

Re-entry Policy and Retention of Expectant Students and Teen Mothers in Public Secondary Schools in Vihiga Sub-County, Kenya

*Leonard Latan Imbosa¹, Eunice Majanga², James Bill Ouda³

1 Department of Educational Foundation, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

2 Department of Educational Foundation, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

3 Department of Educational Psychology, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

*Corresponding Author: Leonard Latan Imbosa

Email: Latani300@gmail.com

Abstract

Vihiga Sub-county, having one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Kenya, presented a scenario that warranted an investigation with respect to the re-entry policy. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to establish the impact of the re-entry policy on the retention of expectant students and teen mothers in public secondary schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Target population comprised of 28 school principals, 28 teachers, and 150 students, one children's officer, one county statistics officer and one sub-county director of education. The study sampled 10 guidance and counselling teachers, 10 principals, 1 children's officer, 1 sub-county director of education, 1 county statistics officer and 50 students who were selected using purposive sampling approach. Data was collected using interview schedules, questionnaires and document analysis. A pilot study was conducted in two schools in Vihiga sub-county, which were excluded from the actual study. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed thematically and presented in form of quotations and narrations while quantitative data from questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed that the re-entry policy was a major positive step towards achieving retention of expectant and parenting students. However, lack of copies of the policy in schools in Vihiga sub-county substantially affected effective policy interpretation and implementation for optimal retention. The study recommended that the government should disseminate copies of the re-entry policy document in secondary schools, conduct continuous public awareness and closely monitor its enforcement. In addition, track re-integrated learners for appropriate psychosocial, financial and material support both at school and community levels.

Key words: Re-entry policy, Retention, Expectant students, Teen mothers, psycho-social support, Teenage pregnancy.

1.0 Introduction

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) guarantee everyone the right to education including adolescent mothers. Teenage pregnancy, especially among school age girls is a global concern. In Europe, the annual reported pregnancies for women aged 15-19 years are on the decline with uneven rates across regions. Teenage pregnancy is highest in Eastern Europe (41 per 1000) than Northern Europe (30 per 1000), while Southern region has the lower prevalence at 17 per 1000. The rates are lower for countries where contraceptives are subsidized for all minors, sexual reproductive health services are provided and parental consent is not required for abortion (Kai, 2013).

In developing countries, approximately 23 million teenage girls (14 to 19 years) become expectant every year, while 15 million girls get married before the age of 18 years (WHO, 2017). Overall, 18.8% of adolescents become pregnant in Africa, with the prevalence in Sub-Saharan region leading at 21.6% while the northern region has the least prevalence of teen pregnancy at 9.2%. Further, the situation is dire in East Africa with a pregnancy prevalence rate of 21.5%. (Kassa et al., 2018). According to 2019 statistics from the Global Childhood, Kenya has the third-highest teen pregnancy rates with 82 births per 1,000 births. Kenyan health facilities across the 47 counties reported that over 378,000 girls aged 10 to 19 years sought medical services related to pregnancy and parenting in the period July 2016 to July 2017 (NCPD, 2018). In specific terms, 28,932 girls aged 10–14 and 349,465 girls aged 15–19 became pregnant. Cumulatively, approximately 13,000 teenage girls drop out of school annually because of pregnancy.

In Vihiga county, teenage pregnancy prevalence rate in the last five years was alarming. Within four years, from the year 2016 to 2019, the county recorded a substantial 27% increase in teenage pregnancy rate. This was from 19.1% increase in 2016 to 46.1% in 2019 for girls in the age bracket of 10–19 years (MoH Vihiga County, 2020). The Kenya school re-entry policy of 1994 was enacted to retain expectant learners in school and assist teen mothers to re-enter school and continue with education after childbirth (Kurgat, 2016). To increase girls' access to education, the government of Kenya developed a policy framework in 2007 to implement the right to education and ultimately achieve gender parity in education (Mutua, 2017).

More recently, the government enacted the 2020 National Guidelines for School Re-entry in Early Learning and Basic Education institutions. This is in conformity with aspiration of The Constitution of Kenya, Kenya Vision 2030, the Basic Education Act, 2013 and Sustainable Development Goal number 4 on inclusive education. The government was concerned that despite its efforts to ensure universal quality and affordable education to all school age children, retention and completion was still a challenge. The guidelines have four key objectives; to provide re-entry process guidelines to forestall school dropout, to reinforce the existing legislation and guidelines on access to quality basic education, to outline the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the school re-entry process and to improve monitoring of the school re-entry system (MoE, 2020).

1.1 Statement of the Problem: In Kenya, 48% of girls who fail to complete secondary school level do so due to pregnancies, teenage marriages and parenting. Likewise, the national teenage pregnancy prevalence rate is 18 percent (HEART, 2015). In the period 2016–2017, Vihiga County recorded one of the highest levels of teenage childbearing prevalence rate (33%), resulting into high female school drop-out rates of 15% (NCPD, 2018). According to the Ministry of Health in Vihiga County, in 2018 and 2019, there were 6,620 and 7,355 expectant girls (10–19 years) respectively, which represented 42% and 46% of the total number of expectant women in the county respectively. In the year 2020 during COVID-19 period, Vihiga medical facilities registered 6,197 teenagers who sought first time antenatal care (MOH Vihiga, 2021). However, the number could be higher than this due to fear by some girls of contracting COVID-19 through hospital visits. The high teenage pregnancy, if not addressed, threatens to reverse the gains made so far in enhancing retention and completion by expectant learners and teen mothers (HRW, 2018). The same also threatens the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4, which calls for the promotion of inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Similarly, SDG number 5 which advocates for gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (UNSTATS, 2016). This teen pregnancy trend is quite alarming hence the need to investigate if these learners were retained in school in the pregnancy state, if they are allowed re-enter school after child birth and retained to complete their secondary school education.

1.2 Objective of the Study: The objective of this study was to examine the effect of implementation of the re-entry policy on retention of expectant students and teen mothers in public secondary schools in Vihiga Sub-county of Kenya.

1.3 Theoretical Framework: This study was guided by the Resiliency theory. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, failure, conflict, frustration and misfortune. Some of the proponents of Resilience theory include Michael Rutter, Norman Garmezy, Emmy Werner and Suniya Luthar. Emphasis is on how one can deal with the difficulties rather than the nature of adversities. Norman Garmezy (2018) views resilience *as* the capacity of recovery and maintained adaptive behaviour after a stressful encounter.

Resiliency theory provided a framework for considering a strength-based approach to understanding child and adolescent development and informing intervention design (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). Teen pregnancy and teen motherhood come with a myriad of challenges to the concerned girl. Rejection by parents, abandonment by the boyfriend, additional burden of motherhood, stigma from peers and health risks were some of the challenges. Amidst these challenges and frustrations, it is how one can deal with such difficulties rather than the nature of adversities that matter.

This study focused on the enormous challenges that surrounded re-entry of expectant students and teen mothers in secondary schools of Vihiga sub-county, as well as how the girls were able to overcome them and be retained in school to completion. Positive factors that resided within the affected girls, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem were assets while environmental factors such as parental support, adult mentors, youth programmes, warmth and supportive teachers and peers were resources that provided the youth with opportunities to build resilience upon re-entry. Resilience theory was of relevance to this study at a time when teen pregnancy and parenthood continued to limit girls' retention for quality educational experiences and outcomes. Resilience theory therefore, opened up new understanding of how expectant students and teen mothers in Vihiga sub-county

were sensitized to overcome challenges they faced in order to be retained and complete secondary education with good academic achievement.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

In Europe, most countries have allowed expectant girls to continue schooling for as long as practically possible and teen mothers to re-enter school after childbirth. In the United Kingdom (UK) for instance, the Equality Act, 2010 is supposed to protect enrolled pupils who fall pregnant whilst studying. The law forbids mistreatment or discrimination of women based on their pregnancy status (Dowden & Gray, 2017). An expectant teen is given 18 weeks maternity leave. However, the teen is allowed to be in school as long as possible before giving birth by being given transport support to school (HEART, 2015). Also, schools support teen mothers' choice to breastfeed by providing the room for milk expression and a facility to store milk during the day. The teen mother is allowed to leave school to feed her baby at agreed times, if the childcare is close to school. Those under twenty years are entitled to funding to assist them pay for childcare and travelling allowance under 'Care to Learn' programme (Dowden & Gray, 2017). However, the findings in UK, a first world country with a developed economy may not be applicable to Kenya, a developing country with lower economic status.

In USA, a school is prohibited from excluding an expectant learner from school except where it is enforced by a medical condition. Schools are expected to allow absence occasioned by teen pregnancy and related conditions such as attending to prenatal clinics, labour, child birth and recovery. Upon return, the teen mothers must be reinstated to same academic and extracurricular level they were when they started their leave and accorded opportunity to catch up on missed work. Further support includes giving bigger desks and private breast feeding rooms, as well as child care centres near schools (Dowden & Gray, 2017).

The Guyana re-entry policy (2018) is one of the most elaborate in the world today. It was a product of collaborative efforts of a wide cross section of stakeholders (Guyana, 2018). The policy goal is both the management of re-entry of expectant teens and teen mothers into mainstream school system and prevention of teen pregnancy. The policy covers key areas of concern such as policy environment, guiding principles, tracking of teen pregnancy, reintegration of teen mothers in formal schools, tracking and support after re-entry, as well as implementation process. It also addresses policy dissemination and awareness, not forgetting monitoring and evaluation of the entire process. In the current study, the focus was to identify the re-entry practices in Vihiga sub-county among public secondary schools.

Africa offers a mixed situation. Human Rights Watch (2018) states that African countries among them Gabon and Malawi, have adopted "continuation" or re-entry policies and strategies to ensure that expectant teens resume learning after child birth. Implementation of laws and policies frequently fall short, and monitoring of teen mothers' re-entry to school remains weak overall. Complex re-entry processes and stringent conditions for re-admission in Namibia negatively affect teen mothers' re-entry and completion of education. Expectant learners can continue to attend school until four weeks before the expected due date of the child. After 26 weeks of pregnancy, the learner is required to provide a medical certificate confirming that it is safe for her to continue to attend school. In order to be allowed back to school, she has to fulfil all the requirements like who

shall care for the infant. This makes it difficult for teen mothers and expectant student to continue learning, which precipitates dropouts (HRW, 2018).

Twenty four African nations, mostly North African nations, lack policies on re-entry of expectant school girls but instead impose heavy penalties and punishment. Morocco and Sudan apply morality laws that criminally judge teen girls with adultery, indecency or extra marital sex. In Tanzania, “the expulsion of a pupil from school may be ordered where a pupil has committed an offence against morality.” School officials often interpret pregnancy as an offense. Girls are subjected to disciplinary measures such as forced pregnancy tests and expulsion causing dropout. In some communities and cultures, there is a widespread belief that permitting pregnant girls and adolescent mothers to continue their education could normalize extra-marital pregnancy, excuse the girls of their wrongdoing and encourage more girls to become pregnant (Akwilapo, 2016).

However some nations are focused not only on combating barriers to re-entry but also root causes to teen pregnancy. Benin, Cape Verde and Senegal for instance, have reversed their hitherto punitive policies on expectant and teen mothers. In Cape Verde and Senegal, schooling teen mothers are accorded time for breast feeding, time-off when babies are sick or to attend clinics among other concessions (HRW, 2018). In Zambia, teen mothers have the option of attending morning or evening shifts while Gabon has set up childhood centres and nurseries close to schools. Rwanda offers financial support for girls at risk of dropping out via girls’ education strategies, as well as free primary and secondary school education to promote universal access (HRW, 2018). In South Africa, after a comprehensive South African National Report (2009) on pregnancy, focus shifted to re-entry and retention. As a result, the situation has improved slightly. Expectant students and teen mothers receive financial assistance, access to sexuality education and contraceptives methods besides safe and legal abortion. However, schools still lack clarity regarding day-to-day support and management of expectant learners and teen mothers (RSA, 2009), which this study would wish to address.

In line with EFA and SDG obligations, the government of Kenya developed more guidelines and legislations to strengthen the re-entry policy to ensure that expectant girls and teen mothers continue with their education with minimum disruption (GoK, 2013). Among the major documents that have strongly support re-entry policy on expectant students and teen mothers to school are the Constitution Kenya and the Children’s Act, 2013. The Constitution of Kenya calls for implementation of affirmative action to ensure school age children, including girls, access relevant education and training. While the Children’s Act, 2013 tasks the National Education Board with the responsibility to ensure that all children attend and remain in school to complete basic education.

Kenya came up with the re-entry policy for expectant learners and teen mothers in 1994 to ensure girls resume school after child birth. The 1994 MoE policy stipulated that expectant teens should continue schooling until when due and be re-admitted upon childbirth to the same school or alternative school, to reduce psychological and emotional trauma (MoE, 1996). Additionally, it advocated for sensitization of teachers, learners and the entire school community to support the reintegrated teen learners. However, when this circular was sent to the District and Provincial offices, uproar ensued against it forcing it to be shelved. This slowed down the implementation of re-entry policy since interpretation and decision making were left to the discretion of individual head teachers (CSA, 2008; Forum for African Women Educationists [FAWE], 2004.)

After shelving of the re-entry guidelines, the only document that specifically addressed re-admission of teen mothers was Article 4.19 xxi of Session Paper No. 1 of 2005 stating that the government will ensure re-entry of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy and early or forced marriage (MoE, 2005). At school level, some head teachers were skeptical to retain expectant teens in school or re-admit teen mothers as it would taint the school image and encourage promiscuity among other girls despite the policy provisions. Studies conducted in several counties in Kenya (Kiambu, Nakuru, Homa Bay, Bungoma and Migori) have indicated that principals and other education stakeholders were not aware of the policy and its provisions besides the inconsistencies cited in its implementation. For instance, in Homa Bay County, Undie et al. (2015) found out that parenting learners continue to be locked out of education and schooling as indicated by 66 per cent of out-of school girls in the county.

The Care and Protection of Child Parents Bill (2016) specifically required county governments to supplement the national government by building and maintaining childcare centres to support teen parents. Implementation of the re-entry policy at county level is hampered by the twin challenges of insufficient resources and little legitimacy. In Nakuru County, the re-entry policy has objectives but lacks implementation, monitoring strategies, the financial and human resources to be effective. The policy objectives are obscure without clear guidelines. Consequently, re-entry procedures depended on the head teacher's discretion with varied outcomes based on teachers' interpretation on a case by case basis (Mwenje, 2015).

The Homa Bay County government in collaboration with STEPUP (an NGO) illustrated the potential of local innovations to support school re-entry. The County Department of Education documented and tracked the re-entry of out-of-school girls in all primary and secondary schools. It also awarded prizes for the top two primary and secondary schools that had substantively supported girls' school re-entry. Several positive outcomes were attributed to the STEPUP project. These included a reduction of the traditional negative perceptions of teenage pregnancy and towards one of understanding, and support. Retention increased among out-of-school girls in the county due to the multiple local innovations that supported re-entry (STEP UP, 2016).

The recently issued 2020 National Guidelines for school re-entry in Basic Education by MoE was aimed at providing a framework for enhancing re-entry policy of 1994. The government was concerned that despite committing immense resources into education besides passing legislations to ensure 100% transition, there was still significance wastage. The 2020 Guidelines therefore sought to clearly point out the re-entry procedure for teens that drop out of school, outline the role of various stakeholders in re-entry, as well as reinforce existing legislations, policies and guidelines on access to quality education and bring efficiency in monitoring of the re-entry policy implementation (MoE, 2020). This is the most resounding government voice on re-entry of expectant learners and teen mothers in the history of this country. It is similar to the Guyana policy only that, the Guyana one was passed by parliament and has strong clauses on tracking and support to expectant, and teen mothers. The present study therefore seeks to investigate the implementation of the re-entry policy in Vihiga Sub-County, Vihiga County in view of all these support legislations and guidelines.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design: The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design is used to collect data from a pre-determined group of respondents to gain insights on a topic of interest (Getu & Tegbar, 2006). Through the survey method, data was collected by the use of standardized procedures; each respondent answered the questions at a level playing field devoid of biased opinions that could influence the outcome of the inquiry (Adit, 2020). A major strength of descriptive survey is that it allowed for collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The collection of different types of data using several approaches compensated for limitations in various methods and produced adequate and in-depth information on the topic (Mwenje, 2015).

3.2 Location of the Study: Vihiga County is located in the Western region of Kenya between longitudes 34°30' and 35°0' east and between latitudes 0° and 0° 15' north. The County covers an area of 531.0 km². The County has five administrative Sub-counties namely, Hamisi, Emuhaya, Luanda, Sabatia and Vihiga). The 2018 statistics from Vihiga County Government show that the County had a total of 117 secondary schools with a total enrolment of 34,188 students. Secondary education completion rate was 92% for boys and 85% for the girls (Vihiga County Government, 2018). According to Upendo Womens Foundation, in Vihiga County, 37 per cent of girls and 44 per cent of boys aged 15-19 have already had sexual intercourse. Further, 13% of girls and 9% of the boys were reported to be sexually active. Most of the girls get pregnant before their 17th birthday causing some to drop out of school to fend for themselves and their babies.

3.3 Target Population: The target population of this study included school principals, teachers in charge of guidance and counselling, students, the Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE), County Statistics Officer and the Children's Officer, all from Vihiga Sub-County as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Population

Target respondent	Population
Principals	28
Guidance and Counselling teachers	28
Expectant students and teen mothers	150
Sub-County Director of Education	1
Children's Officer	1
County Statistics Officer	1
Total	209

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size: Ten schools were selected through stratified sampling, which accounted for the four categories, namely; girls' boarding, girls' boarding and day, mixed day, mixed day and boarding. Mixed day schools constituted a majority of the schools (70.0%) while girls' boarding, mixed day and boarding, and girls' day and boarding schools comprised of 10.0% each. Simple random sampling was used to identify schools in each stratum and the study respondents were selected using purposive sampling. In purposive (deliberate) sampling, the participants are selected according to the needs of the study. Purposive sampling is used to choose respondents in relevant position to provide data that is sought in a given organization. The method was used to select principals, Guidance and Counselling (G&C) teachers, students, county statistics officer, children's officer and the sub-county director of education. The study drew a sample size of at least 30% in each category of respondents as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample size

Target respondent	Population (number)	Sample Size	Sampling Technique	Instrument of data collection
Principals	28	10	Purposive	Interview schedule & data sheet
G & C teachers	28	10	Purposive	Questionnaire & data sheet
Students	150	50	Purposive	Interview schedule & data sheet
Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE)	1	1	Purposive	Interview schedule
Children's Officer	1	1	Purposive	Interview schedule
County Statistics Officer	1	1	Purposive	Data sheet
Total	209	73		

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

The study utilized three approaches to collect data, namely; documentary analysis guide, questionnaire and interview schedules.

3.5 Quality Control of the Research Tools: Quality control of the research tools was done using three approaches, namely; piloting, validity and reliability. A pre-test was conducted in two public secondary schools in order to determine the clarity of the data sheet, questionnaire and interview schedules. The pre-testing was used to identify and correct weaknesses in the data collection tools with regard to the envisaged aims of the study (Debois, 2016). The participants in the pre-test were given an opportunity to state their views on the relevance of the items, which in turn guided adjustment of the items before deployment in the main study. The two pilot schools were excluded from the sample.

Content validity was utilized in the current study. This is a technique that is used to assess whether a measurement method covers all relevant parts of the topic that a study aims to measure (Middleton, 2020). Expert analysis was used to attain validity of the data sheet, questionnaire and interview schedule. The tools were subjected to review by experts from Educational Foundations department

of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST). Consequently, irrelevant or sensitive items were removed. In this study, reliability of qualitative data was established through the inter-rater technique. The approach was used to examine the extent to which different raters give consistent estimates of the same phenomenon by labelling each item as either appropriate or inappropriate (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

3.6 Data Collection Procedure: The researcher visited the sampled schools and made appointments for conducting interviews and administration of questionnaires. During the second visit to the institutions, the researcher personally conducted the interviews and administered questionnaires to the various respondents. The researcher further visited SCDE and the children's officer for interviews, as well as the county statistical officer for administering of data sheet. This was after appointments had been made earlier.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure: The data analysis exercise involved reducing and organizing the body of raw data from the field into categories aimed at producing results that could be interpreted by the researcher. The collected data was thus analysed by use of descriptive statistics. Quantitative data was generated from the students' responses to the structured questionnaire items. To begin with, manual data processing was done. This involved checking and analysing all the questionnaires one by one for completeness and consistency.

Qualitative data was categorized into themes and sub themes in relation to the study objective using the thematic method of analysis. In this study, the analysis of qualitative data began at the data collection stage and continued up to the time of writing the final research report as recommended by Bergin (2011). At the end of each day, the researcher transcribed all the recorded interviews according to the different respondents. This helped in the development of themes and other emerging issues, which were later used for discussion in the findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations: Ethics is about upholding the dignity of the respondents to avoid exposure to harm or negative publicity (Key, 1997; Kumar, 2011). The study participants were provided with sufficient information about the aims of the study; they made a voluntary decision to participate in the study. To ensure confidentiality, the data collection tools did not bear identification details of the respondents. The respondents were given consent forms after sufficient briefing on the aims of the study and their right to withdraw from the study. For minors, written consent was sought from their parents. The researcher was accompanied by a trained counsellor who counselled the expectant and ten mothers who broke down during the interview. Data collection commenced after the respondents had understood and signed the consent forms.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Background Information: The gender among respondents was analysed and illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender of the Respondents

Category	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	0	0.0	50	100
Principals	5	50.0	5	50.0
G & C Teachers	4	40.0	6	60.0
Children's Officer (CO)	1	100	0	0.0
County Statistics Officer (CSO)	1	100	0	0.0
Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE)	1	100	0	0.0
Total	12		61	

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

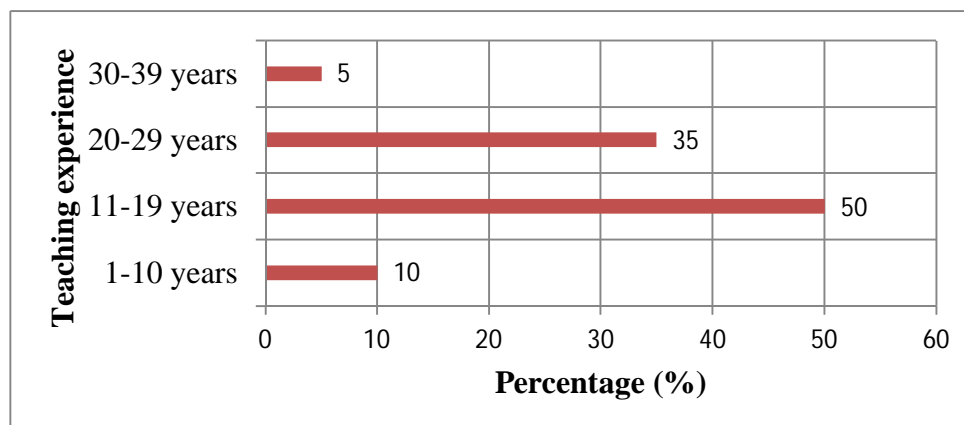
The findings in Table 3 illustrate that all respondents among students were female while the CSO, CO and SCDE were male. There was gender parity among the principals and the females constituted the majority of the teachers. Table 4 shows the working experience among the school principals.

Table 4: Principals' Working Experience as Teachers

Working experience (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20 – 24	1	10.0%
25 – 30	6	60.0%
31 – 34	3	30.0%

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

In Table 4, findings indicate that most principals had a work experience of over 25 years. This shows that they had knowledge and experience required to manage expectant students and teen mothers. With this in mind, the researcher sought to establish teachers' experience. The findings are shown in Figure 2 that follows.

**Figure 2: Teachers' Working Experience**

The findings in Figure 2 show that a majority of teachers had working experience of more than 10 years, this was deemed sufficient in handling issues about expectant students and teen mothers. It was therefore expected that the teacher respondents had what it takes to give the required information for the study. The respondents were likely to pragmatically interpret and implement MoE re-entry policy to support expectant students and teen mothers to complete secondary education.

4.2 Re-Entry Policy and Retention of Expectant and Teen Mothers: To establish the extent to which the re-entry policy had contributed to retention of teen mothers in Vihiga Sub-county, the study considered the issue under four sub-themes; awareness about the policy, engagement with expectant students, school re-entry practices and retention of teen mothers.

4.2.1 Awareness about the Re-Entry Policy: The study sought to establish whether or not the principals and teachers were up to date with the MoE Re-Entry Policy on expectant students and teen mothers, the responses from the principals are presented in Figure 3.

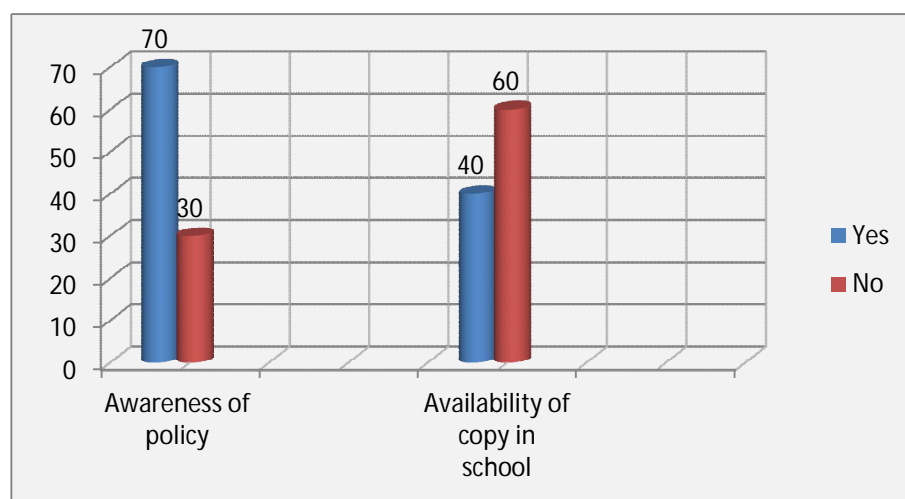


Figure 3: Availability of Re-Entry Policy in School

Findings from the school principals revealed that a majority (70%) of the principals knew that there was a government re-entry policy for teen mothers. Conversely, 30% of the respondents had never heard about the policy. Rather, they had gathered through media that expectant students and teen mothers should be supported to complete secondary education. Furthermore, among those who were aware of the re-entry policy, a follow up question was if they had a copy of the policy in school. The above findings show that despite being aware of the re-entry policy, 60% among the respondents did not have a copy of the policy in school. Even 40% who claimed to have a copy of the policy did not produce evidence of having the policy.

These findings have implications on the effectiveness of implementation of the re-entry policy within the schools. Lack of the guiding policy document on re-entry of teen mothers raises a serious loophole with respect to the consistency in the execution of the government policy. Possibly, lack of a documented guide produced ad-hoc measures that may not have yielded optimal direction to support retention of teen mothers in Vihiga Sub-county.

To corroborate the information from principals, the study sought G & C teachers' knowledge of the re-entry policy and whether they had a copy of the same in the departments for reference purposes. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.

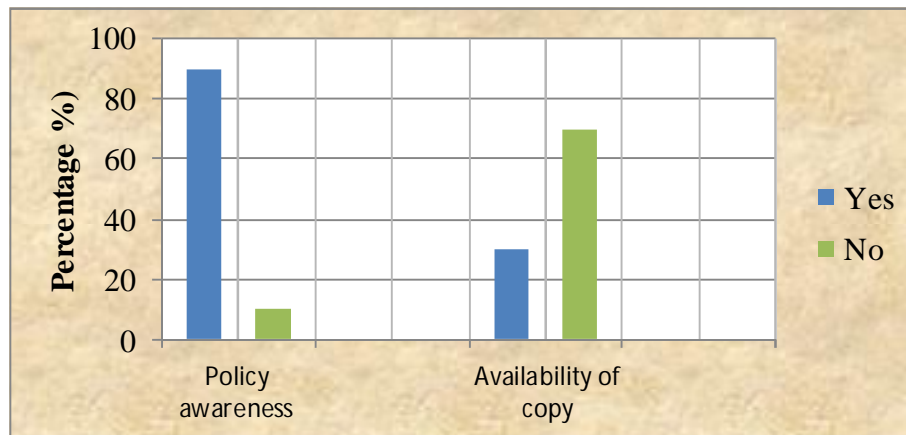


Figure 4: Status of Re-Entry Policy among G & C teachers

The findings show that whereas 90% of the teachers were aware of the re-entry policy on expectant students and teen mothers, a majority of those aware (70%), did not have a copy of the document in their departments. One of the interviewed teachers aptly summarized the situation; “I am aware of the re-entry policy,...but I do not have a copy of it in the guidance and counselling department, it is in the air.”

Another teacher added:

“We just hear pronouncements by the principal in meetings, in staff meetings that expectant learners should be allowed to stay in schools until they are due for birth. I have never seen the policy document.”

The foregoing findings imply that most schools operated without clear guidelines on the requirements to re-integrate teen mothers back to school. This approach was fraught with challenges on the efficacy of the re-entry process conducted without documentary reference. Lack of documented guidelines substantially affects effective interpretation and implementation of good policies. Without a copy of the policy, the grass root level implementer at the institution starts from a disadvantaged position and may not deliver the optimal benefit to the policy beneficiaries. These findings agree with a similar study in Dodoma, Tanzania, that without a copy of the policy, the actual implementer gropes in the dark, which limits the policy penetration to the intended targets (Bahati & Msilu, 2015).

4.2.2 Engagement with Expectant Students and their Retention: Having established the availability of the re-entry policy in schools, the study addressed the steps that schools took to monitor expectant learners as part of retention and preparation to re-admit them after childbirth. Interviews with teachers and principals revealed that the preliminary approaches were geared towards reducing dropout, abortion and suicidal tendencies by expectant learners. The following quotations illustrate some engagement methods that were utilized by the schools to monitor and retain the expectant learners. One of the teachers said, “The school documents all pregnancy cases.

We keep them in school until they are due,...we encourage the girls and give them permission to attend clinics.” Another teacher shared a similar sentiment as follows:

“..., we monitor the pregnancy, advise the girl to attend clinics and regularly ask about the relationship between the girl and her parents, it is useful to know what transpires at home.”

Similarly, one principal said;

“We normally organize a conference of the teacher, parent and learner, which is done in confidence and in a friendly manner. The learner commits in writing to carry the pregnancy up to the end. She is assured that she will not be sent out of school...”

The foregoing findings demonstrate that schools used varied approaches and personnel to enhance retention. They engaged parents and students in order to reduce the negative tendencies of stress and frustration both at school and home, which could contribute to student dropout. Interviews with the principals revealed that retention practices were varied but all had the central point of counselling the learner in order to mitigate the negative effects on the expectant learners. Further, principals strongly felt that although pregnancy testing was outlawed by the re-entry policy, it would greatly enhance retention and mitigate some undesirable actions by expectant learners due to stress and fear. A principal observed in an interview:

“A girl induced and gave birth in the sanitation block on a closing day, but, due to fear of what the parents might do, she used a piece of iron sheet to slit the throat of the foetus and dumped it in school latrine.”

The view was supported by another principal who experienced a legal situation due to abortion in school:

“I was arrested and put in the police remand for over six hours on allegations of negligence of duty, because a girl had aborted and thrown the foetus in the toilet..., I didn’t know, some students heard the cry of a baby in the toilet and raised alarm.”

Retention of expectant candidates until they sat for the terminal Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) national examinations was a common phenomenon among the schools. One principal remarked:

“This year, we have three candidates who are heavily expectant and are due any time. Last year, one girl gave birth during KCSE examinations. She finished her papers in hospital.”

However, some schools still discouraged retention of expectant learners. A principal observed:

“The school policy is, when a girl is discovered to be pregnant, she goes home and comes back after child birth, but if she aborts, she is not allowed back. However, with the current Education Cabinet Secretary, it has become sensitive. We look at it twice.”

The findings in Table 5 show the extent to which the re-entry policy contributed to retention of expectant learners in Vihiga Sub-county.

Table 3: Retention of Expectant Learners 2017-2020

Year	No. of pregnant Students	No. retained in school	No. that dropped out	% retained
2017	24	20	4	83.3
2018	22	19	3	86.4
2019	18	16	2	88.9
2020	110	95	20	78.9
Total	174	150	29	

In Table 5, the findings indicate that a majority of expectant learners were retained to continue with their secondary education. This implies that the re-entry policy by MoE had a positive significant role in retention of expectant students. During an interview, one of the principals observed:

“The sponsor does not want expectant girls in school and even the Board of Management (BoM) recorded that expectant girls should not be allowed to be in school, but I just allow them because it is policy.”

The foregoing findings affirm studies by HEART (2015) in Homa Bay County, that due to the re-entry policy, expectant students are retained in school as long as their health allows. The findings partially agree with HRW (2018) in Namibia, where expectant learners continue to attend school until four weeks to the expected delivery date. However, this totally contrasts with studies in Morocco, Tanzania and Sudan where moral laws are applied to criminally judge expectant girls with adultery, indecency and extra marital sex. Such students are expelled from school (Akwilapo, 2016).

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary: Findings showed that majority of the principals knew that there existed a government re-entry policy for teen mothers. However, no principal produced physical evidence of the policy, hence negative implications on the retention of expectant students and teen mothers within the schools. As a result, the schools operated without clear guidance on the requirements. This led to ad-hoc implementation of the policy that was clouded with a lot of challenges to the reintegrated teens. A majority of expectant and teen mothers were retained to continue with their secondary education at 83.3% (2017), 86.4% (2018), 88.9% (2019) and 81.8% (2020). This implied that the re-entry policy by the Ministry of Education had a positive significant role in retention of expectant students and teen mothers.

Conclusion: the problem of high teen pregnancy and motherhood is a big issue that needs increased engagement among educational stakeholders in Vihiga Sub-County, the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the situation. The re-entry policy is a great step in assisting expectant students and teen mothers to continue schooling but requires improvements.

Recommendations: Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- a) The Ministry of Education should develop an elaborate re-entry policy for expectant students and teen mothers, detailing re-entry procedure, enforcement channels, evaluating and tracking of the re-entered learners;
- b) The Ministry of Education should disseminate copies of the re-entry policy in all secondary schools and enforce its implementation to the latter; and
- c) The Ministry of Education in liaison with the National Assembly should develop a clear and specific law on re-entry in order to protect the expectant students and teen mothers from being mistreated;
- d) The Ministry of Education should closely monitor enforcement of the re-entry policy and track re-integrated learners for appropriate psychosocial, financial and material support both at school and community levels;
- e) The Government of Kenya should conduct continuous public awareness on the re-entry policy;
- f) The secondary school principals and teachers should implement the re-entry policy to the later.

References

- Adit, B. (2020, January 28). *What is a survey-definition, methods, characteristics and examples*. Retrieved March 19, 2020, from Questionpro: <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/surveys/>.
- AECT. (2001). *The handbook of research for educational communications and technology*. North Bloomington: Association for Educational and Communications Technology.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Debois, S. (2016). *Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires*. SurveyAny Place.
- Dowden, A. & Gray, K. (2017). *A phenomenological analysis of the impact of teen pregnancy on educational attainment: Implications for school counselors*. North Carolina: North Carolina State University.
- Gachukia, E. (2003). *A task force on meeting the needs of children with special needs: A report on disadvantaged groups of children and free primary education*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Getu, D. & Tegbar, Y. (2006). *Research methodology: Ethiopia public health training initiative*. Gondar: Univeristy of Gondar, USAID.
- GoK. (2013). *Basic Education Act 2013*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- GoK. (2010). *Constution of Kenya 2010*. Nairobi: Government Printers.
- HEART. (2015). *Education for pregnant girls and young mothers*. Nairobi: HEART.
- HRW. (2018). *Leave no girl behind in Africa: Discrimination in education against pregnant students and adolescent mothers*. Nairobi: Human Rights Watch.
- Key, J. (1997). Research design in Occupational Education: Questionnaire and interview as data gathering tools. *Educational Reseach Journal*, 1 – 4.

- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Lisa, S. (2012). *Teen pregnancy and high school dropout: what communities can do to address these issues*. Washington DC: America's Promise Alliance.
- Maemeko, E., Nkengbeza, D.& Chokomos, T. (2018). The impact of teenage pregnancy on academic performance on grade 7 learners at a school in the Zambezi Region. *Journal of Social Sciences* , 88-100.
- Maritim, E., Ngeno, V., & Sang, H. (2017). Effects of teenage pregnancy on academic progression of girls in primary schools in Ainamoi Sub-county, Kericho County. *Internation Journal of Scientific and Research Publication* , 166-171.
- Middleton, F. (2020, January 13th). *The four types of validity*. Retrieved March 19th, 2020, from <https://www.scribbr.com>.
- MoE. (1999). *Guyana Vision 2030*. Guyana City: Government Press.
- Mwenje, J. (2015). *Implementation of Re-Entry Policy for adolescent mothers in public secondary schools: A case of Nakuru County, Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenyatta University.
- Najoli, E., Ouda, J.& Ndiku, J. (2020). *Capacity building for management of learner pregnancy in schools in the Western Region of Kenya*. Nairobi: MMUST