Secondary school re-entry programme of teenage mothers: views of stakeholders in Zanzibar, Tanzania

Bakari Ngaza[1] and Prospery M. Mwila[2] ✉

[1]*Educational Officer, Urban-West Region, Zanzibar, Tanzania*
[2]*Academician, Department of Educational Foundation: St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania*

✉ Email: bapropsk@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Increasing access to education through the re-entry policy for girls after school pregnancy could be seen in terms of bringing about social justice and equity in education, especially in developing countries, and enabling them to realise its benefits. This strong international and philosophical commitment is different from the traditional view of education as preparation for life roles. Therefore, implementing it in the African context might be expected to raise several problems, possibly resulting in a lack of commitment on the ground. The purpose of this study was to assess the views of stakeholders on the re-entry programme of teenage mothers into secondary schools in Unguja Urban-West district, Tanzania. The study used a mixed method approach and convergent mixed methods design. The study used a sample size of 160 participants, including teachers and parents. The findings revealed that stakeholders were sceptical of the success of this policy. Teenage mothers do not have enough time to complete their homework and to study at home because their relatives who take care of the babies want to be free of child chores the moment they are back at home. The babies also want attention from their mothers when they return from school. For effective implementation of school re-entry programme among teenage mother, schools should create an enabling learning environment that accommodates both the needs of teenage mothers and their children.

▦ INTRODUCTION

The World Declaration on Education For All (EFA) at the Jomtien Conference in 1990 noted the high incidence of girls among children out of school and outlined some of the first signals that the education of girls was important for a global social justice project. It highlighted that girls and women comprised 2/3rd of the large numbers of children without access to primary school and a large number of adults without literacy. The exclusion of girls and women from education was thus part of the problem EFA sought to solve. The inclusion of girls and women was seen as part of the solution, which was to be supported by policies for universal access and a focus on learning rather than just enrolment. The other concern is to utilise a range of different forms of delivery and strengthen the international solidarity that would underpin a common and universal human responsibility (UNESCO, 1990).

Girls' and young women's access, retention and completion in schools is still of enormous concern in Africa to date. The latest figures from UNESCO (2019)

show that 52 million girls are not in school in Africa, while 4 million will never step into a classroom compared to 2 million boys. Africa also has the highest rate of out-of-school children and adolescents globally. However, girls remain more likely to be excluded from education and at a higher risk. This reality calls for redoubling efforts to ensure that education is both of good quality and equitable.

The existence of teenage motherhood in schools has been cited as a constraint in the elimination of gender disparities in education and in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and gender equality in education by 2015 (United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2000). A survey on the underlying causes of high school dropout by the US Department of Education (2001) indicated that one of the reasons for young people dropping out of school was teenage pregnancy, which was estimated at 13.6%. Another report by UNESCO (2003) on "save the children" indicated that teenage pregnancy is a major drawback to educational attainment. It further reported that in industrialised countries, there are

fewer teenage pregnancies than in developing countries. It further reported that 31% of all school dropout cases among girls were due to early childbearing.

It is not a novel phenomenon, but it is hard to believe that in this era with much information on sexuality education and contraception, there is still a high percentage of teenage pregnancies globally. For example, a study conducted by Darrock et al. (2001) in which a comparison was made among four advanced countries established that the USA had the highest adolescent pregnancy rate at 22%, with that of the UK standing at 15%, while that of Canada was at 11%. The study indicated that Sweden's percentage was the lowest at 4% because of their open and easy policy when dealing with sexuality and reproductive health issues such as access to contraception and abortion services, among others (Arai and Pedlar, 2003; Hawkes, 2004).

However, studies undertaken in African countries showed that Mali has the highest school-going pregnancy rate at 45%, followed by Liberia at 35%, Botswana at a rate of 24%, Kenya and Togo at 21%, Ghana at a rate of 19%, Zimbabwe at 16% and Zambia at 12% (Panday et al., 2009). Nevertheless, these are only estimates, as pregnancy outside marriage is looked down upon by many cultures in Africa (Chilisa, 2002). In their study, Meekers and Ahmed (1999) found that up to 10% of school girls stopped schooling because of teenage gravidity in African regions. Ten percent is too high considering that very few girls are still able to access secondary education in this region.

In Kenya, the re-entry policy has been reviewed in an attempt to make the policy and its guidelines more relevant and attract more young mothers back to school. For example, a gender and education policy developed in 2003 revisited the 1994 policy-making provision for the readmission of girls who become pregnant while still in school and even enabling them to seek a place at a different institution than the one they were originally attended to avoid being stigmatised. However, an earlier study carried out by FAWE (2001) in Kenya found that although the readmission strategy has been pronounced, it has been left to the discretion of the head teachers and school boards to decide whether to readmit the girls. The Forum then concluded that in the event that the head teachers or school boards do not value girls' education, the girls seeking readmission suffer. The policy is not working effectively according to several other reviews. Consequently, the Gender Policy in Education, MOE, (Republic of Kenya, 2007) followed up on the 2003 policy, stating that the readmission of girls who become pregnant while in school is one of the ongoing initiatives to address gender disparities in education in Kenya.

In Unguja, it is evident that teenage mothers experience diverse challenges upon returning to school. The challenges that teen mothers face upon returning to school are feelings of despair, low self-esteem and low confidence. This is essentially a psychological problem since the teen mothers were not prepared to be in the stage of motherhood while still young and supposed to be pursuing their studies. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training Zanzibar did not reveal an actual number of teenage pregnancies in Unguja (Urban and West districts) since the enactment of the Spinsters and Single Parent Children Protection Act Number 4 of 2005 to the time of the study (Niboye, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to assess the views of stakeholders on the re-entry programme of teenage mothers into secondary schools in Magharibi A-Unguja. Specifically, it aimed to assess the perceptions of parents and teachers towards the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary schools and to describe the challenges faced by teenage mothers in progress with their studies.

Literature review

Achieving the aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals requires closing the gender gaps in education. Only by partnership, coordination, identifying, and working closely with key community stakeholders can significant progress be made for girls and women in Africa. Since 2017, the African Union International Centre for Girls' and Women Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA), in line with the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), has been striving to involve traditional and religious leaders in the empowerment of girls and women in and through education.

In most African communities, pregnancy finds its right context in marriage. Premarital pregnancies are often met with disapproval and stigmatisation. This traditional perspective has been transplanted into contemporary psyche and incorporated into educational practices; hence, teenage mothers are viewed as 'adults' who have no business remaining in school (FAWE, 1995). Many teenage mothers are pushed into early marriage by this notion. According to Chilisa (2002), many people consider the presence of young mothers in school to be misfortune and against our cultural values and ethics.

Patriarchal inclinations in cultural practices have also influenced people to devalue girls' education and regard it as an investment with little returns. Other than bride wealth, which was reduced in cases

of premarital pregnancy, their parents were not assured of their daughters' support after marriage due to patriarchy (Odaga and Heneveld, 1995). Therefore, among some communities, educating a girl is regarded as 'a case of watering a neighbor's tree'.

The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW, 2007) indicates that education is an important pillar that determines one's health and legal status. Education helps people to become aware of their rights and have adequate knowledge of basic health care skills that include improving child health and reducing infant mortality, complying with medical prescriptions, observing basic hygienic standards and seeking medical services such as antenatal and postnatal care. In addition, the report argues that education enables rationalised thinking and reasoning, providing opportunities for girls and women to learn and understand their rights and making it easier to recognise laws and social attitudes that hinder the enjoyment of their rights. The other aspect outlined by the report is that education is an important tool in liberating girls and women from historical discrimination and disadvantage, thus enabling them to teach the next generation about the benefits of education.

Maluwa-Banda (2004) argued that girls' education is an investment that serves as a way to achieve education for all children. He adds that it has been broadly accepted as a powerful tool for the self-advancement and fulfillment of development outcomes for present and future generations of children. Chege and Sifuna (2006) noted that getting and keeping young people in school, especially girls, dramatically lowers their vulnerability to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), leads to them having greater independence, equips them to make decisions pertaining to their lives and provides them with higher income earning potential.

Bhana et al. (2010) concurred that allowing pregnant teenagers to remain in school and return after giving birth is considered to be significant in delaying a second birth and in offering young women increased opportunities to obtain an education and increase their economic standing. A UNICEF (1999) report confirmed that investing in girls' education leads not only to the realisation of female educational attainment but also to benefits such as good mothers' and children's health, sustainable families, women's empowerment, democracy, income growth, and productivity.

The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), as cited in Niboye (2018), also reported that women who attain higher levels of education tend to marry later and prefer fewer children. Early marriage

in Kenya is higher in rural areas, and those areas are reported to have lower levels of education. Moreover, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation could be brought to an end by increasing girls' access to education since educated women are less likely to allow their daughters to undergo "the cut" and are able to make their own choices.

Chiyota and Marishane (2020) emphasised the national benefits of girls' education, referring to research that shows that educating females produces far-reaching profits for girls and women themselves, their families, and the societies in which they live. He further remarked that, indeed, during his tenure as chief economist of the World Bank, he became persuaded that once all the benefits are acknowledged, investment in the education of girls may well be the highest profit venture obtainable in the developing world.

Similarly, a key World Bank policy document published in 1995 argued for increasing access to education for women and girls in terms of the benefits that would flow to their existing and future children's health and to the gross domestic product of their countries: Mothers with more education provide better nutrition to their children, have healthier children, are less fertile and are more concerned that their children be educated. The report further states that education, in particular female education, is key to reducing poverty and must be considered as much part of a country's health strategy, such as programs of immunisation and access to health clinics (World Bank, 1995).

Bank (2007) noted that women's education has been mentioned in a number of international conferences and agreements that have been held since 1990 as being important in bringing about national development and the emergence of a more democratic world. Further examples of this are given by King and Hill (1993) and Unterhalter (2005), who explained that valued aspects of global policy such as economic growth or social development may be realised through gender equality in education. Zajda et al. (2008) also noted that over the last three decades, especially since the 1990 World Conference on EFA in Jomtien, Thailand, issues of gender inequality in schools within developing countries have gained increased attention globally.

A study carried out by the African Population and Health Research Centre (2007) noted that secondary education is seen today as being critical for economic development and poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa. It further found that the most important strategy for creating economic opportunities and social development for individuals

and nations alike was increasing access to quality secondary education. Moreover, the foundation for development and prosperity in Sub-Saharan Africa would be laid through several benefits associated with secondary education.

In support of this, the CREAW (2007) report argues that education is power and that its access should be equal in all regions without discrimination. Therefore, the government should set a target for the minimum level that women should attain and ensure that all educational institutions are safe havens for girls. As indicated above, there is strong agreement that education for girls is important for social and economic development and that discrimination against women is not acceptable. This is reinforced by several research articles that show that globally, girls' education has always been associated with multiple benefits ranging from individual to communal to national development. The low enrolment for girls in many developing countries indicates aspects of social injustice and gender inequity in education. Increasing access to education through the re-entry policy for girls after school pregnancy could be seen in terms of bringing about social justice and equity in education, especially in developing countries, and enabling them to realise its benefits.

Education is important not only to girls as individuals but also to families, societies and nations. This strong international and philosophical commitment to the idea that the education of girls is crucial to national wellbeing is different from the traditional view of education as preparation for life roles. Therefore, implementing it in the African context might be expected to raise several problems, possibly resulting in a lack of commitment on the ground. Thus, a study assessing the views of stakeholders on the re-entry programme of teenage mothers into secondary schools in Magharibi A-Unguja seems justified.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed method approach and convergent mixed methods design. Convergent mixed methods design is a type of research design used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data and then compare the analysis. It collects data that are used to answer a wide range of what, when, and how questions pertain to a particular population or group. The study used a sample size of 160 respondents from four secondary schools and included teachers, academic teachers, school heads, and parents. That is, fifty (50) teachers, 15 from schools A and B and 10

from schools C and D, were selected. Ninety-four students were selected (94), including 25 from school "A", 24 from school B, 20 from school C and 24 from school D. Four head teachers, three academic offices, and nine parents were included in the sample. The researcher used a simple random sampling technique to select teachers and students, while purposive sampling was used to select the heads of schools, academic teachers and parents. Data were collected through interviews, documentary reviews, and questionnaires after the collection of data. Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis, and quantitative data were analysed by descriptive statistics. Percentages and frequencies were calculated and are presented in tables and charts. Member checking, methodical triangulation, and content validation were used to ensure both validity and reliability. Ethical considerations were ensured through consent forms, confidentiality, and anonymity of the respondents during data presentation and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are organised according to the research objective that guided this study: to assess the perceptions of parents and teachers towards the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary schools and to describe the challenges faced by teenage mothers in progress with their studies.

The perception of parents and teachers towards the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary education

The purpose of this objective was to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the implementation of the re-entry policy. First, the study through interviews offers an opportunity for respondents to air their views on three major areas: policy awareness, the status of pregnant girls, and the status of the school environment to accommodate teenage mothers.

Awareness of re-entry policy

Parents, head teachers, and teachers were interviewed to hear their perception of the re-entry policy. Unfortunately, most of the visited respondents seemed to be confused about the policy itself. The study revealed that educational stakeholders such as teachers and parents are not aware of the policy itself. Participants showed different levels of knowledge about the re-entry policy. During the study in Magharibi A-Unguja, there was a notable lack of

awareness of the policy at various levels among the head teachers, students, and parents.

While many acknowledged the importance of the policy when it was brought to their attention, some head teachers expressed the view that the re-entry policy was not clear and that they were unsure of how to implement it. There were particularly conflicting views about how to interpret the guidelines and different practices with regard to when teenage pregnancy was discovered, when pregnant girls should leave school for delivery, how long pregnant girls should be absent from school and re-entry to school after delivery, among others.

In an interview with one of the heads of school, the following was said:

I have been a head teacher for several years, but we do not know the re-entry policy for young girls, let alone implement it. We often sympathise with the girls sent back to school who had teenage pregnancies. As a school, we are aware of the general re-entry policy, but we have never seen it. The policy document is not given to us to read and understand how to implement it. As a result, implementation becomes completely impossible and thus makes young mothers experience many problems. The policy is unknown to girls; it was not brought to their understanding. In this regard, the policy appeared to be silent and weak.

The quotation from the head of school revealed that educational stakeholders are not aware of the policy itself. Then, it became difficult for them to implement. The study established that there were diverse views from the different respondents about the value, usefulness and effectiveness of the policy. Many of the participants felt that it was a good idea to come up with the policy, but it has been hard to implement it. They noted the ambiguity of the guidelines for the policy and ineffective communication of the policy to all other stakeholders, so they regarded the policy as silent. Others thought that the policy encouraged immoral behaviour.

The other head of school has the following to say:
Sincerely speaking, we lack awareness and understanding of both the policy and implementation. We have contradictory perceptions on the interpretation of the policy from the time the teenage pregnancy is discovered at school, how long the pregnant girl should stay at school, up to the time when the girl should finally leave school for delivery. We are confused on how long the pregnant girl should be excused from school during maternity leave and when she should re-enter after the cessation of pregnancy (Interview, 2022).

The quotation shows that there is a need for more clarification from the re-entry policy before its implementation. Most of the visited respondents seem to be confused on how they can implement the policy. The findings are in line with Mulenga and Mukaba (2018), who found that schools did not have specific programs meant to help re-entered girls and that most girls decided to stop schooling.

The next school head added,

As schools, we need some guidelines. If we could get to know how we are going to handle this right from the beginning then the moment it happens, we would have known that if she becomes pregnant that is where we begin. However, now you see all we have is a circular we don't know how to handle that circular. For example, when they introduce fee-free education, there's a circular, but then they come up with guidelines on how this thing is going to be run, but we've not had this in regard to this policy. However, on this, it's a policy on paper and nothing else. No guidelines on how we are going to do that and that's what will guide us on how to inform them even the information, how to pass the information is important we should be taught. All the stakeholders included these students. Their views on what should be done when this thing happens, but I think now it is just a group of people who met and decided this is going to be done and then how it's going to be disseminated down here there was nothing (Interview, 2022).

The quotation revealed that there is a serious problem in the implementation of the policy. The researcher wonders why those key education stakeholders lack guidelines on the implementation of the policy. Similarly, the Centre for Study of Adolescence (2008) established that successful implementation of the guidelines requires a multipronged approach that combines community sensitisation and awareness creation with support to both the community and school system to create a facilitative environment that supports re-entry of girls.

Status of pregnancy in girls

The visited respondents in Magharibi A-Unguja show a negative per caption among pregnant girls. The study found that in African culture, a girl had to be married before he became pregnant. When girls become pregnant before marriage, their life becomes more problematic. Some school heads thought that because of cultural values, girls who become pregnant become scared and isolate themselves. They pointed to the fact that the Zanzibar community had some cultural expectations from its members. They reported that members of the community were

expected to play different roles and behave according to the norms of the community, specifically the Islamic religion, which is dominant in Unguja. Therefore, when a member appeared not to conform to set societal expectations and values, she was regarded as an outlaw. Some of the head teachers said that this cultural expectation was likely to contribute to some of the girls dropping out of school. They thought that some of the girls judged themselves based on their religious beliefs and isolated themselves from school. One of the visited parents said,

For our society, the act of a girl who is still a student getting pregnant is a very bad thing. Society expects a girl to first finish her studies, then get married and get pregnant. If it happens that a girl gets pregnant before marriage, society must be surprised and want to exclude her. This gives students a hard time and that is why many of them cannot return to school even if they are given a chance (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the parents revealed that the community in Magharibi A-Unguja does not expect a girl before marriage to become pregnant. For some parents in Magharibi A-Unguja, the policy should punish girls instead of giving them a second chance to return to school. On this, the other parent commented,

The policy should be in such a way that it instils fear among girls not to be pregnant so that if they know if they get pregnant, there is a punishment waiting for them. There should be a sentence for those girls who get pregnant and those who are responsible for the pregnancy. We cannot allow tis bad behaviour among our young girls, surely we need serious measures (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the parent shows her concern about disagreement with the re-entry policy. The study established that there is no need for such a policy; instead, the opposite policy must be established to punish girls who become pregnant before finishing school. These findings were contrary to Baragwanath's (1997) study, which noted that the only effective practical means of averting the loss of such young women and children from real participation in society is to bring both mother and child back to school, as practiced in many USA states such as Wisconsin, Maryland and Illinois.

In addition, most of the visited parents in Magharibi A-Unguja considered teenage mothers careless once, and they did not deserve support from the government, including the second chance of going back to school. Through semistructured interviews, one of the visited parents said the following:

Culturally, students who become pregnant while they are in school are careless. In our community, we expect a girl who is care had to accomplish her studies before engaging herself in love affairs. How does a form of one girl become pregnant? What kind of behaviour is this? As a parent, I cannot encourage this kind of behaviour. Child girls had to be responsible for taking care themselves before anyone else took care of them (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the parents revealed that the girls who become pregnant while they are in school are termed careless. The visited parents expect a girl to accomplish her studies before engaging themselves in sexual relationships. Meanwhile, the visited girls were found to be engaged in sexual relationships even before completing form four. Based on parents' views, the study established that the visited parents had a negative attitude towards the re-entry policy, as they consider teenage girls to be careless.

The findings are related to Pillow (2006), who noted that teenage pregnancy has been associated with cultural shortfalls and seen as carelessness on the side of pregnant girls. The study further adds that these conceptions and attitudes of teenage pregnancy, such as the recklessness and negligence of girls, impact policy and practice, affecting the education of pregnant and mothering students. The study then suggests that the assumption that pregnant girls are irresponsible has limited the monitoring and collection of information regarding the education of pregnant and mothering students. Consequently, she concludes that the education of pregnant and mothering students will continue to be determined not by knowledgeable investigation but by beliefs.

School environment

The study observed the school environment in Magharibi A-Unguja and found that the environment is almost the same, with no specific facilities for teenage girls. Through interviews, the teachers provided their perceptions of the school environment and its impacts on teenage mothers. One of the teachers said the following:

The school environment is not friendly for students with children. As you can see, the school has regular classrooms and does not have the technical structures that will enable foster students to continue their studies. In general, the environment is not friendly for students with children. I think that before the implementation of the policy, the government should have prepared the environment to suit the type of students who will return (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the visited teacher revealed that the school environment does not support the return of teenage mothers. For students with children, there is a need for school infrastructures

with special rooms and equipment. In addition, the study revealed that the visited schools also lack necessary services such as guidance and counselling for teenage mothers. These findings concur with the study by Kramer and Lancaster (2010), who showed that there is a need for a school-based rehabilitation center, whose responsibility was to provide encouragement and guidance to girls who experienced teenage pregnancy while in school.

The study further revealed that even the students in schools visited by Magharibi A-Unguja were not prepared to cooperate with their fellow teenage mothers. The truth of the matter is that some teachers and peers are quick to notice that the girls are pregnant such that when they return to the same schools, they come their source of laughter, ridicule, and irony. Teachers have great input to the extent that they can even warn some of their close friends to disassociate themselves from teenage mothers because they will learn bad habits since they are bad role models to them. One of the school heads reported the following:

Teachers and fellow teenage women's classmates stigmatise and gossip about students who are pregnant to the extent of laughing out loudly when they pass by. Some students even go to the extent of pretending to call them, yet they want to show them to their colleagues and then laugh at them, making them feel uncomfortable; hence, they end up dropping out of school. If they are treated this way during pregnancy, what will happen when they come back after delivery (Interview, 2022)?

The quotation revealed that the school environment does not support teenage mothers in returning to school. The study established that there is no support for teenage mothers when they return to school. These findings are similar to a study by Ahikire and Madanda (2011), who revealed that principals and teachers seemed to acknowledge that pregnant learners had a legal right to education but could not assist in managing pregnant learners to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancies in public schools.

The challenges faced by teenage mothers in progress with their studies

The purpose of this study was to reveal the challenges faced by teenage mothers while they proceed with their studies. From the schools visited in Magharibi A-Unguja, the study met two teenage mothers who succeeded in going back to schools and proceeding with their studies. Both students were pregnant when they were in two classes. One of the girls aged 20 years returned to school and completed in 2021, while the other girl aged 17 returned to school but failed to complete all four levels. In interviews with these students, teachers and visited parents, several challenges were discussed, such as difficulties in performing mothers' roles and attending classes, lack of support from teachers, lack of cancelling at school and lack of support from home.

Detection of pregnancy among girls

The intention of the study was to reveal how school administrations detect girls who are pregnant. Through semistructured interviews, the study revealed that the school heads encountered difficulties in detecting and confirming that the girls were pregnant. They also gave conflicting information as to whose responsibility it is to detect pregnancy and how it should be done. Some head teachers reported that they relied on physical signs to detect teenage pregnancy, while others made use of guidance and counselling services in their schools.

The study further revealed that when there is any doubt among girls, the next step is medical checkup from either private or public health clinics to detect teenage pregnancy. They felt that this uncertainty in the detection and determination of school pregnancy complicated the implementation of the policy. One of the visited heads of school added,

We normally call the parent after detection through guidance and counselling mistress and then explain this parent the true position. Because mostly they first refuse to acknowledge, then we tell the parent and, in most cases, are able to agree that these students are pregnant. However, sometimes we use the health facility nearest to school to confirm the situation (Interview, 2022). The quotation from the head of school revealed that the visited secondary schools send girls to hospitals or dispensaries once they have doubts. There is no tendency to check the health of girls frequently.

The other challenge faced by school heads in relation to the implementation of policy is what to do when pregnancy is discovered. They seemed to be unsure who should be involved, at what time and at what level of policy implementation. They had varied views as to what should be done once teenage pregnancy is discovered. For example, some head teachers noted that after discovering that some of their girl students were pregnant, they were referred to the guidance and counselling departments, while others informed their parents first. The interviews with the head teachers further revealed that some of the head teachers suspended the pregnant girls immediately, while others encouraged them to go home and come back to school after delivery. One of

the visited teachers said, "For most cases of pregnancy among students, we refer them to the teachers who work as caregivers. I have a master for that and she is a madam, so she talks to the students and the case also referred to my office and we try to guide the girl, we advise the girl so that she can go home gives birth, she can still come back and proceed with her education (Interview, 2022)".

The quotation from the head of school indicated that teachers appointed by the head of school handle pregnancy cases in visited secondary schools. Some interviewed teachers felt that their head teachers acted on suspicion to subject students to medical pregnancy tests. They reported that the medical check-ups were improper and that their consent as teachers might not have been sought. The teachers believed that students in most cases were ambushed and were not prepared for medical checks in relation to teenage pregnancy.

The time for pregnant girls to leave school

These diverse views on the re-entry policy pointed to unclear guidelines, which seemed to affect its implementation. Opinions were divided among respondents, especially the head teachers, as to when the pregnant girls should leave school to go home to deliver. There appeared to be no clear guideline indicating at what time a pregnant girl should leave school for delivery. This uncertainty about policy timing seemed to present a dilemma to many of the head teachers interviewed. Some of the head teachers felt that the decision as to when pregnant girls should go home should be their decision. This meant that the pregnant girls' continuation of schooling depended on their head teachers. In cases where some head teachers do not support the re-entry policy, continuing schooling for pregnant girls could be difficult.

One of the visited heads of school said, "It has not been very clear how long a girl should stay in school while pregnant and how long or when she is expected to readmit them. Generally, the policy is not clear, and what is implemented depends on the decision of the head of the school. This situation makes it difficult to implement the policy, and in most cases, the students are expelled total from the studies (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the head of school revealed that there are no clear guidelines for the implementation of the policy. Some decisions included when to spell the pregnant girl and when she had to come back after delivery. Some of the head teachers felt that they should be given the power to decide when the pregnant girls should go home. They reported that there were no guidelines in relation to when pregnant girls should leave school and further

noted that they have been implementing the policy without necessarily following any particular guidelines.

The time for pregnant girls to be absent from school

Information collected from the interviews with the head teachers described a lack of clarity in relation to various periods in the policy. There appeared to be no agreement among participants as to how long the pregnant girls should stay at home before returning to school. Many of the respondents seemed to be unsure, and views differed on when the girls should come back to school after delivery. For some head teachers, it should be immediately that the young mother felt ready to do so, while others said that it should be after 6 months or 1 year. The head teachers interviewed attributed this dilemma to unclear guidelines, noting that there should be clear guidelines stipulating policy time length.

One of the visited heads of school stated,

There is not a period as soon as she is fit enough to be in school; they say she can come to school. Even nine months, the tenth month after delivery, she returned. In fact, there are cases where a girl gives birth, then after one week, she is in school. You know, after delivery, she becomes okay within a very short time, but the moment she is delivery truly, she does not fit into the system (Interview, 2022).

Some of the head teachers suggested a shorter period of absence from school for the pregnant girls. There was concern among some of the head teachers that if the pregnant girls are disengaged from their studies for a long time, it may affect their performance. They were also more likely to find it difficult to cope with their academic work when they returned to school. Some participants therefore suggested a relatively short time of absence. However, some head teachers appeared to be concerned about the health of the baby and suggested a longer period that would enable the mother to have some quality time with her child.

The other head of school added,

So it means the minimum period should be stipulated, a minimum of six months because well this has to do with development of the child because in my opinion it should be a minimum of six months. I think by this time the child has weaned, then after this time a teenage mother can be able to proceed with studies (Interview, 2022).

The visited head of schools reported that there were no clear guidelines on the length of absence in the policy. They noted that the Ministry has not defined how long pregnant girls should be absent from school. They felt that this left to the head of schools to determine at what time the girls should return to school. They thought this was more likely to

lead to double standards of the policy during its implementation.

Difficulties in retaining pregnant girls in school

Another challenge noted by many of the head teachers was how to deal with pregnant girls who were in school. Not only were pregnant girls perceived as mothers and different from others, but they were also often seen as bad examples to the rest of the students by both their fellow students and teachers. While indicating the benefits of educating girls, many of the head teachers reported challenges in retaining pregnant girls in their schools. They noted that pregnant girls also faced some challenges in continuing with their studies. They felt that there were no specific guidelines on how to help them know how to respond to these challenges.

Some of them felt that pregnant girls are different from other students and should be handled differently. Many of them admitted to not knowing how to handle the pregnant girls while at school. One of the head teachers said,

So I think the Ministry should come up with guidelines on how to handle students who become pregnant while in school, but you can't tell me this girl has become pregnant she's together in the classroom with the rest, you want them to run to class, run back she has to have different ways of operation in school. Now they have not brought that this same girl is supposed to stay with other students in class, these are young people, they are seeing a protruding stomach. The Ministry could come up with ways of handling these people, how are we supposed to live with them? Should we have different classrooms for them? How should they be treated in class? Not necessarily telling us that they should remain in school, they are different people (Interview, 2022). A number of head teachers reported that some of the challenges pregnant girls faced included being bullied and stigmatised by their fellow students and teachers. Some of the head teachers thought that this bullying and stigmatisation pointed to nonacceptance of the pregnant girls by their fellow students and teachers. They felt that this stigmatisation could affect their continued stay in school and their academic performance. The visited head teachers suggested the need for all teachers to be sensitised to matters concerning how to deal with pregnant girls. They felt that this could help them know how to respond to the needs of the pregnant girls.

Difficulties in performing the mother's role and attending classes

The study established that the visited teen mothers faced a challenge of performing the mother's role and attending lessons. It was observed that there is a situation in which a baby is sick or a teen mother is required to attend the clinic and, at the same time, sessions are progressing. This situation is so tough to them. One of the visited teen mothers said,

The issue of raising a child and attending classes at the same time is not easy. I personally tried but failed. There are times when you wake up at night when the child is crying and you cannot sleep well, then in the morning you get ready to go to school. There are times when you are in class and you think of the child you have left at home. In fact, this matter is difficult (Interview, 2022).

In addition, the visited head teacher said the following:

Teen parents face an overwhelming number of difficulties. Parental and peer pressures are far more common than support and understanding. Mature, adult decisions are required of emotionally pressured adolescents. Managing to care for an infant and devoting adequate time to school work is a great challenge for teen parents. In many situations, teenage mothers are subjected to greater risks of socioeconomic disadvantage throughout their lives than those who delay childbearing until their twenties. Schooling and taking care of the baby is not a joke.

The quotation from the student and head teacher revealed that the teenage mother is not able to manage the situation of being a mother, and at the same time, they are proceeding with their studies. The study established that it is very difficult for teen mothers to concentrate in their studies while they think about the future of their babies. The findings concur with other scholars; for instance, Chigona and Chetty (2007) have established that adolescent mothering is a major cause of low retention rates at primary and secondary schools. This was because of their new roles that affect their time management. The study further stated that girls do not have enough time to complete their homework and to study at home because their relatives who take care of the babies want to be free of the child chores the moment they are back at home. Additionally, the study further revealed that babies also want attention from their mothers when they return from school.

Lack of support from teachers

This was another challenge observed from the study. Through interviews with teenage mothers and head teachers, the study established that teachers in most cases were not willing to go through the lessons the girls had missed due to motherhood. For instance, a teen mother could be absent from school for days because she had to be with her baby in the hospital.

When she came back to class, teachers would not help her make up for the missed lessons. One of the head teachers reported,

When a young mother misses lessons, then the teacher will just tell her to consult with her friends about what they have been studying while she is away, and if she has questions, she can ask the teacher but not that the teacher would go through the whole material. Again, they miss a lot because they do not even start from scratch. Many teachers do not sympathise with a young mother when she misses lessons because she was busy with her child (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the head of school revealed that the support from teachers to teenage mothers is very low. The visited teachers had no time to repeat the lessons missed by teenage mothers. The study further revealed that there is a need for training among teachers who teach teenage mothers. This was established during an interview with one of the head teachers who said,

Teaching students who are parents requires additional preparation. I think that maybe the government would prepare special training for teachers so that they are in line with the real situation. In contrast, teachers will continue to treat these parents as other students, which is not correct (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the head of school shows that it is necessary for the government to think about the training of teachers who teach teenage mothers. As long as these students need special treatment, training for teachers is inevitable. The findings concur with other studies by Bloem (2000) and Olivier et al. (2000). According to Bloem (2000), teachers may need professionals to come and inform them about handling teens and their situations, and they need in-service training to keep track of changes that society is facing. The assumption is that teachers should help teens under such circumstances; unfortunately, some teachers consider the teen mothers' situation a private matter and none of their concerns (Olivier, 2000).

Furthermore, the study seeks to understand whether the visited schools allow teenage mothers to return to school with their babies. Through semistructured interviews, the heads of schools interviewed and one among them had the following to say:

In our school, we don't have such service. In addition, that is not our choice, but the school environment limits us. Here, we don't have special rooms for babies, and there is no any support from government or NGOs in taking care of babies. For betterment of learning among students, teenage mothers had to come themselves and leave their babies at home for someone else to take care (Interview, 2022).

The other head of school added,

What we can offer is the chance for teenage mothers to attend the lessons. However, in the case of their babies, there is no way we can help them. The school had no such environment that could support caring for babies. When teenage mothers decided to return to school, she had to arrange for the person who could take care of her baby at home. The challenge we have here is the lack of a specific budget to support teenage mothers when they need specific materials (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from two school heads revealed that teenage mothers are not allowed to return to school with their babies. This challenge affected teenage mothers because their concentration in studies is very minimal. Most of the time, they think about what is going on their at home baby without a mother for more than six hours. The findings of this study are similar to those of Darroch et al. (2001), who established that in New Zealand, although section 8 of the Education Act 1989 provides that people who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enroll and receive education at state schools as people who do not, many schools may not actively encourage young mothers to stay in school.

The study attributed this attitude to the fact that schools may not provide for the child, and it is unreasonable to expect that a school should allow a student to bring her baby into the classroom. The study further reveals that since young mothers suffer educational difficulties, first because of their pregnancy and then because of the need to care for their child, they cannot practically be accommodated in a conventional class. The study therefore suggests that there is a need for policy to encompass students such as these and alternative systems of education that, if properly monitored and evaluated, can and do work.

Low level of policy awareness among education stakeholders

During the study, teachers and parents were interviewed to reveal their awareness of the re-entry policy. The findings indicated that key education stakeholders were not aware of the policy itself. The teachers in visited secondary schools complain about the policy itself, as they wonder how they can implement a policy without proper guidelines. One of the visited teachers said the following:

The policy itself is not clear, and neither teachers nor parents had proper information on the implementation of the policy. The school as an

institution will work better if the implementation of policy is accompanied by proper guidelines. However, when the situation is like this, the outcomes would not be positive (Interview, 2022).

The quotation from the findings revealed that the education stakeholders, including the teachers, were not aware of the implementation of the policy. The study established that there is a need to involve education stakeholders such as teachers and parents in the implementation of important documents such as policy. When key education stakeholders such as teachers are not aware of the policy, its implementation will not meet the planned objectives. These findings are in line with Park and Datnow's (2009) study, which explains that policy outcomes are determined by local factors since it is at this level that policies are interpreted and enacted. It can be suggested that for policies in education to be more effective and achieve their objectives, it is vital for them to be consultative and incorporate the views of all stakeholders. This would ensure support of the policies by the public, leading to their full implementation. Any diversity of views and experiences from all stakeholders would ultimately enrich policy formulation and implementation processes, resulting in full and sustained attainment of its objectives.

The study established that the re-entry policy in Tanzania is neither well known nor implemented. These findings are contrary to what is practiced in Zambia with the same policy. The re-entry policy in Zambia was meant to give girls who drop out of school due to early pregnancy an opportunity to be readmitted six months to one year after delivery. School authorities were expected to encourage pregnant girls to continue attending classes. They were not allowed to expel pregnant girls from school. Two months before delivery, they would be given maternity leave to prepare for child delivery (Chinemu, 2011).

The guidelines on how the policy would be implemented were developed by FAWEZA in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF (Mutombo and Mwenda, 2010). The guidelines state that all schools, in collaboration with health centres, shall conduct medical check-ups of all girls once per term. Once pregnancy is detected, the school should send a letter explaining the re-entry policy to concerned parents or guardians with committal forms attached to be signed by parents or guardians, promising that they would send the girl back to school within six months to one year after delivery.

Lack of counselling at school

The visited teenage mothers lack guidance and counselling services before returning to school. Through interviews with students, the study established that teen mothers returned to school without going through any counselling to prepare them to deal with their humiliation, parenthood, and schooling simultaneously. This situation makes it difficult for them to cope with the school's challenges. One of the teenage mothers said,

I did not receive counselling services either at home or school. The decision of going back to school was on my own will and the influence of counsellors. Not only that but also when I was still in school during my pregnancy, I did not receive any service or advance from the teachers (Interview, 2022).

The quotation revealed that the visited secondary schools had no guidance or counselling services among teenage mothers. This finding is contrary to Mutombo and Mwenda (2010), who conducted a study in Lusaka and found that although schools at that time had guidance and counselling facilities, they did not focus on those who had become teenage mothers. However, all guidance and counselling teachers interviewed said that all returning teenage mothers were counselled and attended progressive counselling sessions.

Lack of support from home

Through interviews, the study revealed that teen mothers may fail to succeed with their schooling because the support they received from home was insufficient for them to achieve their education goals. The study further established that teen mothers come from financially challenged families and that parents cannot afford babysitting for their grandchild. The lack of support from the fathers of the child multiplies the challenges experienced by teen mothers, which is truly confusing. When none of the relatives is available to look after the baby, the teen mother would be absent from school. One of the head teachers said,

Most of our students come from poor families. In addition, worst of all, if a student gives birth, he cannot get care from the child's father. This situation makes him unable to afford the costs of education. They often depend on their parents, who also have a low income (Interview, 2022).

The quotation form visited the head teacher and showed that the teenage came from a poor family that could not offer basic needs for the mother and her baby. This situation challenges teenage mothers to concentrate on their studies. The findings are in line with Musili et al. (2020), who commented that in Kenya, most principals were reported to have no adequate experience in the proper implementation of

the readmission policy of girls after teenage pregnancy in public secondary schools. These findings also concur with the study by Lewis and Lockheed (2007), who showed that there is a need for a school-based rehabilitation center whose responsibility was to provide encouragement and guidance to girls who experienced teenage pregnancy while in school. Joase (2018) revealed that principals and teachers seemed to acknowledge that pregnant learners had a legal right to education but could not assist in managing pregnant learners to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancies in public schools.

Baragwanath's (1997) study noted that the only effective practical means of averting the loss of such young women and children from real participation in society is to bring both mother and child back to school, as practiced in many USA states such as Wisconsin, Maryland and Illinois. Mulenga and Mukaba (2018) found that schools did not have specific programs meant to help re-entered girls and that most girls decided to stop schooling. Similarly, Chinemu (2011) established that successful implementation of the guidelines requires a multipronged approach that combines community sensitisation and awareness creation with support to both the community and school system to create a facilitative environment that supports the re-entry of girls.

Pillow (2006) noted that teenage pregnancy has been associated with cultural shortfalls and is seen as carelessness on the side of pregnant girls. The study further adds that these conceptions and attitudes of teenage pregnancy, such as the recklessness and negligence of girls, impact policy and practice, affecting the education of pregnant and mothering students. The study then suggests that the assumption that pregnant girls are irresponsible has limited the monitoring and collection of information regarding the education of pregnant and mothering students. Consequently, the study concludes that the education of pregnant and mothering students will continue to be determined not by knowledgeable investigation but by beliefs.

⬛ CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Girls' education is an investment that serves as a way to achieve education for all children. It has been broadly accepted as being a powerful tool for self-advancement and fulfillment of development outcomes for present and future generations of children. Getting and keeping young people in school,

especially girls, dramatically lowers their vulnerability to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), leads to them having greater independence, equips them to make decisions pertaining to their lives and provides them with higher income earning potential. Allowing pregnant teenagers to remain in school and return after giving birth is considered to be significant in delaying a second birth and in offering young women increased opportunities to obtain an education and increase their economic standing.

Unfortunately, major stakeholders lack adequate knowledge and awareness of the teaching and learning process of teenage mothers. Their perception of the re-entry policy is hindered by a lack of awareness of the re-entry policy. Teenage mothers who are readmitted back to secondary school education face many challenges that limit their ability to attend lessons. This was because of their new roles that affect their time management. Teenage mothers do not have enough time to complete their homework and to study at home because their relatives who take care of the babies want to be free of child chores the moment they are back at home. The babies also want attention from their mothers when they return from school.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended for action:

Through the Ministry of Education, the government should effectively implement the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education in schools to help curb the problem of teenage pregnancies. Comprehensive sexuality education should be taught as a standalone subject and should be examinable.

The government should train more guidance and counselling teachers who will also teach comprehensive sexuality education as a subject. Peer educator groups should have comprehensive sexuality education content made available to them for discussion.

Schools should establish peer educator groups to help develop moral virtues among students. In addition, there is a need to establish parent teacher associations (PTAs) to play a more effective role in focusing on moral character development in secondary schools, as recommended in Educating our future.

⬛ DECLARATIONS

Corresponding author
Prospery M Mwila: bapropsk@gmail.com

Ethical approval

The authors declare that this study followed applicable research ethics. This study obtained approval from relevant authorities, including the Regional Education office and the St. Augustine University of Tanzania, who gave clearance for this study. Furthermore, all participants provided informed consent and agreed to participate in this study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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