



THE INFLUENCE AWARENESS OF THE RE-ENTRY POLICY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF RE-ADMITTED TEENAGE MOTHERS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Teenage pregnancy is a global concern and interventions have been undertaken by governments to return them to school. In Kenya, it is established that over 380,000 school girls between the ages of 12-18 get pregnant annually constituting 18.1%. The purpose of the study, was to analyze whether the awareness of re-entry policy influences the academic performance of teenage mothers in secondary schools in Kenya. The study found out that several issues within awareness may contribute to academic performance of teenage mothers within the re-entry policy that include; a public awareness on teenage mother's re-admission to school and some persons in the society were against the re-admission of teenage mothers back to school. Further, the re-entry policy of teenage mothers had inconsistent guidelines and how schools are to support the teenage mothers. Lastly, many teenage mothers drop out of school due to lack of awareness of the re-entry policy leading to failure of the policy.

KEY WORDS: academic performance, re-entry policy, teenage mothers

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy and eventual resultant of teenage motherhood is exposed as a challenge to school going girls and children of adolescent mothers had 30 to 40 percent greater odds of failing to complete secondary school (Fall, et al., 2015). With school age going girls getting pregnant, countries developed ways of dealing with the emergence of teenage mothers who are schooling (Engzell, Frey, & Verghagen, 2020). During the Mauritius Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) meeting of 1994, it was agreed on the need to permit girls to proceed with learning after getting pregnant (Mbugua, 2013, Loaiza & Liang, 2013). This was, therefore, the birth of the concept of teenage mother in education and world forums such as the one at Jomtien Thailand came up with international commitments and later Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Runhare & Vandeyar, Perceptions of Policy duty Bearers on the Inclusive Education Policy for Pregnant Teenagers in South Africa, 2012). According to FAWE, key among the factors influencing the implementation of the Re-entry policy are stakeholders that include Ministry of Education officials, Head teachers, teachers, teacher counselors and parents (FAWE, 2004).

The intricacy of the academic performance starts from its conceptualization as different scholars provide. For some, it is known as school readiness, academic achievement and school performance, but generally the difference in concepts are only

explained by semantics as they are used as synonyms. Conventionally, it has been agreed that academic performance should be used in university populations and school performance in regular and alternative basic education populations (Lamas, 2014). According to Martinez (2007) as cited by Lamas (2014), academic performance is the result of learning, prompted by teaching activity by the teacher and produced by the student. This shows that academic performance is an output of the interaction between the learner and the teacher with specific curriculum to be learned. The learner must be the one expected to show the output upon being examined. The interaction between the learner and the teacher show continuity of learning. Teenage mothers may experience a break in the learning process, thus influencing the end product in terms of grades and the quality of the grades.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study will be;

1. To examine the level of awareness of the re-entry policy among teenage mothers and education managers and its influence on academic performance of admitted teenage mothers in secondary schools in selected counties of Kenya

METHODOLOGY

Convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted and follows pragmatism as a theoretical assumption and is a well-



organised and accepted approach to mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In a convergent design, the integration of both data will help a researcher gain a whole perspective of the one offered by the quantitative or qualitative results alone. It is an approach in which two data sets are joined to get an inclusive representation of the issue being explored and to validate one set of findings with the other (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). In the analysis stage, a researcher can always look for the common ideas across both sets of conclusions.

TARGET POPULATION

The study involved 672 public secondary schools with a girls' enrolment in Trans-Nzoia County, West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Uasin Gishu. The sample size consisted of 246 students, 37 Principals, 33 directors of studies and 36 guidance and Counselling who were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

This study was conducted in secondary schools across four selected counties: Trans-Nzoia, West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet, and Uasin Gishu. These counties are part of the former Rift Valley province in Kenya.

STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from respondents indicated that majority of the students (Mean = 2.573, SD = 1.328, n = 246), Directors of Studies (Mean = 2.455, SD = 1.033, n = 33) and Principals (Mean = 2.583, SD = 1.228, n = 36) agreed that there is public awareness done on teenage mothers re-admission to school. Majority of the guidance and counseling teachers were undecided as indicated by a (Mean = 2.583, SD = 1.228, n = 36). This information indicates that there was a public awareness on teenage mothers re-admission to school as indicated by the students, Director of Studies and Principal. This implies that the society through Ministry of Education, Teachers Service Commission and local administration have sensitized teenage mothers to report back once they have given birth to continue with their studies. It is also critical to mention that schools through the Principals have been implementing this policy as indicated in their response showing that they are aware. It is important however to mention that the Guidance and Counseling teachers were undecided on whether there is public awareness. This may be attributed to the fact that, probably in their (G&C) perception they have a feeling that not much have been done. This concurs with the findings of Wangui (2015) who asserted that raising awareness on the re-entry policy is vital in developing community support for such programmes. This is also contrary to the findings of Omwancha (2012), who while studying the same issue of the re-entry of pregnant in Elgeyo Marakwet found out lack of awareness and many were condemning the school management for the re-admission of teenage mothers. This indicates that with time, the re-entry policy has been articulated by government and many are aware of the same and supported by the study undertaken by Barmao (2020) who stated that the re-entry has been defined clearly and reinforced in schools.

Interview indicated that

As teachers we are aware of the policy at least on paper. On the side of the parent I may say that majority of the parents are aware of the policy and that explains why when they take their daughters many of them say that they will still come back. They cite that "sheria ya serikali" (Government laws) allows them to return their students back.

This finding is similar to Wangui (2015) assertion that, the influence of re-entry policy on re-admitted teenage mothers' academic performance lies on knowledge of the policy by all the stakeholders. The best way to do this is to ensure that the policy is as visible as possible. She asserts that raising awareness is especially important in developing community support for the re-entry policy. However, studies reveal that many stakeholders are not aware of the existence of the policy nor did they fully understand what the policy was all about.

Data presented indicated that it's only the Director of Studies (Mean = 2.515, SD = 1.034, n = 33) who felt that most of the public are not aware of the re-admission of teenage mothers back to school as a policy. Other respondents were undecided as indicated by students (Mean = 2.659, SD = 1.177, n = 246), Guidance and counseling (Mean = 3.054, SD = 1.311, n = 37) and Principal (Mean = 2.75, SD = 1.052, n = 36). It is important to note that contrary to the statement indicating that most of the public are not aware of the policy indeed the opposite is true. This is echoed by Pspise (2017), who stated that in 2014 nearly 200 school principals took part in a policy dialogue meeting convened by the population council collaboration with the Homa Bay Department of Education and it turned out that none of them had ever seen a copy of Kenya's school re-entry policy for girls. A third had not heard the country's national school Healthy policy which let pregnant girls continue with their education. Responses demonstrated that some persons in the society were against the re-admission of teenage mothers back to school. This was indicated by the Director of Studies who agreed to that sentiment as indicated by (Mean = 2.515, SD = 1.004, n = 33). This is critical in explaining the small portion of people who are adherent to customs and traditions and also the different levels of education as previously indicated in the preceding Table.

One of the interview responses (County 102) indicated the following:

There are 2 categories of parents; one, there are parents who are concerned and therefore take action like reporting to relevant authorities. And two, others are never concerned and don't bother the situation of their girls hence just leaving them at home.

Similar findings were made by UNICEF (2011) which pointed that schools deny the teenage mothers an opportunity to continue with their education despite the existence of the guidelines which require them to readmit young mothers to school (UNICEF, 2011). Lack of sensitization among parents can be attributed to lack of awareness of the government re-entry policy of teenage



mothers back to school and this concurs with the findings of Omwancha (2012). In the study of Elgeyo Marakwet, Omwancha (2012) asserted that there is lack of awareness among stakeholders of government policy on re-entry of teen mothers due to failure on the designing and communicating policy.

The findings demonstrated that some teachers were aware of the existence of the re-entry policy of teenage mothers. This is shown by the majority of the students (Mean = 3.533, SD = 1.280, n = 246) and guidance and counseling teachers (Mean = 3.568, SD = 1.385, n = 37) who disagreed to the fact that some teachers are not aware of the existence of the re-entry policy of teenage mothers. Related findings were made by Ncube (2017) who reported that there is inadequate knowledge of national policies of educators, parents and members of the communities they did not know nor had very little knowledge about the guidelines on learner pregnancy management. This means that the intended beneficiaries and implementers are not conversant with the policy thus casting doubt on its proper implementation.

All the four respondents were undecided as to whether teenage mothers were not aware of the re-entry policy. This is indicated by the students responses (Mean = 3.085, SD = 1.224, n = 246), Guidance and counseling (Mean = 3.054, SD = 1.153, n = 37), Director of Studies (Mean = 2.606, SD = 1.116, n = 33) and the Principals (Mean = 3.167, SD = 1.254, n = 36). This could be explained by the fact that the respondents were not the ones who were affected, thus they could not be able to tell specifically the status of awareness, thus supports the work of Omwancha (2012).

Further the findings indicated that majority of the Director of studies felt that the re-entry policy of teenage mothers had inconsistent guidelines. This is demonstrated by Director of studies responses that indicated a (Mean = 2.485, SD = 1.0344, n = 33) and Principals (Mean = 2.556, SD = 1.206, n = 36) who agreed that there may be some inconsistencies to the policy. This finding conforms to Wangui (2015) assertion that for any policy that resulted in new programs, services or operational guidelines it should be circulated and be understood by the people responsible for and using them. Many of the education officials, principals, head teachers and teachers find the current policy guidelines inadequate and confusing in any aspects, they are in a dilemma of how to detect a pregnancy as pregnancy test is not allowed in school because it is unconstitutional and against human rights and the Constitution of Kenya 2010. There are inconsistency practices among the head teachers in relation to re-entry of young mothers to different schools after delivery. They were in dilemma whether to treat them equal to other students. The understanding of the policy is varied and confusing among the MOE officials, principals and teachers and this confusion can allow them either to be positive or negative depending on the situation. It is important the government acknowledges the important role the teachers play and provide them with more professional development and develop specific guidelines to assist pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers.

Respondents agreed that there are no specific guidelines on how schools are to support the teenage mothers. This was demonstrated where students response was (Mean = 2.598, SD = 1.360, n = 246), guidance and counseling teachers (Mean = 2.249, SD = 1.338, n = 37), Director of studies (Mean = 2.121, SD = 0.857, n = 33) and Principals (Mean = 2.178, SD = 1.0344, n = 36). It is critical to mention that specific guidelines such as point in time that the girls should exit and reenter are not very specific. Other aspects as postnatal care are not addressed and even schools may not be in a position to handle. Related literature on Prospects and Challenges in the Implementation of re-entry policy of girls in Kenya, Wanyama and Simatwa (2011) found out that challenges faced by head teachers in the implementation of the re-entry policy are: lack of corresponding guidelines towards its implementation, fear of bad influence of having mothers in their schools and unawareness of the re-entry policy. The re-entry policy therefore remains a bold step towards making sure that teen mothers proceed with their education but other factors which hinders their integration and retention in school leading to several dropout cases among need to be pursued.

Lastly, all respondents agreed that many teenage mothers drop out of school due to lack of awareness of the re-entry policy. Students responses showed (Mean = 2.549, SD = 1.266, n = 246), Guidance and counseling (Mean = 2.541, SD = 1.260, n = 37), Director of studies (Mean = 2.152, SD = 1.064, n = 33) and Principals (Mean = 2.222, SD = 1.186, n = 36). Literature indicates that the lack of awareness leads to practices that shrink the policy space despite how broad and enabling it appear on paper. Barmao (2020) indicated that in Uganda the challenge of girls dropping out of school due to pregnancies has been explained by a mix of socio-cultural views, perceptions and practices surrounding early pregnancies. The study further asserts that in most cultural settings, pre-marital pregnancy among girls is stigmatized both in school and in communities mainly on moralistic grounds without addressing factors that lead to pregnancy among school girls. Many times, school careers of many girls are cut short because of pregnancy either by the girls withdrawing themselves from school or through expulsion with little or no chance of re-entry after delivery. There are gaps on the completion rate of teenage mothers. It is not documented on the number of teenage mothers who go back to complete school or on their academic achieved (Barmao, 2020). This is complemented with lack of information on the existence of the re-entry policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Campaigns and sensitization against teenage pregnancies by teachers, parents, religious leaders and government through various ministries especially that in charge of education should start early when the girls join high school to create more awareness of the issue of teenage motherhood in the education sector in Kenya especially Basic Education. Such campaigns be carried out using the available media, educational meetings and any public gathering. This will go a long way in dealing with gender inequality in Basic education and ensuring that the rights



of the girl-child is not denied as a consequence of teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

CONCLUSION

The study found out that several issues within awareness of the re-entry policy may contribute to academic performance of teenage mothers that include; a public awareness on teenage mother's re-admission to school and some persons in the society who are against the re-admission of teenage mothers back to school. Further, the re-entry policy of teenage mothers had inconsistent guidelines and lack modalities of how schools are to support the teenage mothers upon re-admission back to school for learning. Lastly, many teenage mothers drop out of school due to lack of awareness of the re-entry policy leading to failure of the policy and make it difficult to ascertain the level of academic performance of the re-admitted teenage mother.

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