



THE UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-AWARENESS IN KENYA, TANZANIA, AND UGANDA

A Report for the Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) Project

**SELF-AWARENESS - KENYA, TANZANIA,
AND UGANDA**

This report is a product of the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI). RELI, through the Values and Life Skills (VaLi) thematic group, aimed to collaborate with local leaders to cocreate and develop contextualized assessments in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The RELI project, Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE), has three main objectives: (a) develop contextualized, open-source tools for the assessment of life skills and values in the East African context; (b) generate large-scale data on life skills and values across the three countries; and (c) use this data to inform change and build capacities within the VaLi-ALiVE member organizations.

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1 BACKGROUND

The Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), through the Values and Life Skills (VaLi) thematic group, intends to work with local leaders to cocreate and collaboratively develop contextualized assessments in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The initiative, Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) has three objectives: gathering information (and knowledge), building community, and advocacy. These three broad objectives mirror RELI's three pillars: being a hub for knowledge, transforming member organizations, and influencing policy. Over a period of three years (2020–2023), ALiVE will do the following: (a) develop contextualized, open-source tools to assess life skills and values in the East African context; (b) generate large-scale data on life skills and values across the three countries; and (c) use this data to inform changes and build capacities within the VaLi-ALiVE member organizations. These organizations will advocate for the three national education systems to focus on and produce these competencies, to inform regional policy throughout the East African Community, and to inform global thinking on how to measure life skills and values as 'relevant and effective' learning outcomes.

ALiVE will be a context-relevant, summative assessment. The assessment will target adolescents from 13 through 17 years of age, both girls and boys, and both in school and out of school, focusing on three competences and one value: self-awareness, problem solving, collaboration, and respect.

The first phase in developing the contextualized assessment tools was to conduct ethnographic interviews at different sites (rural and urban) in the countries. Conducted in November 2020, the studies targeted three categories of informants: adolescents, parents, and key persons (e.g., teachers, social workers, youth patrons/matrons, religious leaders, etc.). The studies aimed to determine participants' perceptions and understandings of the selected ALiVE competences.

The aim of phase 1 of the study is to achieve a **contextualized understanding of self-awareness** in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in order to determine the best tools for a large-scale assessment of *self-awareness* in the three countries. Therefore, the main scope of this report is to present a comparative analysis of the findings obtained in the individual country reports in order to identify the commonalities and divergencies between the three countries.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- i) What are the **common facets of the definition** of *self-awareness* in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda?
- ii) What are the **differences** between the definitions of *self-awareness* in the three countries?
- iii) What are the most common **subskills** highlighted by adolescents, parents, and key persons, considering gender and location, in the three countries?
- iv) Which subskills are unique to each country?
- v) What are the common **dispositions** and **values** identified by the participants based on their categories (adolescents, parents, and key persons), genders, and locations in the three countries?
- vi) Which dispositions, behaviours and values are **unique** to Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda?
- vii) Which **support systems** and other **factors** that help the adolescents to grow in *self-awareness* are identified in the three countries?
- viii) What are the common methods identified by the participants of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to **assess** *self-awareness* in adolescents?

2.2 Methodology

Researchers used the comparative method to prepare this report, paying special attention to gender analyses in the different categories analysed. Regarding the study design, a qualitative approach and an ethnographic design were used to explore and collect participants' perceptions and understandings of self-awareness in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. It was conducted in 5 districts of Kenya (Rongo, Mwea East, Kibra, Narok South, and Tana Delta), 5 of Tanzania (Ilala, Mvomero, Ngorogoro, North-A, and Uyui), and 5 of Uganda (Jinja, Kikuube, Moroto, Kampala, and Oyam), which were sampled based on their status as rural or urban, their economic activity (pastoralist, core-urban, or agricultural), and their distance from the respective capital cities.

Two villages in each district were randomly sampled. In each sampled village, researchers targeted at least 4 interviews with adolescents (2 of each gender, including those in primary, secondary, vocational training centre, and out of school); 4 interviews with parents (2 of sampled adolescents, and 2 of non-sampled adolescents, including fathers as well as mothers); and 4 interviews with key persons (teachers, social workers, and others who consistently work with adolescents, from both genders). This resulted into a target of 24 participants per district for the one-on-one interviews. The total target sample was then around 120 participants in each country for the interviews. Given the prevailing challenges, however, the study reached 116 participants in Kenya, 132 participants in Tanzania, and 120 participants in Uganda, for the one-on-one interviews. It should be noted that not all these participants were interviewed on *self-awareness*: only 76 participants in Kenya, 65 participants in Tanzania, and 95 in Uganda were interviewed on it.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, researchers conducted 21 focus group discussions (10 for adolescents and 11 for parents) in Kenya, 20 FGDs (10 for adolescents and 10 for parents) in Tanzania, and 20 FGDs (10 for adolescents and 10 for parents) in Uganda. To

constitute the FGDs, 3 participants in each village (adolescents or parents) were selected to join the other 4 who participated in the interviews. FGDs in each village ultimately consisted of 5 to 7 participants.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Definition and Process

The codes that emerged during the analysis of the definition of self-awareness across the three countries were as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Codes That Emerged as Definitions of Self-Awareness

CODES	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	PARTICIPANTS					
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Knowing/understanding self	57	75.00	48	73.85	52	54.74
Finding solutions	14	18.42			6	6.32
Taking care of self	10	13.16	7	10.77	26	27.37
Knowing/understanding problem	10	13.16				
Judgement	5	6.58	4	6.15		
Being a good person	3	3.95	3	4.62	5	5.26
Facing problems					1	1.05
Valuing self			6	9.23		
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	76		65		95	

The most common definition of self-awareness highlighted by the participants across all three study countries is self-knowledge or self-understanding. Self-knowledge entails a clear understanding of one's rights, identity, feelings, likes and dislikes, capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, as well as desires and goals. To some participants, self-awareness is an in-depth understanding of oneself, and this usually determines how one behaves toward or around others such as teachers, parents, and peers in the community. Though participants from all three countries suggest that a person is self-aware if they understand themselves well, some of them limit self-knowledge to understanding one's surroundings or environment, regardless of their cognitive self-internalisation and evaluation. Some of the participants in Uganda perceived self-awareness as an individual's ability to consistently adhere to his or her values, such as self-respect, and to make decisions without the influence of others.

Participants who want to gain self-knowledge present different motives. The desire to know or understand oneself differs among the participants. For the adolescents, it is important to know oneself to show their parents and community elders that they are appropriate and disciplined,

while for the adults, self-awareness is a prerequisite for supporting their children and community. In regard to participants' genders, more men than women prominently mentioned knowledge/understanding of oneself in Kenya, while in Tanzania and Uganda, no considerable gender differences were observed.

Taking care of oneself is another definition that emerged, especially from participants in Uganda. Participants allude to the fact that a self-aware individual is capable of making careful choices on pertinent matters of health and psychological wellbeing. Taking care of oneself includes feeding oneself properly and taking one's medicine as well as awareness of how an individual's conduct may affect their wellbeing. Analysis of this code in regard to participants' genders revealed that in Tanzania, more women than men prominently mentioned taking care of oneself while in Kenya, more men than women prominently stated this code. No considerable gender differences were observed in Uganda.

The definition of finding solutions emerged from Uganda and Kenya. Considering that self-awareness empowers an individual with sufficient knowledge about one's environment, one is able to identify problems and mitigate them.

Table 2: Similarities and Differences between Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in Defining Self-Awareness

CATEGORY: Definition	DIFFERENCES		
SIMILARITIES	KENYA	TANZANIA	UGANDA
Knowledge of self or understanding oneself emerged as the most prominent definition of what self-awareness is, but with different aspects of emphasis including behaviour, values, etc. Participants also defined self-awareness as taking care of oneself and being a good person.	Self-understanding is associated with the ability to know/understand a problem and find appropriate solutions. A few participants define self-awareness as the ability to judge between good and bad.	The importance attributed to valuing oneself and others and is closely associated with a sense of judgment.	A few participants define self-awareness as the ability to help others resolve their challenges or problems.

3.2 Subskills

The codes that emerged in the theme of subskills include self-confidence/self-esteem, expressive communication, receptive communication, relationship skills, guidance and counselling, empathy, self-regulation, goal setting, teamwork/cooperation, and planning. In the context of our study, the subskills are understood as the skills that are necessary elements of a more complex skill, that is, self-awareness.

Table 3: Codes That Emerged as Subskills of Self-Awareness

CODES	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	PARTICIPANTS					
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Self-confidence/self-esteem	34	44.74	8	12.31	17	17.89
Expressive communication	15	19.74	5	7.69	7	7.37
Relationship skills	13	17.11	1	1.54	22	23.16
Guidance and counselling					18	18.95
Self-regulation	9	11.84	4	6.15	8	8.42
Receptive communication	8	10.53	7	10.77	17	17.89
Goal setting	8	10.53	4	6.15	6	6.32
Planning	5	6.58	2	3.08	4	4.21
Empathy	1	1.32	1	1.54	5	5.26
Teamwork/cooperation			5	7.69	7	7.37
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	76		65		95	

Based on Table 3 above, the most important subskills of self-awareness across the three countries studied are self-confidence/self-esteem, receptive communication, expressive communication, and relationship skills. Self-confidence/self-esteem, also identified as a synonym of *self-awareness*, is considered both an aid to and an outcome of self-awareness. Those with strong self-awareness are not afraid to share their opinions with others, believe in themselves, and actively participate in group activities. This skill was mostly mentioned by participants in Kenya (45%) and a few from Uganda (18%) and Tanzania (12%). In regard to gender, more men than women in Kenya and Tanzania prominently mentioned self-confidence whereas more women than men in Uganda prominently mentioned self-confidence.

Relationship skills, mostly mentioned in Uganda (23%) and Kenya (17%), were identified as important skills for improving self-awareness skills. To the participants, relationship skills refer to the social and interpersonal skills that enable a person to effectively interact, self-reflect, recognise the behaviour of others, and ensure appropriate and peaceful coexistence. Relationship skills encompass both receptive and expressive communication skills. The participants understand receptive communication as the ability to listen to others and follow instructions, and expressive communication as the ability to communicate effectively and speak with others in a respectful manner. Being able to relate and effectively communicate with others helps to boost a person's self-confidence/self-esteem, which will ultimately result in improved self-awareness.

In Kenya and Uganda, more men than women prominently mentioned relationship skills. More men than women in Uganda and Tanzania mentioned receptive communication, while more

women mentioned this subskill in Kenya. Expressive communication was prominently mentioned by more women in Uganda and Tanzania, whereas in Kenya, this subskill was mentioned by more men.

In Uganda, guidance and counselling emerged both as a subskill and an enhancer of self-awareness skills. Self-aware individuals are considered capable of helping others improve their behaviours and resolve problems and challenges by offering appropriate advice. In Kenya and Tanzania, however, *guidance and counselling* is considered a prerequisite for support systems especially in schools and families, which foster children's self-awareness through adequate guidance and counselling from parents and teachers.

Table 4: Similarities and Differences between Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in Subskills

CATEGORY: Subskills	DIFFERENCES		
SIMILARITIES	KENYA	TANZANIA	UGANDA
<p>The key subskills of self-awareness in the three countries include relationship skills, self-confidence/esteem, expressive communication, and receptive communication.</p> <p>A few participants mentioned the subskills of self-regulation, goal setting, planning, and empathy.</p>		<p>A few participants highlight the importance of teamwork/cooperation for improving self-awareness.</p>	<p>A few participants mention teamwork/cooperation as key to improving self-awareness.</p> <p>Guidance and counselling skills are considered a result of self-awareness.</p>

3.3 Dispositions and Values

Dispositions are an individual's inherent qualities of mind and character that influence their behaviour. They signify the affective and intellectual state of mind and attitudes that enable a person to perform an ability in an appropriate and meaningful way. With proper dispositions, an individual exhibits self-awareness in the encounters of daily life. The codes that emerged in the theme of dispositions include responsibility, kindness/friendliness, willingness to be corrected or advised, passion, patience, hardworking, leadership, and others, as shown in the table below.

Table 5: Codes That Emerged as Dispositions of Self-Awareness

CODES	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	PARTICIPANTS					
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Responsibility	19	25.00	19	29.23	20	21.05
Passion	12	15.79	19	29.23	26	27.37
Patience/Time	9	11.84	19	29.23	8	8.42
Kindness/Friendly	8	10.53	3	4.62	13	13.68
Willingness to be corrected/advised	8	10.53	10	15.38	10	10.53
Leadership	8	10.53	3	4.62	4	4.21
Hardworking	6	7.89	20	30.77	29	30.53
Self-reflection	6	7.89	1	1.54	8	8.42
Courageous	4	5.26				
Inquisitiveness	4	5.26	5	7.69	6	6.32
Positive attitude	3	3.95	2	3.08	9	9.47
Self-actualisation/self-realisation	2	2.63				
Perseverance	2	2.63			3	3.16
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	76		65		95	

From Table 5 above, the common dispositions across the three countries are responsibility, hardworking, passion, and willingness to be corrected or advised. Being hardworking, mostly mentioned by participants in Tanzania (31%) and Uganda (31%), is considered an indicator of self-awareness, but mostly in relation to involvement in domestic chores. A few participants connected being hardworking with goal setting when they said that a person can only achieve a set goal if they deliberately work hard. As regards gender, more women prominently mentioned hardworking across the three countries.

Self-aware individuals exhibit a sense of responsibility through taking care of themselves and others, taking on tasks without being instructed or supervised, and helping others. In Kenya, more women than men prominently mentioned responsibility, while more men than women in Uganda prominently mentioned this disposition. No considerable gender differences were observed in Tanzania.

The participants understand passion as being self-driven or self-motivated when executing a task or pursuing a specific goal. Self-aware people have the passion to learn and/or work. In Tanzania, more women than men prominently mentioned passion, while more men in Uganda prominently mentioned this disposition. No considerable gender differences were observed in Kenya.

Willingness to be corrected or advised is another attribute of a self-aware person. It involves openness to advice and opinions from others, seeking for advice and guidance from others,

and having a positive attitude when being corrected. To the participants, this is also considered a means through which self-awareness can be improved. In regard to gender, more men than women in Uganda and Tanzania prominently mentioned willingness to be corrected. No considerable gender differences were observed in Kenya.

Table 6: Similarities and Differences between Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in Dispositions

CATEGORY: Dispositions	DIFFERENCES		
	KENYA	TANZANIA	UGANDA
SIMILARITIES			
Hardworking, responsibility, passion, and willingness to be corrected or advised are important dispositions of self-awareness. A few participants mentioned the dispositions of patience/time, kindness/friendliness, leadership, self-reflection, inquisitiveness, and positive attitude.	A few participants mentioned courage and self-realisation/self-actualisation as attributes of self-awareness.		

3.4 Values and Behaviours

The codes that emerged in the theme of behaviours and values include positive conduct, respect, obedience, discipline, humble, God fearing, love, wisdom, exemplary, trust/honesty and tolerance, as shown below.

Table 7: Codes That Emerged as Values and Behaviours of Self-Awareness

CODES	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	PARTICIPANTS					
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Respect	40	52.63	39	60.00	44	46.32
Positive conduct	38	50.00	33	50.77	53	55.79
Obedience	22	28.95	22	33.85	13	13.68
Discipline	11	14.47	21	32.31	11	11.58
Humble	8	10.53	8	12.31	7	7.37
God fearing	7	9.21	7	10.77	10	10.53
Love	7	9.21	6	9.23	4	4.21
Trust/Honesty	6	7.89	6	9.23		
Wisdom	3	3.95	4	6.15	1	1.05
Exemplary	2	2.63			9	9.47
Tolerance	2	2.63	2	3.08		
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	76		65		95	

Across the three countries, participants mentioned respect as an important value. A self-aware individual is perceived as someone who has respect both for himself and others, regardless of their status and age. Notably, to some participants in Kenya, respect and self-awareness complement each other. In regard to gender, more women than men prominently mentioned respect in all the three countries. Love, wisdom, and humility were other values mentioned by a few participants across the three countries.

Being self-aware is intertwined with demonstrating good behaviours. Participants prominently mentioned positive conduct, discipline, and obedience as behaviours associated with strong self-awareness. In regard to participants' gender, in Tanzania, more men than women prominently mentioned positive conduct, whereas in Kenya and Uganda, no considerable gender differences were observed; more men than women in Uganda and Kenya prominently mentioned discipline, while in Tanzania, more women mentioned this code; and more men prominently mentioned obedience in Tanzania and Kenya, while in Uganda, obedience was mentioned by more women.

Table 8: Similarities and Differences between Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in Values and Behaviours

CATEGORY: Values and behaviours	DIFFERENCES		
SIMILARITIES	KENYA	TANZANIA	UGANDA
<p>Positive conduct, discipline, and obedience are key characteristic behaviours of a self-aware person. A few participants also mention the fear of God.</p> <p>The value of respect is considered the most important. A few participants mention the values of love, humility, and wisdom.</p>			

3.5 Support Systems and Enabling Factors

Support systems and enabling factors are all the essential networks/elements in the community that enhance a person's capacity to become self-aware. The codes that emerged in the theme of support systems and enabling factors include school/training, family, community/developmental partners, friendship/peers, place of worship, media, others' perceptions, reading, and experience, as shown below.



Table 9: Codes That Emerged as Support Systems and Enabling Factors of Self-Awareness

CODES	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	PARTICIPANTS					
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Family	42	55.26	38	58.46	61	64.21
School/training	40	52.63	48	73.85	71	74.74
Community/Developmental partners	14	18.42	15	23.08	29	30.53
Place of worship	13	17.11	6	9.23	13	13.68
Friendship/peers	11	14.47	18	27.69	36	37.89
Reading	7	9.21			7	7.37
Experience	2	2.63	2	3.08	6	6.32
Others' perception			2	3.08	15	15.79
Media; TV, Radio, etc.			1	1.54	2	2.11
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	76		65		95	

Across the three countries, participants mostly mentioned school/training, family, community/developmental partners, places of worship, and friendship/peers as key to enhancing adolescents' self-awareness skills. Participants recognise the initial role of the family before individuals interact with the community and friends. In this regard, parents are aware and proud of their contribution to their children's upbringing. Parent-child relationships influence self-awareness; good parenting improves or builds self-awareness in a child, and poor parenting hinders it. A family ought to provide an environment that is conducive to nurturing the child's abilities.

School/training also contributes immensely to fostering a person's self-awareness, as participants (especially in Tanzania and Uganda) point out. The school provides a platform for young people to freely interact with different categories of people and engages them in various cocurricular activities. Likewise, in the community, adolescents interact with different people who offer good advice especially about the appropriate way to conduct oneself. Most of the participants appreciated an interdependent contribution from all the support systems.

In terms of gender, more men than women in all three countries prominently mentioned places of worship and community/developmental partners. In Uganda and Tanzania, more men than women mentioned school/training while in Kenya, more women than men mentioned school. In Tanzania and Kenya, more women than men mentioned family while more men mentioned this support system in Uganda. In Uganda and Kenya, friendship/peers was mentioned by more men, unlike in Tanzania where more women mentioned this code.

3.6 Assessment Methods

The codes that emerged as assessment methods of self-awareness include observation, interviews, task performance, and staying with people, as shown below.

Table 10: Codes That Emerged as Assessment Methods of Self-Awareness

CODES	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	PARTICIPANTS					
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Observation	30	39.47	26	40.00	37	38.95
Task Performance	17	22.37	16	24.62	24	25.26
Interviews	18	23.68	7	10.77	13	13.68
Staying with the people	3	3.95	2	3.08	2	2.11
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	76		65		95	

Across the three countries, observation and task performance were the common methods identified by participants across the three countries. According to them, observation does not need to be a structured activity; one can tell that a young person is self-aware when meeting them on the street, at home, or even in school. Watching how they walk, behave, talk, and dress paints a clear picture of whether a young person is self-aware. Interestingly, in this case self-awareness is considered an external trait measured using physical attributes rather than actions. On the other hand, task performance means assigning an activity that in most cases is linked to domestic chores at home and class exercises and assignments at school. Notably, in the school setting, those who correctly respond or answer the given exercises are considered self-aware. Some participants said that task performance and observation can be employed at the same time.

Another assessment method that emerged is interviews: an idea that emerged mostly from Kenyan participants (24%). However, their understanding is limited to the informal questioning during casual interactions. The participants suggest asking the young person several questions, mainly on social issues.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The comparison of the findings of the contextualization studies on self-awareness in the three countries shows major similarities and only minor differences. What emerges from the interviews is that the most common understanding of self-awareness is the knowledge of oneself in terms of character, behaviours, values, desires, goals, feelings, strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities. It is also associated with one's ability to take good care of

oneself, knowledge of one's health and identity, and the fear of God. The participants believe that self-aware individuals are respectful and exhibit good behaviours, such as discipline and obedience.

The study further revealed that self-aware young people exhibit the subskills of self-confidence, relationship skills, effective communication, self-regulation, guidance and counselling, goal setting and planning, cooperation, and empathy. These aid the improvement of self-awareness skills. In addition, attributes exhibited and expected of self-aware adolescents include hardworking, passion, responsibility, leadership, kindness or friendliness, willingness to be corrected or advised, courageous, self-realisation or self-actualisation, positive attitude, time management, self-reflection, and inquisitiveness.

In order to help improve self-awareness skills among young people, the support systems such family, school, places of worship, friends or peers, and community or development partners play an enormous role. These support systems should not work in isolation but should instead complement each other, since young people interact with all of them. This interaction points to a sense of community or belonging that adolescents have to demonstrate through helping others in their community, sharing and being open to others' perceptions, working or staying together, and having a sense they are part of a given community.

Observation and task performance are regarded as the most appropriate methods for assessing self-awareness skills among adolescents. These could be employed independently or jointly. Other assessment methods participants identified include interviews and staying with the people.

