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Voices of Children with Impairments in Tanzania: Understanding the Barriers Hindering Participation in Decision Making in School

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Abstract:

This study aimed to understand the barriers hindering participation in decision making in school for Children with Impairments (CWPI) in Ilala and Temeke districts of Dares Salaam City in Tanzania. The study was conducted in two public schools which are Jangwani Secondary School and the Salvation Army School. The study looked at how CWPI were involved in making decisions on administrative issues as well as learning, and the barriers limiting their participation. A sample of 12 students, 8 teachers, and 2 Government Officials was selected. Data were sourced by use of interviews and group activities, and descriptive analysis techniques were used to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that CWPI were imposed by various barriers hindering their participation in decision making, including decisions being made at the ministerial level such as curriculum issues, choice of textbooks. CWPI and Children with no Impairments (CWNI) were thought to be capable of participating in making decisions, however they were also perceived as immature persons thus unable to be involved in decision making with regards to the schools' administration issues such as deciding on the schools' disciplinary measures as well as making decisions regarding learning, including curriculum issues, assessment and choice of text books. Additionally, it was revealed that there was lack of guidelines/policies to guide the participation of children in schools.

Keywords: *Participation, decision making, disability, children with physical disabilities, participation in decision making in school*

1. Introduction

Disabled children in Tanzania have been excluded from the education mainstream due to social- cultural barriers that hinder their inclusion in participation. Several studies have been conducted looking at disabled children's inclusion in the education system. This study particularly focuses on participation in decision making in decision making for physically disabled children in Tanzania.

For the purpose of this research a child is defined in accordance to the Child Act No.21 of Tanzania, as a person below the age of eighteen years. Children with Impairments involved are those with physical Impairment as the researcher saw they were easy to access from two inclusive schools thus suited the limited time of the research.

1.1.1. Participation

According to Roger Hart's definition, "participation is the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured". (UNICEF, 2006). Boyden and Ennew (1997) point out that participation can be interpreted as taking part in something, or just being present when something is happening, or when one is involved or is consulted. Participation also entails being empowered in the sense that one's views can influence decisions made, will be acted on and will make a difference.

Child Participation is designated as "an ongoing process of children's expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them, requiring information- sharing and dialogue between children/adolescents and adults based on mutual respect, and requires that full consideration of their views be given, taking into account the child's age and maturity." (O'Kane, C., 2004 in UNICEF and IPU, 2011. pp.9). Child participation is also viewed as consulting with children and young people, giving children a chance to contribute and make changes, as well as seeing them as persons who can make important decisions. (UNICEF,2006).

Child participation rights include the freedom to express their views, to have an opinion in issues that affect them, freedom of joining associations and peaceful gatherings. Children's opportunities to participate should increase as they develop. (UNCRC, 1945).

1.1.2. Child Participation in Tanzania -Background

In Tanzania, Child participation is not a new phenomenon, it was first acknowledged by the First President of Tanzania, J.K. Nyerere, in 1968 under the umbrella of Education for Self-reliance. (REPOA, 2011). Education for Self-Reliance called for the

involvement of children and young people in development activities and decision making as a tool for developing reliable, self-reliant, and knowledgeable persons in the Tanzanian society. However, there were no guidelines put forth to legalize the self-reliance initiative. (REPOA,2011)

The Government of Tanzania in an effort to protect the rights of the child to participation ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and the ACRWC in 1998. (CDP 2008, REPOA (2012). Furthermore, the Government introduced the Junior Council of the United Republic of Tanzania in 2002 at the national level which was further formed by Save the Children with the aim of promoting child participation at the Local Government Level. However, although the children's council shows that it allows representation, from vulnerable children including CWIs, their involvement in the council is very low, mostly due to membership requirements such as literacy (Couzens and Koshuma, 2011), which hinders equal representation in the children's council as it is evidenced that majority of CWIs are sometimes not enrolled in schools. (NPD, 2004; UNICEF, 2010; REPOA 2012).

The Government also revised the Child Development Policy in 2008 and Introduced the Child Act No. 21 (2009) which recognises the rights of a child to participate and give their views in all matters that affect them including community issues, education and family. (Child Act No. 21, 2009; CDP, 2008; REPOA, 2012). Despite these efforts, there are challenges associated with realising the right of the child to participate in decision making due to views of the adults in the society that children have limited capabilities and status, thus cannot make decisions, and their views are not given significant attention. (UNICEF, 2010; REPOA, 2012)

The situation is worse for CWI, as pointed out by MacAlpine (2008), that they continue to be described by their Impairments, as children with inabilities and are treated as passive victims of their condition. CWPIs face challenges in participating and making decisions on education, family and social activities. (NSD, 2008). Impaired persons, including children, face such challenges due to stigma from the general public who see them as persons that are not able to participate. (NSD, 2008). It has also been evidenced by the NSD report (2008) that people with impairments who were able to participate in community activities, were left out in decision making conversations as they were regarded as persons who cannot make decisions. A study conducted by Feinstein (2009) found out that people with impairments including children felt they were not part of their community because they were seen as members who were not able to participate.

Participation of Children with Impairments (CWIs) is one of the areas that the Tanzanian government has put effort on by increasing opportunities and public awareness on the rights of the disabled child. (CDP, 2008; Child Act, 2009). Despite these efforts, CWIs in Tanzania have no voice, and are mostly excluded from participation by the society, owing much to the cultural views, misconceptions and other societal barriers. (NSD, 2008; McAlpine, 2008; UNICEF, 2010).

1.2. Research Aim and Research Questions

1.2.1. Aim

This research sought to understand the barriers hindering participation in decision making of physically impaired children in school. The research intended to assess the current situation of disabled children with regards to participation in decision making, to identify challenges hindering their participation in decision making and to identify ways that can promote participation and decision making

1.2.2. Research Questions

- i. How are children with impairments perceived by teachers, and other children with regards to participating in decision making in school?
- ii. What are the challenges hindering participation in decision making of children with impairments in school?
- iii. What should be done to promote participation in decision making for children with impairments in school?

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Framework

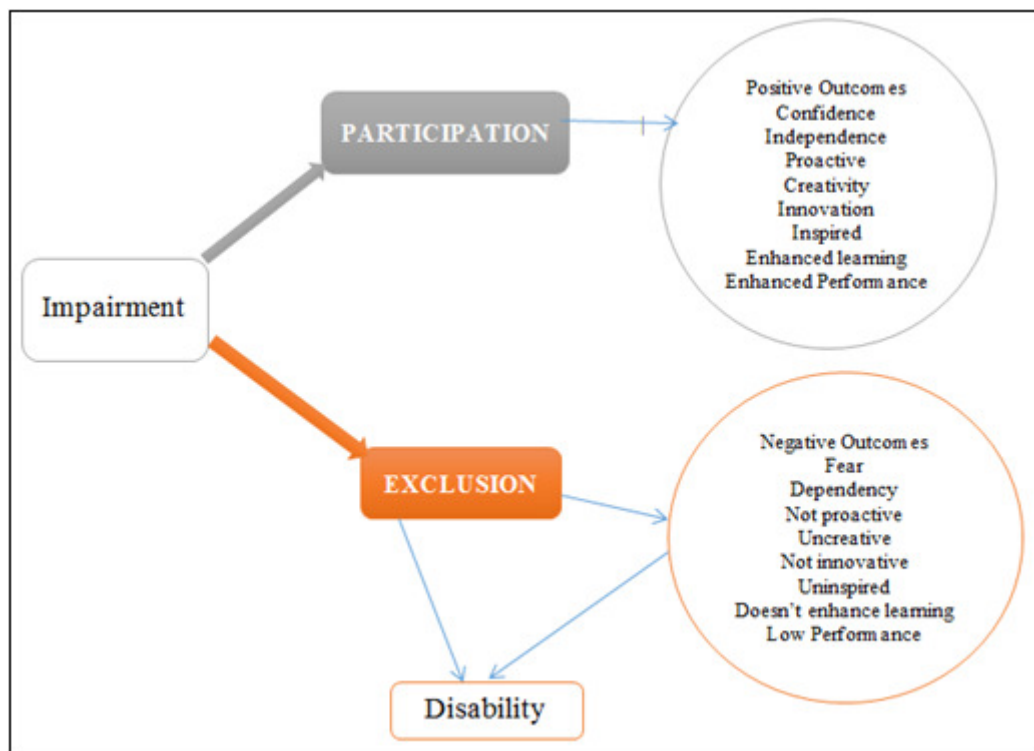


Figure 1: E. Lema, 2017

The conceptual framework suggests that involvement leads to positive outcomes as it enhances confidence in children, making them independence, fosters their proactivity and creativity, as well as innovation and helps in enhancing learning and improving their performance. Contrary, exclusion leads to negative outcomes as it breeds lack of confidence, dependency, and less proactive/creative/innovative, does not inspire disabled children's learning resulting to low performance.

2.2. Literature

Many literatures have expounded the issue of participation for disabled children, as well as participation in decision making for children in school. This part looks at various literatures on the concept of participation and disability, as well as participation in decision making in school.

2.2.1. Exclusion and Disability

Disability has been explained a result of social barriers that exclude the disabled from participating, and not a result of individual deficits. An individual's impairment is interpreted in terms of social and environmental factors that create the barriers to participate. (O'Connell et al, 2008; Jolly, 2012; Davis, 2013). It is the discrimination, prejudices, social exclusion, the social-physical environment and many more that in the long run turns impairment into a disabling condition. (Morris 2001, Carol J 2004, Davis 2013). The quality of the lives of those with disabilities is not determined by how they can function or on what their bodies can or cannot do but on the effect the society has on their impairments, they are a result of social barriers that hinder them to participate and not their individual deficits. (Morris 2001, Jolly 2012, Davis 2013).

CWIs in Tanzania have been subjected to various social hindrances such as negative attitudes, exclusion, and non-conducive environments, barriers that have been argued to worsen one's impairment. (NPD, 2004; UNICEF, 2010; REPOA, 2011; Oliver, 2009). The NPD (2004) points out that children's impairments can be lessened if early intervention and treatment is accessed, however such intervention and treatment does not entirely remove the social 'disabling' barriers that are imposed on them (REPOA, 2012; UNICEF, 2010). Therefore, creating an inclusive society with enhanced personal rights, freedom and choice to participate and be involved in issues that affect disabled children will not only help them to participate in matters of their concern, but helps to lessen one's impairments. (UNICEF 2010; REPOA, 2012).

2.2.2. Participation

Disability is construed as something imposed on top of an individual's impairments by how they are excluded from participating in the society by the society. (UPAS, 1976 in Finkelstein 2001, C. Thomas, 2004). There is a need of having an environment that enables Impaired people to participate and be involved in issues that affect them (J Morris, 2001). O'Connell et al (2008) points out that an individual's impairment is interpreted on terms of social and environmental factors that create the barriers to participate. He further asserts that the problem lies with the social barriers that hinder participation of disabled persons rather than the individual's impairment.

Biologically, children are not-mature persons. This is understood and given meaning in cultural ways (Prout & James, 1998 pp.7).

Mayhew and Barnado in Kehily (2009, pp.5), conceptualizes children as passive persons who do not choose and cannot control what happens around them. Children are further seen as becoming, waiting for what the society is preparing for them in the coming future (Qvortrup, Jens, 2005, pp.5). Lee (2001, pp.8) points out that childhood is interpreted through adulthood, looking at how their future as adults should be and not how their present as children is. Aries in Qvortrup Jens, (2005 pp.3) further suggested that children exist when childhood did not exist. Furthermore, CWI in the NPD (2004) are perceived as silent persons waiting to become adults.

It has been argued that giving children agency makes them more independent as they develop skills and abilities and learn to overcome their own challenges (Lansdown, 2011). However, children including those with impairments in Tanzania are viewed as immature persons who are dependent and are thus not considered as people who can participate in matters of their own concern this owes much to the culture and tradition through which adults make decisions for children and children are expected to obey. (Macha, 2003; REPOA, 2011). Furthermore, McAlpine (2008) points out that CWIs in Tanzania are still described by their “impairments, the whole individual gets lost, are treated as passive victims, and are regarded with compassion but not considered to be active agents in their own life”.

Providing children with the opportunity to participate is one of the principles of the UNCRC (Article 12). Furthermore, the Child Act No. 21 gives children the right to have an opinion, to be listened to and to participate. Thus, participation for CWIs in Tanzania is a legal right. Regardless of Legal Instruments protecting the rights of CWIs to participate, they are still regarded as persons who are not mature enough to make their own decisions, owing much to the culture and traditions through which adults make decisions for children and children are expected to follow. (REPOA 2010, UNICEF 2011).

Jenks in Kehily (2004, pp.94) points out that “children are and must be seen as active beings in the making of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live.”

Giving children a voice is respecting their rights and recognizing their abilities (Kehily, 2009).

Participating in matters that affect them gives CWIs a sense of worth and it is an important factor in developing their own abilities to protect themselves as well as voice up against violations of their own rights, as they understand their own challenges and their own abilities to overcome these challenges, and become independent as they develop skills and abilities. (MacAlpine 2008; UNICEF 2010; Lansdown 2011; James & James, 2012).

Despite the underlying studies on the importance of participation to children with impairments, and the Tanzania’s Government efforts of ensuring that all children have the rights to participate in matters that affect them (CDP 2008; Child Act. 21 2009), CWIs continue to be excluded by the society, first because they are children, and as children decisions need to be made for them by adults (UNICEF, 2010; REPOA, 2012) then because they have impairments, and their impairments are seen as disabilities. (MacAlpine, NSD, 2008)

2.2.3. Participation in Decision making in School

Children’s participation in decision making in school has been identified as a fundamental part of approaches for combating educational disadvantages and exclusion. (Beveridge, S., 2013). Magadla, M. (2007) and Huddleston, T. (2007) points out that children in school should be involved fully in decision making of all aspects in school, including school rules, disciplinary measures, authorizations, curriculum, teaching and learning. Despite such views, children’s participation in decision making in most African countries is limited because of the adult-centric system, in which children are expected to be followers of decisions made for them by adults. (Sithole, 1998; REPOA, 2012; UNICEF, 2013). Schools in Tanzania follow an authoritative culture which allows minimal participation from children. Decisions regarding curricula, choice of text books, and evaluation criteria are done by the responsible Ministry or regional and municipal authorities, whilst other decisions are done by the school management, leaving little or no room for child participation in decision making. (Hannam, D. 2003)

Njuzela, D. (1998) asserts that when children are given an opportunity to participate and advance their skills, their opinions and other contributions should not be undervalued. In support of this, HakiElimu (2005) points out that students learn by doing, therefore when children participate in decision making, they learn and develop various skills, and ways of using their acquired skills in making better decisions in the future. Furthermore, it is believed that a school environment that allows children’s involvement will inspire and boost children’s participation in matters that concern them. (Barth 2001). However, African Schools’ environment is authoritative and does not encourage participation from children. (Sifuna, 2000) Involvement of children in decision making of the school’s issues is mostly limited to only those issues that affect the children but not the stakeholders. (Squelch, 1999; Magadla, 2007; Huddleston, 2007). This authoritarian system entails that students do not get to decide what they can or cannot get involved with. (Jeruto T, B., and Kiprop, C, J., 2011).

A study by Manefield, J., C. Moor., J. and Mahar, C., (2007) found out that teachers are in agreement of student participation in decision making on issues regarding choice of classes to take, management of time, extracurricular and activities. This suggests that that sometimes teachers tend to describe matters that affect children very narrowly. (Huddleston, 2007). In many Tanzanian schools, teachers use student leaders to deliver their decisions to their peers, a view supported by Rajani (2003) who points out that prefects (student leaders) receive instruction from teachers to implement punitive measures to fellow students. This suggests that even in the limited areas where children leaders in schools can make decisions, they have to follow directives from teachers.

3. Methodology

This part will identify the methodological approaches used in this study, highlighting the reasons for using the methodology and methods in this study, the choice of the sample used, ethical considerations and how data will be recorded and analyzed.

3.1. Qualitative Approach

A qualitative research studies the world by looking at how individuals construct meaning and interprets their own setting. (Neuman 1997). This is contrary to quantitative research which uses statistics and experiments, so as to come up with scientific quantifiable data (Neuman, 1997). This study looked at the way people constructed decision making and childhood in the Tanzanian school setting. Therefore, it was important to consider using a methodology that would grasp meaning that cannot be analyzed by numbers and hypothesis. (Neuman, 1997). Thus, a qualitative method was adopted.

This study involved children from a society where children's views and/or opinions are silenced by the cultural-perspectives where by the adult members of the society decide what the children should or should not say. (Sithole, 1998). As the study concerned physically disabled children's participation in decision making, it was only proper that the researcher used a methodology that allowed the children-respondents to participate freely, giving their opinions without being imposed on by the researcher and. Following this viewpoint, the study adopted a qualitative method which Seale (2004:76) points out that it "allows the perspectives and priorities of individuals to be revealed, without imposition of the pre-conceptions of the researcher".

The study aimed at understanding barriers which limited participation of physically disabled children in decision making, looking at the perception of the children and teachers. Therefore, it was important to use a methodology that allowed understanding of the values, perceptions and perspectives of the respondents concurring to Bryne (2004:182) as he suggests that qualitative methods are suitable in "accessing complex issues such as values and understanding". Bryne (2004:182) further added that qualitative methods "allow interviewees to speak in their own voices and their own language." This was also suitable in this study as the respondent's main language was Swahili and not English, the researcher gave the respondent a choice of using a language they were most comfortable with.

Furthermore, the issue of child participation is not a new phenomenon in Tanzania. However, there is little research regarding children's participation in decision making in a school setting, thus it is intended that this study will help to identify future areas for research. This agrees with Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) who points out that qualitative research is beneficial as it helps to recognize concerns that can be addressed in future research.

3.2. Sampling

This study involved a total of 22 respondents, these included Children with Impairments, children without impairments, and teachers from two Inclusive Secondary Schools, as well as Government officials from the Ministry of Education.

3.2.1. Participating Schools

Participating Children and Teachers were from Jangwani Secondary School and The Salvation Army School. Both are Inclusive Public Schools from two different Districts of Temeke and Ilala in Dar es Salaam City. Data was collected from Jangwani Secondary School and Salvation Army School because the two schools are amongst the few available Inclusive schools in Dar es Salaam, thus allowed access to both CWPI and CWNI.

3.2.2. Children

- Number of children Involved

The study involved a total of 12 children aged 12-17 years from 2 schools. Out of these, 8 had physical impairments and 4 had no impairments. 6 children were from Jangwani Secondary School, and 6 students were from The Salvation Army School. From each school, 4 Children involved were children with physical impairments and 2 children were children with no impairments.

- Why Children with Physical Impairments as Majority Respondents

Majority of the respondents involved in this study were CWPI because the study sought to understand barriers hindering them to participate in decision making, from their own perspectives as well as the perspectives of those around them, concurring to Curran & Runswick-Cole (2013) who explained that disabled children are the experts of their life situation and can participate as active respondents and not subjects.

- Why Involve Children with no Impairments as Respondents

Existing Literatures suggests that involving non-disabled children in matters that concern children with disabilities, does not only help researchers to understand the attitudes of non-disabled children towards children with disabilities, but also helps non-disabled children to accept and understand better disabled children. (Andrews, 1998; Heim, 1994; Kelly, P.P., 1995; Lewis and Johnson, 1982; Prater, 2003; Monson and Shurtleff, 1979). From this view, this study also involved children with no impairments (CWNI) in order to assess and understand how they perceive CWPIs' participation in decision making.

3.2.3. Teachers

- Number of Teachers Involved

A total of 8 Teachers were involved from the two schools of the participating children where by 4 Teachers were from Jangwani Secondary School and 4 Teachers were from the Salvation Army Secondary School.

- Why Involve teachers

Social attitudes imposed on CWI are known to affect the perceptions and understanding of those who care for CWIs. (Woolfson,

2004 & Carpenter, 2010 in Curran, 2013). Therefore, Teachers from the schools of the participating children were involved in order to access their perceptions and understanding towards CWIs' participation in decision making at school, because teachers are associated with the children at school.

3.2.4. Government Official from the Ministry of Education:

2 Government officials from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOET) were involved in order to assess their understanding on barriers hindering participation of CWIs, and the strategies passed by the Ministry to address CWIs' participation in decision making. MOET is entrusted with developing, coordinating, implementing monitoring and evaluation of education policies and programmes. Therefore, involving officials from MOET was adequate.

3.3. Access to Respondents

Obtaining access is an important aspect in research and disregarding this can be a drawback in research. (Johl and Renganathan, 2010). In view of this, Access to the respondents was gained through phone calls, emails, letters and visiting the offices/centres/schools. However, it is argued that gaining access to respondents can consume time in research (Okumus et al., 2007; Shenton and Hayter, 2004). Therefore, early preparations were made. Research leaflets containing information about the research were given to all respondents as well as introduction letters to respective authorities (Municipal offices of both districts and the school) as a requirement before conducting research in Tanzania.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

This study used interviews, group activities with children and existing literatures as data collection methods. Existing literatures were used to make critical analysis of the findings of this research. Interviews were used to collect data for all research questions and from all respondents, while group activities with children were used to collect data from children. These are elaborated below.

3.4.1. Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

Research Question 1.....	How are CWIs perceived by their teachers, and other children with regards to participation in decision making?
Method(s).....	Interviews with Children, Interviews with Teachers
Research Questions 2.....	What are the challenges hindering facilitators and CWI with regards to CWI's participation in decision making?
Method(s).....	Interviews with Children, Interviews with Teachers
Research Questions 3.....	What should be done to promote participation in decision making for CWIs in School?
Method(s).....	Group Activities with Children, Interviews with Teachers, Interviews with Government officials

Table 1

3.4.2. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with Government officials, Teachers and Children. Interviews were used because they create a diverse relationship which may include, disguise, use of and may create several different features of communication, such as control, bond, mutuality and common understandings. (Birch & Millar, 2000 in Curran et al., 2013). Furthermore, using interviews with children seemed more adequate because interviews give a voice to the respondents as they take the researcher inside a world that's hidden, giving the unseen a voice. (Becker, 2012). Face-to-face Interviews allowed to not only listen to words voiced by the children but to also listen to their unvoiced words as one is able to observe their actions as well as emotions as pointed out by Sturges and Hanrahan(2004).

Interviews have been described as "a purposeful conversation in which an interviewer asks prepared questions and a respondent answers them." (Frey & Oishi, 1995 in Remenyi 2007, p.72). Assenting to this, an interview schedule was prepared. However, as flexibility allows the respondents to "develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised" (Martyn, 2010. p.176) the interviews were thus flexible, not limited to the interview schedule alone, with the use of semi-structured questions which allowed more flexibility during the interviews, following the interviewee's responses. (Becker, 2012).

One of the advantages of qualitative interviews is that it allows one to build rapport with the respondents, thus opens up a world of relationship from which a researcher shares information with the respondents. (Rogers, C., 1961). Building relationship is important in interviews especially those involving children as it helps them to be comfortable and build trust with the researcher. (Punch, S. 2013). Carl Rogers (1961, pp.33), points out that "If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship". Additionally, Dickson-Swift et al (2007, pp.331) points out that qualitative researchers have to start a rapport-building process from their initial meeting with their respondents so as "to build a research relationship that will allow the researcher access to that person's story". Understanding the importance of building trust with children, it was ensured that rapport was created with the children before and during interviews, which helped them to be more relaxed and speak freely agreeing to Dickson-Swift et al (2007, pp.331) that the participants' "disclosure can be heightened if there is a level of rapport between researcher and participant".

1. Why Interviews with Children

Children are portrayed as active agents, who can participate in various matters including research interviews. Involving children in Interviews shows that a researcher acknowledges and understands children's abilities to express their opinions and respond to questions. (Lansdown, 2011; Punch, S. 2002). Alderson (1995) further stresses that a researcher should not create distinctions by seeing a child as immature. Instead the child should be treated as a capable being who can participate in research interviews. As the study was about CWPIs participation in decision making, using interviews with children was thus suitable as it allowed children to become active agents.

2. Why Interviews with Teachers

Child participation in decision making in school will only be possible if persons associated with them in the school setting understand the importance of involving children in decision making as well as understand the barriers limiting the participation of children in decision making. Therefore, interviews with teachers were conducted as they are people who are most associated with the children in school. Interviews were selected as a method of data collection because, unlike questionnaires, interviews (semi-structured) as observed by Whyte (1982:27) "is not fixed by predetermined questions", rather "it is designed to provide the informant with the freedom to introduce materials that were not anticipated by the interviewer." Furthermore, interviews allowed in-depth discussions between the researcher and the teacher (Mishler, 1986) without interruptions from others, unlike in focused group discussion whereby discussions have a tendency to be prolonged, and some members dominate the conversation.

3. Interviews with Ministerial Government officials

Government officials involved in this interview were elites associated with the responsible Ministry of Education and Vocational training. Ostrander, S.A (1995) argues that elites are used to having people pay attention to them and giving a lot of weight to their words, making them to freely participate in research even when they are not answering questions they were asked. Ball, S (1994) adds that they are experts in evading questions, especially if the questions are not in their own interests. Interviews were used because in such situation, they allow responsiveness and probing as suggested by Rubin and Ruben (2005) and Mason(2002).

3.4.3. Groups

Groups have been found to work well with children especially when it involves peers who share the same experiences/interests. (Unwin and Hogg, 2012). In this case CWPI share almost the same experiences (e.g. attitudes & their Impairments), and they were also around other peers who although don't have any impairments they are fellow students in the same environment.

Groups are also known to create a feeling of comfort and freedom amongst children and young people allowing them to "grow directly out of peer culture." (Eder & Fingerson 2003 p35). Group activities allowed children to unveil and share ideas through debates and dialogue. (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). Groups provide an explicit basis for exploring the involvements of people, group activities with children were used in order to assess the children's views on what should be done to ensure their involvement in decision making. (Morgan and Krueger, 1993)

Groups can create issues of conformity, however, an air of openness, and freedom was created, and an environment which permitted everyone to freely share their opinions, concurring to Morgan and Krueger (1993:7) who pointed out that in groups one should "create an atmosphere of openness and permissiveness in which each person feels free to share her or his point of view" so as to deal with conformity.

Some children responded better and feel free to express themselves when they are not involved in conversation or when they are asked to read/write. Thus, creative methods allowed such children to participate in research. (Tisdall, et.al, 2009). The Group activities carried out in both schools involved debates, drawings, and poetry as creative methods for data collection with children as part of the group activities.

Tisdall, et.al, 2009 point out that use of creative methods in research with children may lead to stereotyping (e.g. assuming that all children enjoy drawing while others may not). In view of this, the decision to decide and choose the creative method was left with the children. Majority of the children used poetry and drawing as methods to depict their views during the activities.

3.4.4. Recording and Data Analysis

For this study information received was recorded by use of a tape recorder as well as taking notes. Concurring to Seidman (2006 pp.79) and Becker (2006) who point out that audio-recording and note taking is important in data collection. Flip charts with children's drawings, and poems were also used as form of written record. (Tisdall, 2009).

Various arguments have been brought forth to allow data analysis to be done by children researchers, (Tisdall, 2009), and as this research looks at the abilities of CWPDs to participate, it seems appropriate that they undertake data analysis themselves. However, such analysis is also argued to consume a lot of time (Tisdall, 2009), and with very limited time available, a participatory approach to data analysis will be difficult. Therefore, an Inductive approach was used (Thomas, 2003; Orme & Shemmings, 2010), with an applied policy framework which according to Ritchie and Spencer, (1994: 176), is "unstructured and unwieldy", and also allows changes.

3.4.5. Dissemination of Findings/Feedback

Data was disseminated by sending the completed report to agencies/organizations and other institutions for disabled children including the participating schools, through emails and/or printed copies, as well as to the responsible Ministries.

3.4.6. Setting

Setting in qualitative research is very important, as it can either create ethical issues (e.g. confidentiality) or make the respondents uncomfortable because the setting is new to them. Data collection with the children was conducted in their own schools mainly because the research was conducted before the school holidays, thus the students were in school during school hours. Interviews with the ministerial officials were conducted in their respective offices. The setting allowed confidentiality, had minimal interactions and was comfortable for the respondents, and hence concurred to Tisdall (2009).

3.5. Ethics

One should not disregard ethical considerations as it strengthens research (Becker, 2012, pp.16). To ensure ethical outcome of the study, I intended to put the respondents at the center of research process and thus drew up a plan for the anticipated ethics issues which was duly followed.

3.5.1. Informed Consent

Informed consent was sought from parents of the children who participated in this research as well as from all participants (children, teachers and government officials). Informed consent was sought before conducting research. Tisdall et.al. (2009) points out that respondents should only participate if they have an understanding of the purpose of the study as well as the underlying consequences, it was therefore ensured that all participants understood the purpose of the research, how data was to be collected, as well as how the information was to be used, by sending out research information leaflets which contained the information about the research to the participants and gatekeepers. The leaflets were designed in English and Swahili, and as suggested by Tisdall et.al, (2009) in a simple language that the children to understand.

After ensuring that the participants had an understanding of the research aim, consent was sought from parents of participating children and all participants including children themselves agreeing with Becker (2012) and Tisdall et.al (2009) that a researcher should not force the participants but should acquire informed consent. In some cases, a respondent can decide to withdraw from participating in the research. (Tisdall et.al, 2009), taking this into consideration, it was ensured that the consent was re-negotiable hence allowed respondents to withdraw from participating.

3.5.2. Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers, provide access to participants and/or research sites. (Miller, 2000). In this research, access to children and their parents was gained through the children's respective school. However, the research leaflets were sent to the school to handover to the participating children, it was expected that the teachers would help the children to go through the leaflets when help was needed from the children. Ethical issues were anticipated to arise as sometimes children's decisions are formed by their gatekeepers and/or parents.(Tisdall et.al,2009).Therefore, a sound relationship was created with the respective teacher(s) who were involved in the research as gate keepers, and ethical considerations were explained to them.

3.5.3. Anonymity

Becker, S (2012, pp.16) points out that a researcher must put into consideration collected information that might endanger the participants as well as the researcher, therefore information must be collected and stored in a safe way. Tisdall et al (2009) adds that such is achievable when the names of the respondents and all information that can identify the respondents is removed. Therefore, pseudonyms were used instead of the respondents' real names and information that could make the respondents identifiable was deleted.

3.5.4. Confidentiality

A researcher should commit to keeping information attained in research confidential. (Orme & Shemmings, 2010). However, child protection issues such as disclosure of abuse were anticipated to arise. Such issues would have imposed the researcher to breach confidentiality as an ethics measure which would have affected the whole context of trust. (Tisdall et.al, 2009).Thus, confidentiality limits to the children were clarified (Morrow, 2004), and a statement drawn stating what would happen in case there was a need of breaching confidentiality. (Tisdall et.al,2009).

3.5.5. Privacy

During research with children, a child might disclose issues of abuse. (Tisdall et.al, 2009). It was intended to record a full account of the situation, and hand it to the responsible persons (e.g. school administrator) or Police, District social worker if necessary. (Tisdall et.al, 2009).

3.5.6. Power Relations

Issues of power relations between the researcher and participants have been pointed out by various children and youth's methodologists (Orme & Shemmings, 2010). Participatory approach can balance the power relations between a researcher and child respondents. (Nieuwenhuys, 2004; Orme & Shemmings, 2010). Power relations issues were reduced by empowering and maximizing control of the participants (Christensen, 2004; Lahman, 2008).

4. Findings

Various arguments have been brought forth to allow data analysis to be done by children researchers, (Tisdall, 2009), and as this research looks at participation for CWPIs, it would seem appropriate that they undertake data analysis themselves. However, such analysis is also argued to consume a lot of time (Tisdall, 2009), and with the very limited time available, a participatory approach to data analysis seemed to be difficult. Therefore, an Inductive approach was used (Thomas, 2003; Orme & Shemmings, 2010), with an applied policy framework which according to Ritchie and Spencer, (1994: 176), is “unstructured and unwieldy”, and also allows changes.

Participation of CWPI in decision making was observed more in issues pertaining Administration issues such as Disciplinary issues, School Fees, School Environment, Uniforms, Extracurricular activities and Learning issues such as Curriculum, Assessments, teaching methods, and choice of textbooks.

4.1. Perception of Teachers, and Children with Regards to CWPI Participation in Decision Making

4.1.1. CWPI can Make Decision Like Other CWNI

This study found out that majority of the respondents perceived CWPI as persons who can participate and make decisions like other children without impairments. This supports the notion brought forth by Curran & Runswick-Cole (2013) who explains that all children are capable of participating and making decisions regardless of their impairments.

When asked about their views with regards to CWPIs' participation in decision making, the children mentioned that they see CWPI as normal children and can participate in decision making in schools if given a chance. “They are doing well in class, it is not as if they cannot speak, they can, just like everyone else. They can be included in stuff and they can decide on many other things.” (13-year-old Child). The children's views, coincides with the findings of Ainscow, Booth & Dyson (1999) whereby children with no disabilities felt that disabled children were no different, and can participate in school.

Furthermore, the children revealed that CWPI can participate in decision making if the school's environment allows involvement of children as decision makers. “They are students too just like us, so if we are given a chance to participate in school things then so should they... My friend has a disability and she's doing better than me in class. If we are asked to make decisions about the school I know she will make good ones”. (15-year-old Child)

Participation of disabled persons has been explained to be impeded or promoted by the social- environment and not one's impairments ((UNICEF, 2013; Davis,2013; REPOA,2011; Carol J 2004) Concurring to this, the study has revealed that all children including CWPIs' can participate in making decisions on different matters in school regardless of their impairments. Teachers pointed out that CWPI should be encouraged to participate in matters concerning them in school, and the social- environment should be made more conducive to enhance their participation. Teachers stressed that all children including CWPI can and should participate in making decisions regarding the schools' extracurricular activities such as school sports, competitions, and forming school clubs. “I think they should be involved in decision making, their impairments should not be a hindrance for them to be involved in other matters such as making decisions” (Teacher 1). “They can participate and they should participate” (Teacher 3).

A report by UNICEF (2011) expounds that disabled persons are experts of their own life experiences, and that participation enhances their learning, develops them as responsible persons and decision makers and enhances their confidence. When asked how they felt about improving the involvement of CWPI in decision making, and it how would affect the school, the children pointed out that involving CWPI would enhance their skills and learning as it the CWPI themselves who understand better their challenges. Children also felt that involving CWPI would help to address the challenges faced by CWPI including arrangement of desks in the classrooms as well as movements from one classroom/lad to the other during different sessions which would be a positive effect for the school. “They know more than most of us about the stuff that are a problem to them in school...we see them struggling to get through the rows of desks in class, maybe it's a problem, but may be its not... They would decide better on this...it's what they go through every day, involving them will not harm us or the school” (16-year-old Child)

4.1.2. Participation with a Limit

When asked about their views on CWPIs' involvement in making decisions that concern school's curriculum, assessments methods, teaching methods, and choice of textbooks, teachers felt that CWPI and other CWNI can be involved in making decisions on the teaching methods including how lectures should be conducted, lecture hours, and class activities because they are the end users. This agrees to the views of Sushila et al. (2006) who pointed out that students are the beneficiaries of final decisions made in schools thus the opinions given by students can be highly effective.

On the other hand, it was established that involving CWPI in schools might affect the school positively or negatively depending on the level of involvement whereby the children explained that there should be a limit of what and how CWPI can be involved in decision making in school. They further explained that giving CWPI too much autonomy might lead to them abusing their power to make decisions which might negatively affect them and the school at large. “I think we can't make decisions about everything... what if we decide that we should come to school once a month? Or because they are disabled then they decide that they should be excused from exams and still get certificates”. (14-year-old child). Squelch (1999) and Magadla, M. (2007) supports this finding, by suggesting that children in school can participate in decision making but with a limit. However, other literature affirms that the more children including those with impairments are involved in decision making, the more effective the students and the school will become, whereas limiting participation will hinder experiential learning. (Sushila et al, 2006; Young, 2000; Huddleston, 2007; UNICEF, 2013)

Teachers also pointed out that there should be a limit with regards to involving CWPI and CWI in participation in decision making, whereby majority of the teachers pointed out that children including CWPIs should not be involved in decision making for administrative issues such as disciplinary measures and schools fees, as doing so might lead the children using the power to make decisions as an advantage to suggest and/or impose very lenient punishments and thus increase maladaptive behaviors from the students. This finding is contrary to literatures on effective discipline in school setting, such as Christie and Potterson (1998) who asserts that when students are actively involved in disciplinary methods, it leads to having more sustainable results.

Furthermore, teachers agreed that the involvement of CWPI and CWI in making decisions that affect their learning should be limited to avoid the possibility of children making decisions that are irresponsible and thus affect their learning. This agrees with the views Sifuna (2000) who asserts that African Secondary Schools are very authoritarian, with a teacher-centred environment that allows minimal participation from students. Due to the nature of authoritarianism, children are expected to be passive recipients who listen to and follow instructions from their teachers and school administrations without questioning (Sithole, 1998).

4.1.3. Decision Making and Maturity

Respondents pointed out that the chances of decision making in the society largely depended on the maturity of the persons involved in decision making, where by adults were found to be more capable of making decisions while children including those with physical impairments were perceived as persons who are not mature to make decisions, concurring to Lee (2001), who points out that distribution of power in decision-making depends on age, under the assumption that children are not as competent as adults. The children further pointed out that they were not involved in making decisions with regards to teaching including the structure of the classrooms and how lectures are conducted, because they were seen as not mature enough to make such responsible decisions. "We have very bad results in Government schools these days. And everyone is talking about it. But we are not involved. Maybe we know why we fail and how we can do better, but they will never know because we are not asked and when we speak we are not heard" ... It is us together with our teachers who know what goes on in class, what is wrong and what should be done to make it better, but we cannot give our views because we are seen as children and them adults." (17-year-old child). This supports findings brought forth in a report by REPOA (2011) whereby children were perceived as individuals who lack maturity and adequate knowledge required to make decisions.

This study also established that children were more likely to be involved in decision making but under supervision of an adult who was either a staff member. "Even in the thing we are involved in a teacher or matron and patron have to be there and they make the final decisions, so it is not really up to us to decide on things like games, and competitions (14-year-old child). Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), stresses that CWIs should be given a chance to exercise their rights to expressing their opinions, for these opinions to be considered seriously and for them to be provided support with regards to their age and disability. Providing children with support in decision making does not entail making the decisions on their behalf, but creating an environment that will allow and promote participation in decision making for children of different ages. (REPOA, 2012).

Teachers believed that children at the ordinary level of secondary education are not mature enough and thus should not be given agency to make big decisions. Most of the teachers were concerned about the ability of the children to make responsible decisions regarding administration issues and learning, without being biased to their own personal interests, in agreement with Sifuna (2000) who points out that many African schools are authoritative whereby decisions that suit the interests and morals of the school and society, rather than the interests of the students are made on behalf of the students, who are then expected to obey.

4.2. Challenges Hindering Facilitators and CWIs with Regards to CWIs Participation in Decision Making

4.2.1. Society's Perception on Children as Decision Makers

It was revealed that the society's perception on children with regards to decision making had an effect on the teachers' perception, decisions and actions. Literatures have explained that the way the society conceptualizes children including those with physical impairments, has an impact on people who are involved with them every day such as guardians and teachers. (REPOA, 2011; Woolfson, 2004; Carpenter, 2010 in Curran, 2013). Teachers were concerned about the society's perception of children as decision makers. "Our society is adult-centric, it is the views of the adults that are given weight, and children are guided by the adult members of the society." "We are adults, the society has entrusted us with making the right decisions for our children in school and not following children's opinions, these are our morals and we have to uphold them". (Teacher 4). Teachers expressed that CWPI should not participate in decision making because as children their decisions should be made for them. Adult members of the society view children as persons who are not competent enough to make decisions and need protection from adults, including making the right decisions on their behalf (Lansdown, 2001; Willow, 2002; McNeish, 1999; Matthews, 2001; Bell et al., 2002; Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Such views hinder the participation of CWPI because teachers are also adults amongst the same society, and they are guided by the norms and conducts that the society has set. (Repoa, 2012)

Children have been conceptualized as immature and passive persons who should follow instructions. (Mayhew and Barnado in Kehily, 2009; Prout & James, 1998, REPOA, 2011). This perception was evidenced in this research which revealed that CWPI and CWNI are perceived as immature beings whereby CWPI and CWNI expressed that they faced challenges in decision making mainly because the society depict them as persons who are not old enough to have the ability to make important decisions. It was revealed that their involvement in decision making was highly limited, and most of the children felt they were not listened to by their teachers and the administration of the school because they were not adults. "I would like to see a different sitting arrangement in my class

because there a too many of us in one room, too many desks, making it difficult to freely move, especially for me as I use crutches, but who will listen? They don't listen because we are children and they are adults". (16-year-old child).

4.2.2. Power-Relations

It was revealed that the adult-child relationship limits participation of all children in decision making. Majority of the respondents felt that children's participation in decision making is highly dependent on how their opinions will affect the opinion of teachers and other adult members in school. A report by UNICEF (2013) and Lansdown (2011) points out that, issues of power relations cannot be ignored when discussing participation for children.

Some of the children felt that they would feel uncomfortable to give views that are counter those of their teachers and would instead try to please the adults. Literatures have shown that children would feel uncomfortable and might resent the participation process if issues of power-relations were not made clear from the beginning, including helping children know who has power over what decisions. (Lansdown; 2001). Nonetheless, it is also pointed out by literatures that children would prefer having less social-power than adults, especially in situations where children believe their views would not be of interests to the adults. (Boyden, 1997; Newman, 1996; Morrow, 1999). Although the study has revealed existing autonomy by adults, UNICEF (2013) has stressed that children should be able to make decisions and give their opinions without being pressurized or manipulated by significant others due to the existing power-relations.

On the other hand, teachers expressed that they would not appreciate having their ideas challenged by children. This is essence to the adult-centric views existing in the society, whereby children are not to challenge their elders. (REPOA, 2011). Regardless of the existing cultures and attitudes regarding adult-child relationships of power, participation should not be limited to not having children out-powering adults, rather the existing power-relations should be discussed and the decision-making process made clear, allowing a shift in power-relations if possible/needed. (Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K. and Sinclair, R., 2003).

4.2.3. Complexity and Bureaucratic Nature of Institutions

The complexity and bureaucratic nature of institutions has been identified as a hindrance to participation (Matthews ,2001; Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K. and Sinclair, R., 2003). The study revealed that CWPI and CWNI were skeptical regarding decision making in school due to the bureaucratic systems in the school and other associated institutions. "Even if we get to decide on things, it will take ages for it to actually happen because things are normally delayed here or at the municipal... there are a lot of processes and stuff...I might be in college by the time they finish those processes". (14-year-old child). On the other hand, teachers were concerned that involving CWPI and CWNI in decision making would elongate and complicate the already existing bureaucratic system. "We already have a process that normally delays implementation of decisions made, if we involve students then it means we are adding more to this process, therefore there will be more delay in implementation." (Teacher 6). Steel, M. (2008) stresses that bureaucratic structures in school can either create a positive, by helping to have a smoother system or a negative environment in school which slows things down.

4.2.4. Decision Making Bodies

The study also established that some school decisions are made by the concerned Ministry of Education and concerned bodies/organs, therefore participation of CWPI is limited. Decisions made at the ministry level were mentioned to be regarding the school's curriculums, grading system especially for the overall national exams, and textbooks to be used (Essential/course books, referral books, and supplementary books). Teachers further pointed out that CWI and CWPI cannot participate in issues in decision making in school because decision making of some issues such as the curriculum and choice of text is within the ministerial level. This concurs to the findings of Backman *et al* (2006) who pointed out that there is very little opportunity for children to make decisions about the contents of the curriculum or the teaching methods, as well as Huddleston, T. (2007) who observes that possibilities for children to participate in issues concerning the schools' curriculums is hindered by the approved curricula regimes of at the national and/or regional levels. Such regimes are governed by the ministry of education in Tanzania(MOET)

4.2.5. Lack of Guidelines

A report by UNICEF (2007) identified lack of policies addressing participation as a hindrance. This was also evidenced in this study, whereby it was revealed that there was a lack of guidelines pertaining what and how CWNI and CWPI can be involved in making decisions in school. The respondents pointed out that due to lack of guidelines, there were disparities in Government schools as far as children's participation in decision making is concerned, where by in some schools there are student bodies that can participate in issues that are not allowed in other schools. The respondents further pointed out that in public schools' children's participation in administration issues and learning is limited.

The children further pointed out that the education system is inclusive in terms of including children with impairments in the mainstream of education (enrolment and equal access to learning), but it is not inclusive in terms of participation in decision making in school for children with impairments and those without impairments. "I am disabled, I study with other children who don't have any problems, and they are not disabled. So that is inclusive. But me and other children are not included in deciding things at school. The Policies say inclusive education but not in decision making I think." (15year old Child). REPOA (2011) study on child participation identified absence of guidelines as a hindrance to child participation, as such the children's power to decision making was limited by adults who abused their roles within the children's council.

4.2.6. Lack of Experience and Training in involving Children in Decision Making in School

Lack of experience and training in involving children in decision making was identified as a challenge that hinders participation of CWPI in decision making in school, whereby the teachers affirmed that due to the existing adult-centric system in which decision are made for children, they do not have experience nor training of involving children in decision making. Kirby and Bryson (2002) and Cavet and Sloper (2004), support this finding by asserting that teacher and other staff members in school may not have adequate experience, competences and skills to needed to facilitate participation of children in decision making.

Additionally, it is evidenced that the education system in Tanzania does not prepare children to become active agents, and participate in decision making, as they are molded as passive persons waiting to become active agents when the society deems them mature enough. This concurs to a report by UNICEF and the Alliance on Children & Young People: Participating in Decision-Making, points out that young people are not prepared to participate in decision making by the education system, thus they lack adequate analytical and problem-solving skills required to participate in decision making.

4.2.7. Time and Limited Funds

The study identified time and limited funds as barriers to participation of CWPIs in decision making in school. Teachers mentioned that involving children including those with physical disabilities in decision making takes time and thus it is a barrier for CWPI to participate in decision making. Agreeing to this, McNeish and Newman (2002) who points out that children's involvement in decision making is time consuming, as it requires training adults and children themselves so that they can develop the necessary skills, as well as having a change of the existing processes which might include creating new guidelines and policies, which might also make the decision-making process slower.

Furthermore, Teachers mentioned that the school funds are very limited and not enough to implement the existing plans, thus it is not feasible to use the already limited funds to promote participation of CWPI in decision making. It is evidenced that involving children in decision making is cost full than involving adults alone as it requires an investment of resources, to enable necessary trainings and changes to take place. (UNICEF and the Alliance in Children & Young People: Participating in Decision-Making). Additionally, REPOA (2012) Identified one of the challenges for child participation as lack of funds needed to train and prepare policies, roll out a national wide plan and so forth.

4.3. Promoting Participation in Decision Making for CWIs in School

4.3.1. Structure, Policies and Guidelines

The study established that children's participation in decision making will be challenging with the lack of guidelines. Most of the respondents pointed out that introducing guidelines or policies that guide the participation in decision of children in schools would help to promote participation of both CWPI and CWNI. The Government Officials pointed out that child participation is clearly stated in the Law of the child Act no.21 (2009) and the child Development Policy (2008) and Education policy. However, it is also evidenced that these policies do not provide a guide for participation in decision making in school, and therefore having a guide on the matter would thus promote CWPIs' participation in decision making. (REPOA, 2011). It was further observed that there should be policies to guide children's participation in decision making according to their age and class level. Teachers felt that having a clear guide that gives directives on how and what children of each age and class can participate, will help promote the participation of all children including CWPI. This was brought forth as a way of overcoming the fear that children might make irresponsible decisions. Mason, C., and Mkombozi (2012) point out that there should be regulations from the Law of the Child Act No.21 (2009), which clearly stipulate the roles of all decision makers including children, and thus provide guidelines on how the children's rights to be heard can be implemented and/or achieved.

It is evidenced that the culture, structures and systems of an institutions has an impact on children's participation (Kirby and Bryson, 2002; McNeish and Newman, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003; Cavet and Sloper, 2004). This research Identified existing bureaucratic structures in schools as a hindrance to participation of CWPI in decision making, whereby most of the respondents were of the view that CWPIs participation in decision making can be promoted if the existing structures were changed to more flexible ones that allows involvement of children. This concurs to Somech (2002) who suggests that decentralized systems are more potential to achieve greater results that were not attained through the traditional centralized school bureaucratic structures. Wade, H and Badham, B. (2003) further proposes that institutions should change their structures and systems to main stream participation.

Furthermore, respondents identified that creating a culture of listening to children is also key to improving participation of CWPI in decision making in school. This notion concurs to various literatures which points out the importance of having a listening and responding culture in which children feel their views are listened to and respected, and thus become more confident to voice their opinions. (McNeish et al., 2000; Sinclair and Franklin, 2000; Children and Young People's Unit, 2001; McNeish and Newman, 2002; Lightfoot and Sloper, 2003).

4.3.2. Decisions through National Children's Council

It was also revealed that children can be involved in decision making of the school's issues at the ministerial level through the already existing national children's council. Some of the respondents pointed out that this can be done by having representatives from different schools participating in matters concerning their schools in the children's councils. majority of the respondents were of theviewthatthechildren'scouncilcancollectopinionsfromallchildrenindifferentschoolsby conducting surveys and or forums which would allow majority of the children to participate and give their opinions which will thereafter be forwarded to the responsible

Ministry. The Government Officials further pointed out that involving the existing National Children's Council in decision making of school issues either by having school representatives in the council and/or conducting surveys to get children's opinions would be a good approach to reach out for CWPIs' opinions in different schools and hence promote participation of CWPI in decision making. However, the Children's council of Tanzania has been faced by many challenges with regards to participation in decision making, for as children, the Local Government Officers expect them listen and follow instructions rather than giving their opinions and questioning adults. (REPOA, 2011). Thus, channeling CWPIs' participation in decision making through the Children's council would be a hindrance to CWPIs' views being heard and given importance.

4.3.3. Parents as Mediators

Some of the Government officials were of the view that CWPI should be involved in decision making through their parents. The respondents felt that children can give their opinions to their guardians who would then represent these views to the respective school. Parents have been involved as mediators between their children and schools, ensuring that their children's opinions are heard and taken seriously. (Ericsson and Larsen, 2000; Beveridge, S., 2013). It is due to the existing perceptions of adults in the Tanzanian society that children are not capable of making decisions, (REPOA, 2011; CDP, 2008). It is expected that views given by the children to their parents will not be given the weight they deserve, and parents will be in a position to decide what views are 'fit' to be represented to the school as per their own morals, and interests. (REPOA,2012)

4.3.4. Making Children Active Agents

The study established that CWPI's participation in decision making can be promoted by giving children agency and seeing them as active persons who can make responsible decisions. The students were of the view that when children are actively involved in making decisions with regards to the schools' administration issues such as deciding on the schools' budget, disciplinary measures as well as making decisions regarding learning including curriculum issues, assessment and choice of text books will improve their decision-making capacities and increase their confidence and experience. Lansdown (2011) stresses that as children become active agents, their skills and abilities advance, and their agency also increases as they become less dependent. Mason, C. and Mkombozi (2012), stress that as children become active agents and are involved in decision making, they become aware of their rights, and responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of adults, thus they can be in a better position to make better decisions even when their rights are violated.

The children explained that participation of CWPIs and CWNI in decision making in school can be promoted only if the society sees them as people who can make decisions and not immature persons who need decisions to be made for them. Recent Literatures have construed children as persons who have their own opinions and can form, shape and direct their own lives. (James, 1993; James and Prout, 1997). From this view, it is evidenced that CWPI are capable beings and can make profound decisions. Adding to that, some of the children agreed that having guidelines will help to promote the participation of CWPIs in decision making, however the majority felt that the way the society perceives their decision-making abilities would largely affect the value of their opinions. Mason, C., and Mkombozi (2012) points that the society need to be made aware of children's capacity to make decision, therefore change the perceptions of the larger society from seeing children as immature beings, to seeing children as active agents who can and should be involved in decision making.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the barriers hindering participation in decision making for children with physical impairments in a school setting, by exploring existing literatures, conducting interviews and group activities.

This study finds that although the UNCRC (1945), UNCRDP (1975) and the URT Child Act No. 21 (2009), recognizes the right of the child to make decisions in all matters that concern them, Children with Physical impairments in Tanzania face various barriers that hinder their participation in decision making. This study established that despite the fact that the Government of Tanzania has ratified and passed laws and policies protecting the rights of the child, and supports the involvement of children as decision making; little has been done to create an enabling social environment that is conducive to participation of children in decision making. The study identified that having the Child Act no.21 and ratifying international convention is not enough, if there are no guidelines, policies or rules. Lack of such documents was identified as a challenge facing CWPI's and their peers, limiting their involvement in making decisions in school. It was proposed that in order to ensure a smooth and just involvement of children in decision making there should be policies in schools that would clearly state the extent to which a child can be involved in decision making, how, and responsibilities of all parties.

Involving children in decision making requires funds and time, as it involves change of process (from a rigid bureaucratic system to a more flexible system) as well as a change of the authoritative culture, to allow a participatory culture in which children are listened to. Such changes take time and require planning. Additionally, students and teachers' training was also encouraged in this study, in order for both parties to understand the whole concept of child participation in decision making, thus creating an environment which does not only foster participation in decision making, but an environment in which all participants are equipped with knowledge and skills needed to give critical opinions and judgment. However, it was further identified in this study that there is a lack of funds and other resources needed to promote participation of children in decision making. Funds are needed in order to ensure the necessary changes are made, thus it is important for the respective schools and concerned ministry to set aside funds in order to allow changes to occur and thus embrace a participatory environment that encourages children to make decisions.

The study has further identified that children in Tanzania are conceptualized as person who are not mature enough, and do not have

the required skills and experience to make decisions, thus decisions should be made for them. (REPOA, 2012; Lansdown, 2011). It was further established in this study that CWPIs are capable beings and can make decisions if the society changes its adult centric views and acknowledge children as active agents. Such perceptions were recognized to affect the perception of teachers and adult members in the school causing more hindrance to CWPI's participation in decision making. It was established that there is a need to raise awareness of the society at large regarding conceptualizing children as active persons, so as to overcome these social barriers.

5.1. Reflections on Research

While emphasis of this research was given to children with physical impairments, it was clear during this research that participation in decision making in school is a problem for all children, as they all faced the hindrances that limited their involvement in decision making. It is from this view point that more research should be done on children's participation in decision making in school for disabled and non-disabled children.

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