JRIIE Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education
Center for Research Implications & Practice

Website: www.jriiejournal.com ISSN 2520-7504 (Online) Vol.10, Iss.4, 2026 (pp. 1202 - 1213)

Assessing Socio-Cultural Decision-Making Patterns Among Secondary School Students in Dodoma Region, Tanzania

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Abstract: *Decision-making is recognized as a vital cognitive function for adolescent development and responsible citizenship, however empirical research examining how socio-cultural environments and school contexts shape these competencies in developing nations like Tanzania remains scarce. In this regard, this study investigates the development and patterns of socio-cultural decision-making among secondary school students in the Dodoma Region, specifically focusing on Dodoma Urban and Kongwa Districts. Adopting a concurrent mixed-methods design, the study examined a total of 168 participants, comprising 4 head teachers, 16 secondary school teachers, and 148 students. Student participants (n = 148) were selected using systematic random sampling across four purposively chosen schools. Data were collected through questionnaires incorporating the General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) inventory. Data were processed via SPSS to compute descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means. The findings indicate that students' decision-making behaviors and patterns are significantly influenced by a combination of personal, social, and contextual factors, demonstrating diverse cognitive and intuitive approaches to real-world choices. Ultimately, the study provides actionable empirical insights to guide educational stakeholders, curriculum developers, and policymakers in fostering essential decision-making competencies among secondary school students to meet the demands of a dynamic global society.*

Keywords: *Decision-making, Socio-cultural factors, Adolescents, Secondary education,*

How to cite this work (APA):

Kagali, G. & Opanga, D. (2026). Assessing Socio-Cultural Decision-Making Patterns Among Secondary School Students in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education, 10(4), 1202 – 1213. https://doi.org/10.59765/yf5

1. Introduction

Decision-making serves as a fundamental pillar of formal education and represents a central cognitive function driving human behavior (Roger, 2022). Everyday choices are frequently guided by subconscious, automatic intuition or gut feelings, which individuals typically rationalize after the fact (Marc & Kart, 2022). Conversely, complex scenarios demand deliberate, analytical reflection. Kahneman (2019) conceptualizes this dichotomy through two distinct cognitive pathways: an intuitive, rapid system and a deliberate, analytical system that relies on conscious reasoning, systematic evaluation of alternatives, and structured judgment. Fundamentally, decision-making involves choosing a preferred action from available options based on established criteria, reflecting an intricate blend of emotional, cognitive, and situational dynamics.

This cognitive process plays a critical role in overall human development. Initial choices in a given context often dictate subsequent behavioral patterns (Webb & Sheeran, 2021). Cultivating strong decision-making capabilities

empowers learners to navigate negative peer pressure, build social competence, deepen self-awareness, and critically evaluate the downstream consequences of their actions (Mincemoyer & Perkins, 2023). Furthermore, sound decision-making supports goal formulation, emotional regulation, and ethical reasoning, which are essential for integrity in positions of responsibility. Consequently, educational systems carry a vital mandate to foster rational, ethically grounded, and socially accountable decision-makers.

In the contemporary era, rational decision-making has emerged as an indispensable competency for students navigating an increasingly complex global landscape. Modern learners require logical and coherent problem-solving frameworks to address emerging societal and global challenges effectively (Barbara et al., 2020). Decision-making proficiency develops through a continuous interplay between lifelong personal growth and social influences. Adolescents equipped with robust decision-making abilities demonstrate greater resilience against peer pressure, enhanced risk management, refined communication skills, and superior emotional regulation, ultimately leading to heightened social responsibility and self-awareness (Wills, 2019; Barbara et al., 2020).

Adolescence represents a critical developmental window for refining these decision-making competencies. By age fifteen, students are generally expected to demonstrate functional decision-making capacity (Mann et al., 2019). Nevertheless, applying rational decision-making during emotionally charged or high-stress situations remains challenging for many adolescents due to ongoing neurodevelopment, biological age, sleep variations, and evolving emotional self-regulation (O'Brien, 2009). Although adolescents are regularly confronted with pivotal lifestyle and career choices, limited impulse control and lack of experience can compromise sound judgment.

Decision-making can be defined as selecting an optimal solution from multiple possibilities following a rigorous evaluation of each alternative (Beyth-Marom & Fischhoff, 2017). Various theoretical frameworks highlight how developmental and contextual factors shape adolescent choices. For example, adolescents often encounter difficulties in accurately estimating potential risks versus benefits or objectively evaluating information (Mann et al., 2017). These variations are further mediated by cultural orientations, such as individualism and collectivism, which determine the degree to which personal choices are influenced by communal or familial expectations. Thus, adolescent decision-making competencies must be evaluated within their specific socio-cultural environments.

On a global scale, educational authorities increasingly recognize the necessity of embedding decision-making skills within formal curricula to prepare students for active, responsible citizenship (Schuerholz-Lehr, 2017). Despite this recognition, empirical research on educational decision-making remains sparse, particularly within developing nations, as much of the existing literature on socio-cultural influences originates from high-income contexts (Berry et al., 2017; Fischhoff, 2018). In Turkey, decision-making was embedded as a core competency in the 2005 national curricula across subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Turkish (MEB, 2008). However, direct learning outcomes aligned with this skill were minimal, and subsequent 2018 curriculum revisions further reduced its presence to a few subjects, such as Human Rights, Citizenship Education, and Social Studies. A similar trend is evident in Kenya, where national curricula feature minimal explicit integration of decision-making competencies (Kowot, 2017).

In Tanzania, a review commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2019) evaluated citizenship-related curriculum implementation. The review revealed that while curriculum frameworks aligned with broad national educational goals, their integration of cross-curricular competencies varied significantly, with none explicitly incorporating socio-cultural decision-making skills. Critics argue that the Tanzanian education system struggles to adequately equip learners with essential 21st-century capabilities such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and responsible decision-making needed to navigate modern socio-economic challenges (Mushi & Mauki, 2022).

Ultimately, effective decision-making across diverse cultural environments relies on applying socially and culturally attuned reasoning, as cultural values directly shape how individuals interpret experiences and execute choices. Concerns regarding the adequacy of socio-cultural decision-making skills among Tanzanian secondary school students highlight the need for targeted investigation (Mushi & Mauki, 2022). Addressing this gap, the current study investigates the development of socio-cultural decision-making competencies among secondary school students in the Dodoma Region, aiming to generate empirical insights to inform curriculum design and pedagogical practices for an increasingly dynamic, globalized society.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Educators, researchers, and policymakers widely acknowledge that fostering decision-making skills in students is essential for tackling global priorities such as peacebuilding, gender equality, and sustainable

coexistence (Mushi & Mauki, 2022). Competence in decision-making empowers individuals to make ethical, well-informed, and culturally grounded choices that drive both personal advancement and national development. In Bulgaria, for instance, young people have a long-standing tradition of participating in domestic and international efforts, playing a pivotal role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (Ayoub, 2020). These instances highlight how decision-making can empower youth to act as engaged citizens. However, questions persist regarding whether Tanzanian adolescents share comparable decision-making proficiencies and whether gender dynamics influence how these competencies develop and function locally.

Existing literature highlights a distinct deficiency in understanding how cultural elements influence student decision-making behaviors in Tanzania. Although prior investigations by Mushi and Mauki (2022) and Ayoub (2020) examined links between culture and decision-making, their emphasis was predominantly on broader community or social frameworks rather than the school environment, which serves as the primary hub for formal education and value acquisition. For instance, Ayoub (2020) observed that adolescents with strong decision-making skills tend to achieve higher academic success, solve problems more effectively, and exhibit prosocial conduct. Nevertheless, the mechanisms by which these skills form within educational settings or how they are shaped by socio-cultural expectations, traditions, and gender roles—remain largely unexplored, creating an intellectual gap in tracking this developmental progression into adulthood.

Ultimately, while the significance of decision-making for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship is well established, empirical data on how these competencies are cultivated among secondary school students in Tanzania remain scarce. In particular, research has yet to thoroughly examine teacher perspectives on socio-cultural decision-making development or potential gender-based variations in student capabilities. Addressing these theoretical and practical gaps, this study investigates the development of socio-cultural decision-making skills among secondary students in the Dodoma Region, aiming to generate actionable empirical evidence to guide future educational policies and curriculum reforms in Tanzania.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Situated Learning Theory (SLT), which posits that learning is not merely the acquisition of abstract knowledge in isolation, but rather an active process that takes place through participation in authentic social and cultural contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Jointly developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, SLT views learning as a process of becoming an integral part of a community of practice, where knowledge is co-constructed through ongoing social interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This perspective is particularly applicable to socio-cultural decision-making, which is inherently learned, negotiated, and practiced within real-world environments such as families, peer groups, schools, and broader community settings.

Situated learning theory emphasizes that individuals develop cognitive and practical competencies by participating in shared activities with others (Wenger, 1998). For secondary school students, socio-cultural decision-making skills emerge dynamically as they interact with peers, teachers, family members, and community leaders. Through these participatory frameworks, students observe, imitate, and eventually internalize culturally appropriate modes of reasoning and choice-making (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

A central pillar of the theory is the community of practice, defined as a social group engaged in a shared enterprise, common activities, or collective purpose over time (Wenger, 1998). In local contexts such as Dodoma, these communities encompass school classrooms, academic clubs, sports teams, religious gatherings, and extended family networks. Each community establishes and reinforces specific norms, values, and behavioral expectations. As students participate within these groups, they adopt the decision-making practices endorsed by the collective, thereby shaping their socio-cultural orientation and judgment (Wenger, 1998).

Furthermore, situated learning acknowledges that learning is mediated by cultural tools including language, traditions, customs, oral narratives, and institutional norms which shape how learners interpret and respond to environmental demands (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within Tanzanian communities, cultural frameworks surrounding respect, social harmony, collectivism, and moral expectations play a crucial role in framing and guiding students' decision-making pathways.

Ultimately, Situated Learning Theory provides a robust lens for exploring how secondary school students cultivate socio-cultural decision-making skills through daily interactions, school-based group activities, and community engagement. It connects students' lived social environments directly to the development of their cognitive and behavioral decision-making strategies (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998)

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Decision-Making Patterns Among Adolescents

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by rapid cognitive, emotional, and social changes. These changes contribute to variations in the way young people approach decision-making. Research shows that adolescents exhibit a mix of the five styles, influenced by factors such as personality, socio-cultural environment, educational context, and peer relationships (Mann et al., 1997; Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Contextual influences, such as cultural norms and school climate, further shape decision-making behaviors, reinforcing certain styles over others.

In socio-cultural contexts like Tanzania, where communal values and social hierarchy play significant roles, intuitive and dependent styles may be more common, while rational and independent decision-making may emerge later as students are given more autonomy in school and community settings (Nsamenang & Dawes, 1998). Understanding these dynamics is important for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen students' decision-making competencies. The decision-making styles are described as follows:

Rational Decision-Making Style

The rational style is characterized by logical analysis, systematic evaluation of alternatives, and reliance on factual information (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Individuals using this style tend to be deliberate and thorough, often taking time to assess consequences before choosing. Among adolescents, rational decision-making is associated with higher academic performance, better self-regulation, and lower susceptibility to peer pressure (Galotti et al., 2011). This style reflects cognitive maturity, though it may be limited when youths lack information or experience.

In the context of secondary education, fostering a rational decision-making style is often a primary objective of academic curricula, as it equips students with the structured problem-solving tools necessary for critical thinking. However, in environments marked by resource constraints and hierarchical social structures, students may find it difficult to execute purely rational choices without institutional guidance and access to comprehensive information. Consequently, educational strategies that encourage students to break down complex problems into manageable components can help bridge the gap between theoretical rationality and practical application in daily school life.

Intuitive Decision-Making Style

The intuitive style relies on feelings, instincts, and subconscious judgments rather than conscious analysis. Studies show that intuition is shaped by past experiences, emotional cues, and learned social patterns (Pretz et al., 2014). Adolescents often use intuitive strategies when decisions must be made quickly or when emotional factors dominate, such as in peer relationships or social conflicts (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Although intuition can lead to effective decisions in familiar contexts, it may be less reliable in complex or unfamiliar socio-cultural situations.

While intuition allows adolescents to respond swiftly to dynamic social interactions and interpersonal conflicts, relying solely on gut feelings can sometimes lead to misjudgments in unfamiliar academic or administrative environments. Because intuitive judgments are heavily anchored in prior personal and social experiences, students operating within culturally diverse or rapidly changing school settings benefit from reflecting on their instinctive choices. Educators can support this balance by helping students critically examine the underlying cues and emotional drivers behind their intuitive decisions, thereby refining their overall judgment capacity.

Dependent Decision-Making Style

Individuals with a dependent decision-making style seek advice, reassurance, or approval from others before making decisions (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Adolescents frequently rely on parents, teachers, or peers due to limited autonomy and the need for social belonging (Smetana, 2011). In socio-cultural contexts where collectivism is valued, such as many African communities, dependent decision-making may be reinforced as a culturally appropriate behavior (Kagitcibasi, 2005). However, excessive dependence can hinder the development of independent judgment and problem-solving skills.

Within collectivist and tightly knit community frameworks, seeking consensus and guidance from trusted figures such as elders, parents, and teachers is viewed as a vital mechanism for maintaining social harmony and collective well-being. Nevertheless, an overreliance on external approval can constrain an adolescent's capacity for independent agency, particularly when they are required to make autonomous career or life choices. Balancing cultural expectations of respect and consultation with the gradual cultivation of personal responsibility is therefore essential for fostering well-rounded decision-making competencies among secondary students.

Avoidant Decision-Making Style

The avoidant style involves delaying, evading, or refusing to make decisions. Avoidance may stem from fear of negative consequences, low confidence, stress, or lack of knowledge (Mann et al., 2017). Among adolescents, avoidant patterns are associated with indecision, academic procrastination, anxiety, and susceptibility to peer influence (Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2014). Avoidant decision-makers may struggle in environments requiring active engagement or quick responses, which can impede the development of effective socio-cultural decision-making competencies.

Avoidance behaviors often manifest when students feel overwhelmed by high-stakes academic pressures, complex social expectations, or a perceived lack of adequate guidance from their environment. When young people lack confidence or fear the social and academic consequences of making a wrong choice, procrastination and withdrawal become defensive mechanisms. Creating a supportive, low-stakes classroom atmosphere where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities can significantly reduce avoidance tendencies and encourage students to engage more proactively with difficult choices.

Spontaneous Decision-Making Style

The spontaneous style is marked by impulsivity and a desire to make decisions quickly, often without evaluating the consequences. Adolescents are more likely to exhibit spontaneous decision-making due to heightened emotional sensitivity and ongoing development of the cognitive control system (Steinberg, 2008). This style can lead to risky behaviors, especially in peer-influenced contexts, but it may also facilitate quick action in time-sensitive situations (Parker et al., 2012). Balancing spontaneity with reflection is crucial for the development of balanced decision-making skills.

The inclination toward rapid, impulsive action during adolescence is deeply tied to neurological and emotional development, where emotional reactivity often outpaces long-term planning capabilities. While this spontaneity can enable quick reactions in urgent or highly fluid situations, it frequently increases exposure to unnecessary risks in social and academic spheres. Instructional interventions that promote deliberate pause and structured reflection can help students harness their natural energy and decisiveness while mitigating the potential pitfalls of uncalculated impulsivity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area

The research was conducted in the Dodoma Region, specifically across Dodoma Urban and Kongwa Districts. These locations were selected because prevailing socio-cultural dynamics and environmental pressures in these areas significantly influence student behavior, developmental choices, and academic decision-making pathways.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to systematically measure, quantify, and analyze the socio-cultural decision-making patterns and dominant styles among secondary school students. A quantitative approach is particularly well-suited for this investigation because it facilitates the collection of standardized numerical data through structured instruments, such as the General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) inventory. By employing statistical techniques, this approach enables the researcher to determine frequencies, percentages, and score distributions across the five primary decision-making styles: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous. Furthermore, the quantitative approach minimizes researcher bias, enhances objectivity, and allows for precise statistical generalization regarding how demographic and socio-cultural variables influence student choices within the target population.

3.3 Research Design

The study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design to capture empirical data on students' decision-making behaviors and characteristics at a single point in time. A cross-sectional design is highly effective for descriptive and analytical studies that seek to examine the prevalence of specific behavioral patterns across a population without manipulating variables. This design allows for the simultaneous collection of data from diverse participants including students, teachers, and head teachers across multiple secondary schools within a defined timeframe. By capturing this cross-section of data, the research efficiently identifies existing relationships between socio-cultural factors and student decision-making styles, providing immediate, actionable insights to inform educational policies and curriculum enhancements.

3.4 Target Population

The target population comprised school heads, teachers, and senior secondary students, as these groups directly shape, mentor, or experience the development of student decision-making competencies.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A sample of 168 participants was established, comprising 16 secondary school teachers, 4 head teachers, and 148 students. Four schools across two purposefully selected wards were chosen using random paper-draw techniques to eliminate selection bias and ensure confidentiality through pseudonyms (Schools A, B, C, and D). History and civics teachers and head teachers were purposively selected for their direct role in student guidance and social welfare. Student participants (n=148) were determined using Yamane's formula and selected via systematic random sampling (every 8th interval) to evaluate decision-making styles.

The Yamane's formula is given as:

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N= population (196);

e = margin of error = 0.05 (level of participation)

The substitution of the formula yields n = sample size=148 Student- participants

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The study employed a questionnaire with both open and closed questions. On the part of closed questions, a study adapted a General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) Inventory adapted to 16 questions rated on a five-point Likert scale with the following divisions: 1) Strongly agree, 2) Agree, 3) Strongly disagree, 4) Disagree. The GDMS is an appropriate, reliable, and valid scale for assessing decision-making and decision-making quality. The GDMS questionnaire elicits decision-making styles in five different patterns, which are intuitive, rational, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous (Scott and Bruce, 1995). The other part contained open-ended questions that sought the students' perception of the phenomena under study.

3.7 Reliability

The scale was developed by the researcher with the purpose of determining the decision-making skills of students. The factor loads of the 15 items under a single factor in the scale varied between .54 and .75, its Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .79, and it explained 41% of the total variance. This was within the Cronbach's alpha range and is considered to be good.

3.8 Data Analysis

Quantitative data in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically mean, frequencies, and percentages. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive statistics are fundamental in summarizing and presenting quantitative data in a meaningful and interpretable form. They enable researchers to identify trends, patterns, and distributions within datasets, thereby facilitating a clearer understanding of respondents' characteristics and responses. In this study, frequencies were used to determine the number of occurrences of specific responses, while percentages were employed to express those frequencies as proportions of the total sample. This approach provided a concise yet comprehensive overview of how students and teachers perceived the development of socio-cultural decision-making skills in secondary schools within the Dodoma Region.

The use of frequencies and percentages is particularly appropriate in educational research because it simplifies complex datasets and enhances interpretability for both researchers and policymakers. Frequencies illustrate how often particular responses occur, while percentages allow for easy comparison between different categories or variables. In this study, these statistics were used to summarize data obtained from questionnaires administered to students and teachers. For instance, the researcher analyzed students' participation in social clubs, the influence of school programs on their socio-cultural awareness, and their engagement in community-related decision-making activities. Presenting the data in percentage form made it easier to compare groups and identify prevailing trends across schools. Such numerical summaries provided the foundation for subsequent interpretation and discussion of the findings in relation to the study objectives.

To ensure accuracy and efficiency, the quantitative data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS. version 31) software for analysis. This computer-based tool allowed for systematic data management and reduced the likelihood of manual errors (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). SPSS generated frequency distributions and percentage tables that clearly displayed the responses for each questionnaire item. According to Bryman (2016), the use of software in quantitative analysis enhances the reliability and transparency of research results, as it ensures that the analytical process follows standardized procedures.

Moreover, the Means shown in the original Table 4.6 (N=148) were calculated by averaging the numerical responses (1 to 5) given by all 148 raters for each question, separated by the student's gender. The fact that Appropriate

Social Skills has a high mean (Girls: 4.47, Boys: 3.63) suggests it was a positively-worded item (where 5 is good), while indicators like Jealousy/withdrawal have low means (Girls: 1.15, Boys: 1.38), suggesting they are negatively-worded items (where 1 is good, meaning the behavior is rarely present).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Official research clearances and approval letters were secured from relevant university and regional authorities. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after fully disclosing the study's purpose, ensuring that participation remained strictly voluntary with the right to withdraw at any time. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were strictly safeguarded through secure, password-protected storage and the use of pseudonyms.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents data analysis and discusses findings obtained following a critical analysis of the data for this study that investigated how secondary school students in the Dodoma region make socio-cultural decisions.

4.1 Students ' Decision-Making Patterns

Following a critical analysis of the data obtained, the study observed that students perceived socio-cultural decision-making skills differently, and these perceptions are summarized in Table 4.1. The data suggest that students' decision-making behaviors are influenced by a combination of personal, social, and contextual factors, a trend that aligns with prior research on adolescent cognitive and social development (Koda, 2019).

Table 1: Students ' Decision-Making Patterns (N=140)

S/No	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total (%)
Intuitive							
1	I make decisions in a logical and systematic way	15%	35%	15%	15%	0%	100
2	When I make decisions, I tend to rely on my intuition	15%	35%	25%	15%	20%	100
3	When making a decision, I consider various options in terms of a specified goal	30%	35%	0%	15%	30%	100
Dependent							
4	When making a decision, I trust my inner feelings and reactions	30%	15%	35%	15%	5%	100
5	I double-check my information sources to be sure I have the right facts before making decisions	25%	15%	35%	15%	10%	100
6	When making decisions, I rely on my instincts	5%	15%	35%	15%	30%	100
7	I generally make decisions that feel right to me	10%	15%	35%	15%	25%	100
Rational							
8	I usually have a rational basis for making decisions	20%	15%	15%	35%	15%	100
9	When making decisions, I do what seems natural at that moment	20%	15%	35%	15%	15%	100
10	I postpone decision-making whenever possible	20%	15%	35%	15%	15%	100
Avoidant							
11	I often put off making important decisions	15%	15%	40%	15%	15%	100

S/No	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total (%)
12	I avoid making important decisions until the pressure is on	35%	15%	0%	15%	35%	100
13	I put off making decisions because thinking about them makes me uneasy	20%	15%	35%	15%	15%	100
14	I generally make important decisions at the last minute	10%	15%	35%	20%	20%	100
Spontaneous							
15	I often need the assistance of other people when making important decisions	20%	15%	35%	15%	15%	100
16	If I have the support of others, it is easier for me to make important decisions		15%	35%	15%	15%	100

Source: Field Data

Table 1 presents the findings regarding students' decision-making patterns among Tanzanian secondary school students, which are categorized into five styles: intuitive, dependent, rational, avoidant, and spontaneous. The data reveal that students exhibit a mix of decision-making approaches, with noticeable variations in preference across categories. This implies that students know little about how they should make their own decisions and those that affect their fellows. Chinyamurindi et al. (2021) point out that decision-making skills influence teaching and learning issues and affect teachers' and learners' belief systems and attitudes. It is therefore essential for schools to establish curricula that align with the cause.

4.1.1 Intuitive Decision-Making

The data analyzed indicate that a considerable proportion of students reported relying on intuition when making their decisions. For instance, 50% of respondents (15% strongly agree, 35% agree) indicated that they make decisions logically and systematically, while a similar proportion (50%) agreed that they rely on intuition. This suggests that Tanzanian secondary school students tend to blend both logical and instinctive thinking when approaching decision-making situations. Furthermore, 65% of the respondents reported that they consider various options in terms of a specified goal, implying that intuition is often complemented by some level of rational evaluation. This balance may reflect students' efforts to integrate both cognitive reasoning and personal judgment when making choices in academic or social contexts.

These findings indicate that students attempt to integrate both intuitive and evaluative approaches when making decisions. According to Epstein (2010), intuitive decision-making is often driven by affective and experiential processing, which is common during adolescence when cognitive control and emotional regulation are still developing. The findings also correspond with Kahneman's (2011), who posited that individuals frequently shift between intuitive and analytical modes of thinking. Therefore, Tanzanian students' reliance on intuition may reflect a natural cognitive balance between quick judgment and deliberate reasoning.

4.1.2 Dependent Decision-Making

The findings also indicated a moderate level of dependency in students' decision-making. For example, about 45% of respondents agreed that they trust their inner feelings and reactions, while 40% double-check their information sources before deciding. However, 45% of respondents indicated neutrality (indifferent) or disagreement across several dependent-related items, suggesting that although some students' value external confirmation and emotional guidance, others exhibit independence in their choices. This could be attributed to differences in students' confidence levels, exposure to decision-making experiences, or the availability of guidance and counseling in their schools.

These findings primarily suggest that many students seek external validation or support when making decisions. Similar findings were reported by Kaggwa and Nyarangi (2021), who found that Tanzanian adolescents often depend on teachers, peers, and family members when making academic or personal choices. Such dependency may stem from cultural values emphasizing communalism and respect for authority, which shape many people's decision-making behaviors in African contexts (Nsamenang, 2013). Consequently, the observed dependence can be interpreted as both a social strength and a developmental limitation supporting cooperation but potentially restricting autonomous reasoning.

4.1.3 Rational Decision-Making

In terms of rationality, the findings indicated that only 35% of the respondents agreed that they usually have a rational basis for making decisions, while 50% either disagreed or were indifferent. This pattern suggests that rational and analytical decision-making is not dominant among Tanzanian secondary school students. A similar trend was observed in statements like "I postpone decision-making whenever possible," where 35% agreed or strongly agreed, indicating some level of indecisiveness or lack of structured decision strategies. This finding implies that while students may understand the importance of rational decision-making, they may lack the necessary problem-solving and analytical skills to apply it consistently.

These findings align with research undertaken by Byrnes (2013), who noted that adolescents often exhibit inconsistent rationality due to developing cognitive structures and limited experience in weighing complex outcomes. The tendency toward less rational decision-making may also reflect contextual challenges in Tanzanian secondary schools, such as limited access to decision-making training, counseling, or structured problem-solving programs (Mkonongwa, 2018). Therefore, while students may understand the importance of rational approaches, they might lack the necessary cognitive and educational tools to consistently apply them.

4.1.4 Avoidant Decision-Making

The analysis further indicated that avoidant tendencies were evident among a considerable number of students. For instance, 55% of respondents (strongly agree + agree) indicated that they avoid making important decisions until pressure is on, while 40% of respondents admitted to often putting off decisions. Such procrastination patterns could stem from fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, or limited decision-making training within the school environment. The findings suggest that avoidance may be a coping mechanism for dealing with uncertainty or pressure, which is common during adolescence, especially when students face numerous academic and social challenges.

This avoidance behavior reflects a fear of failure or a desire to escape uncertainty, which is common among adolescents experiencing high academic or social pressure Ndemanu, 2020). Studies conducted in East African schools (e.g., Ndemanu, 2020) have similarly shown that avoidance is a coping mechanism students adopt when faced with conflicting expectations or limited autonomy. This finding underlines the need for interventions that foster decision-making confidence and time management skills among secondary school students.

4.1.5 Spontaneous Decision-Making

With respect to spontaneous decision-making, the findings indicated that about 35% of students agreed that they often need the assistance of others when making important decisions, while another 35% of respondents stated that having support from others makes their decision-making easier. This reflects a social dimension to decision-making among Tanzanian students, where peer and adult influences such as friends, teachers, and parents play a key role. The observed reliance on social support in decision-making could be linked to the collectivist nature of Tanzanian society, where communal values and interdependence shape individual choices.

These findings reflect a spontaneous but socially anchored decision-making approach. According to Mann et al. (1997), spontaneous decision-makers act quickly and often rely on emotional and social cues rather than deliberate reasoning. In collectivist cultures like Tanzania, seeking group support before acting is not only typical but also socially reinforced (Nsamenang, 2013). Hence, students' reliance on social input can be interpreted as an adaptive strategy within their cultural framework.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Students' decision-making patterns among Tanzanian secondary school students were categorized into five styles: intuitive, dependent, rational, avoidant, and spontaneous. The findings reveal that students exhibit a mix of decision-making styles, as mentioned, with noticeable variations in preference across categories. Students exhibit a combination of intuitive, dependent, and avoidant decision-making patterns, with less emphasis on purely rational approaches. Many students appear to rely on both intuition and external support while displaying some degree of hesitation or postponement in decision-making. These findings suggest that decision-making among secondary school students is influenced by a mixture of personal, cognitive, and social factors.

5.2 Recommendations

Developing socio-cultural decision-making skills among secondary school students is crucial. The study recommends the following:

5.5.1 For Action

Service Learning: Integrating community service projects into the curriculum enables students to apply their learning in real-world contexts while addressing socio-cultural issues. This hands-on experience cultivates empathy and

encourages students to think critically about societal issues, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions.

Critical Reflection: Encouraging students to reflect on their experiences through journaling or group discussions promotes a deeper understanding of their socio-cultural contexts. Reflection helps them analyze their decision-making processes and recognize biases or assumptions that may influence their choices.

Mentorship Programs: The Government can establish mentorship relationships with community leaders or professionals can provide students with guidance in navigating socio-cultural challenges. Mentors can share insights from their experiences, helping students develop practical decision-making skills relevant to their communities.

Parental Involvement: School leaders engaging parents in the educational process reinforces socio-cultural learning at home. Schools can organize workshops or informational sessions that help parents understand how they can support their children's development of decision-making skills related to cultural awareness.

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