

Parent–Student Priority Factors in The Selection of Schools: A Case in Secondary School Education in Tanzania

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Abstract: *The provision of secondary education to all, both boys and girls, with a focus on quality assumes greater meaning today when we consider the emerging challenges in our society. It is reported that education does not only impart knowledge but serves as the most important driver for ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity, as well as improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability. No wonder education has become a top priority for every parent and child across the globe including Africa. In addition to individuals' perceived quality of schools, several other factors influence the school selection process. We assessed key influential factors of parents and students during the selection of secondary schools and the effect of parents' background characteristics on their choice of single-sex or coeducation. Results showed that parents esteem exam results, safety, discipline, care of ward, distraction from the opposite sex, and the school's reputation, in the same order of importance. Similarly, three of these factors (exam results, school's reputation, and discipline) were on the top five priority list of students. Parents' background characteristics, except gender and level of education, significantly influenced their choice of schools. This outcome can be capitalized to bring poor-performing schools up to speed on these factors to make more schools attractive, which could lead to maximizing attendance and output of nationwide education.*

Keywords : *Education; secondary school; single-sex; coeducation; choice; influential factors.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Education has become a top priority for every parent and child across the globe including Africa. This has intensified the debate on which education type (i.e., single-sex and co-educational schooling) could boost academic achievement, social mores, and career goals of wards. When deciding to send their wards to a single-sex or co-educational school, parents often face conflicting thoughts. Education is not merely life preparation but life in itself. The need for skills and strategy of parents when choosing schools is becoming increasingly relevant in today's society where academic and career outcomes are increasingly being emphasized (Wiseman 2008; Cheung 2015).

Education is a key component of the Government of Tanzania's social and economic development agenda. While Tanzania has made progress in education in terms of access and equity, there are few corresponding advances in the quality of education, particularly in early grades (USAID 2019). Public and private sectors provide education in Tanzania, beginning with pre-primary education, followed by primary, secondary ordinary, secondary advanced education, of which they are either single-sex or coeducation, as well as university-level education (Joyce-Gibbons et al. 2018). There are two critical transitional examinations; first, National Primary School Leaving Examination which determines the entry into secondary education, and second, two secondary education examinations (i.e., after form 1 to 4 "O level" and after form 6 "A level") (UNICEF 2009).

In secondary education, the overall enrolment rate is low at about only 5%. This is characterized by a low emphasis on secondary education policy in the past, failure in national primary school-leaving examination, inadequate school infrastructure to accommodate students (Chediell, Sekwao, and Kirumba 2000; Joyce-Gibbons et al. 2018). The secondary schools that perform highest in the national examinations employ better-trained teachers, including experienced graduates, higher pay, and efficient school management especially private schools.

Tanzania's secondary educational system consists of single-sex and coeducation or mixed schools. The increased emphasis on academic credentials to decide either to select single-sex or coeducation schools during secondary education has gain momentum in Tanzania. In recent National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) top ten (10) performing secondary schools list published showed single-sex schools dominated the list, with six girls' schools, two boys' schools, and only two coeducation schools. Several studies including that of Moshia (2000) that compared the performance of single-sex secondary schools from mixed schools in Tanzania showed that students in single-sex schools

performed better than those in mixed schools. Safety combined with the importance of academic qualifications and career, both within and outside of the education system, makes school selection an especially important activity for both parents and students (Hayes, Pahlke, and Bigler 2011; Yalcinkaya and Ulu 2012; Cheung 2015). A single-sex or coeducational learning setting should not be the only consideration when deciding on choosing a secondary education. In Tanzania, parents choose private schools over public schools because of instruction given in English, among other factors (Chediell, Sekwao, and Kirumba 2000).

Regarding factors that influence the choice of schools in Tanzania, there is little existing literature and no empirical studies. The need to understand parents' and students' choice of selecting a secondary school is crucial amid the low enrolment rate to secondary education. Previous research in other countries exploring preferences for coeducational or single-sex schooling has focussed on only either students (Hannan et al. 1996; Robinson and Smithers 1999) or parents (Jackson and Bisset 2005). This study explores, what factors influences both Tanzania parents and student when choosing single-sex or coeducation school for secondary education.

1.1 Current state of secondary school education in Tanzania

The quality of education in Tanzania's public secondary schools as well as alternative education pathways (AEP) and Folk Development Colleges (FDCs) systems is low. UNICEF reports that enrolment at secondary school education or vocational training was as low as 33.4% in 2016. According to The World Bank factsheet report on Tanzania's secondary education quality improvement program (SEQUIP), although secondary school enrolment increased from 1.8 million in 2015 to 2.2 million in 2018, a significant number would drop out. Approximately 60,000 of this number drops out of lower secondary school per year in addition to further dropouts at the upper level and due to pregnancy and other factors (WORLD BANK, 2020). There have been increased institutionalization and policy formulations to provide better, safer, and more accessible secondary education to help build the country's human capital. These are meant to keep children in school and help all secondary school dropouts, including pregnant girls pursue their secondary education; and also provide them with a path back into the formal public education system in the next cycle. The cost of education is relatively high considering the poverty rate in the country and the national average salary of a worker, resulting in the inability of many families to meet the financial needs of their wards (SCOLASTICA 2014). Regardless of parents' financial inability to enroll their children in public secondary schools (which offer cheaper tuition), available private schools rather demand additional financial commitment. Transportation to secondary school persists as an ongoing issue for millions of Tanzanian adolescents. Most of Tanzania's population remains condensed in rural areas far away from secondary schools. Six people riding on one motorcycle to school lingers as a common image in some of these communities. Some students can receive housing at a boarding facility or private hostel by a school, while poorer families simply cannot make such sacrifices. This forces some students to walk or ride bicycles through 20-25km, which usually takes more than an hour hence the involvement of certain educational funds to relieve students (TEF 2020). Many other factors like early marriage (2 of 5 Tanzania girls marry before the age of 18), language barrier for effective teaching, lack of schools' infrastructure, etc. continue to hamper secondary school education in Tanzania. Irrespective of these barriers, it is strongly anticipated that an effective assessment of what parents and students look for when selecting a secondary school could improve enrolment. This can be made possible when these factors are built into the national educational policies as well as educational structures to appease enrolled students (prevent dropout) and encourage enrolment of the less interested. An effective utility of data on the choices of parents and students when choosing either a single-sex or coeducation can also reform schools and enhance the quality of education.

1.2 Single-sex versus coeducation

In many countries, coeducation schooling is predominant today, though single-sex schooling was once the norm in history. From the 1960s to date, several studies have been conducted to compare the relative effects of single-sex to coeducation schooling on students' academic- and career-related outcomes, as well as affective and social development (Yalcinkaya and Ulu 2012; Gee and Cho 2014; Eisenkopf et al. 2015; Lee, Niederle, and Kang 2014; Cheung 2015). This unceasing debate is distributed across several factors at the center of which is the issue of gender equity in education. Proponents of single-sex education believe that separating boys and girls, in classrooms or schools, increases students' achievement and academic interest (Pahlke, Hyde, and Allison 2014). It is reported in many countries that males currently lag behind their female counterparts in schooling attainment but females are still underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) studies. In linking this observation with single-sex secondary education, Park *et al.*, (2018) analyzed multiple years of administrative data from college entrance examinations and a longitudinal survey of high school seniors, as well as students' interests and self-efficacy in math and science, along with expectations and actual choices of a STEM college major in university. They found significant positive effects of all-boys schools consistently across different STEM outcomes but not for girls (Park, Behrman, and Choi 2018). On the contrary, Eisenkopf *et al.*, (2015) demonstrated that single-sex schooling improves the performance of female students in mathematics. The female secondary school students were randomly assigned to either co-

educational or single-sex classes and faced the same curriculum up to four years before the final assessment. A further survey from the same study reveals that single-sex schooling also strengthens female students' self-confidence and renders the self-assessment of their mathematics skills more level-headed (Eisenkopf et al. 2015).

1.3 Parent/student opinions on the choice of school

There is evidence that most parents choose schools by placing a large weight on school performance. In addition to school performance, several other factors that influence the school selection process include safety, discipline, proximity, fee level, good facilities, and class size, among others (Allen, Burgess, and McKenna 2014). Different parents value different aspects of schools besides academic performance and different parents in different circumstances may evaluate the trade-off between these aspects in different ways. They may for valid reasons not necessarily always choose the highest performing school. Therefore, there is little basis for describing some parental choices as 'unacceptable' and others as 'acceptable' since multiples factors influence individuals' choices and perception of school's quality. According to Hunter (1991), the four aspects of selection criteria most often cited by parents as most important in their choice of secondary school are discipline/children well-behaved, emphasis on good exam results, single-sex (girls-only or boys-only school, and proximity to home. (Hunter 1991).

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY :

The main objective of the study is to examine parent-student influencing factors on the choice of secondary schools in Tanzania. In effect, the study aimed at:

- (1) Highlighting the top priority factors of parents and students in selecting secondary education and comparing the outcome.
- (2) Analysing the effect of parent background characteristics on the selection of either single-sex or coeducation schools for their wards' education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

Random and purposive sampling was used for the selection of both schools and participants to avoid biases. The data collection process utilised the administration of questionnaire. Ethical approval was sought and granted from the relevant University Research Ethics Committee and is in compliance with ethical protection for human subject research. All students and their parents signed informed consent prior to data collection.

3.2 Study area and sample population

The study was conducted in the Dar es salaam region, the largest region in Tanzania with a population of about 6.7 million and have five administrative districts. Two mixed-sex schools and two single-sex schools consisting of one girls only and one boys only were selected. A total of 415 respondents participated in the study, including, 251 students and 161 parents. The sample of parents selected for this research is a cohort whose children had most recently joined the schools in the standard entry years. This cohort of parents is selected because: (i) they have recently undergone the process of choosing a school for their wards, therefore, the decision-making process was still fresh in their minds; and (ii) they would have little experience of the school to influence their responses.

3.3 Measures

Parent-student influencing factors were measured using 17 items obtained from questionnaires used in previous studies (Jackson and Bisset 2005). The items were scored using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The factors were arranged according to their mean score in participants' response to assess the topmost influencing factors in parent-student choice of single-sex or coeducation secondary school.

3.4 Data Sets and Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using STATA (StataCorp 2021) to produce descriptive statistics. Analysis of variance, including independent T-test was used to analyse between group to find whether or not there was a significant difference in main research variables (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011).

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS :

4.1 Socio-demographic of parents

The study recruited a total of 161 parents consisting of 85 (53%) females and 76 (47%) males. Their ages range from 30-60 years with a modal age group of 41-50 years (53%). Each parent has had at least secondary education and approximately 86% of them have completed tertiary education, where 92 (52%) graduated from single-sex secondary education. About 85% of the parents were double-parenting as against 15% single parents, and 81 (51%) were Muslims

and the remaining Christians. There was an even distribution of parents over having their wards in either mixed- or single-sex secondary school (52% and 48% respectively)

4.2 Factors that influence parents' choice of secondary school

The parents were provided with a seventeen-list of common factors that have been documented to be associated with choosing a school. The factors were assigned a five-scale definition of being either very important, slightly important, neutral, slightly not-important, or not important. The analysis indicated that parents esteem exam results of schools above all other factors when selecting a secondary school for their wards. This was followed by safety, discipline, care of ward, a distraction from the opposite sex in school, and the school's reputation. The least influencing factors were sports success, the reputation of the school's head, the size of the class, and good facilities. Interestingly, although 133 (83%) of the parents indicated that the type of school (whether mixed- or single-sex) influences their choice, the factor was ranked the 8th most important factor. This implies that although single-sex or co-education influences parents' school selection process, it is not as key as the seven other factors ranked before it. **Table 1** presents the ranking of these factors and their standard deviations.

Table 1 Parents' response to the factors that influence their choice of single- or mixed-sex secondary school

Factors	Rank	Mean	Standard Deviation
School's reputation	6	1.67	0.71
Exam results	1	1.14	0.38
Good staffs	7	1.80	0.72
Small class size	15	2.50	0.63
Care of the pupil	4	1.49	0.57
Discipline	3	1.47	0.68
The reputation of school's Head	16	2.53	1.00
Good facilities	14	2.38	0.96
Sports success	17	3.05	1.02
Accessibility (proximity)	10	1.95	0.80
Fee level	=12	2.15	0.79
Recommendation of friend	11	2.11	0.77
Single-sex/co-education	8	1.82	0.95
Strong emphasis on technical skills	=12	2.15	1.00
Distraction from the opposite sex in school	5	1.61	0.78
Safety of ward	2	1.34	0.65
Career goals	9	1.88	0.89

4.3 Sociodemographic of students

A total of 251 students from two mixed-sex schools and two single-sex (one girls' and one boys' school) schools participated in the study with a male: female ratio of 59%: 41%. Their ages mainly ranged between 16-20s (83%). On average, 177 (68%) as against 82 (32%) of the students graduated from O and A levels respectively, but 90% of the students from girls' single-sex schools graduated from O level while 83% of the students from the boys' single-sex schools graduated from A level. Details of the students' sociodemographic are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2 The sociodemographic of students who participated in the study

Name of schools		Single-sex school				Co-educational school			
		Feza Girls		Feza Boys		Tusiime		Alpha	
Demographics	N=259	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Gender	Female	36	100%	0	0%	22	29%	31	41%
	Male	0	0%	72	100%	54	71%	44	59%
Age	11 - 15 years	0	0%	47	65%	14	18%	12	16%
	16 - 20 years	35	97%	25	35%	59	78%	62	83%
	20+ years	1	3%	0	0%	3	4%	1	1%
Education	O level	6	17%	65	90%	65	86%	41	55%
	A level	30	83%	7	10%	11	14%	34	45%

4.4 Factors that influence students' choice of secondary school

The same factors and measurement scale used in the parents' assessment were applied in the students' assessment. The results showed that the most influential factor for students when considering the prospects in secondary schools is exam results, followed by the school's reputation, care for students, and good facilities. The least important factors to students were a distraction from the opposite sex, class size, single-sex/co-education, and recommendation of a friend. The ranking of the factors according to the students' preferences is presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3 Students' response to the factors that influence their choice of single- or mixed-sex secondary school

Student Factors	Rank	Mean	Standard Deviation
School's reputation	2	1.49	0.90
Exam results	1	1.32	0.84
Good staffs	7	1.77	1.11
Small class size	16	2.78	1.36
Care of the pupil	3	1.51	0.98
Discipline	5	1.58	1.01
The reputation of school's Head	12	2.02	1.24
Good facilities	4	1.53	0.92
Sports success	6	1.74	1.04
Accessibility (Proximity)	10	1.88	1.11
Fee level	12	2.02	1.18
Recommendation of friend	14	2.34	1.35
Single-sex/co-education	15	2.60	1.45
Strong emphasis on technical skills	11	1.90	1.16
Distraction from the opposite sex in school	17	3.42	1.61
Safety of ward	8	1.83	1.15
Career goals	9	1.87	1.25

4.5 Comparison of parents' and students' choices in selecting schools

Concerning parents' and students' ranking of the factors, there were several similarities in their choices and interesting variations. For the top five priority factors within each group, three of them (exam results, care of pupil, and discipline) shared common positions in both groups. Factors that shared the same ranking positions among both students and parents were exam results (1st), good staff (7th), career goals (9th), accessibility/proximity (10th), and fee levels (12th). This means that both groups agree on the same scale concerning the level of influence exerted by these factors during the school selection process. Among the last seven less important factors within each group, five of them (strong emphasis on technical skills, fee level, recommendation of a friend, reputation of school's Head, and small class size) appeared in both groups. This implies that both parents and students share a common notion on the less influencing effects of these factors in their choices.

On the other hand, wide variations were observed among factors such as good facilities (students-4th vs parents-14th), sports success (students-6th vs parents-17th), distraction from opposite sex in school (parents-5th vs students-17th), and single-sex/co-education (parents-8th vs students-15th). While students are strongly influenced by the availability of goods facilities and sports success of their prospective schools, parents rather deem these factors less significant. Interestingly, parents are more concerned with the possibility of their wards getting distracted by the opposite sex, hence consider the choice of single-sex or co-education important compared with students. In order words, students prefer to mix-sex in schools and therefore ranged 'distraction from the opposite sex in school' the least of all the factors. The reason they still attend single-sex schools could be explained by an earlier study that reported that parents, particularly mothers, are the most influential persons who affect the school selection decision process (Roslyn 1989). Other factors with a variation in the choices between both groups include safety of ward (parents-2nd vs students-8th) and school's reputation (students-2nd vs parents-6th).

For further analysis of differences between the selection priority of parents and students, the variation in the means of the factors of both groups was analyzed, and statistically, significant difference determined at a p-value of ≤ 0.05 . The outcome indicated that 11 out of 17 factors exhibited significant variations in the mean between the two groups. A negative value of the mean implies that parents are more influenced by the factor while a positive value implies that students are more influenced. Of the factors that had significant variations between students and parent means, students were more influenced by good facilities, sports success, the reputation of school's Head, strong emphasis on technical skills, and school's reputation. On the other hand, parents were more influenced by factors such as single-sex/co-education, a distraction from the opposite sex in school, safety of ward, and small class size. Interestingly,

although both parents and students ranged exam results as the topmost factor in their decision-making process, this factor tends to influence parents more than students as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4 The comparison of parents’ and students’ choices of the factors

Factors	Parent Mean	Student Mean	Diff.	p-value
School’s reputation	1.67	1.49	.180	0.0222**
Exam results	1.14	1.32	-.180	0.0028***
Good staffs	1.80	1.77	.027	0.7653
Small class size	2.50	2.78	-.287	0.0037***
Care of the pupil	1.49	1.51	-.019	0.8021
Discipline	1.47	1.58	-.113	0.1696
The reputation of school’s Head	2.53	2.02	.515	0.0000***
Good facilities	2.38	1.53	.850	0.0000***
Sports success	3.05	1.74	1.312	0.0000***
Accessibility (Proximity)	1.95	1.88	.074	0.4282
Fee level	2.15	2.02	.134	0.1649
Recommendation of friend	2.11	2.34	-.232	0.0256**
Single-sex/co-education	1.82	2.60	-.779	0.0000***
Strong emphasis on technical skills	2.15	1.90	.253	0.0182**
Distraction from the opposite sex in school	1.61	3.42	-1.812	0.0000***
Safety of ward	1.34	1.83	-.499	0.0000***
Career goals	1.88	1.87	.007	0.9462

***0.001 **0.05 *0.1; ** There is a significant difference between the means; Diff neg (-) Parents are more influenced by a factor if negative and vice versa,

By applying the analysis in Table 4 to the hypothesis that parents and students are equally influenced by each factor (parent mean = student mean), it can be deduced that the hypothesis is true for all factors with non-significant variations ($p \geq 0.05$), which are fee level, discipline, accessibility/proximity, good staffs, care of the pupil, and career goals. Conversely, the remaining 11 factors tend to lean toward more parental or student influence as expounded above.

4.6 Parent background context and choice of school

The study further examined parents' background about the choice of selecting a single-sex school or coeducation school for their wards' secondary education (**Table 5**). The data revealed that apart from parents' gender and level of education, all other background characteristics assessed in this study significantly influence the selection of schools for their wards. Despite results showing that the majority of parents (52.2%) are likely to select coeducation schools over a single-sex school for their wards, a larger proportion of mothers tend to select coeducation secondary schools for their wards while the fathers exhibited an equal probability of selecting either single-sex or co-education school. Concerning parents' level of education, a slightly increased proportion of parents with tertiary education (70/138 respondents) selected single-sex schools for their wards.

Table 5: Parent background context in selecting schools.

Type of school of wards	Age			Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	6.4306
	30 – 40 years	41 – 50 years	51 – 60 years		
Single-sex	22	48	7	Degree of freedom (df)	2
Co-education	28	38	18		
Total	50	86	25	P-value	0.040**
		Education			
	Secondary		Tertiary	Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	3.2525
Single-sex	7		70		
Co-education	16		68	Degree of freedom (df)	1
Total	23		138		
				P-value	0.071

	Gender			
	Male	Female	Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	0.2726
Single-sex	38	39	Degree of freedom (df)	1
Co-education	38	46	P-value	0.602
Total	76	85		
	Parenting			
	Single	Double	Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	8.3465
Single-sex	18	59	Degree of freedom (df)	1
Co-education	6	78	P-value	0.004**
Total	24	137		
	Religion			
	Christianity	Islamic	Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	6.0328
Single-sex	30	47	Degree of freedom (df)	1
Co-education	49	35	P-value	0.014**
Total	79	82		
	Alumnus			
	Single-sex	Co-education	Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	8.2330
Single-sex	53	24	Degree of freedom (df)	1
Co-education	39	45	P-value	0.004** *
Total	82	69		
	Single-sex education or mixed school influence?			
	Yes	No	Pearson Chi-Square (x^2)	26.6031
Single-sex	76	1	Degree of freedom (df)	1
Co-education	57	27	P-value	0.000** *
Total	133	28		

5. DISCUSSION :

5.1 The Key Factors that Affect Parents’ and Students’ Choice of Secondary School

The provision of secondary education to all, both boys and girls, with a focus on quality education assumes greater meaning today when we consider the emerging challenges in our society. According to the World Bank, education does not only impart knowledge but serves as the most important driver for ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity, as well as improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability (WB, 2017). In today's society, where there is an increasing focus on academic and career success, parents' need for the ability and strategy in choosing schools is becoming ever more significant. Several factors have been outlined to play a critical role in influencing both parents and students during the school selection process. In this current study, parents esteemed exam results of schools above all other factors when selecting a secondary school for their wards. This was followed by safety, discipline, care of ward, a distraction from the opposite sex in school, and the school's reputation. The least influencing factors were sports success, the reputation of the school's head, the size of the class, and good facilities. Moreover, the data showed that the most influential factor for students when considering the prospects in secondary schools is exam results, followed by the school's reputation, care for students, and good facilities. The least important factors to students were a distraction from the opposite sex, class size, single-sex/co-education, and recommendation of a friend.

Because young adults cannot mostly make the right choice due to factors such as immaturity, lack of experience, and peer influence (David-Kacso et al., 2014; Valente et al., 2013; M.-T. Wang et al., 2018), parents (mostly mothers) become the most influential persons during the school selection decision process (Roslyn, 1989). This is evident in this current study as most of the students seemingly preferred to mix-sex in schools, yet attend single-sex schools. Our data shows that parents are more concerned with the possibility of their wards getting distracted by the opposite sex, hence consider the choice of single-sex or co-education important. On the other hand, students prefer to mix-sex in schools and therefore ranged 'distraction from the opposite sex in school' the least of all the influencing factors.

5.2 The Choice of Single-Sex Versus Coeducation Secondary School –a Continuous Debate

A large volume of literature has assessed the effects of single-sex schools vs coeducation on several aspects of students' lives including academic- and career-related outcomes, as well as affective and social development. In this study, although a large proportion of parents (83%) indicated the importance of single-sex/co-education, several other factors were highly influential in the selection process compared to this factor, hence was ranked 8th among parents. On the other hand, students ranked single-sex/co-education as the 15th influencing factor, indicating its less effect on their

choice of secondary school selection. It is generally observed that attending all-girls schools or all-boys schools as compared to attending coeducational schools is significantly associated with enhanced academic outcomes and prospects (Cheung, 2015; Eisenkopf et al., 2015; Park et al., 2018). Females are 7% more likely to pass their first-year courses and score 10% higher in their required second-year classes than their peers attending coeducational classes (Alison et al., 2018). Moreover, evidence suggests that mixed-gender classes at the secondary school level decrease the number of females that eventually pursue subjects such as science, engineering, and economics at universities, implying that gender-separated classrooms are an effective way to increase women's career opportunities and salaries (Anelli & Giovanni, 2013; Black & Spitz-Oener, 2007).

Interestingly, the mere transition of students' gender type from single-sex to coeducation leads to deteriorated academic outcomes for both girls and boys, conditional on time-varying observables and school-fixed effects. The report added that among the boys, the negative academic effect is mainly driven by exposure to mixed-gender peers at the school level, while for the girls, it is class-level exposure to mixed-gender peers that explains their disadvantage (Dustmann et al., 2018). A study that estimated a single cross-section of data for high school students concerning the total effects of attending coeducation vs single-sex school indicated that coeducation lowers achievements for both boys and girls by 4-10%, with similar estimates across subjects, including, English and Maths (Park et al., 2013). These observations affirm the significance of the subject of single- or mixed-sex education on students' educational and career outcomes, hence its continuous influence on parents during the school selection process for their wards.

On the contrary, other studies have reported no systematic differences in performance across gender or school type, adding that single-sex schooling does not reduce the gender gap in competitiveness (S. Lee et al., 2014). Yalcinkaya & Ulu, (2012) report that no significant differences between co-education school and single-sex school systems about both learning experiences and academic achievement (Yalcinkaya & Ulu, 2012). It is also documented that boys in all-boys schools have significantly higher odds of experiencing more frequent physical and verbal attacks compared to their counterparts in co-educational schools (Gee & Cho, 2014). It can therefore be concluded that despite the abundance of literature of which most support the singly-sex education system, the debate on this subject continues unabated.

5.3 Comparison of Parents and Students Choices in Selecting Schools

Concerning the ranking of the factors that affected parents and students, there were several similarities in their choices and interesting variations. Among the top five priority factors within each group, exam results, care of pupil, and discipline shared common positions in both groups. Some of the factors shared the same ranking positions among both students and parents; exam results (1st), good staff (7th), career goals (9th), accessibility/proximity (10th), and fee levels (12th), implicating that both groups agreed on the same scale level concerning the degree of influence exerted by these factors during the school selection process. On the other hand, huge variations were observed among factors such as good facilities (students-4th vs parents-14th), sports success (students-6th vs parents-17th), distraction from opposite sex in school (parents-5th vs students-17th), and single-sex/co-education (parents-8th vs students-15th). In implication, while students are strongly influenced by the availability of goods facilities and sports success of their prospective schools, parents rather deem these factors less significant. Interestingly, parents are more concerned with the possibility of their wards getting distracted by the opposite sex (parents-5th vs students-17th), hence consider the choice of single-sex or co-education important compared with students (parents-8th vs students-15th). Further analysis using the variation in the means of the factors between both groups at a p-value of ≤ 0.05 , indicated that 11 out of 17 factors exhibited significant variations (Table 5)

5.4 Subjective Opinion of Parent/Student on School's Quality

Exam results: A key assumption of school choice is that parents' most important priority when choosing a school is its quality (Hofflinger et al., 2020). The key measuring tool of a school's quality is data on the school often gathered through exams result or standardized testing (Cuesta et al., 2020). Even though the type of school (single-sex or coeducation) significantly influences parents' choices, several other factors fill their top priority list before the type of school. Our data highlighted that parents esteem factors such as exam results, safety, discipline, care of ward, a distraction from the opposite sex in school, and the school's reputation, in the same order of importance above all other factors. Similarly, three of these factors (exam results, school's reputation, and discipline) were on the top five priority list of the students. These factors could form the subjective opinion of parents regarding the perceived quality of schools, as people's opinions about school quality matter at least as much as objective measures like proficiency tests (Brasington & Hite, 2012).

Students' safety: Safety-related issues are a top priority factor for both parents and students. In this current study, while parents selected safety of wards and care of pupils as the 2nd and 4th topmost priority, the students' selected care of pupils as the 3rd most important factor. It is expected of every school to have not only an environment that would prevent sexual

risk, substance use, and experience of violence among students (Ethier et al., 2018), but also void of bullying victimization in-person and electronic (Steiner & Rasberry, 2015), adequate traffic safety (Barboza-Palomino et al., 2020), and proper food safety knowledge and handling practices (Majowicz et al., 2017; Whited et al., 2019), among others. Increasing the use of security measures is a frequently employed response to perceived safety concerns in schools. However, while outside surveillance cameras and the presence of security personnel may be perceived by students as safekeeping, inside surveillance cameras may evoke feelings of being viewed as potential perpetrators who need surveillance (Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2018).

School discipline: School discipline relates to the measures used by the school organization or teachers towards students when their behavior disrupts the ongoing educational activity or breaks a rule created by the school. Discipline is meant to guide the students' behavior or set limitations to assist them to learn to take better care of themselves and other people. The crucial role of schools' discipline has resulted in several pieces of research in this area, leading to the development and application of technology including but not limited to 3D simulations, videos, and web-based apps to promote self-discipline or self-regulation among students (Cho et al., 2020). Both an indiscipline environment and excessive/inappropriate response to misbehavior, correlate with negative educational and life outcomes (Larson et al., 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018). However, positive measures such as self-affirmation exercises delivered by teachers in the classroom bolster students' school trust and improve their behavioral conduct, significantly lowering the rate of discipline incidents to a 69% lower rate than students who did not receive self-affirmation (Binning et al., 2019).

Others: Parents and students are not only concerned about the label of a school as a "disciplined school" but also the measured employed by the authority to correct misbehavior, particularly in Africa and other underdeveloped or developing countries, where the use of violent discipline methods by teachers to manage students' behavior is still highly prevalent despite the enactment of laws that prohibit school violence (Ssenyonga et al., 2019). In this current study, both parents and students were highly influenced by this factor in their school selection. School authorities should therefore endure incorporating the perspective of both students and parents into the school's disciplinary measures. This is vital because the perceptions of school discipline may vary between school authority and parent/student as reported by a recent study that concluded that students and their parents perceive certain disciplinary measures as unfair because school officials marginalize their voices throughout the disciplinary process (Bell, 2020).

5.5 Contrast in Factor Significance with Previous Studies

Interestingly, several factors that have been reported to be the top influential in the selection of schools were ranged least important among both parents and students in the current study. For example, although proximity or accessibility to schools has been asserted to be crucial in the selection process according to other studies (Alderman et al., 2001; Chumacero et al., 2011), it appeared less significant in this current study. Both parents and students ranged it 10/17 in their priority scale. In other words, although proximity is less considered in school choice in Tanzania, it is an important determinant in the school selection process in other developed and developing countries (Alderman et al., 2001; Simon Burgess et al., 2015; Chumacero et al., 2011), wherein some cases, the probability of parents prioritizing proximity over quality is higher for parents of low socioeconomic status (Hofflinger et al., 2020). Moreover, several studies have highlighted the significance of class size since it affects classroom interactions, student's behavior, and ultimately, learning outcome (Blatchford et al., 2011; J. Francis & Barnett, 2019; Kedagni et al., 2021). It is reported that class size has a hump-shaped effect on students' achievement, where smaller class sizes (for example, around 19) maximize academic attainment (Kedagni et al., 2021). However, in this study, class size was ranged 16/17 and 15/17 among parents and students respectively. Other factors such as fee level, strong emphasis on technical skills, career goals, the reputation of the school's Head, and recommendation of friends were not popular in both parents' and students' choices (Tables 2 and 4).

5.5 Influence of Parent Background Characteristics in School Selection

Concerning parents background characteristics and the likelihood of choosing either single-sex or coeducation for the ward, our data indicated that, while the gender and level of education of parents did not have a significant influence on their choices, parents' age, parenting type (whether single parent or double parent), religious background, and type of school attended (single-sex vs coeducation) significantly influenced their choices of schools. On a general scale, 133 (83%) of the parents indicated that the type of school (whether mixed- or single-sex) influenced their choice. Among these parents, 57% of them preferred single-sex schools for their ward as against 43% of them who preferred coeducation. A slightly higher proportion of double-parents (78/137, 57%) selected coeducation secondary school while more single-parents (16/22, 73%) preferred single-sex school to coeducation. It could be speculated that the current state of parenting (double- or single-parenting) causes a bias in parents' choice since double-parents like coeducation and single-parents like single-sex education. More Christian parents (49/79, 62%) preferred coeducation to single-sex (38%)

as against slightly more Muslim parents' preference for single-sex school (47/82, 57%) compared to coeducation (43%). Moreover, a higher percentage of parents who attended coeducation preferred coeducation (45/69, 65%), with the same trend among parents who attended single-sex school (58% preferred single-sex vs 42% preferred coeducation).

6. CONCLUSION :

The influence of single-sex or coeducation remains significant among parents and students during the school selection process. However, in order of importance, the school's exam results, safety, discipline, care of ward, a distraction from the opposite sex in school, and the school's reputation are the top priority influential factors for parents. Similarly, students prioritize exam results, the school's reputation, care for students, and good facilities in the school selection process. These factors could constitute the subjective opinion of parents/students on school quality. Schools seeking to increase recruitment can capitalize on this outcome and enhance their status concerning the key influential factors in the parent/student school selection decision process. Again, policymakers can enact specific regulations or organize specific programs meant to bring poor-performing schools up to speed on these factors to make more schools attractive, which could lead to maximizing attendance and output of nationwide education.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

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