

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania



Edna Harriet Mtoi

The Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, Faculty of Leadership and Management Science, Department of Gender Studies, P.O.Box 9193 Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

ABSTRACT: In Tanzania, adolescent mothers were previously been prohibited from returning to public secondary schools particularly during the fifth government phase led by the late President John Joseph Pombe Magufuli. However, under his successor President Samia Suluhu Hassan, a new re-entry policy for adolescent mother has been re-introduced. The policy aims to address the challenges faced by adolescent mothers who drop out of school due to pregnancy. Although the policy granted the opportunities for adolescent mothers to continue with their studies after giving birth, its implementation in country is still uncertain. It is against this backdrop that the current study explored the perceptions held by selected educational stakeholders and adolescent mothers to appraise the extent to which the re-entry education policy has thus far been implemented, drawing on a case of the secondary schools sampled from Urambo District, in Tanzania. The study deployed the interpretivist approach and phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling was used to select ten study participants reflecting two counterfactual scenarios, namely: adolescent mothers who enrolled through re-entry program after delivery and who did not do so after delivery. The methods of data collection included in-depth interview with adolescent mothers and key informants; and focus grouped discussions with community members. The data were analysed through thematic analysis. The study findings revealed that implementation of the re-entry policy is marked with several challenges on part of the adolescent mothers which include: lack of support from families and schools. More to say, there prevails a stubbornly rigid and unchanging social stigma subjecting the typologies of the mothers into a state of dilemma, making it difficult for them to perform both the expected double roles of a mother and student simultaneously. The study also disclosed a lack of clarity on the re-entry policy guidelines, which has forced some of the re-entry policy implementers to use their own discretions. Additionally, the findings indicated that awareness creation was not sufficient enough to enable adolescent mother especially in remote areas to enrol back to school after pregnancy. The paper recommends that, for successful implementation of the re-entry policy, comprehensive counselling programmes for adolescent mothers and awareness creation among the educational stakeholders and community members are inevitable.

KEYWORDS: Re-entry policy, Education, Adolescents Mothers, Urambo, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, early pregnancy is a hindrance to the completion of education by adolescent girls. Adolescent pregnancy and childcare have remained the biggest causes of school dropout and failed re-admission among girls (McFairland, Cui and Stark, 2018). In most research, it has been observed that adolescent pregnancies occur in both developing and developed countries. However, nearly a third of all women in developing countries, start having children at the age of 19 or younger, and almost half of the first birth to adolescent are younger than 17. Sub-Saharan Africa is riddled with the highest pregnancy rate of adolescent girls in the world. Each year, thousands of adolescent girls become pregnant (UNFPA, 2022). Ironically, the countries are characterized by lack of and inaccessibility to contraceptive methods, unfavorable community attitudes towards adolescent contraceptive use, and poor knowledge of sexual and reproductive health in adolescent, all of which leading to higher prevalence of adolescent pregnancies (Kassa *et al.*, 2018). Given the high rates of adolescent pregnancies in the Sub-Saharan Africa coupled with ineffective policies (Population Council, 2015), adolescent mothers find it hard to go back to school after birth in order to continue with their education. Their inability to complete the education circle diminishes their chances of engaging in meaningful employment in their

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

adulthood which could ultimately lead to achieving socio-economic freedom (Undie *et al.*, 2015) and consequently a cycle of poverty.

Education is a globally appreciated human right and key for enabling every child to live to potential and contribute to the economic, societal, and civic growth of their countries (United Nations 2015). Education access and gender equity are guaranteed in the world vision articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNFPA, 2022). Due to rising in wastage in education resulting from pregnancies, the focus on adolescent has moved to the center of the global agenda and is stipulated in the SDGs (Elfert, 2019). One of the strategies that is globally embraced to enhance gender equity in education is the policy on school re-entry. The strategy seeks to guarantee pregnant adolescent students continued learning while adolescent mothers re-enroll in schools after childbirth. The school re-entry policy has formed a foundation for regularization of the guidelines guaranteeing access and gender equity in education.

The World Education for All (EFA) is a policy framework which identifies a common ground around quality which includes respect for individual rights and improved quality education. Expelling and banning pregnant girls from returning to school were the normal practices happening despite the fact that Tanzania ratified both international and regional instruments that promote human rights, including the rights of the girl child to education (TEN/MET, 2021). The country ratified the Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). All these conventions state that everyone, including pregnant schoolgirls, has the right to education. Ratification of these conventions was an indication of the governments' commitment to protecting the rights of her citizens, including pregnant girls. Furthermore, the 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) recognises the rights of children to education and protects children against early marriages and harmful cultural and social practices (URT, 1977). Thus; banning pregnant and adolescent mothers from continuing with education after delivery was interpreted as a violation of children's rights to education. Martinez and Odhiambo (2018) argue that this discriminatory ban on pregnant girls and adolescent mothers badly impacts thousands of lives by forcing them to end their education.

The debate on re-admitting teenage pregnant mothers back to school was a major topic of contestation in the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania. The major shift on how adolescent mothers should be handled reached the public attention on 22nd June 2017. In one of his public speeches, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency the late Dr. John Pombe Magufuli made it crystal clear that during his tenure as President, pregnant teenage girls in public primary and secondary schools in Tanzania would not be allowed to continue with normal schooling (Niboye, 2018). He emphasized that after delivery, such teen mothers will have to look for alternative education advancement options or engage outright in farming and other economic activities. The ban was justified by the argument that allowing such girls to go back to school particularly through fee free education would symbolise permission of immoral conducts sanctioned and sanctified by the State. Following the rulling, girls who happened to become pregnant while schooling had to look for alternative education advancement options.

After ascending the helms of power, Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, the first woman Head of the State of Tanzania effective from 2021, emphasized that there has been a notable increase of gestures clearly depicting discrimination faced by adolescent mothers in education provision. Responding to criticisms voiced by various internal and external organizations, the Minister of Education, Vocational and Training announced on November 24th, 2021, in a press conference held in Dodoma, Tanzania; that girls who had been forced to leave school due to pregnancy would be allowed to return to school to continue with their formal education within two years after giving birth (Issa and Temu, 2023). This pronouncement was succeeded by a set of re-entry guidelines created to realise the purpose, and started to be implemented by February 2022 (Kapiipi, 2022). This change allows girls to re-enrol to school within two years after giving birth. The re-entry guidelines foreshadow a significant commitment to protecting pregnant and adolescent mothers in Tanzania from self-opinionated political motives depriving women of their right for education. The effort is also supported by the United Nations principle of "leave no one behind" to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2021). It is against this background that the current study was rationalised. It is anticipated that the study will contribute to the existing empirical knowledge on the aspects of adolescent mothers and the education re-entry policy. The study sought to answer mainly two research questions, as follows: First, what are the experiences held by adolescent mothers during the implementation of the re-entry policy? Secondly, how do policy makers, local government official and community members handled the implementation process and acceptance of the re-entry policy? The paper is organised in six main sections, namely: general introduction, literature review and research methodologies. The remaining sections contain the study findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section contains a review of the literature related to the aspect of re-entry educational policies. The section begins with theoretical framework, followed by a review of empirical studies.

Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by the critical theory to explain the nexus between the tenets of re-entry policy for adolescent mothers and the actual implementation of the policy. One of the main tenets of the critical theory proposed by Habermas (1984) is that it advocates for liberation of people through making them aware of the basis of their misrepresentations through self-reflection and self-understanding of their situation. This liberation may lead to constructive engagement of individuals enabling them to pursue their goals in life. The theory is applicable to this study essentially because it emphasizes that key stakeholders in education such as policy makers, heads of schools, community leaders, parents and students should be engaged in free, open, and democratic decisions in order to move beyond basic information and communication (Waghid, 2002). Thus, critical theory provides a framework for thinking about re-entry policy in terms of engaging all stakeholders in discussion about how the policy could be better implemented. Equally importantly, the theory underscores a need for having in place educational policies tailored to attain inclusive and equitable representation for all. In the context of this study, the re-entry policy, mirrors succinctly other education policy framework provided for at global level, including: SDGs, EFA, UDHR and CEDAW.

Empirical Literature Review

Global literature related to the implementation of re-entry policy reveals different perspectives. To begin with, the United State of America (USA) and England have in place the policies that allow adolescent mothers to return to school (Namayuba, 2020). Paradoxically, though, Scholl (2007) report that school officials in USA were routinely fond of expelling pregnant girls from schools. Likewise, Dawson and Hosie (2005) reveal that learners in England were usually been side-lined in public institutions of learning. Even after the introduction of a number of policies initiatives in 1997 by the government of the United Kingdom (Selman, 2003), some social norms such stigmatization still existed. The literature reviewed from these countries indicates that in some schools, the re-entry policy was not implemented based on the law (Selman, 2003); thereby discouraging adolescent mothers from returning to school.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there has been an ongoing debate on adolescent pregnancies policy for a long time. The trend in most countries is to move towards the policies that make it easier for adolescent mothers to continue with their education. Botswana is one of the first country to implement an education re-entry policy in sub-Saharan Africa since 1979 (Hamusonde, 2003). In South Africa, the re-entry policy came into effect in 1996, through School Act (No 84), which enacted an educational policy, with its commitment to gender equality in schools (Shefer *et al.*, 2013). This means before enactment of the Act, it was legal to expel pregnant learner from school. Another reference to the background on the implementation of re-entry policy in Sub-Saharan Africa are the studies conducted by Birungi *et al.* (2015) and Molosiwa and Moswela (2012). The findings of these studies were almost similar, reporting the re-entry policy was implemented with mixed feelings. The study findings disclosed that the Ministry of Education did not promote policy awareness activities in the communities. It was also established that the schools implementing the re-entry policy were hard to access due to poor record keeping by the Ministry.

Currently, Tanzania is among the countries in sub-Saharan Africa that has re-established a re-entry guideline. The guideline was re-affirmed in 2021 to allow adolescent mothers go back to school. This was meant to promote the education of girls and help the country move towards attaining education for all in Tanzanian. Due to its importance in education, a number of papers have been written to appraise its effectiveness. One such papers is Ngonyani (2022) who suggested that the government should make efforts to create awareness through counselling and prepare teachers and students to receive teenage mothers in their schools. Before the establishment of re-entry, Laiser and Muyinga (2017) revealed that some education stakeholders were opposing re-admission based on moral and traditional grounds, implying that they were not ready to welcome it. Since re establishment of the re-entry policy, no scholarly and empirical wrtings have documented revealing the views held by the educational stakeholders such as adolescent girls in secondary school, teachers, parents and education officers toward the re-entry policy. It is on this ground that this study explored the implementation of the educational policy for adolescent mothers who drop out of school after pregnancy in public schools in Urambo District, Tabora region. The focus was to understand the experiences of the adolescent mothers and hear the views of different stakeholders on the implementation process of the re-entry education policy. Two research questions were formulated in order to tap the respondents' points of view, namely: (i) What is the extent to which the respondents are aware of the re-entry education policy? and (ii) How different stakeholders in education sector and community handled the implementation process and acceptance of the re-entry policy in public schools.

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The study area

The study was carried out in Urambo district which is one among the eight districts of Tabora Region. Tabora ranked the second highest (43%) prevalence of adolescent pregnancy in Tanzania (Triantafyllidi *et al.*, 2024; UNFPA, 2022). Urambo district was randomly selected to represent other districts in Tabora region. The district is dominated by two tribes which are Sukuma and Nyamwezi, in which patriarchy cultural values are dominant especially in rural areas. These two tribes are known for adhering strongly to their culture. Usually, the father is the head of the family, and if they pass away, then the older brother becomes the head of the family, not a widow (Kapipi, 2022). The patriarchy nature of the study area has implication on girl child especially when it comes to decision making on their livelihood. Besides that, the girl child is considered a form of wealth for the family because bride price is paid upon marriage. Marrying their daughters, translates the family will earn twelve to fifty cattle. Principally, the younger the girl, the larger the number of cattle paid as bride price. This socio-cultural family set up encourages the tradition of early marriage, eventually leading to early parenting. This male chauvinist behaviour adds to the situation of girls tending to drop out of from school to fulfil their parents expected social roles and obligations.

Study Design

The study employed the case study approach which allowed the researcher to collect extensive contextualized information from the respondents. The study applied an interpretivist approach using the phenomenological research design to explore experiences, perceptions and attitudes held by the respondents. The design facilitated collection of data in form of the stories narrated by adolescent mothers who managed to return to school and those who were did not despite the presence of the re-entry education policy. Purposive sampling was used to collect the data from key informants and adolescent mothers in schools. In selecting adolescent mothers, the heads of schools were consulted to reach the right respondents. For non-student adolescent mothers who did not return to school after pregnancy, snowball sampling was employed to get them. In this case, the Community Social Welfare Officer (CSWO) were employed as the gatekeeper.

Data Collection

The study used a variety of data collection methods, including interviews and focus group discussions. In-person open ended interview were conducted to collect data from all adolescent mothers and all key informants. This was considered appropriate and convenient to the respondents because it gives them freedom and ample time to express themselves. It also allows flexibility and adjustment. The one-on-one questioning also allows the researcher to gain access to non-verbal cues from the respondents. The study conducted one focus group discussion (FGD) comprising six community members where adolescent mothers reside. Ten adolescent mothers were involved for interview, of which six were returnees through re-entry program while four were adolescent mothers who did not return to school after pregnancy. Seven key informant respondents (2 officer from district education office, 2 heads of schools, 2 school counsellors and 1 social welfare officer) were also involved in the interviews. Individual face-to-face interview with these officials were conducted using interview question guide. This method has advantage of giving chances to clarifies unclear issues and provide the opportunity for the researcher to request for elaboration.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected were scrutinised to identify themes and patterns of meaning that repeatedly came up, and thereafter were subjected to thematic analysis. The analysis procedure in relation to the study respondent's is summerze in Table 1. The analysis involved categorisation, arranging and presenting insights into the form of meaning or themes. The data collected were transcribed. Consistent patterns and themes related to the research objectives were identified through critical reading and analysis. Finally, descriptive narrative format with literary references was used because it is flexible and capable of providing in-depth information which was important for understanding the status and implementation of the re-entry policy in the study area.

Table 1: Data analysis from each study respondent

S/N	Respondents	No. of Respondents	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1.	Adolescent mothers	10	Interviews	Narrative and Thematic
2.	District Education Officials	02	Interviews	Thematic
3.	Heads of Schools	02	Interviews	Thematic
4.	School Counsellor	02	Interviews	Thematic
5.	Social Worker Officer	01	Interview	Thematic
6.	Parents	06	FGD	Thematic

Infering from Table 1, adolescent mothers were the majority. This selection was deliberate because they constitute the subject of the study.

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

Consent and ethics

The researcher followed all the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy Research and Consultancy's processes and requirements. Permission was sought from the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy (MNMA) and the MNMA Research and Consultancy Committee (MRCC). The permission to conduct the study was also sought from the Office of the Regional Administrative Secretary in Urambo, from the Ward Executive Director and the heads of the schools where the study was conducted. In addition, the rights of respondents were upheld by notifying them of the purpose of the research before the commencement of the research. An introduction letter was presented to the participants in order for them to validate the research. Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from all the participants, who were informed about the purpose of the study. The participants were informed that they were under no obligation whatsoever to answer the questions and that they could end the interview whenever they wished. Confidentiality was ensured throughout the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Information of the Adolescent Mothers

The intention of including demographic information in a study is to know the characteristics of the respondents in the study area. Ten adolescent mothers were approached during the study period, and all agreed to participate in the study. Their median age was 15 and 16 years old, ranging from 13 – 19 years old. Six of them were enrolled in education re-entry program, while one participant dropped out from school six months after the enrollment. Four of the adolescent mothers did not attend to school after becoming mothers. These were regarded as out of school (non-students) adolescent mothers. Table 2 provides a summary of all adolescent mothers who participated in the study. Furthermore, the results shows that most adolescent in the study group fell pregnant at the age of 17 with the lowest age being 13. Based on these results, it is notable that students at ordinary level, especially in Form One to Form Three are mostly affected by early pregnancies as compared to advanced level students. These findings coincide with what was reported by Tanzania Demographic Health Survey (TDHS/MIS, 2016), that most adolescent girls in Tanzania begin sexual relationship at the age of fifteen in which majority are at ordinary level of secondary education. Therefore, the education sector in various places in Tanzania needs to pay attention to this age category, hence play an important role in reducing pregnancies. This can be done through addressing some of the underlying causes of adolescent pregnancy, and targeting secondary schools as platforms for comprehensive sexuality education and health promotion. As emphasized by previous studies such as that of Vicent (2009) in Kenya and Hubbard (2008) in Namibia, girls are becoming mothers when they are too young to handle parenting roles. That helps justifying why the re-entry policy has emphasize professional counseling with a view to empowering adolescent students to take responsibility for their actions in order to avoid early pregnancies.

Table 2: Socio-demographic details of the adolescent mothers.

Participants	Age when 1 st pregnant (years)	Education level when pregnant	Current age (years)	Re-entry status	Current education level
Case 1	19	Form 4	20	In school	Form 5
Case 2	17	Form 4	19	In school	Form 4
Case 3	13	Form 1	15	Returned	Dropped out after 3 months
Case 4	15	Form 2	17	In school	From 3
Case 5	14	Form 1	16	In school	Form 2
Case 6	13	Form 1	15	In school	Form 1
Case 7	17	Form 3	19	Did not enrol	Did not return
Case 8	16	Form 3	18	Did not enrol	Did not return
Case 9	14	Form 1	16	Did not enrol	Did not return
Case 10	17	Form 4	20	Did not enrol	Did not return

Themes Emerging from Data Analysis

The thematic approach was used to ascertain the themes emerging from the research questions of this study. The analysis started by coding the transcribed responses from interview with the respondents. The process was intended to attach meaning to the collected information which allows summary of data by collapsing the codes into themes. Based on the study's objectives; three themes (Table 3) emerged from the collected information in conjunction with the research objectives and research questions.

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

Table 3: Codes Construction

Research Question	Emerging Themes and Sub-themes
What is the extent to which the respondents are aware of the re-entry education policy?	Theme 1: Knowledge and awareness of the re-entry policy Awareness and experience. Incommunicable policy
	Theme 2: The Actual Practices and Implementation Challenges Dual responsibility - early motherhood and student. Sense of guilty (leaving a child while attending school) Social support and protection
How different stakeholders in education sector and community handled the implementation process and acceptance of the re-entry policy in public schools?	Theme 3: Stakeholders perceptions on re-entry policy Diverse perceptions of the education stakeholders Cultural norms and attitudes

Knowledge and awareness of the re-entry policy

Adolescent mothers had several views which shed light on their experience during the implementation of the re-entry policy. The knowledge of the existence of the policy was perceived by the respondents to be an indication of good news. It had brought about a sense of hope and encouragement to a number of adolescent mothers. They contended that the existence of the policy was a radical departure of the gender insensitive education policy that shuttered the hope of women continuation with education after becoming pregnant. However, the new policy brought new hope of completing their education journey. When asked about how they became knowledgeable of the existence of the policy, adolescent mothers were quoted as saying:

"...I heard about the policy from the school head, and that is what encouraged me to return to school; at first I thought my dreams were shuttered, but when I heard about the policy, it awakened and encouraged me to resume my studies after delivery..." (Case 6 interview; December, 2023).

"... When my class teachers established that I was pregnant, I was called to the matron's (school counsellor) office. I was asked a lot of questions and was subjected to a counselling session. Finally, I managed to open up and speak to them. They explained to me the circumstances leading to the pregnancy, but also the opportunity available to continue with my studies through the re-entry program..." (Case 2 interview; December, 2023).

The few adolescent mothers who were aware of the existence of the policy cited the head of schools, class teachers and school counsellors as sources of the information. This implies that these education officials played an important role in creating awareness to the adolescent mothers about the existence of the policy. Responding to a question on how she was feeling after the counseling session and the news about the re-entry policy, an adolescent mother commented:

"... I am contented with the government's reintroduction of the policy. I will not waste time and make similar mistakes this time. I want to put in more effort, finish my secondary education, and proceed with the higher levels until I get the job to sustain my needs and care for my family..." (Case 2 interview; December, 2023).

The above quotations show that the introduction of the re-entry policy supported some adolescent mothers to continue with schooling after delivering. Hence, it increased the chances of developing their full potential. Girls' education has been perceived as one of the critical approaches for reducing high levels of poverty, high fertility rates, and achieving suitable development (Hamusonde, 2003). Similarly, Bhana *et al.* (2010) commented that offering adolescent mothers opportunities to continue with studies increased chances to proceed with higher education. It increased their economic standing and many other opportunities.

Contrary to the above finding, another respondent reported that awareness of the policy was insufficient to compel some of the adolescent mothers to resume studies after delivery. With regards to the existence of the education re-entry policy, an adolescent mother had this to say when asked about the policy:

"... No one has ever mentioned about the policy. When I realized I was pregnant; I left the town where I was residing with my aunt and returned back to village. I came to learn about the policy during training on reproductive health services in the village, which was organized by CSW. I could not resume my studies after having stayed at home for more than two years..." (Case 10 interview; December, 2023).

Based on the above quote, it is observed that awareness of re-entry policy was not sufficient enough to enhance its implementation for some adolescent mothers in schools especially those in rural areas. This poses a challenge to the implementation of the re-entry policy; prompting an education gap among some adolescent girls. The main tenant of the critical

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

theory which informed this study advocated for liberation of people in order to make them aware of the situation around them. Consistent with the theory, there is a need to sensitize the rural communities on the opportunities brought by the education re-entry policy for adolescent mothers so that they can exploit advantages available to complete their education.

Practice and Implementation Challenges

The study's findings demonstrated that adolescent mothers were struggling with school activities and assignment while also they are required to play the role of mothers and students concurrently. One adolescent mother who dropped out of school three months after registered to the re-entry program expressed the reasons for not continuing with the studies. She maintained that unavoidable dual responsibilities as a mother to her child care and student at the same was the main hindrance for opting not to continue with her studies. This she acknowledged as saying that:

"... it was too much to handle, making sure I attend my child before going to school and preparing myself for school. Sometimes my child does not sleep well at night, so by the time she gets some sleep, it's time for me to get everything ready for school. I regarded myself not only unproductive at school but also carelessly handling my child. I could not take it any more, so eventually I decided to quit..." (Case 3 interview; December, 2023).

Dedicating adequate time for school activities while simultaneously managing child care was a burden for some adolescent mothers who enroll back to school after pregnancy. In some instances, adolescent mothers are caught in between responsibilities while trying to balance between the two. Adolescent mothers who continued to pursue with studies admitted that; the situation of raising a child and attending school at the same time is not easy, as captured in the quote:

"... I have to wake up early in the morning to wash my child's clothes and prepare her meal. But I also have to help with the household chores so that my sister, who is helping me with my child, is left with few chores. There are certain situations in which I miss classes, examinations, or both..." (Case 1 interview; December, 2023).

Based on the challenged faced by early motherhood, adolescent students often find it detrimental to balance the dual roles of being both a mother and a student as revealed in above quotes. These dual responsibilities impose physical, emotional, and academic demands, making it difficult for adolescent mothers to fully engaged in their studies. The experience of navigating these roles simultaneously can impact their personal development, limit future opportunities, and, in many cases, lead to school dropout. In order to attend their tasks, adolescent mothers need assistance with day-to-day responsibilities such as the one provided by the adolescent mother as indicated in case (1). This may assist them balance between studies and maternal role. Bukhosin (2019) pointed out that, the burden of dual responsibilities may negatively impact student mothers' execution of both roles and ultimately predispose them to emotional and psychological risks.

Moreover, the adolescent student mothers' narratives of the conflicting demands of parenting and school also appeared to be heavily tinged with guilt. When parenting from a distance, the majority of adolescent mothers experienced a persistent sense of guilt because they were unable to actively participate in their children's care and development, which was contrary to the social norms in which mothers are regarded as the primary caregivers. The following quote illustrate some of the guilty that adolescent mothers expressed:

"... I sometimes feel disturbed when my child gets sick, and I know I need to take her to the hospital while at school there is an examination or test concurrently. I feel too bad when I am in class, but my mind is brooding both of the home unfinished commitments and my sick child..." (Case 1 interview; December, 2023).

The guilty expressed reflects the complex sentiments associated with physical and emotional distance from their children, and the competing demands of studying and mothering. The finding implies that the burden of responsibilities for adolescent mothers may hinder their capacity to return to school and cope with the school schedules, as the re-entry policy guideline requires. The expressed guilt might be a reflection of the contradictory moral judgement feelings linked to weighing up between emotional physical attachment to a child and the conflicting demands of accomplishing educational dreams. According to the aforementioned research findings, adolescent mothers' overwhelming workloads can make it more difficult for them to comply with the re-entry policy guideline and return to school. In Urambo district, like in any other parts of Tanzania, whereas patriarchy system is widely practiced, all domestic work is socially constructed as the women's responsibilities, including taking care of babies and young children. This observation acquiesced with what was reported by Bhana (2012); that adolescent mothers bear the full weight of raising and caring for their children due to the limited engagement of male partners in childcare.

Stakeholders' Perception of the Education Re-entry Policy

The stakeholders had different views reflecting their perspectives regarding the implementation of the re-entry education policy in Urambo district. In particular, the District Education Officers argued that the policy promoted advancement of adolescent mothers in education and in many other facets of development. They strongly argued that mandating adolescent mothers to return to school was the best option to enable the girls who fall pregnant complete their education circle, leading to secure their

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

cherished bright future. This was revealed in one key informant interview (KII) with the Acting District Education Officer who ascertained that:

“... it was just fair to support and allow adolescent mothers to return to school because the boy who impregnated them usually continue schooling or with their businesses while girls were expelled from school. Re-entry will help to reduce the number of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy since the policy gives them opportunity to complete their schooling after delivery...”

Supporting the statement, another education officer remarked:

“... Since most girls come from low-income households and are reliant on their parents, it is a good idea to readmit them after they become pregnant. When a girl becomes pregnant and gives birth, she adds another dependent to the family, and they lose all hope and hopes for a brighter future. However, if they are granted the opportunity to re-enter school, they will complete their education journey, position themselves for a career in the future, and be able to support their parents and the child...”

The quotes suggest the re-entry policy is unanimously supported and acceptance by the district education officers in Urambo District. While the implementation of the policy received a positive consideration from the district education officers, there were mixed perspectives on the part of heads of schools who are among the key stakeholders implementing the policy. Lack of preparedness and ignorance of their roles was among the major concern in the implementation of the policy. The verbatim below captures the sentiments held by one the head of school:

“... I was not given any training on the implementation of the policy. I only received education circular (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Education Circular No.2, 2021) directing us to allow the pregnant adolescent in school and offer re-admission and continue with studies if they come after giving birth...” (Head of School, 01).

A similar concern was also shared by school counsellors who maintained that they had neither read the policy nor provided it by the responsible ministry. So, they were completely ignorant of it. They commented that they had no clear guidelines on what to do when pregnancy was discovered; when girls should leave school to deliver; how long should girls be absent from school and how adolescent mothers who returned to school should be treated. Lack of preparedness and ignorance on part of some stakeholders within the education cadre allows for both negative and positive responses from them. Similarly, lack of awareness of the same meant that the school counsellors were unable to provide proper guidance and counselling to the adolescent students who fall pregnant. This drawback is connected to the failure of the government to involve all stakeholders in communicating and implementing the policy. This finding amplifies what was reported in a study by Psaki (2016); that lack of guidelines on how re-entry policy of young mothers should be handled is one of the barriers to implementing the policy.

In order for the re-entry policy to be successfully implemented, parents must support the adolescent mother by covering her school expenses, giving her child support so that she can re-enter the workforce, ensuring that her child is in a safe and in supportive environment, and minimising disruptions from household duties (Kapiqi, 2022). However, social-cultural factors and community attitudes surrounding the adolescent pregnancy and motherhood is traditionally rooted in customary gender practice as pointed out by Bafi (2020). The study found that the reaction of community members is mixed with those who do not commiserate with the re-entry policy. In FGD; the community social welfare officer narrated that she encountered a case where the adolescent mother indicated interest in coming back to school, but the father said tradition did not allow the girl to stay with him in the same house after she had given birth. The only solution was for her to get married to the father of the baby. Supporting that, one participant commented :

“... I believe when a girl conceives, that marks the end of education. I don't believe in the policy. If she fails to stay at school while alone, how can she manage to study while leaving a child at home...”

Another participant added:

“... it is against our culture to have a mother attending school with other normal students. Her place is a home with the rest of women who are already mothers.” (Participants with adolescent mothers not in school, FGD; December 2023).

The quotes confirm that the families with deep rooted cultural norms are likely to continue perpetuating stigmatization even when the government resolutely stand against such anti-development cultures. Notably, such adamancy jeopardizes the re-entry policy for adolescent students.

While some parents had negative perception of the policy, others parents were happy to see their daughters getting the second chance to continue with studies. To complement their support on the re-entry policy, one parent said: *“...I am happy that my daughter has returned to school. I will provide her with all the necessary support she may need until she completes her studies so that she can fend for herself and the child in the future...”* (Participants with adolescent mothers in school, FGD; December 2023). Some parents reported that they were still hopeful that their daughters will complete their education after being given the chance to return to school. They seemed to realize that their daughters could have better future by completing their formal education. The narration of participants from FGD shows a mixed reactions that community and families have towards the policy. Other insult

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

them for becoming mothers at a young age while in school, while others encourage and support them to continue with studies. Thus, this study has revealed that just like others stakeholders, parents and other community members are among the key stakeholder for the implementation of the re-entry policy. Their role in providing social support to adolescent mothers is very important for them to cope with early motherhood because social support is a critical element required for adjustment to motherhood.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is concluded that there is lack of awareness of the re-entry policy among the participants except a few (such as education officers) at the district level. This means that the policy guidelines and the implementation protocol is only known by the top education officers while other stakeholders are not well informed. Stakeholders varied views are linked to the poor implementation of the re-entry policy. Lack of preparedness amongst the stakeholders such as head of schools and school counsellors seem to stagnate the implementation of the policy. Few parents who should take the lead in the implementation seem to uphold their cultural values at the expense of the re-entry policy. Some of community members view the policy as supporting and nurturing the moral decay among youth in the community. Regarded from the point of view of the ideas espoused by the critical theory advanced by Habermas (1984) regarding the successful implementation of the education re-entry policy, this study suggests that all stakeholders in education should be fully engaged in free, open, and democratic decision on how the policy should be implemented. The theory insists on the liberation of the people by making them aware of what is required of them. This was very important for the saucerful implementation of the re-entry policy that all key stakeholders of the policy in education cadre (students, educations offices, parents and other community members) should be actively involved as suggested by the theory.

REFERENCES

- 1) Baafi, S. A. (2020). *The Plight of Young Girls: School Re-entry for Pregnant Schoolgirls and Young Mothers in Techiman, Ghana* (Masters, International Institute of Social Studies). Hague.
- 2) Bhana, D., Morrell, R., Shefer, T., & Ngabaza, S. (2010). South African teachers' responses to teenage pregnancy and teenage mothers in schools. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 12(8), 871-883.
- 3) Birungi, H., Undie, C. C., MacKenzie, I., Katahoire, A., Obare, F., & Machawira, P. (2015). Education sector response to early and unintended pregnancy: A review of country experiences in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 4) Bukhosini, Sithulile. 2019. "Being Student and a Mother: Exploring the Experience of Motherhood among University Students." M. Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 5) Conceptualizing and measuring unintended pregnancy and birth: Moving the field forward," STEP UP Meeting Report. Accra: Population Council, 2015.
- 6) Dawson N, Hosie A. *The Education of Pregnant Young Women and Young Mothers in England*. Bristol: University of Bristol, 2005.
- 7) Elfert, M. (2019). Lifelong learning in Sustainable Development Goal 4: What does it mean for UNESCO's rights-based approach to adult learning and education? *International Review of Education*, 65(4), 537-556.
- 8) Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action Reason and the Rationalisation of Society* (Vol I), Boston: Beacon Press.
- 9) Hamusonde, B.S (2003). *Teenage Mothers and Their Re-Admission into Schools*, M.A Dissertation, UNZA. International (P) Ltd.
- 10) Hubbard, D. (2008). Realising the rights to education for all. In Legal Assistance Centre's Gender Research and Advocacy Project, "School Policy on Learner Pregnancy in Namibia". Ministry of Education: Namibia.
- 11) Issa, F. H. & Temu, L. (2023). Enrolling teenage mothers in the formal secondary education system: a new policy implementation assessment. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 5(2), 16-33.
- 12) Kassa GM, Arowojolu AO, Odukogbe AA, Yalew AW. Prevalence and determinants of adolescent pregnancy in Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis 11 medical and health sciences 1117 public health and health services. *Reprod Health*. 2018;15(1):1-17.
- 13) Kassa GM, Arowojolu AO, Odukogbe AA, Yalew AW. Prevalence and determinants of adolescent pregnancy in Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis 11 medical and health sciences 1117 public health and health services. *Reprod Health*. 2018;15(1):1-17.
- 14) Laiser, M.L. & Muyinga, E. (2017). Perceptions and experiences of educational stakeholders regarding teenage-mothers readmission in secondary schools in Tanzania Mainland. *International Journal of Science Arts and Commerce*. 1(12);53-64.
- 15) Martinez, E. and Odhiambo, A. (2018). *Leave no girl behind in Africa: Discrimination in education against pregnant girls and adolescent mothers*. Human Rights Watch.
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/au0618_insert_webspreads.pdf

Implementation of Education Re-Entry Policy for Adolescent Mothers in Urambo District, Tanzania

- 16) McFarland, J., Cui, J., & Stark, P. (2018). Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2014. NCES 2018-117. National Center for Education Statistics.
- 17) Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2021). Education Circular Number 02 of the Year 2021 on School Re-Entry for Primary and Secondary School Students' Drop Out for Various Reasons.
- 18) Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MoHCDGEC). (2016). 2015-16 Tanzania Demographic Health Survey - MIS Key Findings. Rockville, Maryland, USA.
- 19) Molowosiwa, S & Moswela, B. (2012). Girl-pupil dropout in secondary schools in Botswana: Influencing factors, prevalence and consequences. *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 3(7).
- 20) Mwashamba Kapipi Amiri. (2022, December 16). Re-entry of adolescent mothers into secondary education in a context of social exclusion: the case of Igunga, Tanzania. *Social Justice Perspectives (SJP)*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2105/6537>
- 21) Namayuba, C. (2022). Re-entry Policy Implementation Challenges and Support System for Teenage Mothers in Zambia. In Book: *The Education System of Africa*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343666957>
- 22) Ngonyani, R. (2022). Views of teachers and student's on re-admission of teenage mothers in formal schooling system in Tanzania. *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences*, 3(7), (10 – 15)
- 23) Niboye, E.P. (2018). Back to school after delivery, the plight of teenage mothers in Zanzibar: Experiences from Mjini Magharibi's Urban and West Districts in Unguja. 5(3) pp. 54–67.
- 24) Psaki, S. (2016). Addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy as barriers to gender parity and equality in education. 46(1), 109-129.
- 25) Scholl, M.F. (2007). Educating adolescent parents: Proactive approaches by school leaders. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 73 (3), 28.
- 26) Selman, P. (2003). Scapegoating and moral panics: Teenage pregnancy in Britain and the United States. In *Families and the State* (pp. 159-186). Springer.
- 27) Shefer, T., Bhana, D., & Morrell, R. (2013). Teenage pregnancy and parenting at school in contemporary South African contexts: Deconstructing school narratives and understanding policy.
- 28) Tanzania Education Network/Mtandao wa Elimu Tanzania (TEN/MET) Investigating the existing educational initiatives for out of school girls and teenage mother in Tanzania mainland (TEN/MET, 2021)
- 29) Triantafyllidi V, Basinda M, Tayari M, et al. (January 16, 2024) A Qualitative Analysis of the Barriers to Healthcare and Education for Adolescent Girls in Tanzania. *Cureus* 16(1): e52384. DOI 10.7759/cureus.52384
- 30) Undie, C. C., Birungi, H., Odwe, G., & Obare, F. (2015). Expanding access to secondary school education for teenage mothers in Kenya: A baseline study report.
- 31) UNICEF. (2019). Sustainable goals and children in Tanzania: Sustainable changes start with children: Dar es Salaam: United Nations Children's Fund
- 32) United Nations Population Fund. (2022) Motherhood in childhood—the untold story. UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/motherhood-childhood-untold-story#:~:text=This%20report%20examines%20trends%20in,occur%20in%20dangerously%20quick%20succession>
- 33) United Nations. (2021). Access to Health: Leave No One Behind. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021.
- 34) URT (1977). The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania.
- 35) Vincent, K. (2009). Responding to schoolgirl pregnancy: The recognition and non-recognition of difference. *Improving Schools*, 12(3), 225-236.
- 36) Waghid, Y. (2002). *Democratic Education Policy and Praxis*. Matieland: Stellenbosh University Printers.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.