification. For refugees, it can have a substantial impact to overlay the frequently complex and dynamic components of national and cultural identity development. This is especially true when circumstances interfere with what is thought to be the normal trajectory of cultural identification during an acculturation period (Mitchell et al, 2021). To find their own identities, refugees must integrate their cultural,

¹ A Kiswahili expression that translates into ‘If you expose yourself, you will be exposed.’

personal, and national values. This process is known as identity formation. After all, challenges adjusting to a new culture often put their sense of self to the test. They may find it increasingly difficult to maintain a positive sense of self because the host culture fosters introspection, self-reflection, and personal growth (Harrell & Wolff, 2023). Tanzania is now home to almost a million refugees, with the most of them being displaced individuals from countries where civil hostilities forced them to flee, particularly, in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), based on government and UNHCR statistics. Currently, an estimated 50 refugees, which represents a small number of refugees allowed to live in Dar es Salaam and survive on their own, still live in camps or settlements in accordance with the current Tanzania government policy (UNHCR Tanzania refugee report 2023).

As soon as they set foot in their new nation, refugees begin the process of assimilating into the people, language, and culture of their new home. Changes that come about in individuals or organizations as a consequence of external forces are part of the process of adapting to a new environment. These changes might happen immediately or gradually (Phinney et al., 2022). Usually, acculturation refers to the changes that individuals and communities experience upon their first-hand interaction with a different culture (Garcia et al., 2020). Such acculturation covers a variety of changes at the group level such as technological, social, cultural, political, and economic ones. Psychological acculturation, or individual-level acculturation, describes how a group member can change in ways that are dissimilar as those of other members in terms of behaviour, values, attitudes, and identity (Garcia et al., 2020). Accordingly, the individualisation of the life course can be a difficult task, even for non-immigrant citizens with only one cultural or ethnic background.

An individual can highly or moderately be acculturated into both the host and refugee groups, or neither, or just one of the two groups, hence resulting in four possible acculturative strategies: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration or biculturalism (Garcia et al., 2020). Regardless of the status, every immigrant treats integration as a means for adjusting to their new surroundings by conserving cultural distinctiveness while blending into the majority population. Assimilation implies that a person or group renounces their cultural identity in order to fit in with the dominant society. People are disconnected when they refuse to cultivate positive intergroup ties and, instead, remain firmly anchored in their own culture. Marginalisation in this case implies not belonging to any social group (Hack et al., 2021).

The ability to communicate with individuals from different background is one of the most important criteria for both a person's personal and professional life in the increasingly globalised and multicultural world (Sousa & Santos, 2019). Additionally, interpersonal communication tends to foster mutual understanding and knowledge sharing among people from disparate socio-cultural backgrounds. In any case, communication is the primary way that individuals from different backgrounds can exchange information and build socio-cultural ties, claim Peng & Wu, (2019). In interpersonal communication, the stranger looks seek the group's safety when there was no a clear definition of the issue. They also consult it for confirmation and information regarding the characteristics of the strange and new surroundings. As a result, urban refugees in Dar es Salaam in their acculturation process are

considered on the basis of how they interact with their hosts and hence the slogan “*Ukijianika Utaanuliwa*” (If you show yourself, you will be exposed), which constitutes a grounding strategy regarding how they keep adjusting their style of interpersonal communication with others. People that belong to the same national group end up strangers because others perceive them as foreigners. This foreign members tend to influence one another’s perceptions of the unfamiliar environment. Because of their comparable circumstances, the group of strangers may provide each other with a believable social reality (Peng & Wu, 2019). To improve their interpersonal communication link, co-national social networks offer a sense of safety, acceptance, and a possibility for group affirmation of the strange surroundings. The co-national network also provides refugees a strong sense of anchoring to a larger community, which helps to retain identity constancy in the face of discontinuity and change.

Since they are susceptible to a variety of dangerous situations that could endanger their safety while residing in Dar es Salaam, this study explored how urban refugees’ self-identity acculturation develops and its influence on how they formulate and sustain interpersonal communication during the acculturation process. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to answer three research questions: (i) How do urban refugees in Dar es Salaam adjust their self-identity acculturation? (ii) How do urban refugees in Dar es Salaam relate to their social networks? (iii) How does local media consumption set pace of interpersonal communication of urban refugees in Dar es Salaam?

Literature Review

The literature reviewed here will look into how the urban refugees develop and navigate their identities in the process of acculturation, will also look into two main facilitators which is media and social adaptation. The literature will finally look into interpersonal communication and how the urban refugees develops it in the process of acculturating in Dar es Salaam.

Urban refugee Self-Identity Acculturation

Usually, concerns and decisions related to city development and the attitudes of hosts regarding migration significantly influence the challenges that immigrant groups contend with during the process of acculturating in urban areas. Yang et al. (2022) allude to evident distinctions between industrial areas, transport and infrastructure systems, market economies, and the size of social networks that set rural and urban places apart as separate cultural settings. Implicitly, the rural-to-urban movement signifies how the acculturation process entails adjusting to a new civic setting that encompasses diverse socio-economic, and cultural circumstances. However, O’Loughlen and McWilliams (2017) assert that most of the urban refugees in Tanzania were not allowed to work in the formal sector and coexisted in poor living conditions in informal settlements with Tanzanians. The urban refugees in Dar es Salaam were aware that it was going to be difficult to adapt to an environment of struggle to fend for themselves because of tension accompanying the acculturation process. Rudolf (2022), contends that structured support services provided in camps and designated settlements were frequently inaccessible to urban refugees. Such refugees must, therefore, find alternative forms of support and social networks to live in cities when they were cut off from official humanitarian assistance networks.

Urban refugees work on developing their identities to blend in and survive in cities when they arrive from camps or directly from outside borders. However, the reality of refugees' lives quickly disproves the notion that they were helpless, obedient victims of abuse. Large populations of refugees reside in many African cities, as noted in Jonathan Bascom's (1995) article "The New Nomads." As a result, one of the main issues refugees today face is their assimilation into urban life, which is still mostly unstudied and little understood. Even though these migrants relocate to metropolitan regions as individuals, they later adjust their identities once more in response to the urban environment. Lalli (1992) created the notion of "urban identity" in general by examining the self-concept via a social-psychological framework. Lalli holds further that the complex relationship between an individual's self and their urban surroundings contributes to their overall sense of self, which serves as the foundation for their personal growth during the process of acculturation. The five facets of identity connected to cities serve as an operationalisation of the notion of urban identity. The first step of evaluation entails comparing one's community with others to identify what makes it unique. The town's tie to the person's personal history constitutes continuity, a sense of belonging is called attachment; the perception of familiarity with the town is known as familiarity; and the resolve to remain in the person's future is known as commitment (Lalli 1992). In other words, when refugees arrive in urban areas they tend to stay in places where they have some connection linked to their fellow refugees' friends with whom they have developed a bond.

How an immigrant develops one's sense of self during the acculturation process is greatly influenced by the fact that they are moving in with someone from a different cultural background. Several academics support this theory by pointing out that for a variety of reasons, such as speaking the same language, belonging to a similar culture or religion, or for other reasons, the host society is more tolerant of specific immigrant groups that are economically advantageous to their community. Conversely, less well-liked immigrants, such as refugees, are more strongly associated with negative stereotypes. They are perceived as rival groups vying for the same social resources and as a burden on the social services system, a cause of instability, or a threat to the host society's culture (Schmitz & Schmitz, 2022). The process of acculturation does not only focus on behaviour and language, but also on identity that reproduces the way urban refugees identify themselves in order to formulate modality of adaptation in the new culture.

Urban refugees' views tend to determine the adaptation tactics towards both their host culture and their culture of origin, in accordance with Berry's (2019) acculturation paradigm. Their concealment of their identities to fit in with the new culture and win over the hosts' acceptance is based on these beliefs. Relocating to a new community, however, may interfere with the process of building a cultural self and identity for urban exiles. Individuals' sense of self is strongly shaped by the society in which they are brought up. Evidently, affiliation with a certain cultural group shapes a person's self-identity, which explains why refugees tend to settle in the same areas. As a result, they identify as, for example, Congolese or Burundian. When someone moves to a new culture, they change many aspects of who they are to integrate experiences and information from that new setting.

Facilitators of Acculturation Identity

Media Consumption

The link between immigrants' media consumption and acculturation has been the subject of several immigration studies which aim to provide light on how immigrants identify with and adapt to their new culture. Hoewe et al. (2020) revealed that immigrants use American media to learn about their new home as well as to lessen cultural uncertainty and emotional unease. Although there are many different ways for immigrants to become used to their new culture, including friends, family, and coworkers, Li, and Shao (2023) contend that one very effective and pervasive way is through the mainstream media.

Mass media communication behaviours have an equal, if not greater, impact on people who are just beginning the process of adapting to a new culture. These individuals are less familiar with the new culture, and have less interaction with people in the host country who speak a language they are not fluent in. Traveling from one's familiar, home environment with its own culture, to a foreign one governed by another person might provide terrifying moments in some situations. It can also be a heady sensation that gives rise to the thrill of transgression. Urban refugees frequently struggle with a wide range of concerns, including psychological difficulties, difficulties in adjusting to the immaculate environment, and difficulties in adjusting to the new society and culture (Berry, 2019).

Furthermore, refugees in urban areas need a large quantity of information to help them settle in their new surroundings, from job search to the relationship building, which starts with how they identify themselves wherever they go. Yet, in an unfamiliar environment that are still strange; they tend to consider information in media that they cannot find elsewhere. Immigrants now highly rely on media to learn more about various cultural issues on the countries that they reside for them to know how to relate and survive. Commonly, the nature of the messages transmitted through media in its diverse forms can affect the overall societal attitudes, which in turn can affect how people perceive issues. For example, Khalimzoda and Siitonen (2022) have recently underscored the need to examine how immigrants use of mediums in the acculturation process.

The Use and Gratification theory best explains how people consume media in their day-to-day activities. According to Kasirye (2022), the theory includes three main assumptions: first, an initiative-taking audience that seeks out the media to meet its wants; second, the audience chooses which media content to absorb. The third various media compete to meet the wants of their audiences (Buf & Stefanita, 2020). This idea demonstrates how the media are viewed as active users, and thus have an impact on the mass communication process. According to several experts, the audience's use of media is governed by their own wants, with the aim of having their requirements met by the type of information they desire (Gieske, 2019).

The greatest explanation for how individuals utilise the media in their daily lives is evident in the Use and Gratification hypothesis. Three basic presumptions underpin Lin's (1999) theory of usage and pleasure. The first is a proactive audience that looks to the media to fulfil its needs. The second is that media content is selected by the audience to be consumed. The third is that media outlets compete to satisfy their consumers' needs (Kasirye, 2022). This theory

illustrates how the media are perceived as active participants in the process of mass communication. Numerous experts assert that the audience's usage of media is determined by their own needs, with the goal of having the information they seek satisfy their requirements (Gieske, 2019). The greatest explanation for how individuals use media in their daily lives is provided by the Use and Gratification hypothesis.

The above presumptions support the position that the audience's usage of media is determined by their own needs, with the goal of having the information they seek satisfy their requirements. Furthermore, Gieske (2019) demonstrated how the impact of mass media surpasses the duration of the day in the acculturation process, so demonstrating how it impacts acculturation.

As many immigrants find it difficult to engage and communicate with the host, according to Briandana et al. (2021), many of them usually turn to the mass media as a substitute for interpersonal contact because it is virtual and constitutes a useful tool for acclimatising to the culture and language of the recipient. Throughout their process of acculturation, these immigrants use the media to learn about their new cultural surroundings (Sui, 2022). Researchers such as Scherman et al. (2022) examined the functionalist view of the media with respect to cross-cultural adjustment as a means of gaining the communication skills required for constructive social engagement in a new culture using a variety of media-sourced data to bolster this opinion. In this regard, Portes and Rumbaut (2024) contend that publicity from the host country's media information provides immigrants with a wider range of cultural fundamentals that facilitate adaptation to their unfamiliar environment. These researchers found that the language employed in a variety of programmes and media aids immigrants in learning acculturation instructions, which in turn helps them adjust to their new surroundings. Additionally, it also shows that immigrants always turn to the media for information about their daily lives. This empirical evidence demonstrates that one uses the media of the nation in which they are live to assist in achieving a higher degree of socio-cultural change and to promote increased engagement with members of the new culture (Yu & Gupta, 2019).

The Uses and Gratifications theory might provide an explanation for the increasing usage of local media by urban migrants in their new community, since their acculturation process is aided by the satisfaction they receive. People actively engage in mass media consumption and interact with communication media by creating profile groups of connected uses and, preferably, correlated gratifications. This is a basic tenet of the U&G theory (Luo, 2002). This theory, which helps characterise the motivations and goals of media use for different individuals, originated from the functionalist perspective on mass media communication (Krishna & Agrawal, 2023). This theory simplifies the comprehension of how audiences utilise the media to fulfil their unique needs, motivations for using media, and behaviours.

Social behaviour and adaptation

A supportive social network may be found in five main settings: a community, a family, a place of worship, or regular activities, as cited by Rudolf, (2022). In this connection, Mann's (2008) findings established that among Tanzanian youth refugees living in metropolitan areas,

having close peer relationships was a major source of support. When they must fend for themselves, refugees encounter challenges in acclimatising to the host country and learning about the range of experiences and opportunities that await them. Because they are from different countries, it can be challenging for them to adjust to a new community, which affects not only their psychological well-being but also their ability to survive in Dar es Salaam. In other words, refugees in Dar es Salaam experience some acculturative stress. Galli (2022) asserts that consistent social support can lessen stress. Peer support has been shown to lessen the stress of acculturation, which is linked to anxiety and depression in urban refugees.

Sullivan (2015) argues that even though there is a negative correlation between social support and acculturative stress, there is also a positive correlation between social encouragement and a reduced likelihood of acculturative stress. Some studies show that host countries could ease acculturative stress because they could advise and support immigrants on local cultural norms and expectations (Koo & Yun, 2021). Going one step further, Zhang and Goodson (2011) found sadness and the difficulties of cultural adaptation to be moderated and mediated by social engagement with host nationals. Utilising their unique and multi-ethnic strengths allows urban refugees to manage stress as they adapt to a new cultural setting. A person's ability to adjust to a new culture is influenced by their level of acculturation. In Dar es Salaam, urban migrants also find social support helpful.

Following their arrival in the urban area, refugees might not construct adequate network of co-national support to meet their numerous social adjustment needs. Concentrating on the nature of personal links, network analysis can link the space between a person and the collective level of social life networks that affect individuals. Zhaoyang and Martire (2021) established basic properties of the kinship component in a network concern and obligation, and aid for personal problems and ceremonies that tend to create a strong social support bond. The general foundation of friendship is an agreement that is manifested in available voluntary social activities. Whether they come to the urban area alone or with a spouse, there is a need for frequent interaction with co-nationals; moreover, the initial (strong or weak) motivation to begin trying actively to integrate socially with members of the host country where they reside is a crucial determinant.

Significantly, empirical literature has established various 'interactional' characteristics that refer to the nature of social interaction bonds. According to Pilisuk and Minkler (1980), the strength of ties as a combination of factors such as tenacity, emotional strength of the ties, the anticipation of their durability and availability, and the degree of closeness or disclosing which occurs during the exchanges. These factors also account for differences in relationships among the people whose combination also determine the overall strength of the ties. The quality of network ties, likewise, refers to the meanings that the urban refugees attach to their relationships with the host communities. Oh et al. (2023) points out that social networks, such as social support groups, supply individuals with diverse information, including knowledge that they are loved and cared for and, valued and respected, and that they are a part of a network of communication and shared responsibility. Moreover, urban refugees in east Africa have turned to religious communities for support to get material assistance, spiritual guidance, and emotional support (Tippens, 2020).

Scholars concur that the process of acclimating to a new country can also be difficult for urban refugees, with social connections and friendship playing a pivotal role in helping them with their cross-cultural transitions and adjustments (Chen et al., 2021). In these transitions, social networking facilitates interaction and interactions with others. Meanwhile, building social relationships requires both cultural modelling and conversation, other studies have employed the social capital hypothesis to examine how students form and sustain social relationships (e.g. Bethel et al., 2020). Furthermore, social capital, which gives students easier access to knowledge and supports them in fortifying their social identities, correlates with the worth of resources in social network linkages and facilitates the process of acculturation (Chen et al., 2021).

Interpersonal Communication and Adaptation

According to Ward et al. (2020), the functional model of friendship network holds that urban refugees strive to form three types of social relationships: co-national, multinational, and host national. In the model, friends originating from the same country are 'co-national friends', multinational friends are 'other friends', and friends from the host country 'host national' buddies. In this regard, the urban refugees can build close bonds with their co-national peers and, to a lesser extent, with their multinational peers. Their interactions with the host country's citizens, conversely, tends to be a little more remote and instrumental. Interpersonal communication justifies people's behaviour or facilitates character prediction based on psychological facts derived from how well people know someone and how tied that person is to the external roles. As connections evolve through time, according to the social penetration hypothesis, self-disclosure progresses in depth and breadth (Gyollai, 2022).

Such models of social interactions have implications for the spatial sorting of persons and activities. This viewpoint is based on theory of social penetration as cited by Zhang et al. (2023), which contends that as relationships progress, people move from relatively low degrees of self-revelation to more intimate ones. This viewpoint demonstrates that in long-term relationships, people tend to expose more of themselves, particularly their sentiments. Tomas et al. (2020) further argues that only one's revelation provides access to a human being's inner thoughts and secrets. which is critical in developing and maintaining a connection among social members and in cultivating stronger social networking ties. In this regard utilising an interpersonal communication device differs from being exposed to the media since these are social relationships between individuals who socialise because they can relate to each other and understand their behaviours while conversing (Son & Feng, 2019). As people's interpersonal communication improves, the lines between them blur, both in terms of the tasks they must complete and the numerous services they provide to users. As a result, a growing mass of communication with a closed circle of ties foreshadows the strengthening of trustful relationships rather than the formation of new open associates. Interpersonal interactions among refugees from diverse cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities also help them to learn some new cultural information in addition to improving their communication skills. As noted by Pistorino (2020), the ability to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds is a crucial talent in both public and private life. Moreover, Pope et al. (2019) proffer that, enhancing the fruitful relations with people from diverse backgrounds would

prompt urban refugees possess several amicable manners and skills, such as tolerance and communication competencies.

Also, interpersonal communication is the most vital requirement for survival in the urban areas in the lives of refugees, particularly those who live in a multicultural environment. In this regard, interpersonal communication paves the way for individuals to establish friendships and expand their social relationships. Friendships and social relations among individuals can help them develop lasting interpersonal interactions aimed to boost their interpersonal communication competencies. Such interpersonal interactions occur because of the relationship among individuals resulting from their collaboration (Sarwari, 2019). Moreover, interpersonal communication competency is the main requirement for individuals to enjoy successful interpersonal interactions as it also helps individuals to have effective and well-organised interactions (Tostune et al., 2021). Interpersonal interactions among individuals from different societies affect their psychological well-being and functional fitness. Furthermore, an effectual interpersonal communication competence improves the quality and performance of relationships among people (Thumiki, 2019).

The strong link between urban refugees' intercultural communication with the host society, perceptual complexity, and cheerful outlook appears to confirm Berger and Calabrese's theory of interpersonal communication (1975). Berger and Calabrese stressed the importance of cognitive "uncertainty" in describing the evolution of interpersonal interactions from the beginning. According to this hypothesis, significant ambiguity, such as the inability to explain and anticipate one's own and others' behaviour, encourages communication, and less uncertainty about the communication's outcome, in turn, enhances liking (Literat, 2020). Communication is vital in the acculturation and adaptation of refugees for all the people in the socialisation process. Kim conceptualised this process as the theory of cross-cultural adaptation. She argued that interpersonal communication with the host nationals enabled immigrants to adapt to a new society. The theory highlights the process of learning communication skills for adaptation into a new culture. Studies have further revealed that communication plays a pivotal role in people's adaptation and acculturation to the new culture (Kim, 2017). Communication, as the main factor in the cross-cultural adjustment process, enable people to interact with others from another culture since it significantly influences their behavioural practices. The three main themes of personal communication are the ability to communicate in the local language, adaptive motivation, and flexibility. In short, personal communication when these three variables get together facilitates their adaption of foreign cultures. As such, it is important to consider people's overall capacity to encode and decode appropriately the hosts' information capable of helping them easily adjust to the host environment and navigate through the harsh survival conditions (Kim, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this study aimed to address the current gap in the literature on personal communication and acculturation among urban-based refugees from neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi. Its purpose was to explore how older and younger Burundian and Congolese urban-based refugees formulate self-identity in their acculturation process in Dar es Salaam and its impact on their interpersonal communication with the host communities. This study, therefore, aimed to address the primary obstacle of

social integration between the urban refugees and the host. The findings could inform policy formulation to foster an environment where the elusive but equally important components of social acceptance, cultural tolerance, and respect for human dignity are a reality for urban-based refugees in Tanzania.

Method

From May to October of 2023, this study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. To develop positive interpersonal communication skills with the host, the study explored how urban refugees, specifically Burundian and Congolese refugees construct their identities and handle their interpersonal communication skills while acculturating in Dar es Salaam. The study used conversational multiple-case interviews (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998) to gather information from the refugees in the form of focused discussions. During an interactive process, questions from one interview are based on the responses from earlier conversational interviews. The author's prior research on refugee interviews led to the selection of the domains of self-identity, social networks, interpersonal communication, and media. These domains were significant. Since the researcher is an immigrant in Tanzania, the Congolese and Burundian urban refugees perceived her in a similar light as they (urban refugees and the researcher) both have "migrant" status and must navigate interpersonal communication skills to build positive relationships with the host community members as part of their acculturation process. The researcher's previous involvement in an outreach programme and fluency in Kiswahili helped her establish a strong bond with urban refugees. Despite relying on a research assistant for interviews, her fluency in Kiswahili helped her build rapport and earn trust. The article maintains participant anonymity, leaving specific places and organisations anonymous.

The primary interviewees were specifically selected based on their residency in Dar es Salaam, refugee status, and nationality. In the case of nationality, the participants were to be Burundian or Congolese. The study used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants. This sampling method had been applied to earlier research involving urban Congolese refugees in east Africa (Tippens, 2017), and NGO sources found it to be a suitable recruiting technique to reach additional urban refugees residing in Dar es Salaam without proper paperwork. The participants were selected through the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) called Dignity Kwanza and Redesso. These presently assist refugees by providing them with necessary support. The two local NGOs helped identify participants comprising fathers, mothers, and young people. The researcher had also previously worked with these NGOs during an outreach programme.

The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 60, they had all lived in Dar es Salaam for more than two years. A combination of adult and youth urban refugees made up the participants. Every interview was conducted in Kiswahili. The first part of the interview was to establish rapport through introductions, outlining the research, and providing enough time for the questions to be answered. This explanation, which was taken from Glesne and Peshkin (2015) addressed the goals of the study, the methodology, data ownership, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity concerns (Logan, 2023). After the initial introductions, the

study collected background data such as the length of stay in Dar es Salaam. The interview's major body came after this. The duration of the six group of interviews, including the rapport-building phase, was one to one and a half hours. The findings are presented thematically with a reflection on the setting of the urban refugees' acculturation in Dar es Salaam, utilising the processes covered in the introductory literature (Urban Refugee Self-identity Acculturation, Mass Media, Social behaviours, Interpersonal Communication).

Ethical considerations

The research project was approved by both the Tanzania Refugee Department and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained ahead of the discussions. To verify that the interview questions were acceptable, a pre-interview discussion was held with NGOs that support urban migrants. Once permission was obtained, the objectives, limitations, and possible uses of the study were all understood. Forty of the participants expressed readiness to participate in the conference room of the NGO offices. Participants were compensated for missing events with 10,000 Tanzanian shillings (4 USD) following the interview.

Urban Refugee Self-Identity Acculturation

The findings suggest that because refugees face numerous risky situations during their process of acculturation, they frequently create a new identity that they utilise to describe who they are. Even though the acculturation literature frequently only examines two identities, the host and the immigrant, and the process of adaptation with relation to those two cultures, a person's sense of self might significantly benefit from this third identity. The following are some of the evidential statements that urban refugees provided on what helps them create their own self-identity as they acculturate in Dar es Salaam:

R1: *In the neighbourhood where we live, when they first find out that you are a refugee, they look down on you. They treat a refugee as a dog, as a person who is not suitable. So, I just introduce myself as a human being just like anyone else without going into details about my originality.*

R2: *In fact, even there are Tanzanians at the beginning I was afraid to introduce myself to them. At first, if you say a word, they follow up to find out who you are, until they go to the area chief to say something bad about you. That is where I learnt the concept of 'Ukijianika Utaanuliwa' (If you expose yourself, you will be exposed), hence this made me to always be cautious whenever someone asked who I was. I would respond to what she or he is looking for from me to avoid creating room for more interrogation regarding my identity.*

R3: *I don't know how I can describe the issue of self-identification because Tanzania has had a long-term peace, and many people are born here and have never been to foreign countries. If you tell someone that I am a refugee, he sees that you are a murderer because he heard that Congo is killing each other, Burundi is killing each other, Rwanda is the same, something like this. They see a refugee as a killer. As I said, even to those who are educated it's difficult for*

them to understand you being a refugee. Someone once asked me, are you a Burundian? I responded by saying Yes. He answered by saying refugees, Mr. mischief, when he has not seen anything with that mischief that I have done. Do you see this?"

Behavioural and identity dimensions as observed from these respondents are all included in the process of acculturation. The identities that emerge from the progression of acculturation represent different levels of pride and satisfaction with the host culture. In consequence, urban refugees' adaptation tactics are determined by their views towards both their host culture and their culture of origin, as per Berry's acculturation model (Phinney et al., 2022).

Use of Media

The information that the urban refugees obtain from reliable sources such as the mass media is one of the ways through which migrants reportedly build and develop their identity. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2024), news coverage of the host nation provides immigrants with a wider variety of cultural elements that can aid their adjustment to their new environment. Studies also show that the amount of media exposure of immigrants in their new country might indicate how adaptive they would be (Ramasubramanian & Saleem, 2017). The respondents' responses, which state the following, also support these study findings:

R1: *We prefer social media channels because they help us to keep up to par with current news about gossip in Tanzania as that is what sets the tone of communication with our hosts so that we are on the same page as the host when we are discussing issues".*

R2 *"In the morning I listen to the BBC, Radio One, and Nipashe. In Nipashe it covers everyone, be it Congo, Kenya, Burundi or Rwanda, if there is something to talk about you must find it in Nipashe. If you want to know about this area of ours".*

R3: *"I want to know what is happening especially in Congo; the kind of situation our country is in. I want to know the news, today there is something, or here in Tanzania, I want to know what is going on. This is other people's country, you have to know what is going on. You're not just sleeping. For instance, in the past, at Gongo la Mboto here in Dar es Salaam, bombs exploded. I was in my house unaware. I woke up in the morning and found people lying on the ground with bare chests. I was very shocked. I wondered what had happened. They asked me, why I didn't hear last night, the bombs were exploding? That's why I really like to follow up on the news to know what's going on so that I can inform my fellow refugees who are living here in Dar es Salaam"*

The way urban refugees utilise media confirms what other researches have shown about the role that media consumption plays in the process of acculturation, conducted with different populations and in different circumstances (Yau et al, 2020; Li & Shao, 2023). These

researchers confirm that immigrants intentionally expose themselves to the media, in order to obtain information and aid in their acculturation to new environments. As a result, immigrants alter their social identity, perceptions, and behaviour.

Social Behaviour and Adaptation

The way urban refugees behave in Dar es Salaam with regard to participating in community events has a beneficial impact on their process of building self-identity in the acculturation process. Formal community participation, according to researchers such as Ji et al. (2019), and Zhang et al. (2023), is when an immigrant engages in planned activities, focusing on the interaction between an individual and a group, whereas informal social engagement is related to the interaction between individuals. They discovered that, particularly for marginalised groups like refugees, informal engagement has been demonstrated to have an impact on the development of a sense of security, belonging, and social adaptation (Zhang et al., 2023). The following are some of the testimonies that explain the social behaviour of the respondents, which aid their adaption process in Dar es Salaam:

***R1:** Like me, starting from home I usually cooperate with all people, where I live, it's on the road, not inside, it's 50 m away, but when you get at the bus station, if you ask my name, even a young child will take you to my house”.*

***R2:** For example, for me where I stay, I make sure I co-exist with people well, because for Tanzanians if you want to live well with them, just follow their social behaviour. For instance, when I shut myself up inside, my hosts who are my neighbours will be afraid. They start asking themselves, why hasn't she woken up? Why is she still inside? This clearly shows they are caring people, and hence it also means I should love them as well.*

These statements are consistent with Wen and Hanley (2016) who found that meeting the immediate needs of migrants constituted the primary purpose of community participation. This group of urban refugees in Dar es Salaam reported needing to feel like they belong to the local community for effective acculturation to occur. Apparently, the illustrative answers from the participants highlight the advantages that Dar es Salaam's urban refugees experience when they establish positive relationships with their hosts, and so foster a conducive environment amenable for their process of adaptation and acculturation.

Interpersonal Communication

In daily life, interpersonal communication serves a number of functions, including enabling people to establish and mould their self-concepts, make life decisions, share information with others, and express thoughts and emotions through communication. The acquisition of communicative ability by these urban refugees is symptomatic of their acculturation as well as beneficial for all elements of cultural adaption. Hence, the level at which they adapt to the host community's culture largely depends on their interpersonal communication processes. The following response exemplifies how careful these urban refugees are in avoiding misinterpreting anything when speaking with members of the host community:

R1: *On my part, I have to try and find a way to hide my identity so that I can go on along with them in our conversations. For example, when they ask me who I am I always say that I am from Bukoba because of my natural look which they quickly agree to as I resemble people who hail from that region.*

R2: *Even for best friends we live by not trusting any of the friends that we have. There might be a day when anything may happen and you quarrel. They may decide to look for a certain type of person and get a certain amount or a certain gift and disclose your information. There is no trusting anyone, so even if it is a best friend, you will not tell them everything about yourself.*

R3: *At my place of work where I am selling cigarettes, biscuits, water, and consumables in small, quantities, many times, people meet there and when they start to communicate issues in regard to refugees, I refrain from participating in such conversations as I might end up being emotional about it hence destroy our interpersonal communication.*

The communication patterns of the urban refugees indicate that the adaptive modifications that have already occurred during the process of acculturation, notably, because acculturation is a continual process that one must continue undergoing while residing in an urban region. Implicitly, the connections between the concepts in the model are fluid rather than fixed. In this regard, interpersonal communication is a method of social interaction that entails conveying messages effectively and clearly with full openness and honesty so that it affects performance. Moreover, communication is a fundamental component of social interaction. As social beings, humans communicate information intentionally or unintentionally, directly, or indirectly about thoughts and perceptions (Dorrance & Scharp, 2021).

Overall, the research shows how in the absence of an appropriate immigration policy capable of helping migrants acclimatise with the host community and adjust accordingly to a stable and safe environment as part of the acculturation urban refugees end up suffering. Evidential statements allude to the absence of such a policy, which forced some of the respondents to hide their refugee status and identity. Gruber (2023) asserts that the implementation of local integration programmes and regulations for migrants is a critical function of local governments. These regulations might cover language and social behaviour, equitable access to opportunities and services for immigrants, cooperation with anti-discrimination campaigns through NGOs, and the application of specialised conflict resolution methods in multicultural communities. This study has also reaffirmed Berry's conceptual framework's value as a typical methodology for comprehending acculturation processes that follow migration across borders. Thus, the study suggests that effective handling of social adaptation difficulties pertaining to urban refugees, consideration should be given to topics and decisions impacted by the host communities, beginning at the level of authority, rather than focusing solely on the migrants' preference for acculturation.

Conclusion

Even though studies on the acculturation experiences of urban migrants are conducted globally, localised ones, particularly in the context of Tanzania are rare. The contribution of this study, therefore, is to our understanding of the degree of acculturation of refugees residing in urban areas by considering the identity and interpersonal communication elements. Many studies have tended to focus on refugees based in the rural areas, who level in camps separated from the local communities. Based on the findings of the current study, it is apparent that by devising effective psychological support strategies, relevant governments, and organisations, such as the UNHCR can help mitigate the effects of acculturation stress on refugees who have been authorised to remain outside the camps and opt to live in urban centres. After all, as this study partially demonstrates many of the refugees in urban areas go through some degree of acculturation stress, not only because they move to a new place that can be difficult for people from other nations but also because of the sensitive nature of their refugee status that tends to affect their personal communication vital in cross-acculturation. As a result, they suffer not only in terms of their emotional health but also their ability to adapt in the host urban communities.

Acknowledgment

This research has been conducted with support from the International Development Research Centre's Research Chair on Forced Displacement at University of Dar es Salaam.

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