

ANALYSING THE INFLUENCE OF RE-ADMISSION POLICY ON EDUCATION OF TEENAGE MOTHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI

Dalia Kapasule¹, Vijay Kumar¹,

¹Department of Education, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, India

Email: vijay.chechi@lpu.co.in

Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyse the influence of re-admission policy on education of teenage mothers in Secondary Schools in Malawi. The objective that guided the study were: to determine the material support given to teenage mothers after re-admission, to understand the knowledge and role of teachers on the re-admission policy and its implementation, to find how well teen mothers know about the re-admission policy and the impact of re-admission policy on education of teen mothers. The findings indicate that some head teachers play a role by inviting back girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy. Most of the teachers know about the readmission policy but has never read it, or know the process of readmission. Most teenage mothers knew about the readmission policy before getting pregnant, either through the radios of friends. There is lack of provision of material support in the policy which is a challenge for the girls who have gone back to school hence leading to drop out. The study used qualitative technique, and face to face interviews were used and audio recorded, which was later transcribed. The study recommends that there is need of material support for the teen mothers' education and the life of their child. And also, teachers need to be trained on the re admission policy and how to treat the teen mothers in schools.

Keywords: *Teenage mother, re-admission, education.*

1. Introduction

Everybody has the right to education. This statement has made UNICEF to put girls education at the core of its activities (UNICEF 2004). This only means that despite how desperate or poor the country is no girl child should be deprived of education. No amount of reason can be accepted for rejecting a girl child the chances of exploring her maximum capabilities. This is in agreement with the convention on the rights of children that allows every child a right to education without considering gender, religion, culture, social status, colour or financial background.

A good investment that assists as a path to accomplish education for all children is girl education Banda, M (2004). He continues to say girl education has been largely recognized as

a powerful weapon for advancement of self and accomplishment of developmental results for future and present group of children. He continues to say that it has been largely recognized as being a influential tool for self-achievement and accomplishment of development products for present and future generations of children.

“Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 calls for access to quality education and lifelong learning for all; while SDG#5 is to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.” Education for adolescent girls is critical in countries striving to reach these goals. To improve further access of girls to a good quality of education, is a global importance that is expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And in Malawi it is also a national priority. The vision drawn in Malawi’s National Girls’ Education Strategy (NGES), for instance is that “All girls in Malawi access, participate in, complete and excel at all levels of education that empowers them to effectively contribute to the country’s sustainable social, economic development by 2018” (MoEST, 2014c, p. 9).

In as much as many countries are trying to educate girls, there are so many problems that need to be dealt with. 30 million which is half of the projected 60 million girls around the world who left school are adolescences

Much as there is good will to have educated girls in many countries there are still challenges that have to be dealt with. Half of the projected sixty-two million girls worldwide who dropped out school are teenagers. 16 million girls of the age range 6 -11 year at no time start school, in comparison to eight million boys. According to United Nations Population, over 140 million girls will enter child marriages over the period of 2011-2020 (UNFPA 2013c). And a lot of these girls will quit school. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are the two developing regions with the highest number of teen girls drop out of school. In 2012, South Asia, 12.6 million girls of junior high school age were out of school; while in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of the drop out in junior high school was 11.8 million. UNESCO attributes early and unintended pregnancy to unprotected sex and inaccessibility of services like current contraception and family planning methods. Due to the transition period from childhood to adulthood (puberty) which is associated with new and complex emotions, sexual desires being one of them, adolescence are naturally and normally attracted to sex (UNESCO, 2014a). “Being sexual is an important part of many young people’s lives and can be a source of pleasure and comfort and a way of expressing affection and love” (UNESCO, 2009).

1.1 Re-admission policy and education of teenage mothers

In July 1990 the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in Article 11(6) affirms that “State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that girls who become pregnant before completing education are able to continue with their education” (Kurgat, 2016). In complying to this some of sub-Saharan countries, like Cameroon, Madagascar, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia and Kenya, introduced the re-admission policy allowing teenage mothers to go back to school (Chilisa 2002). Research done by World Bank (2001) shows that “early marriages and pregnancy can lead to girls dropping out of school. Countries including Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya have introduced policies which facilitate the re-admission of young mothers after giving birth. Its statistics shows that between January and June 2007, over 326 pupils in Malawi came back to school as a result of the re-admission policy and other countries however are still lacking behind.”

In Kenya the school re-admission policy was passed in 1994, but in spite of the policy opening chances that allows the teenage mothers to re-admission into schooling, it is approved that only a few of them do go back to formal schooling (Kurgat, 2016). On issuing the recommendation of the re-entry of young mother in schools the head of the schools were given obligation to help the adolescent mothers to join school. According to MOE (1998), “one of the guidelines on re-admission of teenage mothers is that girls who become pregnant should be admitted back to school unconditionally and that head teachers, sub-county and county education officers should be directed to assist such girls to join other schools to avoid psychological and emotional suffering”. Even though it has been observed that many heads of the schools were unwilling to accept the teenage mothers into their school system, but could assist them to transfer to other schools Omulako et al (2011).

For instance, the Educational Regulations 1980 in Jamaica, specified that a girl who gets pregnant should be expelled from school. This law also authorised school administrators to remove from the school register any student who fails to report to school for a period of one month. Adolescent girl who become pregnant will only be allowed to return to school after delivery and upon approval from the Minister of Education. There is no official rule in place at the moment to support these choices that leads to many girls being eliminated. Consequently, many girls were denied the opportunity to complete their studies. In 2013, an important policy known as National Policy for the Reintegration of School-Age Mothers into the Formal School

System was formulated to guarantee getting comprehensive and functional education for adolescent girls during and after pregnancy (Kennedy 2017).

According to Kennedy(2017) The Law for the Reintegration of School-Age Mothers into the Formal School System was aimed to support the world-wide right to education by assisting teen-age mother complete school in the formal school system. The plan is based on supports of comprehensiveness, enhancement, fairness, and suggests the aims/results which among others include;

1. Development and application of a system for compulsory restoration of adolescent mothers into the formal school system.
2. Application of a school-based system for transfer and checking of pregnant schoolgirls in collaboration with the WCJF's Programme for Teen-age Mothers.
3. Combination and extension of facilities to support adolescent mothers to finish their education.
4. Improved public consciousness of the right to education for adolescent mothers and the desire to decrease adolescent pregnancy.
5. Improved official recognition of compulsory restoration of adolescent mothers into the formal school system.

The Guidance and Counselling Unit (part of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information) and the WCJF are the two chief custodians of the policy and are accountable for guaranteeing its efficiency (Kennedy 2017). Working together with the Committee on Reintegration including officials from organisations in and out of government, they operate to achieve the policy goals. The execution of the policy is a determined determination involving many participants, groups, and agencies. For beginners, the division is the overseer of the policy and organises its operation, while the WCJF assists as the first place of recommendation for adolescent mothers and is accountable for easing their sustained education. The teenage mothers resume to the formal school system four to six months after they have delivered. Girls who are of secondary school age (11 to 16 years) return to the formal school system, while those who are 17 years and above are referred to a tertiary program.

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) Malawi in 1993 made a policy that permitted pregnant girls to return to school after they have delivered. The policy specified that a pregnant teen-age student and a boy student liable for the pregnancy be suspended from school for a period of one academic year and upon request be allowed to come back to school (Samati, 2016). MoEST (2016) further stated that the policy stipulated that a girl who get impregnated has only one chance of having the opportunity to be readmitted. Meaning that after readmitted and gets another pregnancy again, then, she will lose her place and will never be taken back to school. The 1993 policy did not state plainly the procedure of readmission and fails to find the details of the challenges adolescent mothers encounter a situation which led to majority of the readmitted girls falling out of school again due to lack of care in addition to improper implementation of the policy. (Samati, 2016). MoEST, (2018) further observed that the procedure of readmitting of teenage mothers was so cumbersome and tedious for the students who wanted to be readmitted. The process requires the affected students to write three letters addressed to the head of the school, EDM and the ministry asking them to spare their place, and on resuming back to school, the same process is to be followed which usually takes a lot of time and often stressful.

In 2018 MoEST reviewed the readmission policy which made it much easier at the school level only. The purpose is to increase enrolment, retention and completion of education phase. The policy also ensures that special backing mechanism at family and community levels are put in place to assist the teen-age parents.

MoEST, continued to make regulations to ensure that girl education is enforced and sustained at all levels. Local and community leaders are mobilised, arrangements that identify and avert violence against children at community level. For instance, victim support unit, community police, child protection officer, and mother groups are linked to the school system. The readmission policy identifies the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act 2010, and The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relation Act 2015 on child maintenance and age of marriage. The policy also links itself to Gender Equality Act (GEA) 2013 which among other things prohibit any discrimination based on gender and promotes equal access to education and training and sexual reproductive health services. (moest 2018). The revised re admission policy of Malawi say it will ensure that “Procedures for learners to be readmitted in school are decentralized and are less bureaucratic. Implementation of readmission procedures is standardized. Recommended withdrawal period for girl learners who fall pregnant is clearly defined. School Management Committee (SMC) create a conducive environment for

readmitted learners. Counselling and psycho social support are institutionalised in all schools for readmitted learners. Extra-curricular activities that deter learners from risky behaviours are available in all schools. Remedial academic support to readmitted learners is provided in all schools. Reporting procedures for GBVs in schools are established and institutionalised. School leadership adheres and reinforces readmission policy. Punitive measures of teenage pregnancy perpetrators are enforced according the laws of Malawi.” (MoEST, 2018)

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has been in place and functioning since 1992 to encourage Education for All through encouragement, tangible actions and policy transformations. In the mid-nineties, the Forum fruitfully convinced Ministers of Education in many African countries to effect reforms in their policies that barred teen-age mothers from returning to school. In Malawi, for example, since 1995 teen-age mothers have been given opportunity to continue their education by the Education department after giving birth. (Monsen 1998). Though, it has been stated that the dispensation of applications for readmission often takes a long period of more than a year. This however prevent these girls who are already struggling with community challenges to get married rather than go backs to school because they are mothers. McConnell & Mupuwaliywa (2016) states, that there are some issues that have been observed where certain stakeholders are not supporting the policy and also lack of checking, assessment and application of plans. For example, an investigation conducted by the (CSEC) Civil Society Education Coalition discovered that even though many teachers are aware of the policy because many of them were not aware of its application. (CSEC 2014). Gender audit report in 2013 accepted that it is necessary to strengthen the follow-up on the policy (Rugimbana & Liwewe,2013). The 2018 readmission policy recognises that the important issue of teenage pregnancies continued to be unresolved due to absence of clarity about the readmission processes and procedures, and where it is practiced, the process often viewed to be long and burdensome for the persons looking for readmission.

1.2 Objectives

1. To determine the material support given to teenage mothers after re-admission.
2. To understand the knowledge and role of teachers on the re-admission policy and its implementation.

3. To find how well teen mothers know about the re-admission policy
4. To understand the impact of re-admission policy on education of teen mothers

2. Methodology

The research design adopted was descriptive survey which involved qualitative techniques. The research was conducted in four districts in Malawi, two from the southern part and two from the central part. The target population on the study was the teachers, teenage mothers still in schools and successful the then teenage mothers. The study used stratified random sampling and also in course it adopted snow balling sampling. The data collection tools that were used in this study were face to face interviews and questionnaire, al the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

3. Findings

The findings of the study showed that

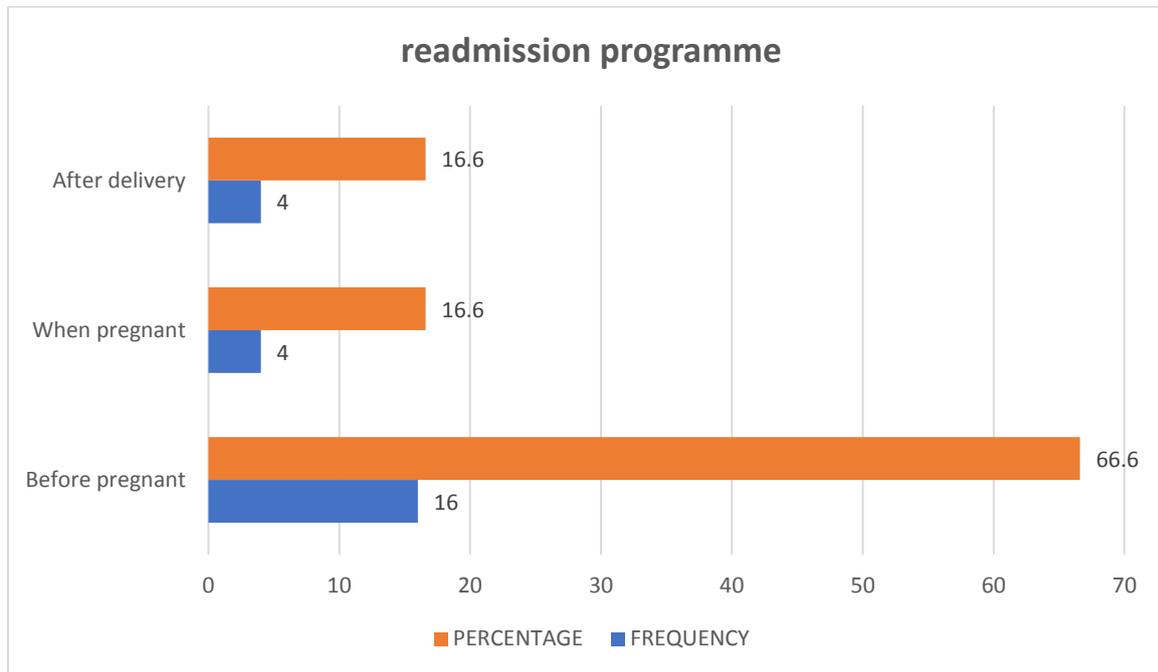
100% interviewed girls admitted hearing about the back to school programme. Other girls said they heard it on the radio, other girls said they heard it from friends' others from the teachers. Samati (2016) said after the readmission policy was formulated in 1993, the Government of Malawi through the help of other NGO publicised the back to school programme in each and every district for a period of one month. From this information it can be said that the readmission policy is well publicised in schools.

The period these teenage mothers heard about back to school programme.

Table 3.1

	Frequency	Percentage
Before pregnant	16	66.6
When pregnant	4	16.6
After delivery	4	16.6

Figure 3.1



Interpretation

From the graph it can be concluded that 66.6% of sampled teenage mothers had the knowledge of back to school programme before they got pregnant. Only 16.6% knew about the back to school programme when they were pregnant and 16.6% after delivery. This means that back to school programme has been publicised well.

When the teenage mothers were asked how the management of the school treated them when they first went for readmission this is what they said

Table 3.2

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Welcomed	23	95.8
Asked to apply	1	4.1

From the table it is clear that 95.8% of girls were welcomed by the management. One of the respondents even said that. “When I went back to school, the school management gave me a

gift for the brave decision i took of coming back to school.” (Respondent 23, field work) Only 4.10% of the sampled population reported that they were asked to apply for the readmission. In one of the schools in Lilongwe the head teacher said that she keeps all the records of the girls who have dropped because of pregnancy and after a year if they are not coming back to school, she follows them even up to their homes. In agreement with findings for Omulako. 2011; MOE, (2016) the head teacher and teachers are more willing to be involved in addressing the concerns of teen mothers. MoE, (1998) says headteachers inspires adolescent mother to go back to school after leaning school because of pregnancy.

In conclusion most of the schools in Malawi are doing all the best to accommodate these teen mothers whether they write a letter or not, as long as the student was at that school or was selected to that school before she got pregnant. It also shows that the schools are re admission of students is at school level, there is no protocol to follow.

The following tables shows how long the re-admission process took place.

Responses	Frequency		Percentage	
	At school	Working	At school	Working
Immediately	3	0	12.5	0
Less than 1 month	12	2	50	20
1 to 2 months	4	3	16.6	30
3 to 4 months	3	1	12.5	10
More than 4 months	2	4	8.3	40

From table 3.3

Teen mothers still schooling.

12.5 % admitted that the same day they went to ask for readmission they were allowed to go to class. 50% said the process took less than a month. And 16.6 % of the teen mothers still going to school reported that the process took 1-2 months, but not all because of the readmission process but other said because of other reason like, fees, uniform and who to leave the child with. 12.5 % said it took them 3-4 months to start going in class from the day they went to ask for readmission. Only 8.3 percent of the teenage mothers said it took them more than four months, mostly these girls were married after being pregnant that’s why they took a lot of time to start classes.

For working teen mothers.

None reported to be admitted the same day, and 20% of the sample said the readmission process took less than a month, from the day they asked for readmission to the day they entered class. 30% recorded that the process took 1-2 months while 10% that it took them 3-4 months and again 40% their readmission process took more than 4 months.

In connection with other researcher, girls are permitted to go back to school after a certain specific period of time. In south Africa the department of education in 2007 “released measures for prevention and management of learners’ pregnancy supporting girls to return to school and recommending two years break from such after pregnant” (Willian, 2013). However in Malawi the readmission policy say that the adolescent girl is deliberately withdrawn from school when pregnant for a period of one academic year after that they can go back to school, and apart from that before going back to school they should apply or write three letters to the head teacher, division and ministry in order to reserve their places which is rarely done (Mchaju, 2012).

90% of the teachers said the adolescent moms are advised when they come for re-entry in order to help them to deal with the stress of being a mother and at the same time a student, they are advised and warned in advance that their peers might mock them so they just have to focus on the education not what they are saying. One of the teachers said when the teen mothers are coming for re admission, we ask them to come with parents so that they should also understand and be able to accept their child and the responsibility of taking care of their grandchild.

Moore, (2014) find out that positive relationship exists between adolescent mothers’ resilience and success with the counselling. She continues to say that with the help of counsellor, teenage mothers are able to with stand the pressure and challenges they are facing in school, and it has helped the teen mother to change the challenges into resilience factors. 10% of the teachers said the teen mothers after readmission are not counselled, they just allow them to go to class.

On the back to school programme few questions were asked to the teachers. First one was whether the teachers have any ideas about back to school programme or re-admission policy and the second one, teacher were asked if they feel back to school programme a good and how it is beneficial to the teen mothers. Below are the summarised answers.

All teachers confessed that they are aware of back to school policy, and among them, majority indicated that they have never seen nor handle the policy document while small percentage indicated that they got the information from meetings and the media, and have no thoughts on

the procedures to be adopted when re admitting the girls. Small percentage also indicated they have read a little about the policy document but not in detail.

Responding on the second question, all teachers opined that the back to school programme is a very worthy venture, and that it will provide the opportunity for the girls to brighten up their future. Back to school programme is a noble idea, but other training projects and programs are required to be in place for teen-age mothers, for instance, simplify the process of readmitting them back to school so as to build in confidence in them and raise their self-esteem. One of the teachers expressed that back to school programme is worthy because she has seen many teenage mothers resourcefully pursued their education up to tertiary level and are now doing well in various areas of their chosen endeavours.

Half of the teachers recognised the presence of some NGO's who assist the teen-age mother in their educational process. They said these NGO's support the girls with dues, learning materials, uniforms and shoes. The teachers also said there are some organisations who assist the teen-age mothers. Adolescent mothers still manage to complete their schooling notwithstanding the challenges they meet. (Moore, 2014). Policies are not continually practicalised in schools because of absence of information at local or school level (Maluli & Bali, 2014). Teachers don't have the required knowledge on how to use policies, or implement action plan, supportive devices or resources in the educational institutions for the success of the system discussion for a global consultation, Nov, 2014).

With regards to the successes recorded by the teenage mothers, teachers had divergent opinions., half of them believed that the teen-age mothers become committed and hardworking in academic work after their readmission as result, their performances improve significantly. Their behaviour, conduct and general level of discipline also improve substantially. It has been observed by one the school teachers that after readmission, most teenage mothers shy away from the male counterpart and concentrate greatly on their school work. In the same vain, another teacher also shared the same sentiment that since the girls were prejudiced by their mates pressure which resulted to predicaments, they tend to isolate themselves from their male colleagues by rather concentrating on their school work to avoid reoccurrence of the unfortunate incidents. Half of the teachers opined that combining school work with motherly life often impacted negatively on their studies, as aptly observed by one teacher who said the teenage mothers are usually inattentive in class and have low self-esteem.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that most of the teen mothers new about the readmission policy even before pregnant. When readmission policy was established the government launched an awareness campaign in all the districts in Malawi, in all the radios, televisions etc for a month to encourage girls to go back to school after giving birth.

The readmission policy does not consider some of the materials needed for a young mother to go to school, it only allows the girls to go back to school, but not helping them with school material and also care of the child the adolescent mother has. From the study it can further be concluded that only a few girls receive the help for school but nothing for their child.

All the teacher knows about the readmission policy, but many did not actually study the document, or know how it is implemented and what are their roles in the implementation of the policy.

It can also be concluded that most of what the readmission policy say that it will do is not practiced it's just on paper but on the ground, things are done differently.

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