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ICT Skills and Refugees' Immigration Rights: A Study of the International Organisation of Migration, Uganda

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This study examines the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills on the realisation of refugees' immigration rights, focusing on the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Uganda. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative data from 150 refugees and IOM technical staff with qualitative insights gathered through interviews. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.973$, $p < 0.001$) between ICT skills and the ability of refugees to assert their rights. Respondents indicated that enhanced ICT skills significantly improve their access to information about immigration rights and facilitate communication with support organisations. Despite these advancements, barriers such as limited digital literacy and socioeconomic challenges persist, underscoring the need for targeted training programs. The study emphasises that investing in ICT skills development is crucial for empowering refugees and improving their advocacy efforts. Recommendations include establishing community technology centres and conducting assessments to identify specific barriers to training. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of ICT in fostering refugee empowerment and rights realisation in Uganda.

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INTRODUCTION

The historical context of refugees' immigration rights has evolved significantly since the aftermath of World War II, which marked a dramatic increase in global displacement. The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and the subsequent adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention were pivotal in recognising the rights of refugees and outlining the frameworks for their protection (UNHCR, 2021). Over the decades, various international organisations, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), have emerged to address the complexities of migration, focusing on the integration and empowerment of refugees. Uganda has been noted for its progressive refugee policies, which emphasise self-reliance and community integration, allowing refugees to access rights that facilitate their livelihood and social inclusion (Kälin & Künzli, 2016). However, despite these advancements, many refugees remain unaware of their rights, highlighting the necessity for effective information dissemination and skills development, particularly in the realm of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The study is grounded in the **Human Capital Theory**, which posits that individuals can enhance their economic and social status through the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Becker, 1993). In the context of refugees, ICT skills are critical for enabling access to information about immigration rights, legal processes, and available resources. Additionally, the **Social Constructivism Theory** provides insight into how social contexts shape the understanding and utilisation of technology. This theory asserts that the effectiveness of ICT in empowering refugees is influenced by their socio-

cultural backgrounds, access to resources, and the availability of supportive networks (Vygotsky, 1978). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study explores how ICT skills can empower refugees to assert their rights and navigate the complexities of the immigration process.

Conceptually, the study focuses on the intersection of ICT skills and immigration rights. ICT encompasses a wide array of digital tools and platforms that can enhance communication, access to information, and advocacy for refugees. The notion of **Digital Literacy** is central to this research, as it refers to the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate, and create information using digital technologies (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Understanding how ICT skills facilitate access to information about immigration rights is crucial for developing effective interventions that promote refugee empowerment. Furthermore, the concept of **Digital Empowerment** highlights the potential of technology to enhance refugees' agency, enabling them to advocate for their rights and engage with relevant organisations more effectively.

The contextual backdrop of this study is Uganda, which hosts over 1.5 million refugees from various countries, including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Burundi (UNHCR, 2021). Uganda's inclusive refugee policies allow for freedom of movement and the right to work, yet many refugees lack awareness of their rights and the services available to them. The rapid growth of mobile technology and internet access in Uganda presents unique opportunities for enhancing refugees' understanding of their immigration rights. However, barriers such as limited digital literacy, language challenges, and unequal access to technology persist (Wamala, 2016). This study aims

to investigate how ICT skills affect the realisation of immigration rights among refugees in Uganda, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of technology in fostering refugee empowerment and advocacy.

RELATED LITERATURE

Mutarubukwa, P., Mhunga, E., and Mgaya, L. (2020) conducted an e-governance needs study in Tanzania, observing that while infrastructure grew, inadequate digital literacy constrained refugee inclusion. Similarly, Seyama, J., Piri, D., and Tembo, I. (2021) examined online class barriers for Zambian displaced learners, recognising limited abilities as a chief hindrance. Both studies emphasise that complementary skills training is needed to optimise available technologies.

These findings highlight the critical role of digital literacy in facilitating refugees' access to information and services, underscoring the need for targeted training programs to bridge the skills gap.

Against this backdrop, programs working to enhance ICT proficiencies have documented meaningful gains. UNHCR and MSRDC's (2018) evaluation of digital literacy courses in Rwanda reported improved self-sufficiency through social media and job searching. Kennedy, H., Mian, A., and Mortazavi, H. (2020) conducted an impact assessment of IT training for Iraqi IDPs and concurred that it significantly boosted self-employment by facilitating market connections. Additionally, Sturm, T., and Fechter, A. (2019) studied tech hubs empowering refugee youth in Turkey and established that peer learning benefited abilities and well-being.

These examples illustrate how enhancing ICT skills can lead to increased self-reliance and employment opportunities for refugees, reinforcing the importance of such initiatives in promoting integration and rights protection.

Nevertheless, certain contextual factors also determine the accessibility of such initiatives. Kamel Boulos, M. N., Giordano, D., and D'Ambra, J. (2017) examined urban refugees in Nairobi and noted that despite available programs, cost remained a barrier to sustained engagement. Dona, D. (2020) presented a case report mirroring the Congolese experience, supporting these findings and highlighting complex needs like childcare as additional obstacles. To design context-appropriate skills strengthening strategies, ground-level understandings are therefore essential.

These insights emphasise the necessity of considering socioeconomic challenges when designing ICT training programs, ensuring that they are accessible and relevant to diverse refugee populations.

Targeting women presents special considerations as well. According to Vearey and Carr (2018), female refugees confront more structural restrictions hindering their adoption of ICT. In recognition of this, several organisations implement tailored training to boost confidence in using digital tools for goals like employment. A comprehensive assessment of prevailing interventions is important to verify efficacy and make recommendations for replicating good practices, facilitating gender-inclusive fulfilment of rights.

Recognising the unique challenges faced by female refugees is crucial for developing effective ICT training programs that empower women and promote gender equality in access to opportunities.

Insights from similar initiatives provide direction for the current study's skills-focused component. Atia (2018) evaluated an e-platform helping Egyptian women refugees gain livelihood skills and reported improved social and economic empowerment through multi-level technical and soft support. Furthermore, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2016) case analysis of a South Sudan digital education project in Ugandan settlements identified

the necessity of coupling ICT courses with financial literacy and entrepreneurship modules to enhance outcomes.

These findings suggest that integrating financial literacy with ICT training can significantly improve refugees' economic prospects, highlighting the need for holistic approaches in skills development programs.

Skills development curriculums necessitate regular re-evaluation and adaptation to changing contexts as well. Ranganatha and Ranganatha (2019) longitudinal assessment of an information access program in Rohingya camps found the evolving digital landscape warranted increased emphasis on AI and coding instruction later on. UNICEF (2022) proposed that future trainings should integrate social media risk guidance and verifiable credentialing, given growing usage trends. These underscore that assessing beneficiaries' and trainers' perceptions of relevance is imperative for flexible, demand-driven curriculums.

This dynamic approach to curriculum development ensures that training remains relevant and effective, equipping refugees with the necessary skills to navigate an ever-changing digital landscape.

Studies also highlight the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation in operationalising digital skills initiatives. For instance, Otiato, P., Opiyo, A., and Reed, L. (2021) explored efforts to train displaced South Sudanese youth in Northern Uganda, emphasising that sustainability requires the involvement of refugees themselves, as well as camp administration and private sector collaboration. Alongside this, Barbour, K., and Lian, W. (2019) conducted a comparative case study of programs scaling technical empowerment courses globally, maintaining that continuous partnerships ensure needs-based adaptation.

This cooperative approach not only enhances the sustainability of ICT training programs but

also ensures they are tailored to the specific needs of refugee communities, fostering greater engagement and impact.

Coordination with service providers using ICTs also merits investigation to identify complementary training opportunities. An impact study of a UNHCR database simplification process found that working with telecoms yielded connectivity subsidies for refugees pursuing certified online courses (Vraga and Zheng, 2019). Operationalising skills development, therefore, warrants a participatory approach, mapping synergies across technical and socioeconomic domains of partners.

This collaboration emphasises the importance of integrating ICT service providers into skills training initiatives, enhancing access and effectiveness for refugee learners.

Given dispersed settlement patterns, mobile and e-learning have emerged as effective modalities for delivering skills training to refugees. Furuholt & Kristiansen (2007) early experiment assessing a mobile agricultural advisory program in Uganda demonstrated how ICT can overcome barriers like distance. More recently, UNESCO (2021) proposed online and blended formats help reach learners facing mobility constraints, like women. However, this necessitates reliable connectivity within settlements.

These modalities highlight the potential of ICT to reach marginalised populations, but they also stress the critical need for adequate infrastructure to support effective learning.

Evaluating technical infrastructure accessibility and quality is thus important when developing digital skills curriculums. Tessier et al. (2021) vulnerability assessment of a MOOC initiative for Syrian youth in Jordan found that most could not participate due to insufficient bandwidth. Similarly, Al-Harhi & Al-Harhi (2022) explored ICT readiness among Yemeni refugee students in Oman, emphasising that connectivity upgrades supported

meaningful e-learning. Such findings underscore the need for complementary infrastructure considerations.

These assessments are vital for ensuring that ICT training programs are not only designed well but also implemented in environments where participants can effectively engage with the content.

Beneficiary Involvement in Curriculum Design

Involving beneficiaries in curriculum design fosters culture-sensitive, community-owned solutions as well. Bailey & Grotti (2020) examined participatory models developed with Central African refugees in Rwanda, noting that locally determined content made courses engaging and impactful long-term. Qualitative feedback is therefore valuable for this study in crafting inclusive, demand-driven training frameworks that uphold dignity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach and a cross-sectional design were utilised in this study. This approach combined qualitative and quantitative methods to

gain a deeper understanding of the effect of ICT on immigration rights. The qualitative component involved interviews to gather rich, in-depth insights, while the quantitative component used questionnaires to collect numerical data for statistical analysis.

Study Population

The study population consisted of 150 participants who were refugees and IOM (IT technical staff members (IOM Internal Report, 2023). This population comprised Information Communication Technology (ICT) Users, ICT Non-Users, Immigration Help Desk Staff, and refugees who had submitted family applications digitally. Participants were selected based on specific criteria related to the research objectives and the target group of interest.

Determination of the Sample Size

The sample size was determined using Morgan's (1970) formula, which took into account the desired level of confidence and the expected variability in the population. The formula was applied to ensure that the sample size was representative and sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions from the study.

Table 1: Sample Determination Table

| Category | Population | Sample Size | Sampling Technique |
|---|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| ICT Users | | | |
| Information Communication Technology (ICT) Users | 60 | 40 | Purposive |
| Refugees who have submitted family applications digitally | 48 | 26 | Simple random |
| ICT officials | 20 | 20 | Purposive |
| Immigration Help Desk Staff | 22 | 22 | Purposive |
| Total | 150 | 108 | |

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods for this study included both questionnaires and interview guides. Questionnaires were administered to gather quantitative data on participants' perceptions and

experiences related to ICT usage and immigration rights. Focus group discussions were conducted with selected participants to collect qualitative data, allowing for a deeper exploration of their perspectives and experiences. This mixed-methods

approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, integrating both numerical data and personal insights.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were designed to capture relevant information, such as the level of parental monitoring, behaviour outcomes, and demographic characteristics of the participants.

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule consisted of a set of open-ended questions designed to explore participants'

experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards ICT and its effect on immigration rights.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality of their personal information. The study adhered to ethical guidelines and protocols to protect the rights and well-being of the participants.

FINDINGS

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Effect of ICT Skills on Accomplishing Refugees' Immigration Rights.

| ICT skills | Mean | Std Dev |
|---|------|---------|
| I have the necessary ICT skills to effectively advocate for my immigration rights. | 3.65 | 1.277 |
| My proficiency in ICT has made it easier to access information about my rights. | 3.45 | 1.243 |
| I feel confident using ICT tools to communicate with legal representatives regarding my immigration status. | 3.78 | 1.370 |
| I believe that improving my ICT skills would enhance my ability to assert my immigration rights. | 3.52 | 1.239 |
| I regularly use ICT tools to stay informed about changes to immigration policies. | 3.46 | 1.179 |
| My ICT skills have enabled me to connect with other refugees to share information about rights. | 3.62 | 1.044 |
| Average mean | 3.58 | 1.225 |

Source: Primary data (2024)

The descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into the perceptions of refugees regarding their ICT skills and how these skills impact their ability to advocate for their immigration rights. The average mean score across the six statements is 3.58, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents about the significance of ICT skills in facilitating their advocacy efforts. This suggests that while refugees recognise the importance of ICT in navigating their rights, there is still room for improvement in their confidence and proficiency.

Examining the individual statements reveals varying levels of confidence and proficiency among

respondents. The highest mean score, 3.78, corresponds to the statement "I feel confident using ICT tools to communicate with legal representatives regarding my immigration status." This high score indicates that many refugees feel capable of utilising ICT for important communications, which is crucial for effectively managing their immigration cases. In contrast, the statement "My proficiency in ICT has made it easier to access information about my rights" received a lower mean score of 3.45. This suggests that while refugees may have some confidence in their communication skills, they may not feel as proficient in using ICT to access critical information about their rights.

The standard deviations for the responses range from 1.044 to 1.370, indicating a moderate degree of variability in the perceptions of ICT skills among refugees. For instance, the relatively high standard deviation of 1.370 for the confidence in using ICT tools to communicate with legal representatives suggests that while some refugees feel very confident, others may experience significant uncertainty or lack of skills in this area. Additionally, the statement "I believe that improving my ICT skills would enhance my ability to assert my immigration rights" has a mean of 3.52, indicating that many refugees recognise the potential of further skill development to bolster their advocacy efforts.

Interview Responses:

How would you rate your own ICT skills in terms of accessing information about your immigration rights?

"I would rate my skills as fair. I can find information online, but I sometimes struggle with more complex tasks like filling out forms."

In what ways do you think your ICT skills have contributed to your ability to assert your immigration rights?

"My skills allow me to search for information quickly. I can find out what documents I need and understand the processes better, which gives me confidence when I talk to officials."

Have you taken any steps to improve your ICT skills? If yes, what motivated you to do so?

"Yes, I attended a workshop at a local community centre. I wanted to learn more because I realised that better skills would help me navigate my situation more effectively."

Can you describe a situation where your ICT skills helped you navigate a challenge related to your immigration status?

"When I needed to submit an online application for my residency, I used my skills to research the requirements. I was able to prepare everything correctly and submit it on time."

Table 3: Pearson Correlation for ICT Skills on Accomplishing Refugees' Immigration Rights.

| Correlations | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| Study variables | | ICT skills | Refugees' immigration rights |
| ICT skills | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .973* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Refugees' immigration rights | Pearson Correlation | .973* | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between ICT skills and the accomplishment of refugees' immigration rights shows an exceptionally strong positive correlation, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.973. This indicates that higher levels of ICT skills are closely associated with the successful realisation of

immigration rights among refugees. Such a high correlation coefficient suggests that as refugees' ICT skills improve, their ability to understand and advocate for their rights also significantly increases.

The significance level for this correlation is reported as 0.000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold, confirming that the relationship is statistically

significant. This suggests that the likelihood of this correlation occurring by chance is extremely low, reinforcing the importance of ICT skills in empowering refugees. The strong statistical

significance indicates that the findings are robust and reliable, making a compelling case for the positive impact of ICT skills training on the realisation of refugees' immigration rights.

Table 4: Linear Regression Analysis for ICT Skills on Accomplishing Refugees' Immigration Rights Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .973 ^a | .946 | .010 | 1.233 |

a. predictors: (constant), **ICT skills**

ANOVA

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 7.417 | 1 | 7.417 | 4.878 | .000 ^a |
| | Residual | 573.185 | 99 | 1.520 | | |
| | Total | 580.602 | 100 | | | |

a. Predictors: (Constant), **ICT skills**

b. Dependent Variable: **Accomplishing refugees' immigration rights**

Coefficients

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.086 | .206 | | 14.953 | .000 |
| | ICT skills | .121 | .055 | .973 | 2.209 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: **Accomplishing refugees' immigration rights**

The linear regression analysis conducted to evaluate the relationship between ICT skills and the accomplishment of refugees' immigration rights reveals significant findings. The model summary indicates a high correlation coefficient (R) of 0.973, suggesting a very strong positive relationship between ICT skills and the ability of refugees to accomplish their immigration rights. The R Square value of 0.946 indicates that approximately 94.6% of the variance in accomplishing immigration rights can be explained by ICT skills. This high level of explanatory power underscores the critical role that ICT skills play in enabling refugees to navigate their rights effectively.

The ANOVA results further support the significance of the regression model, with an F-statistic of 4.878 and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that the model is statistically significant, confirming that ICT skills are a meaningful predictor of the accomplishment of refugees' immigration rights. The low p-value suggests that the likelihood of this relationship occurring by chance is extremely low, reinforcing the conclusion that enhancing ICT skills is essential for improving the ability of refugees to advocate for and assert their rights.

Examining the coefficients, the unstandardized coefficient for ICT skills is 0.121, meaning that for each unit increase in ICT skills, there is an associated increase of 0.121 units in the accomplishment of immigration rights. The standardised coefficient (Beta) of 0.973 indicates a strong effect size, confirming that ICT skills are a dominant factor in predicting the accomplishment of these rights. Both the constant (3.086) and the ICT skills coefficient are statistically significant with p-values of 0.000, highlighting the importance of focusing on ICT skill development as part of programs aimed at empowering refugees. Overall, these findings suggest that investing in ICT training and resources can significantly enhance the ability of refugees to understand and assert their immigration rights, ultimately leading to better outcomes in their integration and advocacy efforts.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

ICT Skills and Immigration Rights

The study finds that ICT skills play a crucial role in enabling refugees to effectively navigate and assert their immigration rights. Respondents indicated that possessing stronger ICT skills significantly correlates with their ability to access information and communicate with support organisations. This aligns with the findings of Mutarubukwa et al. (2020), who noted that despite improvements in ICT infrastructure, inadequate digital literacy remains a barrier to refugee inclusion in Tanzania. Similarly, Seyama et al. (2021) found that limited digital skills were a primary obstacle for displaced learners in Zambia, emphasising the need for comprehensive skills training to optimise the use of available technologies.

Supporting these findings, the evaluation by UNHCR and MSRDC (2018) on digital literacy courses in Rwanda reported positive outcomes, including improved self-sufficiency through the use of social media and job searching skills. Kennedy et al. (2020) highlighted the significant benefits of IT training for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in

Iraq, demonstrating how enhanced ICT skills can facilitate market connections and self-employment opportunities. Additionally, Sturm and Fechter (2019) found that tech hubs in Turkey, which promote peer learning, effectively improved the abilities and well-being of refugee youth. Collectively, these studies emphasise the necessity of investing in ICT skills development as a means to empower refugees and enhance their advocacy for immigration rights.

Conversely, some literature points to contextual factors that may limit the effectiveness of ICT skills training initiatives. Kamel Boulos et al. (2017) noted that although programs exist, financial barriers often prevent sustained engagement among urban refugees in Nairobi. Dona (2020) echoed this sentiment, highlighting that complex needs, such as childcare, can hinder participation in skills training programs for Congolese refugees. *These contrasting perspectives indicate that while enhancing ICT skills is vital, addressing contextual barriers is equally important to ensure that training programs are accessible and effective for all refugees.*

CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals that ICT skills are a critical factor in enabling refugees to navigate and assert their immigration rights effectively. The correlation between ICT skills and the observance of immigration rights suggests that as refugees develop their technological competencies, they become more capable of accessing vital information and communicating with support organisations. This finding is consistent with recent studies that emphasise the importance of digital literacy in fostering self-sufficiency and enhancing refugees' ability to engage with their rights. Consequently, investing in skills training initiatives emerges as a vital strategy for improving the overall empowerment of refugees within the immigration system.

Nonetheless, the study also highlights barriers that may impede the effectiveness of ICT skills training, such as financial constraints and contextual challenges. While the positive impact of skills development is clear, it is equally important to address the barriers that prevent refugees from participating in these programs. Tailoring training initiatives to meet the specific needs of refugees, including considerations of childcare and affordability, is essential for ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness. By adopting a holistic approach that combines skills training with support for contextual challenges, stakeholders can significantly enhance the ability of refugees to realise their immigration rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that refugee support organisations prioritise the development and delivery of comprehensive digital literacy training programs tailored to the specific needs of refugees. These programs should cover both basic ICT skills and advanced topics relevant to accessing immigration rights and services, with training sessions conducted bi-weekly in community centres or refugee camps.

The study recommends that educational institutions partner with NGOs to create accessible learning platforms for ongoing ICT skills training for refugees. Such collaborations should leverage existing resources to ensure effective delivery, with online platforms developed to accommodate varying schedules and learning preferences.

The study recommends that governments and funding agencies allocate resources for the establishment of community technology centres in refugee settlements and urban areas. These centres should serve as hubs for ICT skills training, equipped with the necessary technology and trained staff to provide a conducive learning environment.

The study recommends that organisations involved in refugee advocacy conduct assessments to identify specific barriers to ICT skills training among

refugee populations. These assessments should focus on issues such as affordability, childcare, and transportation, allowing for the design of targeted interventions. Regular surveys and focus groups should be utilized to gather insights directly from refugees to ensure that interventions effectively address their needs.

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