The Implications of Socio-Cultural Values on Educational Equity: The Case of Public Secondary Schools in Tanzania

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Abstract: This paper examines the socio-cultural values and their implication for educational policy implementation with an aim to address issues in educational equity and consequently social justice. A review of various gender equity research papers, Tanzania's education policies and the discussion on social justice perspective are presented in the paper to argue for the need for culturally responsive educational policies as a step towards addressing equity issues in Education. The study adopted qualitative research methods involving a thematic analysis informed by social justice and the feminist theories. Data collection was purposive through one-to-one semi-structured interviews with four heads and four matrons of four secondary schools in Tanzania, and within the same four secondary schools, Focus groups discussions with four groups of school girls as well as two focus groups discussion with two groups of women from a local government and the central government were conducted. The data analysis included a triangulation of the interview and focus groups discussion data with evidence from documentary analysis of various educational policy documents and research based scholarly materials. The findings discussed in Otieno, (2016, 2020) provided the analysis of the outcome of current educational environment in Tanzania; challenging the neoliberal perspectives in what the study called 'Edu-classification' rather than education for girls due to unassertive political will in carefully financing education. The paper hopes to further stir political will towards timely review of relevant educational policies in support of social justice and, to realistically address equity in education.

Keywords: Equity, Education, Policy, Cultural Values, Social Justice

1. Introduction

In Otieno, (2016); a study that led to this paper; the neoliberal input in education is assessed while at the same time the harmful socio-cultural norms which, have serious impact on girls' social participation in their later lives were examined. Currently, Komba, (2020) has similarly made a critical examination on the trends in financing higher education in Tanzania where he found that the government underfunds the education sector. This has critical consequences for girls more than it is for boys as shall be shown later. Further, in a study, 'Assessing cost-effectiveness with equity of a

programme targeting marginalised girls in secondary schools in Tanzania'; a number of researchers found that reaching girls in more remote rural of Tanzania cost more money with an implication that a few of these benefit from any support in ensuring that they gain something education-wise from even the bare minimum quality of education that they are able to access (Ricardo Sabates, Pauline Rose, Benjamin Alcott, & Delprato, 2020). In this study, International literature giving both global and African perspectives were consulted in relation to educational equity and the challenges facing education for girls overall. Morojele's (2012) analysis in South Africa, for example, reveals how Basotho culture promotes gender inequalities in schools. Similarly, Mungai's (2012) application of human social and financial capital frameworks involving family and school factors showed those contexts as central to barriers to girls' education. The two scholars identify the direct cost of schooling, the domestic labour market, and the social customs within families while physical facilities, such as laboratories, classrooms and books, are directly associated with the society. Mungai, (2012) also cites discrimination in the education system and female under-representation, which negatively influences education practices for girls in rural areas (Mungai, 2012; Otieno, 2016).

The cited scholars' arguments on barriers to girls' academic achievement in Sub-Saharan countries above resonate with those in other developing African countries as cited in (Figue, Marphatia, Djitrinou, & Parkes, 2010). Further literature associating the girls' level of engagement and the need to improve these in addressing equity in the context of psychosocial support systems were reviewed and found to be grossly inadequate in both developing and developed nations alike, as noted in Pattison (2009). Vaughan, (2010) critiques the insubstantial education rendered to girls where she associates the sort of education to the "education-economic growth black box" (p.416) theory that focuses on economic productivity as a primary justification for educating women but ignores the full functioning aspects of women in their societies (Otieno, 2016).

In line with the above arguments, Otieno (2016) contests that addressing full functioning of a person is part of being humane and cannot ignore social cultural support systems as these are central to individuals and the wider societal livelihood. Scholars who argued for the psychosocial support systems for girls in their cultural contexts include Pattison (2009). She reports the usefulness of counselling in schools generally. While speaking from a Western and Nigerian point of view, she points out issues of cultural relevance, the type of clients, the nature of problems and the specificity of therapeutic approach applied as important. In the report, there are a range of activities that are important within the school environments, and which relate to healing in the African social context, identified by Naidoo and Sehoto (2002), cited in (Pattison, 2009).

Oluwatosin (2014), refers to the Nigerian social context in defining counselling practice and its potential for improving students engagement while Owino (2015), reports on research that identifies the usefulness of guidance and counselling units in Kenyan secondary schools. Relating these to the significance of social cultural support systems in schools, Otieno (2016) argues that these can significantly improve students' engagement and therefore address gender equity in education if effectively implemented.

In line with the above literature, this article closely examines one of the four themes in Otieno, (2016, 2020) where issues of gender and culture were assessed in the context of the place of Gender Equity in Education. It was necessary to examine this theme further in the context of socio-cultural values, how these have been scantly addressed, their negative impact on social justice and therefore inequity in education. Hence, this article seeks to uncover culturally associated practices that are rarely addressed head on. However, these practices seem to prolong the debate on equitable resource distribution, educational experience of the learners which, in turn affect the delivery of justice in education.

Some of the examples cited here are drawn from one of the themes examined in Otieno (2020); further analysing the effect of cultural values, their infiltrating attributes that shape political decisions made on various social policy formulation and reviews that perpetuate inequity in education. This draws attention to women's political participation and what their absence in active decisions on educational policies formulations and/or reviews mean in relation to social justice in education.

The paper is structured in the following order: The statement of the problem is followed by the objectives and key research question that guided this study. The review of empirical and theoretical literature used are followed by methodology and study design. Further down is the discussion of the findings that leads on to key suggestions for the way forward by the participants is presented in the recommendation and then the conclusion and references used.

1.2 The Statement of the Problem

There are many equity related problems in the educational processes of boys and girls in Tanzania. These problems are not directly perceived to relate to

cultural barriers in the way education should be provided to secondary school students. Unlike other more obvious problems to do with the ratios of boys to girls enrolling in secondary schools, the problems associated with cultural barriers are scantly addressed. A clearly designed strategy to ensure a more equitable education for students in government secondary schools across the country is missing. As a result, the evidence of historically inherited problems pertaining to equity persist across many government secondary schools in Tanzania. Because of the persistence of such problems, this paper aims to closely examine the implications of cultural values, recommending culturally available support systems as a possibility in closing the gap of practical justice in education to address educational equity.

1.3 General Objective

To contribute to the understanding of how some socio – cultural values have serious implications on social justice and consequently equity in education.

1.4 Specific objective

a) To emphasis on the social justice in education
b) To provide suggestions about socio-cultural possibilities in addressing equity in education.

1.5 Research question

What is the influence of school matrons on girls' educational experience, and social participation in Tanzanian mixed gender government secondary schools?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Empirical review

The challenges facing girls' education in developing countries is attributed to their minimal active social participation in politics and most sectors of the economy. This is relative to the educational experience in their schooling years. Rihani, (2006) highlights the barriers and challenges facing girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa as, "household responsibilities; child labour; higher opportunity cost to the family; long distances to schools from girls' homes; early marriage and/or pregnancy" (Rihani, 2006, p. 29). She provides further reasons for the lack of progress towards increasing girls' rates of social participation to include sexual harassment, violence in schools and communities, and the lack of girl-friendly sanitary facilities (Rihani, 2006). Other barriers are the gender discriminatory teaching and learning methods as well as parents' and communities' lack of awareness about the value of education for girls (Rihani, 2006). According to Nyar, (2007), the improvement in girls' social participation and wellbeing is minimal as evidenced by fewer number of women in the skilled workforce in comparison to men across many developing countries. Based on the life stories of various participants reported in Morley, Leach and Lugg's (2009) study of Tanzania's and Ghana's higher education, where there is any form of participation for girls, there is a heavy price associated with it.

Other factors for girls and young women's poor educational participation and achievement in most African countries involve educational management (Gergel, 2009). Concerning that, Gergel, (2009) observes a lack of adequate funding and attention as well as a gap between policy and practice in addressing girls' education policy initiatives. An instance of this is where many governments across Africa set up girls' education units which he states, "are often staffed by one or two people who don't have the skills and capacity to influence overall education policy" (Gergel, 2009, p. 6). Other studies identify further barriers that affect both the teachers' role and the teaching process, thus contributing to girls' low rates of participation in education. As hinted in the introduction, Morojele's (2012) analysis in South Africa, for instance, reveals how Basotho culture and language promote these gender inequalities in schools (Morojele, 2012).

Walker, (2012) points to the effect of early marriages across Africa, including Tanzania, as one of the main factors in the low participation rates of girls in education. Furthermore, Unterhalter, (2012) has similarly highlighted barriers to girls' participation in education to include pregnancy, early marriage and poverty topping the list. Other barriers noted are parents withdrawing their daughters from school, a widespread lack of education facilities, ill health, and distance from school (Unterhalter, 2012). Overall, financial barriers and poverty quite often translate into inability to pay for girls' education, especially in rural areas (Posti-Ahokas, 2013). Some of these barriers still hinder the progress of those girls who gain access to the secondary education system, leading to their dropping out of school or poor performance in their examinations.

In the case of Tanzania, the shaping of a woman's past, present and future social position has gone hand in hand with the division of labour among the sexes (Mbilinyi,

1975). This was the case during pre-colonial days, during colonialism, and at the present within the education systems as reviewed in Otieno (2016); and as we see through various examples beginning with key issues within Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP). The Cross Cutting Issues policy in the SEDP is one of the key protocols in addressing gender inequalities in education. However, the funding that was allocated to cater for this policy area was very insignificant compared to the other key areas and the reality of the needs under the cross cutting issues.

Meena's (1996) detailed situational analysis of the status of women, and of the education for girls and women in Tanzania up to the late nineties is still relevant today. She highlighted gender discrimination and fewer opportunities for women in education, due to unequal access to secondary and higher levels of learning. In addition, she noted that women also got less of the quality education compared to men as revealed by the examination results, a situation that has consistently prevailed in Tanzania. Moreover, she identified a gender-stereotyped curriculum, which filters females out of higher education hence undermining their future position and social participation, specifically in the world of work. According to Meena, all of these are a result of socio-cultural and political values legitimised by the patriarchal system in most societies in Tanzania (Meena, 1996).

Another social attitude towards girls' education has been to enhance the development of the nation by stressing that the need to heed hygiene and childcare is part of girls' eventual domestic roles. It is generally believed that educated girls become better parents who would look after their families' health well as the concept of hygiene was closely equated to health (Obrist, 2004). Hence, to this very day, Swahili language metaphors and sayings that are coined to match this social attitude towards girls' education, and the concept of hygiene in the home, still exist. For example, 'mwanamke usafi' literally means that for one to be a proper woman, she must embrace cleanliness. Another is, 'mtu ni afya' –translated, a man is health, a saying used to emphasise the importance of hygiene in the society. Many other examples could be given. Therefore, education for girls is largely expected to enable them to carry out their domestic duties well, as both the first educators and also as the health care givers within their families.

Overall, the Tanzanian education system embraced the concept of national development through the Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) vision, one of the socialist ideologies according to Nyerere (1962). This education ideology was to enable the country to develop through its own people's effort while avoiding intervention from outside as much as possible (Wedgwood, 2010). Therefore, the primary goal of education was to prepare all children as self-reliant future citizens in an agricultural economy (Wedgwood, 2010). Subjects taught in schools such as 'Maarifa ya Nyumbani' – meaning, Domestic Science or Home Science were compulsory in all girls' schools with common topical areas like, 'Chakula bora' meaning 'healthy food' 'afya njema' meaning 'good health' and more of such concepts. Hygiene was part of domestic skills and was integrated in the syllabus for girls' schools (Obrist, 2004).

At present, there is no indication of any future improvement in funding allocation for girls' education initiatives (MoEVT, 2010). The ETP of 1995 highlighted barriers to the growth of participation of women in education. The main barrier cited was the cultural preference for educating male children in Tanzania. Other related barriers included high drop-out rates due to early marriages and pregnancies as well as low levels of academic performance by girls in comparison with boys (URT, 1995). In connection with this, Mushi, (2009) identified several factors explaining the slow progress of Tanzanian women's participation at different levels of education compared to men's. These include, but are not limited to, the cultural preferences of educating male children, and high drop-out rates due to early marriages and pregnancies (Otieno, 2016). Others are, relatively low performance in assessments, and economic hardship which normally affects girls more than boys (Mushi, 2009).

In general, equal access to a quality educational experience remains a big challenge affecting Tanzanian girls' wellbeing and social participation more than it is for boys (Meena, 1996; Wedgwood, 2007). This is true for both secondary and higher levels of education across Tanzania (Machumu, Makombe, & Kihombo, 2011; Rihani, 2006; URT, 2012). It follows, therefore, that the graduating girls' future income, social participation and wellbeing is more likely to be considerably compromised by the barriers and challenges Tanzanian girls experience early in their secondary education life. Despite recent moves aimed at boosting girls' social participation through education, girls' poor performance overall in their secondary school examinations remains a concern (Bangser, 2012).

Hence, in Tanzania like other African countries, schooling and education for girls is very complex and tends to focus more on the traditions and social roles of women. These are mostly much more binding in rural areas, where girls are responsible for carrying out domestic duties, than in urban areas (Okkolin,

Lehtomäki, & Bhalalusesa, 2009). Tanzania is a predominantly patriarchal society that favours segregated gender roles, and women are traditionally looked upon as mothers and wives who should not normally engage in politics or leadership positions (Yoon, 2008). What is perceived as the current positive direction in the appointment of women leaders, especially in political spheres have not seriously considered the significance of education, and of training of women in key leadership positions that most hold and this has impact on their performance in these roles.

2.1.1 Attitudes towards women's political leadership

Drawing examples from political leadership among Tanzanian women during and after the colonial era, gender roles and constraints attached to womanhood did not allow for their political participation. Even educated women were encouraged by political leadership at the time through the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) to unite women's groups to promote domestic science among other things. Thus, domesticity was seen as the appropriate goal for women's development (Geiger, 1987). The colonial state promoted women's domestication by using educated women to perpetuate the trend of women's domestication. This was enhanced by perceiving ordinary women to be the target to whom educated women would render services. Thus educated women, "were now called upon to offer their 'less fortunate' sisters sewing lessons in place of politics, and domestic science and adult literacy in place of personal conscious-raising" (Geiger, 1987, p. 25).

Since 2015 to date, the current government has shown willingness in addressing the problem of promoting and nurturing leadership attitudes among women at a younger age as evidenced in the composition of women in the special seat position comprising the 12th parliament in Tanzania. However, women holders of special seats still lack not only autonomy in conducting their business outside the parliament as has been noted (Yoon, 2008). They also are often seen as people who are only favoured and have yet to prove their leadership abilities in order to qualify in their own right as candidates for parliamentary election in their constituencies (Yoon, 2008). This is very much to do with the overall socio-cultural perception of what women can/cannot and/or should/should not do also based on the directives within the Tanzanian constitution (URT, 1977).

Today, the Tanzania parliament has a total of 126 Women which is 36% of the parliament. Citing an example of a situation where cultural values are above everything else; it is notable that among the 126, only one woman comes from the Maasai community. This is an expression of how the number of Maasai women is limited in the parliament – a major organ for decision making in the country's policies and laws pertaining education and across other sectors of the economy. Having participated in the 2020 election in Tanzania, I concur with Otieno's (2016) analysis that cultural values and resource barriers are still a serious dilemma and hindrance to most women who aspire to participate in leadership positions in Tanzania. Social participation elsewhere is not different either; for example some researcher report that Tanzanian women in the fisheries sector cannot participate in this economic activity because of barriers such as cultural, economic, access to fisheries resources, and policy (Bradford & Katikiro, 2019).

Currently, the social barriers to girls' educational experience and the attitudes towards girls' leadership have barely changed from former times Otieno (2016). This is due to the absence of a mechanism for educational preparation in this area. For example, some African countries, including the Tanzanian government, adopted a special-seat system to recruit women members of parliament as a way of closing the gender leadership gap and as a strategy for the empowerment of women (Yoon, 2008). However, the system does not effectively fit into the equity seeking world where the social values, the economic and the labour market, are changing (Okkolin, Lehtomäki, & Bhalalusesa, 2010). The system simply does not favour the sustainable development of leadership attitudes which would include future women leaders as part of the country's development (Otieno, 2016).

The inability to do away with inequalities directly links with social relations that play a significant role in ending Africa's economic and political marginalisation (Tikly, 2003). Dimitrova-Grajzl and Obasanjo (2019) suggest that a way forward would be to transform the *type* of quota that will have an impact on the de facto ability of women in parliament to influence legislative agendas and ultimately to improve the lives of women. However, the question of who would be responsible for that transformation to occur remains a challenge in a society where some members have a lesser voice when major decisions need to be made. This is in consideration that economic and social obligations underpin the need for higher education, which is significant in skill development (Morley et al., 2009). A limitation of active female voice within the Tanzanian social context is significantly proliferated in (Yoon, 2013). This limitation of the active female voice in decision-making – aside from mere representation marks a significant lack of opportunity to understand gender specific

problems within the Tanzanian society in order to effectively address them.

With reference to Agenda 2063,Tikly, (2019) states that the economic term of a prosperous Africa is based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. This requires that everyone can actively participate in different sectors of the economy based on their needs. For such participation to be a practical reality, then it is correct to say that some cultural values that ignite resource barriers have implications for personal skills formation (Tikly, 2003). Besides, skill acquisition and the participation in educational policy formulation and reviews as a way of addressing inclusivity and therefore equity in education becomes impossible.

2.2 Theoretical review

The study is guided by social justice perspective; the idea of social justice embraces the distribution of resources and opportunities equitably among members of a given society. Social equity includes fair decision making in the socio-political structures that shape opportunities around the social lives of people (Honoré, 1961). The participants in this study indicated the need for social attitude change towards, and public valuing of, girls' education which was associated with cultural values that function as a barrier to educational equity. This change of attitude is perceived as a crucial measure for any meaningful transformation in favour of girls' educational experience and social participation. The argument was with the perception that the national policy makers are part of the Tanzanian society in which negative attitudes towards girls' education prevails (Otieno, 2016). For this reason, the decisions around educational policies, access to schooling and within school processes are consequently affected.

With reference to the introduction section, Mungai (2012) employs human social and financial capital frameworks, which involve family and school factors as the categories where barriers to girls' education are situated. They identify family factors as involving the direct cost of schooling, the domestic labour market, and the social customs. The school factors, on the other hand, include the physical facilities such as laboratories, classrooms and books (Mungai, 2012). In addition to the school factors, she mentions discrimination in the education system and female under-representation which negatively influences education practices for most girls in rural areas (Mungai, 2012). Mungai's (2012) arguments on barriers to girls' academic achievement in Kenya resonate with those in other developing African countries (Figue et al., 2010; Walker, 2012).

In order to achieve equity, (Kitunga & Mbilinyi, 2009) advocate for policies that take a holistic approach to social wellbeing. These ideas challenge the dominant top-down approaches that continue to contribute to the inhibiting of the social voice of the already culturally silenced voices of the masses in Tanzania. The top-down approaches silence the social voice in the sense that the governing power is withdrawn from the state with its lost autonomy in policy making and its increased dependency on other agents (Rust & Jacob, 2015; Tarabini, 2010). At this point, it is important to look at the nature of policies and how they promote or inhibit social inequalities.

Some psychosocial researchers, such as (Maio et al., 2007), reported on the existing relationship between social attitudes and influences in policy formulation. With regards to this study, it can be argued that the social attitudes that prioritise economic development and human rights have for many years influenced the formulation of education policies. As a result, the theoretical lenses and methodological approaches used to address barriers and challenges facing girls' education more often focussed on economic benefits and broad discussion on human rights rather than addressing the full spectrum of women's social participation in their daily lives (Otieno, 2016, 2020, Vaughan, 2010). The understanding of the social attitudes towards girls' education in developing countries is important as it leads to further understanding of the problems of educational inequality faced by girls. This is essentially based on the reason that the social willingness to welcome change is driven by the attitudes held by the society towards it.

3. Methodology

The qualitative research approach with a case study design suited the study nature and the type of data required to address the study questions. This was in line with Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013), who defined a qualitative research as established materials that can practically help us interpret, transform and visualise the world through a chain or series of representations that include the following:
…field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self …qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 4). This approach allowed flexible methods to generate data that are well suited to the study's social context. Further, the qualitative methods provided detailed and rich complex data that retained the complexity of the participants' stories.

3.1 Data sources and Methods of data collection

The main sampling approach was purposive in identifying research sites and participants. Fieldwork involved the collection of data through interviews, reflexive journaling, and document review and analysis. In a purposive sampling technique, the researcher strategically samples cases (for example, research sites) and/or research participants relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012).

3.2 Data Analysis Procedures

A thematic analysis procedure was employed in two concurrent phases using – framework analysis and constant comparison. This analysis process involves searching for and identifying common threads that extend throughout the whole set of interviews (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) which, are constantly compared for similarities, differences or odd data. The uses of NVivo – one of the commonly used software for management of qualitative data analysis was employed in phase one and manual drawing of the organised themes at a later stage. Thematic analysis of the claims made was anchored upon; Social justice and feminist perspectives. According to (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22), thematic analysis interpretive power is lost if not anchored in a theoretical stark. Girls and women participants were the experts of the knowledge they shared. Analysing the culture and gendered nature of society created themes to explore with a view to inform and transform, bringing about questions such as, 'why and how things are the way they are; questions that brought about the need for a deeper adoption of reflexivity in the analysis process – resulting in this article.

3.4 Research ethical clearance

The Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee in New Zealand provided ethical clearance, further clearance was provided in Tanzania by The Prime Minister's Office Rural and Local Governments (PMO-RALG'S) to collect data in rural and urban secondary schools in five regions where two regions met the criteria sought as described in the methods section in Otieno (2016). Other participants were two women's groups from local and Central Government communities whose organisations gave consent for their participation.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings indicated that the lack of government's full involvement in financing education have many negative implications that lead to myriad of inequity issues for girls' education in Tanzania – further leading to culturally driven decision on who should or should not have a better educational experience. It is that lack of vigorous and practical strategies to really own the education rendered in the country for the broader benefit of the Tanzanian masses that has further brought fourth this part of discussion in the current paper. Participants provided suggestions for improvement with political will seemingly at the core of transformation. Three overall themes in relation to the suggestions for improvements summarised in the following figure adopted from Otieno (2016) are central to this discussion.

Figure 1. Suggestions to improve girls' educational experience. **Source:** Otieno (2016)

According to the findings of this study, educational practices are gendered in nature where issues of equal access to secondary schooling for girls focuses more on parity than equity per se (Rust & Jacob, 2015). Parity is a focus on quantifiable achievements such as attaining an equal number of boys and girls in school without necessarily addressing accompanying needs to retain them or address their actual learning experience. Equity covers all aspects of the learning process and includes a range of things. These include, but are not limited to, access to basic school needs, availability of resources and infrastructure to facilitate the actual learning process, and the levels of engagement of the learners. Gergel, (2009) perceive the solution to the problem of inequity in the light of educational management (Gergel, 2009). Concerning that, he observes a lack of adequate funding, attention and the gap between policy and practice in addressing girls' education policy initiatives. This is where political will is of essence; lack of which, we identify gendered educational opportunities.

4.1 Gendered educational opportunities

A critical analysis of the education policies and concerning the execution of the human rights agenda, Unterhalter, (2005) argued that education for women did not empower them to live on an equal basis with men because the 'rights talk' was not able to address the complexities of power imbalances in which the majority of women lived. In that aspect, the priorities for women's education were based and set on the economic development agenda, which was purely the outcome of the post-colonial era's politics (Vaughan, 2010). (Vaughan, 2010) refers to this as the "education-economic growth black box" (p.416) theory, which was central to the human capital framework that focused more on economic productivity as the first reason for educating women while ignoring the full functioning aspects of women in their societies. She argues that the theory did not pay attention to the content and quality of what girls learned. Neither was there much attention directed towards girls' learning process, thus the concept of black-box. Moreover, there was no consideration as to whether girls faced gender inequalities in their later lives (Vaughan, 2010).

Girls in the focus group discussions gave reasons associated with time that matrons need to attend to their complex gendered problems as illustrated under the problems associated with enactment of malezi in Otieno, (2016, 2020). Their suggestions indicate a need to strengthen and expand the matron system in ways that require the rewriting of educational policies and guidelines. The need for transformation noted by the participants require an understanding of whether the school matron system is needed in the first place. In this regard, all the participants favoured the presence of matrons in schools as illustrate by one School Principal:

Matrons are very important, they encourage girls to study, giving them reason through constant talk as to why that is important, why they should aim for division one and not two? What education is all about, they assist students understand life generally not only in their schooling environment but socially. Even in terms of character building mostly with emphasis on how we expect girls to conduct themselves as students. They [...] create better learning platform for girls; they are role models to them in many ways. (School Principal; Urban School Two, 2014)

In line with the excerpt above is, gendered nature of existing policies and practices where a frequent mention of pregnancy as an example in which girls received unequal treatment in schooling was demonstrated in comparison with the males who happen to cause those pregnancies. Both the women focus group discussions mentioned the presence of oppression and demeaning of girls while the male perpetrators remained mostly untouched Otieno (2016). Members of the Girls' focus group discussion made suggestions for transformation concerning this problem but also agreed that there is a lack of political will in protecting girls' educational rights and, in doing justice to both genders through their schooling process that they related to a reluctance in policy implementation as cited:

In the whole relationship issue, all those who are found to cause pregnancy for girls, the government should have in place a severe persecution measures against them for doing that. [...] The government should take charge, about the required law for this. The challenge of female students becoming pregnant, if she has safe delivery then they should be allowed to come back to school and have a second chance so that they may fulfil their dreams because many would have liked to continue schooling but they got badly influenced and became pregnant. (Girls' focus group; Rural School One, 2014)

The cited problem indicates a lack of political will for implementing regulations in support of girls' right to education because more often, girls fall out of school while boys tend to continue with their education even where they are responsible for girls' teenage pregnancies. As such, there is a need for social attitude change and public value regarding girls' education.

School matrons, School Principals as well as the girls themselves, commented on the existence of negative or unhelpful attitudes in the wider community and sometimes within these girls' own families. The School Principals suggested that in order for a social attitude change to occur in favour of both the girls' and the boys' educational experience, the education of parents, their

valuing of girls' education particularly was vitally important. A school principle for instance reported how some parents and guardians discourage children from attending school as cited:

... "instead of going to school, ... stay at home and help me as a parent to look after our livestock." ..."as you can see, I am not educated myself, so I have no income so if you go to school, you will still need to eat, how will you eat? ... as a result, she or he may just disappear from school just like that. (School Principal; Rural School Two, 2014)

The statement above indicates that traditional way of life is complicated by the change of modern lifestyle where the source of economic wellbeing is eroded by the need to educate children. Further, economic hardship of the parents is a determining factor that affects not only their priority for girls' education, but also the value for education of their children regardless of their gender. Thus, economic hardship is seemingly a catalyst for the negative view of education since it does not have an immediate return in comparison to other socio-economic activities such as tending for livestock that provides immediately needed food for poor families. The School Principal's perspective on the need for parents' education below indicates a need for a change in the mind-set concerning the benefits of education other than only economic gains as cited;

Part of that has to do with the parents' level of education, and the value, they put on education. Sometimes they tend to see education as a luxury. Therefore, they think it is not necessary and so, it would be best if their children stayed at home. (School Principal; Rural School Two, 2014)

In line with the above quote by the school principal cited, one of the women's focus group expanded their point of view regarding the way some parents are caught up in poverty and the cultural values on girls' education pointing this out in the following example:

... A suitor comes knocking the door saying, "I want to marry the girl" and the parents permit. They do not value education, all their focus is to get money, cows, goats ... and the parents cannot resist because of their poor living conditions. (Women's focus group; Central Government, 2014)

Based on the accounts above, equating marriage to earning an income is seen as the same as getting an education to do the same only more favourable due to its attachments to traditional and cultural practices and immediate economic returns. This implies that the problem is more economic one rather than associating it fully with the lack of value of education for most

families. However, the biggest force behind seeing that education can wait and marriage cannot is the culture where early marriages are a way of life in most communities.

There are some instances where women themselves have prioritized their daughter's marriage over education. Communities where parents were married early tend to have negative impact on especially girls who are mostly the victims of early marriages as well. The situation is often worse when they have teenage pregnancies. In such situations, this study's findings reveal that the girls' mothers often favour marriage of their pregnant daughters instead of education giving a negative impression on the value they put on education itself.

As a matter of fact, the economic needs become more urgent at the expense of other potential benefits that education can offer, not only to the girls and their families, but also to the wider community and the nation as a whole. The detailed illustration below indicated a frustrating incidence that sometimes takes place within the society where some local government leaders get involved in hindering girls' educational advancement for economic gain:

> *... There are areas where once the girl reaches puberty, even if she is attending school, she will be stopped. Teachers and even the matrons are bribed with some money so that they do not follow up. The Local Government leaders such as village leaders and councillors who are expected by the Central Government to follow up that all children go to school; and where that is not happening a valid reason be given. These leaders happen to share these values and traditions. (Women's focus group; Local Government, 2014)*

The account indicates the extent of the problem of cultural values and tradition and how girls are seemingly trapped partly because of the poor socio-economic situation of a larger society. The poverty fuels corruption that is fixed or supported within the valued culture of early marriages for girls. As a result, the girls are left helpless to decide what might affect their future social participation forever. The following excerpt uncovers what actually happens making the problem of cultural value such an impeding issue against educational experience of girls and therefore a hindrance to educational equity.

> *What parents do, once the marriage dowry is paid for the girl, they will divide some and give them to the village leaders and the councillors so that they can also gain from it. Therefore, the girl is getting married and at school there will be no report or follow up by the teachers*

> *and matrons. That is what they do here, it is some kind of business. (Women's focus group; Local Government, 2014)*

A lack of social awareness regarding the value of girls' education was perceived by the participants as part of the mind-set of the majority of parents in rural areas. Once girls reach puberty in these villages, the urgency to train them to become future mothers and wives in order to bring a dowry to the family is seen as being more important than their education. This is made possible by the valued practices of rites of passage commonly known among many Tanzanian communities as '*jando na unyago*'. During these practices, some girls are removed from school and obliged to stay indoors for a period of up to three months depending on regions. As a result, girls' time at school is reduced or ended. In many situations, this is a major barrier to girls' education as noted by one matron:

> *..., the government regulation... is that when a student misses classes for ninety days, she has naturally terminated herself from school. Therefore, most girls at this age will end up not continuing their education* (Matron; Urban School Two, 2014).

As discussed above, there are many cases where cultural values and traditions drive parents' coercion of their daughters into early marriages. The following excerpt illustrates a typical scenario and the impact on educational equity.

> *...in my ...tribe, [...] girls are seen as source of income to their families. Most of them [...], mere children will tell you they are married and introduce you to their husbands or showing you their own babies. You [...] will find that they have elder brothers who are still schooling [...] Parents do not understand the value of giving a girl an education ... You will hear them saying, "should I educate someone who is going to get married and leave the one who will be staying in the family?"* (Girls' focus group; Urban School One, 2014)

The various examples provided in Otieno, (2016, 2020) above enhances the understanding of the effects of culture and traditional practices on girls. As a matter of fact, similar examples were repeated over and over by each distinctive group of participants in this study. The girls cited below directly blamed the less educated parents who favour their daughters getting married instead of supporting their education, and especially if the person responsible for their pregnancy is wealthy. According to these girls, since such parents do not value education, their daughters seem to follow suit. In fact, their daughters' role is to influence their parents,

especially mothers, to accept the situation. In such cases, the parents do not make any effort to encourage their already pregnant daughters to continue their education. If anything, they think that marriage of such daughters is a much better option:

> *I personally think the problem lies with parents' desires. ... They know that someone should be educated in order to have money. But you ask yourself, if that is their argument, then why is it that the boy who is already coming from a wealthy family is needing to continue his study? ... They need to be more educated on some serious things concerning life and education.* (Girls' focus group; Rural School Two, 2014)

Another example by the women's focus group from the local government is cited:

> *[...] there are some tribes for instance, when girls reach puberty, [...] they must stay at home for more than one month in order to fulfil the requirement of their culture. [...] they are 'kept indoors' waiting [...], 'kuchezeshwa ngoma' a 'traditional drum dance'. And what usually follows [...] is men choosing wives for themselves ... sometimes they will report at the school that she is sick. She will be told that it is their culture and has to be honoured, they will tell you, 'mwacha mila ni mtumwa' meaning, 'whoever abandons his culture is a slave.'* (Women's focus group; local government, 2014)

In most traditional African societies, respect to elders is highly valued. This is an impressive practice that is passed on from one generation to the next and it has a role of ensuring the continuity of cultural values from one generation to the next. However, with reference to the coercion of girls to yield to the cited traditional practices, girls will cooperate at the cost of their education. In a completely different direction, the perception of girls as vessels of pleasure and marriage also bring further challenges in their relationship with teachers of opposite sex while at school.

4.2 The middle ground

This section demonstrates the overlaps between the suggestions for a way forward. The eminent need to compromise political will, social cultural attitudes/values and empowerment of the matrons are seemingly critical in addressing gender equity in education. This seems to be brought about by the problems with cultural values cited earlier. For instance, the matrons, women and girl participants stated situations of helplessness in the school environments where sexual harassment was a huge concern. This

becomes a norm or a problem that is not adequately addressed because of the fact that girls are regarded as second hand citizens where what affects them is not given much attention even when it is harmful. The girls particularly mentioned the behaviour of some of their male teachers concerning this with some suggestions:

> *I think the morals and values should be emphasized in teachers' colleges. Teachers who come to school should be thoroughly checked for character and behaviour appropriate for teaching because of being in contact with young boys and girls. Their discipline over all, this will help.* (Girls' focus group; Rural School Two, 2014)

The girls point back to the role of government and the political will. Since key players in these government platforms in decision-making are a part of the Tanzanian society, this suggestion calls for a great need for a change in social attitude. The change is not only necessary at the family level, it must involve the society at large for any change of direction in reviewing key policies and regulations relevant to finding a transformative direction to address equity in education. In finding ways to transform the attitude of the wider society, one Girls' focus group discussion suggested the need for specific and relevant education necessary to help them in the process of awareness raising as quoted below:

> *First of all, looking back at the challenges facing us girls, I suggest and request that relevant education be made available to us. This is because, when you know how to deal with certain challenges when you are in contact with teachers, parents of fellow students or anyone in the streets who challenges you in any way. It can be greatly helpful, just knowing what to do and what can be done.* (Girls' focus group; Rural School Two, 2014)

The examples above indicate that there is not enough research done with girls to uncover the extent of problems facing them through their education. It also offers possible suggestions for change in favour of girls' education and; the helplessness of the current situation where power and decision-making are involved.

4.3 The cultural attitude and equity in education

The participants pointed out that a lack of political will to alleviate the problem of resourcing the matron systems leads to frustrations and emotional experiences

for both girls and the matrons. The focus group members recounted how, as parents of female students in these schools, they have struggled with unfair treatment of their daughters. They pointed out problems associated with situations where girls who fall pregnant are denied the opportunity of continuing with their education in government schools. Therefore, they suggested a need for a better search for the mechanism that will ensure effective recognition of parity of participation in education. This study theorise that this can only be possible if the various social cultural values are a part of that recognition. This is in the sense that giving opportunity to girls depends on both the availability of opportunities and relevant rules and regulations that protect their interests. However, the very rules are interwoven within the cultural values of the communities in which, these girls are a part.

According to (Roche, 2013), across time the importance of education has always been parallel to the value accorded to its benefits in practice. In connection with this, there are tensions that are created as a result of problems with the implementation of policies concerning active participation of girls in education in Tanzanian communities. Based on the review of Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP) In Otieno, (2016); the levels of fragmented accountability mean that there is a delay, or even a complete absence in the implementation of teachers' professional development and in-service training. The said training must be integral part of the cultural values that have, for a long time, impeded the growth of realistic equity in education.

Some scholars have previously identified tensions concerning educational policy implementation in Tanzania that create inequity in the knowledge acquisition process depending on whether learners are based in rural or urban areas (Brock-Utne, 2010; Sumra & Katabaro, 2014). Despite the measures taken by the current government to ensure the implementation of equitable educational policies in the areas identified by these scholars, effective outcomes of such measures are still theoretical. This is the case despite the processes involved in supporting those measures. A lack of vigour in some of the formulated education policy statements – such as the training of matrons and patrons – continues to maintain the existing tensions within the country's education sector.

In relation to these findings, the Heads of Schools and matrons in this study confirmed that there is a lack of training of matrons and patrons, especially, in matters of guidance and counselling. This is despite the fact that this training need was stipulated in the SEDP II under the cross-cutting issues that comprise statements aimed to address gender equity in education (MoEVT, 2010). Given this state of affairs, it is arguable that strategies to alleviate gender specific problems in addressing equity through the matron system – seemingly a culturally friendly 'malezi' tool of **retaining** girls in schools is now urgent.

4.4 Equity in education and the need to train school matrons

Part of a possible solution presented in Otieno, (2016, 2020) was the dire to ensure resource availability and its connection with the enactment of malezi in government secondary schools. Overall, participants noted that the programmes for guidelines used are outdated and irrelevant, especially to the matron system. The lack of resources for that purpose was seen as a reason for appointing professional teachers for the role and, implied that system in itself is undervalued. In other words, this lack of the needed resourcing and support for those appointed to carry out the matrons' role of malezi is an evidence of its low priority in government plans. Two women in one focus group discussion presented a mixture of views for the best way forward to redress this situation:

> *If there can be a training institution to train them 'ulezi' and health, instead of assigning a teacher who has another heavy responsibilities like teaching, preparing lessons, I think it is not right or fair. […] she should have a separate employment and as a matron, she should not be involved with other things, she should train as a matron.* (Women's focus group discussion; Central Government, 2014)

However, while the participants in the group cited above tended to agree with the above illustration, one woman within the group stated that she was in favour of separate employment but added that emphasis be put on close cooperation between the teachers and the matrons:

> *There is a school I know… where a matron is a matron and a teacher is a teacher. Most cases go to the matron. The teacher will approach a matron and tell her she has noticed a problem with a certain girl and request her to follow it up. […] My emphasis is that the roles be separated with close cooperation of teachers and matrons.* (Women's focus group; Central Government, 2014)

Some of the participants reasoned that a matron who is a teacher by profession stands a better chance of helping girls than one who is not. In favour of matron teachers, the reduction of the matrons' workload was a suggestion as cited below:

> *It would be best if it were a teacher matron because of the fact that a teacher will*

understand students better from classroom experience as well. [...]Perhaps reducing other responsibilities such as those of teachers on duty for matrons can help. Or perhaps they should teach fewer number of lesson periods, let's say just eight periods per week, so that they can do more of the malezi roles. (Matron; Urban School Two, 2014)

In conjunction with the above quote, which favours teachers playing the role of matrons, the women's focus group discussion pointed out the need for matrons to gain special skills in dealing with gender specific needs for girls around the school. This was also with the view that such training would bring about accountability to the role:

> *Education for matrons is important because for most schools, matrons are teachers who have only completed a teaching course but not training of malezi. Therefore, even if you place legal action against them, it will not be effective because they are not trained as walezi.* (Women's focus group; Local Government, 2014)

In this discussion, the group also identified what the researcher could relate to as a former secondary school teacher and matron. Based on the researcher's personal experience in situations where a school has a limited number of female teachers or none at all, sometimes the Head of School is obliged to find someone to help the girls. Some situations can be urgent depending on the school's needs. This can force the School Principals to recruit the people they know and think can help. In some cases the immediate person they can find to recruit is their relative. When that happens, they stand a chance of accusations against nepotism. Such appointments can turn against these principals if it happens that the person they appoint as a matron is not passionate in helping girls. Where the matrons appointed have limited or no understanding of dealing with problems of young girls, which is more often the case, the problem associated with such an appointment can be very serious for the School Principal as well as for the girls. In this kind of scenario, the women's group suggested that, if possible, there should be a training college for school matrons in helping girls around the school environment:

> *I think there should be an intention to have a school or a college for matrons. In the same way training colleges for teachers exist, hence matrons must go through these colleges with a specific identification as matrons who are not concerned with classroom teaching and this can somehow help most problems associated with the girls.* (Women's focus group; Local Government, 2014)

In recent years, the focus and emphasis has been on enrolling more girls in secondary schools to match the number of boys. However, this does not include the fair distribution of resources that cater for the specific needs of girls such as the sanitary facilities in schools. For example, all heads of schools in this study reported enrolling more girls than boys in form one, although more boys than girls completed the ordinary level. At the same time, they all mentioned a lack of gender specific resources such as private/counselling rooms to help the school matrons better address the problems girls face. Based on these findings, the biological development of girls strongly influences their educational opportunities and participation in various social dimensions in later lives.

In order to address gender inequity, there is a need to improve existing procedures and develop a new process for implementing current education policies relating to girls' educational experiences. Concerning the lack of resources in supporting girls' educational experience, this extraneously contributes to a lack of distributive justice resulting to unequal distribution of opportunity for girls' social participation in comparison to boys. In reference to Honoré, (1961), there is outright lack of social equity which includes a lack of fair decision-making in the socio-political structures that shape opportunities around the social lives of people. If we consider a social justice perspective, the emphasis on gender neutrality in the equal distribution of resources is simply not realistic given the study findings and more measures and strategies are necessary to change things in favour of equity in education. This would require a review of education policies that are intended to improve the quality of girls' education, increase educational access, and improve retention rates. The section below summarises the study and provides recommendations in addressing educational equity in the context of this study.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion

This paper has analysed the relationship between major themes drawn from Otieno, (2016) and further analysed the unpacked overlaps between themes in Otieno, (2020) in addressing equity in education. These themes were: 1. the significance of political will in provision of necessary resources for girls' education, 2. the need for social attitude change and public education regarding girls' education and, 3. the need for training of the matrons in support of girls' education. Although there were three themes, participants were mostly articulate about ways in which the role of matron could better be supported in terms of making it more professional. The

participants' responses implied that they experienced a sense of helplessness in thinking about how to change the wider social attitude and damaging cultural values which, in their views, devalued education for girls. Their particular focus were on rites of passages, early marriages and teenage pregnancy which were taken as an excuse to exclude girls from education. Therefore, participants sought systemic, political or government supported change in order to re-write policies for the training and employment; roles and responsibilities of school matrons if they are to be part of key players in improving girls' educational experience and social participation.

The participants provided evidence of the entrenched limiting cultural practices embedded within otherwise valuable traditional practices of rites of passage. These emphasised gendered roles in most of the Tanzanian societies which diluted the values attached to girls' education. These practices were supported by some parents and the wider society who harbour girls' active social participation. The poor socio-economic background of most parents intensifies the existing cultural practices that are used as coping mechanisms. Such mechanisms are socially constructed and accepted as norms but are perceived to go against girls' educational experience and social participation beyond the domestic circle. This situation contributes to conflict/tensions partly because the desire to educate every child as stipulated in the education policy collides with the availability of resources in some families especially among the rural communities.

Participants' representative quotes from across the data drawn from Otieno (2016, 2020) were used to illustrate the suggestions they made for improvements based on problems that were mentioned to be facing girls and the matron system overall. As the situation stands in Tanzania, the future agenda of most women significantly lacks effective equity of representation as the space for listening to gender specific concerns at the decision-making level is not yet well thought through. Throughout the findings, all participants reported that matrons were an important part of girls' overall socialisation and educational support. However, the surprising point is that apart from a mere mention of the need to train matrons, there is very little emphasis on how the process of training is to be implemented within the SEDP II (MoEVT, 2010). To date, the training of matrons and patrons to support secondary students' educational processes remains a hoped possibility – a theoretical assumption rather than a practical reality.

5.2 Recommendations

In line with the preceding perspectives, the participants focused on ways of tackling barriers to girls' education in a comprehensive manner, arguing that everyone needs to participate in finding solutions. For instance, the girls suggested mobilising the parents and female teachers in order to establish a specific budget that would take care of their sanitation problem while calling for every education stakeholder to participate in supporting such a move. The girls reported a lack of two main things – a nurturing physical environment as well as emotional support within the school to cater for their needs. All the other participants voiced their suggestions concerning proper resourcing of schools along the same line as the girls.

The matron's role needs to be better understood and the challenges they face addressed in realising equitable power and identity along the lines of gender within the schooling process for girls. The provision of private spaces such as an office for the matrons where girls' privacy and dignity is protected and matrons roles recognised are ways of addressing such challenges. Lack of such basic resources contributes to silencing the voices that reveal the serious nature of girls' problems. Some matrons cited examples of situations where girls experienced sexual abuse, rape and harassment from peers, in the communities, and sometimes from their male teachers, but were unable to speak with matrons because of the presence of other staff members. The need for such private spaces is clearly essential.

The lack of recognition of the need to improve girls' engagement through a psychosocial support system depends on the government's exercise of power in decision-making pertaining to three things: Firstly, the value it attaches to the matron system as part of the integral social structure with the potential to improve and support girls' engagement within all its educational establishments. Secondly, the socio-economic, and cultural values it attaches to girls' education; and, thirdly, political will power to address matters pertaining to the distribution of resources and opportunities in supporting girls' educational processes. In reference to these three things and in my assessment of the matron system, I concur with (Lizzio, Wilson, & Hadaway, 2007) on ideas concerning procedural justice and Fraser's (2010) elaboration of participation parity in her discussion of the scales of justice. Based on the findings of this paper, the key players in implementing gender policies through the matron system need to review the potentials of this useful social structure as highlighted in the following paragraphs.

First, one Head of School [male], in acknowledging the low value attached to the matron system in government mixed gender secondary schools, stated that the system was perceived as more relevant during colonialism. He explained why they appoint professional teachers for the

matron's role stating that the system is mostly relevant in girls' only schools. This perceived lack of value for girls' psychosocial support system within government day secondary schools by policy makers indicates little commitment to gender equity in education and a wakeup call is made to change this mind-set.

Second, the barriers identified within the findings of this paper and also in various research reports fewer numbers of women advance academically as mentioned earlier in (Morley et al., 2009). (Mlyakado, 2012; Morley, 2010; Posti-Ahokas & Lehtomäki, 2014; Sumra & Rajani, 2006; Thomas & Rugambwa, 2011; Tonini, 2010); and (Unterhalter & Heslop, 2011) need to be gradually addressed . Those scholars have all reported barriers related to culture, the poor social economic status of most parents, patriarchy, and lack of political will which together result in unequal social power relations that if left unchecked will always perpetuate discrimination in education.

 Third, these findings echoed a 'subtle' but 'the silenced' female voices. They all reported the complexity of girls' secondary educational experience.

An experience limited to equal social participation that aligns with Morley et al's (2009) report. Their report emphasises the need for social participation beyond secondary school, and essentially this goes further beyond the school and home social contexts. Morley et al. (2009) report the limitations on the decision-making platforms where women's leadership autonomy is lacking in special seats in the Tanzanian House of Representatives. The same is reported in Local Government in (Mkilanya, 2011). Such systematic silencing of female voices in the Tanzanian society seriously affects their social participation in education in comparison to males. I recommend a better mechanism that will attract other educational stakeholders to join forces in finding a better initiative that can go beyond the appointment of women in special seats to increase the participatory in women's decision making in a more pragmatic way. This can be women specific leadership training institutes that aim to service the support systems within government secondary schools. Either, training manuals and curriculum content where available need to be reviewed and where missing need to be developed in making this recommendation a reality.

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