

Participation in Decision-making among
Unaccompanied Children and the Essence of
Adult Support.

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Foreword

I started working in the child welfare services in 2012 as an environmental therapist in care homes. Prior to that, had I worked in the psychiatry. I started encountering unaccompanied children in the psychiatry and gradually grew a passion in wanting to know more about them.

After working a couple of years in care homes with UAC, my interest on them grew more and I decided to enroll for the Masters program in child welfare to get more theoretical knowledge. The first year of studies went very smoothly. Personal reasons made me take a year's permission from the study.

On a comeback to complete my studies, I encountered numerous challenges in getting participants to do my research. This has been demotivational and at some point, wanted to quit. I finally met with my supervisor through the recommendation of the faculty, who recommended scoping reviews as a means of doing a research.

I must confess here that, doing this scoping review has been very challenging as it is relatively a new method compared to the conventional methods in doing research. Therefore, I had very little colleagues to discuss the scoping review method used in this research.

The courses in the study has given me more insight into the practices of the child welfare services and especially in the work with unaccompanied children. I have grown to see beyond the behavior of unaccompanied children. I have grown to respect them, encourage their exploration of choices and support their decisions.

To my supervisor, Oyenyi Samuel Olaniyan, thank you for the motivation and support to see me end this study. Thank you for sharing your knowledge in doing scoping reviews. And above all, thanks for the honest and challenging comments. You did, what you did for my goodness. And to all the unaccompanied children I am working with day in and day out, I hope this will be of great benefit to you and the child welfare in general.

To my friends and relatives, thank you all for the motivation I received in diverse ways.

To my children, I did this for you.

Bergen, 25th November,2020.

Kai Gibson.

ABSTRACT

Background: Unaccompanied children encounter a lot of challenges in adjusting to their new settlements. One of these, is the right to participate in decision-making as stated in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Aim: This study was undertaken to identify the challenges unaccompanied children face in the participation in decision-making. The study also investigates the essence of adult support in meeting the needs of these children.

Method: This study is a scoping review of 17 empirical articles on the topic, participation in decision-making among unaccompanied children. The findings on the essence of adult support in meeting the needs of these children was categorized and reported according to Maslow`s hierarchy of needs.

Results: Findings from the study indicated that, unaccompanied children`s participation is limited to some decisions due to partially some challenges and partially the interpretation of the guiding principle of the best interest of the child and the observation of Art 12 of the CRC in relation to the local culture and laws.

Relevance: The findings are relevant to all adults who are in close contact with these children including child welfare workers, the community and policymakers.

Keywords: Participation, unaccompanied children, decision-making, rights.

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1.Introduction

Over the last decades, several countries in Europe and other Western countries have dealt with increasing numbers of unaccompanied children (UAC), mainly from countries experiencing armed conflicts and oppression, or abuses of human rights and deplorable living conditions.

Unaccompanied children (UAC) are defined by the United Nation`s convention, as individuals who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, p.5).Norway has received a good number of UAC. These children are characterized to be fragile either physically, intellectually, or socially. They lack the care and protection of their primary caregivers and may be easily exposed to abuse and neglect. Because of this situation, they are at serious risk to be further deprived of their rights.

Many researchers (to name a few, Davidson, G.R. et al., 2010; Ehntholt, K. A. et al., 2018 and Felsman, J., et al, 1990) have investigated the myriad challenges UAC face when settling in the countries of refuge. The focus has largely been on their vulnerability leading to mental health issues. According to Herz & Lalander (2017) , the psychosocial health conditions of unaccompanied children have received enormous attention in research to predict future mental illnesses due to the experience of loss of primary care givers; the experience of traumatic events from armed conflicts, the hazardous journeys, loneliness etc. While little has been done on the conditions that reinforces their strengths and resilience to enable them cope with their past, present and future lives to flourish in their new settlements.

(Sönderqvist, 2014, as cited UNCHR, 2005 and 2007) has written that, these children have an increased risk of being exposed to trauma, poverty, and lack of education and that it may be of great importance that their rights are protected, and this can only be accomplished if their voices are heard.

Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger (2017) has supported this statement by saying that, with so many unaccompanied children that should be integrated into society, it is of great importance to listen to their voices.

1.1.Aim of study

The purpose of this scoping review was to examine the literature available on the challenges unaccompanied children face in exercising their rights to participation in decision-making and the essence of adult support.

1.2 Research questions

1.What are the challenges found in the literature UAC face in the right to participate in decision-making?

2.What do the findings say about adult support in meeting the needs of unaccompanied children?

It is worthwhile to note here that, the adult is considered in a broader perspective in this paper. The adult in this case, represents all grown-ups the children interact with either officials or non-officials (foster parents, guardians, workers in care homes, child welfare workers, health workers etc.). And they also represent the system (policymakers) in the new environment UAC find themselves.

1.3. Structure

This masters thesis is written as an article. In accordance with the regulations in submitting a masters thesis in the form of an article in child welfare in “Mittuub”, the article should be submitted together with an introductory part and the thesis with a maximum of 20 pages. The article is formatted according to the guidelines provided by Children and Youth Services Reviews for publication (Attached in Appendix 2). The article is about 6226 words.

Chapter one is the introductory part of this thesis and it comprises of the introduction, the aim of the study, the research questions, and the structure.

Chapter two presents the main terminology used, participation and unaccompanied children.

Chapter three presents the study`s focus. Chapter four presents the theoretical point of departure. Chapter five presents the methodology used.

Chapter six shall present the study contents and chapter seven makes a brief conclusion of the study.

2. Main terminology

2.1. Participation

Participation in decision-making according to Maslow's popular hierarchy of needs, is placed on the top of the pyramid and is associated with growth needs. Growth needs do not stem from a lack of something, but rather from a desire to grow as a person. Once these growth needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization. (McLeod, 2018, p.1).

There is a growing global trend towards acknowledging children and young people's right to participate in matters that affects them (United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

The above declaration is incorporated into the child protection law of Norway § 6-3 that "*a child who has reached the age of seven or younger that is in the position to make his/her opinion, shall be informed and given the opportunity to express himself/ herself before a decision is taken in issues that affect him/her.* (Translated from Norwegian). (Lindboe, 2012, p.96). These laws include also the unaccompanied children.

The term participation has been used not only to mean "taking part" or "being present" but also to have an influence over decisions and actions. The review is concerned about UAC's participation in all decisions that influences their lives.

Even though involving children in decision-making is complex as pointed out by Coyne and Harder (2011) because of issues such as, adult's instincts to protect children from distressing information; the burden of decision-making and the adult's concern about the children's competency to participate. There are documented greater benefits in involving children in decision-making. In general, there is evidence that children's participation can lead to improved service development, increases in children's and young people's citizenship and social inclusion, and their wider personal development (Kirby et al, 2003, p.7)

Participation is inclusive. It draws in those often excluded like unaccompanied children by increasing their knowledge, understanding, confidence and self-belief in specific areas to effect a change in their lives. (Kirby et al, 2003).

It promotes citizenship and political education, including knowledge of children's rights,

structures, services to develop more positive community relationships and creates a sense of belonging through the increase of skills, employment opportunities and heightens their aspirations and plans. (Kirby et al, 2003).

Participation empowers UAC who are extra vulnerable based on their situation, with the necessary tools to guide them in their lifelong journey.

(Førde, 2017, as cited in Antonovsky, 1979; Prilleltensky, 2012; Tones and Green, 2004) agrees that, children who are not encouraged to participate in decision-making and when the conditions of effective participation are absent, will be characterized with an inability to make future predictions, lack self-control and will lack the feeling of association and belonging that are key factors in strengthening their strength and resilience. (Førde, 2017, as cited in Seligman et al, 1995; Garbarino, 2008; Ungar, 2012) also concluded by saying, when children`s fundamental needs of care, fairness, safety and belonging to their immediate environment are not met, they navigate other possibilities that are neither good for them nor the environment they live in.

2.2. Unaccompanied children

According to (Wernesjö, 2011 as cited in the United Nations Refugee Agency) an unaccompanied child is a person who is under the age of eighteen and is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so.(Wernesjö, 2011, as cited in Chin , 2003) went further to make references on the definition of unaccompanied children to be conceived as children out of bounds and beyond the realm of what is considered a normal childhood. These children are also considered according to (Wernesjö,2011 as cited in Halvorsen, 2002) to have travelled out of their country of origin and they have been separated from their parents. When these children are described from the research available, they are characterized to be a vulnerable group mostly associated with loss, uprooting, separation and trauma (Wernesjö, 2011).

Globalization with the increased technological advancements, has shifted the patterns of migration “*enabling individuals, corporations to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before.*” (Finn, Nybell & Shook, 2010, p.3). The world has therefore become a global village wherein accessibility to information about places and its people and so on and so forth is much more easily available now than before. As a result of

this, we now see an influx of refugees, asylum seekers and hence the UAC into western countries.

This transition has indeed a great effect on the lives of children especially UAC. When we look at globalization in the context of neoliberalism wherein the private enterprise and the individual's initiative is the key to the creation of wealth through profit maximization, the elimination of poverty and the improvement of human welfare, the situation of the welfare state becomes threaten. The welfare state with its non-profitable goal on the other hand is left in danger. It is agreed by scholars that, children are implicated and affected by the political, social and economic arrangements that shape up their communities and the institutions in which they participate. (Finn, Nybell & Shook, 2010). These vulnerable children as said earlier solely depend on the welfare state services for a normal upbringing.

It is worthwhile to point out that, it is very easy for one to only focus on the problems these children carry along with them forgetting that they also have coping strategies and inner resources to deal with their problems. These group can easily be stigmatized when one sets a focus only on the problems and neglect the resources in them. Wernesjö (2011) did mentioned a research made by Goodman on culturally responses to trauma. This research pointed out coping strategies focusing on collectivity and the communal self; suppression and distraction; making meaning; and emerging from hopelessness to hope” (Wernesjö, 2011, p.504).

This paper has used the term UAC in a broader perspective to be able to include all the children either on their journey or have reached; have a permit to stay or not; awaiting deportation; living in reception centres or care homes, foster homes or living by themselves with little or no supervision from adults. The reason being that most of the research that are included in this study have made their research collectively.

3. The study's focus: Participation in decision-making.

Participation according to (Franklyn & Sloper, 2006 as cited in Boyden and Ennew, 1997), can simply mean *“taking part, being present, being involved or consulted. Alternatively, it can denote a transfer of power so that participant's views influence decisions”*. (p.5).

This definition is largely in accordance with the UNCRC already mentioned above that was incorporated into the Norwegian Child Welfare Act.

The term *participation* in decision-making covers a broad continuum of involvement and is a multi-layered concept, with the term being used to describe many different processes as stated by (Franklyn & Sloper, 2005 as cited in Kirby et al., 2003; Sinclair, 2004). In what processes do UAC participate? How is their level of participation? To throw light into these questions, will I look at two types of participation, the consultative participation and the collaborative participation. These two aspects of participation were identified by (Vis, 2014 as cited in Landsdown, 2010). The type of decision to be made, has an influence on the type of participation of which I will look at below.

3.1. Consultative participation

Consultative participation is when adults seek children's views in order to gain knowledge and understanding about the children. This aspect of participation is conducted by adults and does not involve sharing of power with the children themselves. (Vis, 2014, p.9). This type is mostly common in judicial administrative proceedings. This could be, in the case of UAC. The decision of whether to render or not to render a permit to stay in Norway, decisions like which municipality to be placed, which institution, economy, family reunification, house rules etc. These could be considered as high-level decisions in an atmosphere wherein citizens are clearly demonstrating their scepticism about international migration.

The child's right to be consulted in this aspect of participation is unconditional. The child will be informed, given the right to express his or her opinion but there is no absolute right to influence the decision. Influence is therefore conditional depending upon the child's age and maturity. (Vis, 2014).

3.2. Collaborative participation

Collaborative participation on the other hand, is seen as a process that involves information sharing and discussions that aim to balance children`s views with those of others. It provides a greater partnership between adults and children. It is an opportunity for shared decision making with adults. It means that children may influence outcomes in addition to setting agendas.

Vis, (2014) argued that “authentic participation has to involve partnership and delegation of power and control” (p.13). Are they considered as partners? How much power is delegated to them and how much control do they have over their own lives?

It is obvious that a consultative participation can become a collaborative participation depending on the nature of the decision and the involvement of a deliberative process. For example, house rules that are formed by the adult practitioners in care homes can be reversed after a dialog or a deliberation with the children and the adults see reason to the arguments presented by them. This could involve rules like limitations to the use of the internet, visiting hours, bedtime etc.

4. Theoretical point of departure

The research questions of this thesis were basically to investigate the challenges UAC face in the exercise of their rights to participation in decision-making. In view of this, I have decided to include article 12 of the CRC as a guiding theory and used both Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the self-determination theories to highlight the research topic and questions.

4.1. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, states parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, and the views of the child should be given due weights in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (CRC, Article12).

Insights from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and the native law of Norway indicated that the best interest of the children (also UAC) should be a guiding principle in all decision-making processes that affects their lives.

In this perspective, (Hedlund and Salmonsson, 2018, p.492. as cited in Freeman, 2000) wrote that, when assessing the best interest of the child, he/she should be recognized as an autonomous individual. How autonomous are UAC and how effective is this theory really put into practice? Article 12, when examined closely, is in accordance with the protectionist view of children. The protectionists see children as "not yet adults". (Kaukko, 2017). While at the same time the article includes the assumption that, the person who hears the views of the child can decide how seriously the view can be taken. (Kaukko, 2017, p. 146). Recognizing the child as an autonomous individual, leads me to the self-determination theory. But before going into the self-determination theory, I would first like to introduce Maslow's theory that is interrelated to the self-determination theory.

4.2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs

According to Maslow's hierarchy, the needs down the pyramid needs to be first satisfied before an individual can attend to needs higher up. Although Maslow further clarified that, it is not a must that all lower needs must be satisfied before an individual can climb up the

pyramid, he argued that those needs that are met will lead the individual to focus on other needs. From down to up, he classified the needs as follows: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (McLeod, 2018).

Participation in decision-making according to Maslow's popular hierarchy of needs, is placed on the top of the pyramid and is associated with growth needs. Growth needs do not stem from a lack of something, but rather from a desire to grow as a person. Once these growth needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization. (McLeod, 2018, p.1). These needs are also referred to as being needs. Being needs have nothing to do with deficit needs. Being needs are internal and are at the very top of Maslow's hierarchy pyramid with ties to self-actualization.

4.3. Self-determination theory

The self-determination theory sees the human being as an active, self-determined organism that has the need for autonomy, the need for competency and the need of affiliation to other human beings. (Deci and Ryan, 2012). This theory focuses both on the individual as it also focuses on the affiliations of other human beings. It has a focus on the influences of the social environment on attitudes, values, motivations, and behaviors both developmentally and in current situations of individuals. (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p.2). As this paper also examines the essence of adult support, this theory becomes vital.

Self-determination considers special factors within the social environment as autonomy supportive. Autonomy supportive according to Deci and Ryan (2012) means, the first person often the authority (in this case, adults) accepts and acknowledges the internal frame of reference of the children. They convey respect for the children, encourages exploration and choice, supports their decisions and refrain from pressuring and controlling them even in subtle manners. (p.2).

Autonomy supportive has been found to promote autonomous self-regulation both by helping people maintain intrinsic motivation and facilitating internalization of extrinsic motivation. When the environment one lives in, caters for these needs, there is the potential for development through the achievement of goals and well-being. (Manger & Wormnes, 2015, p.175).

Self-determination encourages the possibility of a positive learning environment capable of equipping children with the necessary ability to make sound judgement in things affecting their lives.

5. Method

In this chapter, I will describe the scientific theory that forms the basis of this research paper. Afterwards, I will go into depth with some part of the research process that was not mentioned in the article.

Scoping reviews falls under the category of literature review that are in turn qualitative studies. A qualitative research design is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; the collection of data; analysing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible writing structure. (Creswell, 2014, p.246). This research has chosen to analyse the data deductively with regards to the aims of the overall research.

5.1. Transformative worldview.

Before taking a decision on what scientific method is suitable for my topic and research questions, I asked myself what is the nature of research that has a transformative goal for the participant, researcher, and society? I therefore chose to place this study into a transformative worldview method. A transformative worldview has the potential to contribute to both personal and societal transformation according to Mertens, (2017). According to Mertens (2017), this process goes beyond self-examination to a critical analysis of the cultural blinders that might obscure our ability to contribute to positive impacts (p.1).

This method is in total contrast with the postpositivist worldview that sees the world to be governed with rules, laws and theories that are opposed to marginalised people in our societies or issues of power and social justice, discrimination and oppression that needs to be addressed. This view also stipulates that the constructivist has not done much to see that those marginalised are helped. The transformative method therefore according to (Creswell, 2014. p. 9, as cited in Mertens, 2010), holds the view that, research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever level it occurs.

5.2. Ethical reflections.

There were no formal ethical criteria to fulfil in order to undertake this study. It was desired that this research could represent high standards of research ethics and at the same time present a high quality of knowledge in relation to the discipline of child welfare.

The two child welfare workers who participated in this study were kept anonym for ethical reasons.

The researcher's values, background, experience and theoretical background can have an influence on the interpretation of data (Gadamer, 2018). With my background as being working with UAC for years, I found it worthy not to allow my experience to influence the findings of the research. The Cartesian doubt has been necessary to have in mind and in use in all phases of the research. Gadamer (2013) stated the Cartesian doubt as "*accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted and adopting the idea of method that follows from this rule.* (p.284). Everything should absolutely be doubted until proven right. I have held myself neutral throughout the process to the final findings.

5.3.Scoping review as a method

Scoping review is an ideal tool to determine the scope or coverage of a body of literature on a given topic and give clear indication of the volume of literature and studies available as well as an overview (broad or detailed) of its focus. They can report on the types of evidence that address and inform practice in the field and the way the research has been conducted. (Munn et al., 2018, p.2).

Tricco et al (2018) stated that "*scoping reviews follow a systematic approach to map evidence on a topic and identify main concepts, theories, sources and knowledge gaps*". (p.1). This scoping review has followed a systematic approach using the guidelines found in the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) to map out the challenges on the participation of UAC in decision-making and identify the research gaps for further future studies. The framework has been proved to be effective in mapping out the extent, nature and range of selected bodies of research. In addition to the identifying of knowledge gaps found in the literature, scoping reviews can also put into use mixed methods that can be essential in filling in some gaps on a research and provides a complete overview of a topic.

Even though the methodological and reporting quality of scoping reviews needs improvement according to Tricco et al. (2018), this study found the use of it necessary as it maps the evidence available in the literature and inform practice about its findings.

5.3.1. The choice of data.

The data in this study consists of empirical studies in the form of articles. This study has conducted the search strategy by first going through a planning phase wherein the search terms and the data bases were identified together with the supervisor of this study. A thorough thought was given into all words and terms that might be relevant to the topic that can have the tendency to be unidentified. This was to make sure that all relevant studies to my topic will be identified in the search. I decided to compress topic into four key words as suggested by Arksey & O'Malley (2005). These are, *unaccompanied children, participation, decision-making and rights*. I did several test searches to see if there could be other words that can give more precise and better results. They could have been altered if there were other more suitable options.

In the first search filter, “unaccompanied children” have I included, *unaccompanied minors, unaccompanied asylum-seekers, refugee minors, refugee children, asylum children, asylum-seeking children and asylum-seeking minors*. In the second filter, “*participation*” have I included *participation on, inclusion, included, heard, listen, voice, recognition, recognized, influence, influencing*. On the third filter “*decision-making*” have I included, *decisions, decision processes, decide*. And on the fourth filter “*rights*” have I included *decision rights, rights, choice, choices, alternative, alternatives*.

Boolean operators “OR” and “AND”. OR was used when words were used on the same filter and AND when combining the filters.

A database search was conducted between the 12th to the 19th October, 2020 by using Web of Science, Embase, Eric and PhycInfo. Idunn was used as a back up to generate research articles basically from Norway and the Scandinavia. These databases were chosen because they provide a wide range of research articles on social sciences and humanities that includes child welfare, sociology, health policy and management.

There was uncertainty about the research available on this very scoping review topic. It was therefore decided not to have any specific time limit on the publication frame.

A total of 403 articles were primarily acquired. They comprise articles from all over the world and in other languages even though the search was basically done

in English and specifically in Norwegian when Idunn was used.

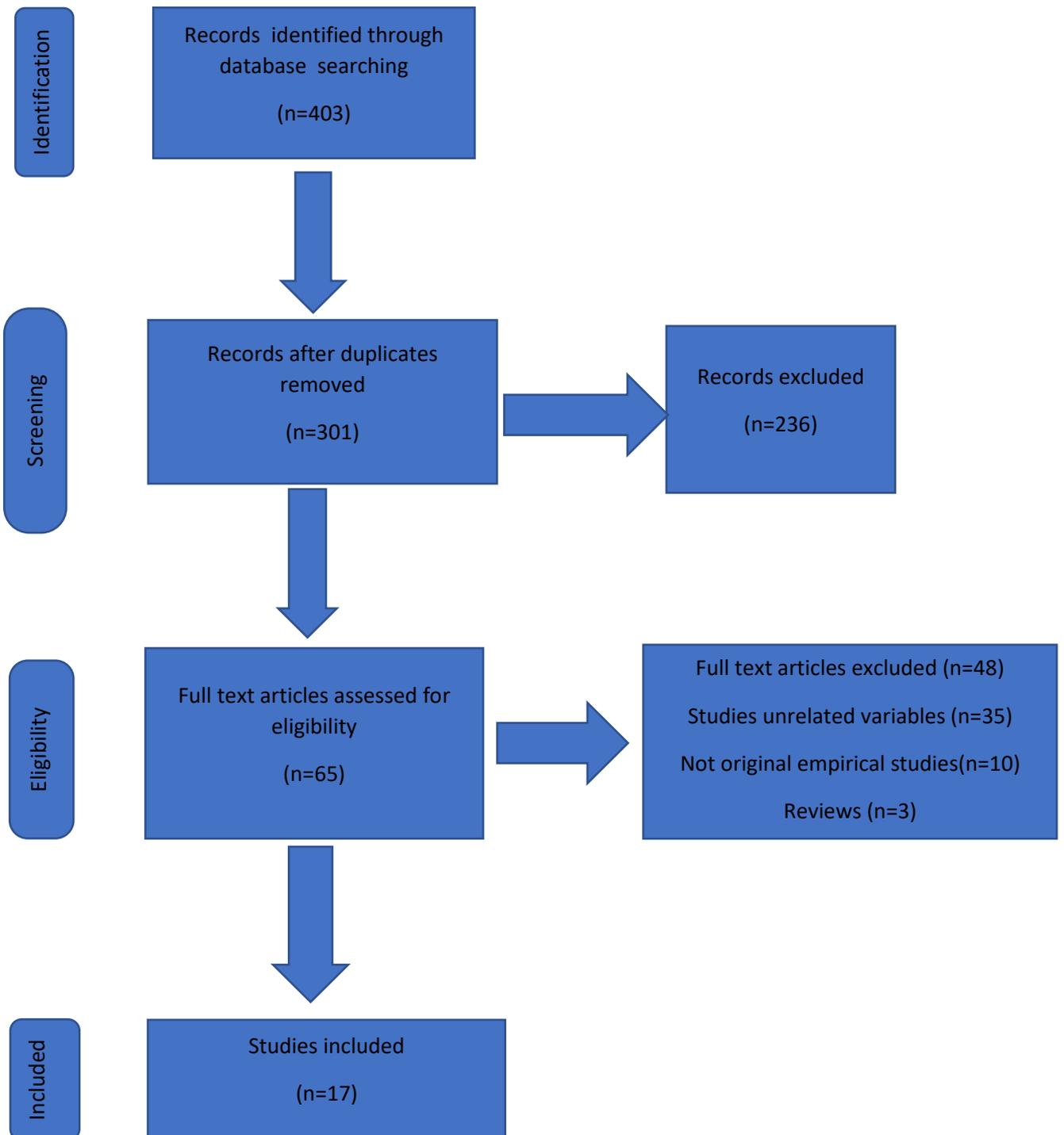
After excluding duplicates, there were (n=301) articles remaining. These articles were stored on a word program with their titles and abstracts. They were screened by reading through the articles, taking notes of titles, keywords and abstracts. A lot of the articles (n=236) had UAC in relation to health issues, age determination, services at reception centers etc. These articles were excluded as they did not fulfil the inclusion criteria.

(n=68) articles were selected by not only reading titles and abstracts but by also opening and downloading the articles in order to get a proper glimpse of all what the article is about.

(n=47) were further excluded as they were either not related, not original empirical studies and were reviews.

Finally, (n=17) articles were included for this scoping review as shown on the next page.

Figure 1



5.3.2 Thematic content analysis

A thematic analysis of the data was conducted with an intention of making sense out of the articles selected. All the articles were first read to provide a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning as prescribed by Creswell, (2014).

A spreadsheet was developed on Microsoft Word and the extractions from the articles were noted systematically on a table (Table 1 on Appendix 1). The information from the articles was coded in relation to the focus of this review. Coding is the process of organising the data by bracketing chunks or texts and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Creswell, 2014, p.198 as cited in Rossman & Rallis,2012). This coding enables me to generate themes that were used as sub-headings and imparts a significant outcome of the findings. These descriptions were used in the interpretation of the data in various ways. (Creswell, 2014).

I have used Tesch`s eight steps in the coding process as prescribed by Creswell (2014) to ensure that the coded themes represent the data before analysing the findings. I have gone over these coding several times to make sure that they correspond with the information on the articles in the original form.

In analysing the data had I asked myself, what lessons have I learnt? These lessons could be my personal interpretation couched in the understanding that I bring into the study from a personal culture, history and experiences or it could be a meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with information gleaned from the literature and theory, according to Creswell, (2014, p.200). I have kept myself neutral to stick on to the later in interpreting the findings.

5.4. Credibility, reliability, verifiability and transferability

To keep my background in check in order to promote the credibility of this project, have I adopted the Cartesian doubt as mentioned earlier from the inception of the project to its end. The inclusion of only empirical studies in this review, will add more credibility to it. The inclusion of the narratives of the child welfare workers will also strengthen the credibility of this scoping review. As data collection from different sources is intended to promote the quality of the research. If the evidences from the different data sources are converged together with the findings from the review, one will be able to make a coherent justification of themes. Creswell (2014) called this the triangulation of different data. The data from the articles will

either justify or in conflict with the meanings from the child welfare workers. This study has brought in use not only qualitative research methods, but also mixed methods that can fill in absent information in the data to create a triangulation and adds to the credibility.

Credibility is really when the findings are in consonance with the reality. Even though the child welfare workers did not make mention of the challenges to participation the study found out, they made mention of the fact that the children were not allowed to partake in some of the decisions-makings.

The findings from the study answered the research questions. Findings clearly found the challenges UAC face which stems with the reality and therefore renders the study reliable and verifiable.

With regards to transferability, this study has not focused only in the home country of the researcher, but an extensive inclusion of studies in the Scandinavia, the rest of Europe and USA. The findings are applicable in all the countries studies were included from and therefore makes it transferable.

Being the first paper that focuses on the essence of adults in facilitating the participation of UAC children in decision-making, this paper will serve as a reflection in the practices of adults/child welfare workers and the society in dealing with UAC.

6. Research content

In the analysis of the data presented by the articles, several challenges to the participation of UAC were found. Most of the challenges were challenges that are created by the immediate adults the children interact with and the environment. I have discussed this in a more detailed manner in the article. The participation of UAC in decision -making is found to be very limited to certain types of decisions due to perhaps the protectionist view of seeing children as *becoming* rather than *being* or the consultative type of participation described above that is commonly used in the judiciary.

The basic physiological needs described in Maslow`s theory can be related to the status of the children meaning, their accomplishment can be different from the children who have a permit to stay and to those who do not have one.

It was found that the children with loving, caring and inclusive adults around them, flourish well, get a better self-esteem, a sense of autonomy and become self-determined.

The interpretation of the article 12 of the CRC and the assessment of the best interest of the child has been experienced to be in conflict with the local laws and cultures that lives one with the question, whose best interest is taken into consideration in many decisions taken that affects the lives of UAC.

Thørnblad and Holtan (2012) consider the power relationship between the practitioners and the children who are involved with them to be in the form of structural power, knowledge power and symbolic power. These power categories have a great influence on the participation of the child. This relationship can also be asymmetric meaning that the child protection officer represents the expertise knowledge and poses to know what is best for the child. (Thørnblad & Holten, 2014, p.37). This asymmetric relationship will affect the behaviour of the child and his/her position in all discussions, negotiations prior to any decision taken. There is a power imbalance in such a relationship rendering the practitioner powerful and the child powerless ready to take whatever is presented.

It is worthwhile to note also the challenges in accomplishing the rights of the child in relation to child centred difficulties. (Liden and Rusten, 2007, p.277 as cited in Alston, 1994; Boyden, 1997; Nykanen, 2001) that *“the CRC reflects a view of childhood as evolving and unique in that a child`s capacity and ability to carry responsibility depends on age as well as the social*

and cultural context of their upbringing". This could be a special focus for practitioners working in the child welfare unit to take into consideration when working with children from other parts of the world. The capacity to participate and influence the decision-making process can vary a lot in such a case as these children very often have been isolated from participating in decision making processes according to their social upbringing and culture. Can this be an assignment for all adults including the practitioners from the child welfare unit to be concerned in providing room and training in the creation and expression of meaningful thoughts for these children? Can this enhance their autonomy and participation for future events? Child development in many forms takes place in meaningful interaction with adults as well as the peer group and the environment.

7. Conclusion

I have made clear the background of this study. I have made a detailed description of the terms and the theories related to both the topic and the research questions. I made a systematic description of the methodology and its credibility, reliability, verifiability and transferability. I have used enormous efforts to get myself conversant with the literature and theories in the study that leaves me with the conclusion that it is important that great efforts be made towards raising awareness of the challenges and the essence of adult support in realizing better participation. It could also be of great importance to note the challenges encountered in assessing the best interest of the child and the implementation of Article 12 of the CRC in practice with regards to the local culture. Participation, if encouraged, can increase autonomy and thus self-determination.

Research on the general challenges UAC face in the process of trying to be integrated in their new environment is not new, but this review is the first to summarize the challenges they face in accessing their right to participate in decision-making and the essence of adult support in doing so and in meeting their general needs.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Summary of cohort studies on the participation of UAC in decision-making and the essence of adult support.

Author and Year	Sample Population	Sample size	Research Design	Country	Participatory Indicator	Key Findings.
Crea et al. (2017)	Adults	79	Qualitative	USA	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children need adults support to build independent living skills. -children need adults to love and understand them. -children need to be connected to the new home and community. -children have a greater need for adult support in getting adequate information and knowledge of the legal system. -children need healthy positive parental figures to give adult support.

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high levels of mental health problems. -language is a key challenge. -children need adult support to keep them safe from bad influences and dangerous gangs.
De Graeve (2014)	Adults	13	Qualitative	Belgium	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -there are negative responses from the community about UAC in the country. -adult support can be challenging when professionalization and uniformity should be a common practice in relation to going into personal relationships with UAC.

						-good care is a resource to form social capital for UAC.
Engebrigtsen, (2003)	Govt. officials and workers	25	Qualitative	Norway	None	-Findings show that: -children need adult support for care and protection. - decisions on family reunification are based on judicial and political grounds. Children are excluded from such decisions. -there is a weaker legal protection for UAC in relation to ethnic Norwegian children. -UAC are labelled and categorized and therefore discriminated in the exercise of their rights.
Førde (2005)	Children	5	Qualitative	Norway	Little	Findings show that:

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children in the reception centres have poor relationships with the adult workers. -there are maltreatment cases of UAC in reception centres. -there is evidence of labelling and categorization. -there is the need for trustworthy adult support. -children are not taken seriously in decision-making. - there are cases of psychological problems. -there is a need for information.
Gimeno-Monterde et al. (2019)	Children	382	Mixed	Spain and France	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adults are sceptic about UAC's ages. -children's integration into the host society is important. -children need adult support in

						<p>mentoring and motivating for education and employment through befriending.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -incorporating the family into protocols if present in the country is important. -children have the feeling of being a product.
Herz and Lalander (2017)	Children	23	Qualitative	Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -being called UAC led to feelings of loneliness. - Language is a major problem. -children report loneliness. -children are unhappy about some rules that brings more loneliness. -there are information needs. -children are in need of adult

						support with emotions.
Hopkins and Hill (2010)	Children and adults	101	Qualitative	Scotland	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children are not recognised as children due to the assumptions made by certain practitioners about their ages. -there is emphasis made by both adults and children about the importance of education. (Information). -the need to be recognized as children. -linguistic support was a primary factor. -there is an adult support need in the provision of a safe, secured and constant accommodation. -children need adult support on

						<p>health and medical issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children need adult support on legal representation. -children need adult support in acquiring information. -there is a need for effective interpreters. -there are psychological problems. -there is a need for adult support in cultural and religious needs.
Kalverboer et. al. (2015)	Children	132	Mixed	Netherland	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -placement decisions made by adults. -cultural considerations are given in decision-making of placement. -children preferred going to the normal school

						<p>with ethnic children rather than just the language school.</p> <p>-children need attention from adults.</p> <p>-foster home children participated in structuring the activities and culture of the household.</p> <p>-included in making action plans.</p> <p>-there is need for information.</p>
Kaukko (2017)	Children	12	Qualitative	Finland and Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-age appropriate information is needed.</p> <p>-interpretation of rights depends on the local culture (Environment).</p> <p>-the need for a reliable adult is identified.</p>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children raised the need to be heard. - children were not involved on major decision-making.
Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017)	Children	23	Qualitative	Finland and Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -UAC are pathologized and conceived of being in a deplorable state. -children expressed the need for adult support to learn more about rights. -children prefer adults to take care of children's best interests. -children had conflicts with staffs. -children reaching the majority age demanded more responsibility and participation. -children are critical to some rules.

						-there is a power imbalance between children and adults.
Kohli (2005)	Adults	29	Qualitative	United Kingdom	None	Findings show that: -children wants to be recognised as children. -children had limited contacts with adults. - children lacked guardians. -there are evidences of psychosocial problems. -children suspected adults of being spies. -there were reports of trauma
Kohli (2006)	Adults	29	Mixed	United Kingdom	None	Findings show that: -children had a fear that limits them to open up. -children mistrust adults. -the children`s asylum status

						influences their participation.
Van Os et al. (2018)	Children and adults	27	Mixed	Netherland	None	Findings show that: -children hesitate to talk. - there is a lack of information. -there are insufficiencies in the child rearing environment. -there are reports of mental health issues.
Paulsen et al (2015)	Adults	36	Qualitative	Norway	None	Findings show that: -there are questions on the competency of workers. - there are indications of psychological problems (sleepless nights). -their asylum status affects their life situation. - there are reports of loneliness and missing home.

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -there are limited social networks. -there is poor cooperation between the child welfare and the reception centres. -reports of interpreter problems. - there are evidences of discrimination. -Categorization as “asylum-seekers” leading to less prioritizing of needs.
Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger (2017)	Children	36	Qualitative	Norway	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children want adults to see them from their own perspective. - most children are scared to talk in the beginning. -there is a greater need for information. - children are unhappy the way

						<p>rules are communicated.</p> <p>-children want adults to help them.</p>
Söderqvist (2014)	Young adults	11	Qualitative	Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-Young adults who were once UAC have a feeling of being different among young adults.</p> <p>-there are reports of loneliness and isolation after leaving care centres.</p> <p>- they expressed difficulties of being integrated because of language and knowledge of society.</p> <p>(Information needs)</p>
Söderqvist et al. (2016)	Adults	13	Qualitative	Sweden	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-there is evidence of conflicts with adults with regards to food decision.</p>

						<p>-adults take into consideration to some extent the self-determination of the children.</p> <p>-it is challenging for adults to differentiate between home and workplace.</p> <p>Professional or private.</p>
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Appendix 2

[Children and Youth Services Reviews. .pdf](#)



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