

Teachers and Students' Awareness of Re-Entry of Mother-Students Policy in Public Secondary Schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigates the awareness levels among teachers and students regarding the re-entry policy for mother-students in public secondary schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania. The study employed a descriptive research design. A purposive sampling method was employed to select 10 of these 35 schools, ensuring a diverse representation from different areas within the city. The selected schools' population included 11,329 students and 512 teachers, from whom a sample of 489 students and 104 teachers was drawn. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test. Based on the findings, the study concludes that gender and students' education level determine the awareness of re-entry policies. Those students in higher classes had greater exposure to the policies than those in lower classes. Therefore, educational mobility expands individuals' access to policy discussion, calling for specific interventions among females and lower classes. The study suggests that professional development programs must increase teachers' understanding of the re-entry policies, especially for female teachers. The school curriculums should introduce an extensive advocacy program for lower-level classes and girls. A fair outreach must be undertaken so that students, regardless of their socio-economic background, can know about reentry policies.

Keywords: Continuation; Re-entry; Adolescence; teen mothers; awareness; ordinal secondary school.

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Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is a global concern due to its significant social, economic, and educational implications Nations grapple with the challenges faced by mother-students, recognizing the need to ensure these young girls have the opportunity to

continue with their education (Muli et al., 2023). This study provides an overview of the global context and narrows down to the specific challenges faced in Dodoma City, Tanzania, regarding the re-entry of mother-students into public secondary schools.

In nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and China, considerable efforts have been made to address the educational rights of mother-students. These nations have implemented policies and initiatives to provide teenage mothers with the support they need to continue their education while fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers. Provisions for flexible schooling schedules, childcare facilities and counseling services empower young mothers to balance education and parenting (Freedman, 2020). In the United States, *Title IX* ensures equal access to education for pregnant and parenting students (Brake & Grossman, 2020).

In developing nations across Africa, including South Africa, Zambia, Mali, Egypt, Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania, high rates of teenage pregnancies pose significant challenges to girls' education (Ahinkorah, 2021). Cultural norms and socioeconomic factors often contribute to early pregnancies, creating substantial barriers to educational attainment. In Tanzania, the government introduced a re-entry policy in 2021, allowing mother-students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy to return (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021). However, there was some political interference towards this plan between 2018 and 2021, which impacted its implementation and effectiveness.

The increase in early pregnancies among girls in Tanzania can be attributed to a complex interplay of social, economic and educational factors. Studies by Momsen (2019) and Erete *et al.* (2021) highlighted the pervasive sexual oppression and violence faced by girl children in these domains. This oppression creates an environment where some girls find themselves vulnerable to early pregnancies, leading to detrimental consequences such as dropping out of school.

One contributing factor to this alarming trend is the legal framework surrounding child marriages in Tanzania. Cherri *et al.* (2017) and Como and Voena (2021) underscored how existing laws on marriage inadvertently perpetuate the trend. According to these laws, a child can marry as young as 14 with parental consent and at the age of 16 if the court grants approval. This legal framework fails to adequately protect the rights and well-being of young girls by allowing early marriages that often result in early pregnancies and subsequent school dropouts.

Recent studies reveal that girls claim to be back on the issue relating to their affairs, leading to losing

the chance to return to school. For example, Kanku (2010), Mathias (2015) and Loivotoki (2017) reported on the stakeholders' perceptions and experiences regarding the re-admission of teen mothers in secondary schools. However, there is limited literature on how socio-demographic variables relate to the level of awareness among teachers and students. Since the government of Tanzania mainland has released a circular letter for teen student mothers to get back into the regular education system in secondary schools (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021), there was a need to determine the level of awareness among secondary school teachers and students.

Community awareness and understanding of the re-entry policy are crucial for its successful implementation. Richard (2018a) and Sharmila (2021) stress the need for strengthening the community's awareness of re-entry guidelines. Recent studies revealed that a lack of awareness and understanding among girls leads to missed opportunities to return to school (Kanku, 2010; Mathias, 2015; Loivotoki, 2017). However, there is limited literature related to the level of awareness among teachers and students.

The awareness of both teachers and students plays a crucial role in addressing the issue of early pregnancies. Teachers, as key figures in a girl's educational journey, may lack sufficient training or awareness to recognize signs of sexual oppression or violence (Mayo, 2022). This oversight can lead to missed opportunities for intervention and support. On the other hand, students' awareness may be influenced by prevailing social norms and stigmas surrounding early pregnancies, further perpetuating the cycle (Benshaul *et al.*, 2020).

Despite intentional efforts to ensure that female children get their fundamental right to be protected and get an education, recent statistics show a high rate of students suspending their studies due to pregnancy challenges in Tanzania. For instance, 2019 statistics show that the Dodoma Region is third in the number of students who dropped out from studies due to pregnancy problems, followed by Mwanza and Morogoro regions (BEST, 2020). Among the districts of these regions, Dodoma City had a larger number of students (96 cases) who dropped out of school because of pregnancy.

Recognizing the right to education for all, the Tanzanian government issued a decree for students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy to be

reinstated in the formal education system (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021). However, there are limited studies investigating whether teachers and students are aware of the re-entry policy. Therefore, this study assessed the level of awareness among teachers and students regarding the procedures for returning female students expelled from school due to pregnancy and the association of their attributes with their awareness levels.

Literature Review

This section presents existing literature on awareness regarding re-entry policies for mother-students in secondary schools, highlighting insights and identifying gaps that inform the present study.

Mother-Students' Re-Entry Policies Awareness

The examination of awareness regarding the re-entry of mother students in secondary schools is crucial, as it illuminates the obstacles and challenges these students face. This understanding is essential for effective policy development, community engagement, teacher training and advocacy, all of which contribute to a more equitable and inclusive education system. The literature review highlights several key themes supported by various studies.

In Zambia, Phiri (2020) and Malende (2022) highlighted the critical issue of low teacher awareness of re-entry policies. The study identified low levels of teachers' awareness, suggesting that this gap may hinder effective policy implementation. The study recommended awareness campaigns and teacher training programs to enhance the understanding and support for mother-students.

Chiyota (2020) and Smith et al. (2019b) explored the role of community behavior and practices in shaping awareness and access to education for mother-students. The study underscored the importance of community dynamics in influencing students' awareness of re-entry policies and recommended tailoring interventions to local needs. Similarly, Smith et al. (2019a) stressed the need for awareness campaigns aimed at educating both students and educators about the rights and support available to mother-students, highlighting the significance of community-level efforts in improving policy awareness and implementation.

A study by Samati (2014) examined societal barriers, including family attitudes and social stigmatization as significant obstacles for mother-students seeking re-entry into education. These studies reveal that

negative societal attitudes and stigmatization play a crucial role in hindering the re-entry process, although specific recommendations for overcoming these barriers were not detailed.

Moreover, Richard's (2018b) study in Dodoma, Tanzania, highlighted the need for region-specific interventions, considering cultural, social, and economic factors unique to the area. This study emphasized the importance of effectively adapting policies to address local challenges and awareness gaps.

The literature reveals significant gaps in the comprehensive exploration of awareness levels following policy changes. While existing studies have identified various challenges and barriers, there is a lack of detailed analysis on awareness levels after the introduction of the re-entry policies. This study aimed to address this gap by investigating the awareness levels of teachers and students following the implementation of re-entry guidelines by the Tanzanian government.

Methodology

Design

The study employed a descriptive research design to assess the awareness levels of teachers and students regarding the re-entry policies for student-mothers. This design was appropriate for collecting numerical data through a structured questionnaire, enabling the measurement and analysis of awareness levels in a systematic and objective manner. The use of this design facilitated the gathering of large-scale data, which was analyzed using statistical methods to draw reliable conclusions about the topic.

Population and Sampling

Dodoma City has 35 public secondary schools. For this study, a purposive sampling method was employed to select 10 of these 35 schools, ensuring a diverse representation from different areas within the city. The selected schools' population included 11,329 students and 512 teachers. To determine the sample size, the Yamane formula was applied. A sample of 489 students and 104 teachers was drawn using stratified sampling, where schools and classes served as strata to ensure representative sampling across different educational levels.

Instruments

Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire designed based on a thorough literature review and expert consultation. The

questionnaire consisted of sections on teachers and students' awareness of the re-entry policy. Awareness was measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 3. The instrument was translated into Swahili to accommodate respondents' language needs.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through a rigorous process, which involved reviewing relevant literature and consulting with experts in the field. This approach confirmed that the questionnaire effectively measured the intended constructs related to awareness of re-entry policies. For reliability, a test-retest method was applied, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.705. This statistic indicates that the questionnaire provided consistent and reliable data across multiple administrations, ensuring stability and accuracy in measuring the constructs.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data analysis began with descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, to summarize the distribution of responses based on categories such as gender and awareness levels. The primary statistical tool used for inferential analysis was the chi-square test, which was applied to explore relationships between categorical variables, such as the association between gender and awareness of re-entry policies. This method allowed for an examination of significant relationships between different groups and variables, providing insights into patterns of awareness among participants.

Ethical Considerations

Personal identifiers were removed from all data reports to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaire underwent a thorough review by experts to ensure ethical compliance. Approval for the study was obtained from the District Executive Director. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they were fully informed about the study's objectives and their involvement.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's results, highlighting key findings on teachers' and students' awareness of re-entry policies for mother-students. The discussion interprets the results while presenting their implications for policy implementation and identifying potential areas for targeted interventions to improve awareness and support.

Students' Socio-Demographic Information

The study gathered data from 489 students. Of these, 293 were males while 196 were females. Respondents' age ranged from below 13 to 21 and above years. The study level ranged from Form One to Form Six.

The education of the students' mothers and fathers ranged from adult education, primary education, secondary education, certificate, diploma, Bachelor degree and postgraduate studies. Some of the parents were farmers, entrepreneurs, businesspersons and civil servants. The majority of students (289, 59%) lived with both parents while the rest lived with single parents or none of the parents.

Teachers' Socio-Demographic Information

There were 104 teacher respondents. Of these, 70.2% were males while 29.8% were females. Their age ranged from 11 to 61. The majority (83.7%) of teachers were married, while the rest were separated, widows/ widowers, singles, or cohabiters. Their level of education ranged from diploma to postgraduate level. Their work experience ranged from below one year to above 30 years.

Students' Awareness on the Re-entry Policy

The study sought to establish students' awareness of re-entry policies for mother students, revealing various levels of awareness among the respondents. In the table, Unfavorable, Moderate, and Favorable represent different levels of awareness or perception regarding the re-entry policies for student-mothers. Unfavorable indicates students with a low level of awareness, Moderate reflects a neutral or intermediate awareness and Favorable includes students with high awareness of the policies. The percentages show the distribution of students in each category, such as by gender, age, or class level, across these three awareness levels.

The data in Table 1 reveals significant insights into students' awareness of re-entry policies. Overall, a notable percentage of students exhibit favorable awareness of the policy, with 49.5% of female students and 60.2% of male students demonstrating a positive understanding. However, there is also a considerable proportion of students who fall into the unfavorable and moderate categories, indicating that while many students are aware of the policy's existence, a detailed understanding of its provisions is lacking as seen with 37.9% of females and 34.7%

of males showing unfavorable awareness. The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 9.76, p = .01$) reveals a statistically significant difference in awareness levels based on gender, with male students displaying a higher level of favorable awareness. While this awareness might be considered moderate to high, particularly for males, the lower favorable awareness among females suggests a gap in the policy's outreach and

comprehension, which could have implications for policy implementation and effectiveness. Studies in similar contexts (UNESCO, 2020) highlight that awareness gaps can undermine the success of re-entry policies, calling for targeted interventions to ensure that both male and female students are fully informed about their rights and the specifics of the policy.

Table 1: Students' Level of Awareness

Variable	Unfavorable (%)	Moderate (%)	Favorable (%)	χ^2	df	p-value
Sex of Students				9.76	2	.01
Female	37.9	12.6	49.5			
Male	34.7	5.1	60.2			
Age of Students				13.98	10	.17
Below 13	33.3	33.3	33.3			
13-14	44.4	0.0	55.6			
15-16	39.0	9.2	51.8			
17-18	39.3	10.0	50.7			
19-20	17.9	8.9	73.2			
21+	28.6	14.3	57.1			
Class Level of Students				22.01	10	.02
Form I	48.7	5.1	46.2			
Form II	32.3	10.8	57.0			
Form III	43.5	9.9	46.6			
Form IV	35.0	11.4	53.7			
Form V	14.3	0.0	85.7			
Form VI	17.5	10.5	71.9			

The analysis presented in Table 1 indicates no significant difference in awareness based on the age of students ($\chi^2 = 13.98, p = .17$), suggesting that awareness of re-entry policies remains consistent across different age groups.

In contrast, a significant difference in awareness was observed based on students' class levels ($\chi^2 = 22.01, p = .02$), with students in higher classes (Form V and VI) exhibiting markedly higher favorable awareness (85.7% and 71.9%, respectively) compared to lower classes. This trend suggests that as students progress in their education, their awareness and understanding of re-entry policies increase, likely due to enhanced exposure to relevant information and discussions surrounding the policy. Recent studies, such as those by Mbilinyi et al. (2021) and Katana et al. (2022), support this finding, demonstrating that older students often possess a more nuanced understanding of educational policies, attributed to their increased

engagement in academic discussions and access to educational resources. Furthermore, research conducted by Wambura and Chacha (2023) indicates that higher educational attainment often correlates with improved policy awareness, emphasizing the importance of integrating re-entry policy discussions into the curriculum at earlier stages. These findings highlight the necessity for educational stakeholders to focus on age-appropriate outreach strategies and educational interventions that foster awareness of re-entry policies among younger students, ensuring that all students are well-informed regardless of their academic level.

Teachers' Awareness on the Re-entry Policy

A statistical analysis performed on the data from Table 2 suggests a significant difference in the teachers' knowledge of documents related to Re-entry Policy with respect to their gender, as confirmed by chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 7.42, p = .03$).

Favored awareness among male teachers was higher at 77.4% than females (60.3%). The chi-square statistic reveals a significant relationship between teachers' sex and their awareness of policy, indicating that female teachers are less likely to be aware of re-entry. This is different from Mwambene and Mawere (2020), who found no significant differences in policy awareness between males and females. Hence, male teachers in the current study had higher awareness. The results suggest the necessity of concerted efforts to improve knowledge among female teachers as well as equitable information provision for identifying

targets in a more reliable implementation of re-entry policy.

Age distribution supports the inference of high awareness levels with advanced age, with most teachers falling within the 32-41 age range. This age group typically comprises individuals with both experience and energy to stay informed about policy changes and their practical applications. However, statistical analysis showed no significant difference in awareness based on the age of the teachers ($\chi^2 = 4.75$, $p = .57$), indicating that awareness levels are relatively consistent across different age groups.

Table 2: Teachers' Level of Awareness

Variable	Unfavorable (%)	Moderate (%)	Favorable (%)	χ^2	df	p-value
Sex of Teachers				7.42	2	.03
Female	34.2	5.5	60.3			
Male	9.7	12.9	77.4			
Age of Teachers				4.75	6	.57
22-31	28.6	5.7	65.7			
32-41	29.3	6.9	63.8			
42-51	12.5	12.5	75.0			
52-61	0.0	33.3	66.7			
Religion of Teachers				2.54	4	.64
Christian	29.8	8.3	61.9			
Muslim	15.8	5.3	78.9			
Neither Muslim/Christian	0.0	0.0	100.0			
Level of Education				7.19	4	.13
Diploma	0.0	50.0	50.0			
Degree	25.8	7.5	66.7			
Masters	44.4	0.0	55.6			

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that gender and students' level of education determine the level of awareness of re-entry policies. This is because awareness was higher among male students and male teachers compared to female students and teachers. Furthermore, those students in higher classes had greater exposure to the policies than those in lower classes. Therefore, educational mobility expands individuals' access to policy discussion, thereby calling for specific interventions among females and those in lower classes.

Recommendation

Professional development programs must increase teachers' understanding of reentry policies, especially for female teachers. The school curriculum should introduce an extensive advocacy program aimed at lower-level classes and girls. Fair outreach must be undertaken so that students, regardless of their socio-economic background, can learn about reentry policies.

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