

# The Influence of Challenges Faced by Admitted Teenage Mother Students on the Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Kenya

## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of challenges faced by admitted teenage mother students on the academic performance in secondary schools in Kenya. To achieve this two specific objectives were utilized. These were to examine the challenges faced by the teenage mothers in the learning environment upon being re-admitted to school and its influence on their academic performance; and to explore the family and community perception of teenage mothers and its influence on the academic performance of admitted teenage mothers.

**Study Design:** The study a Mixed Methods Design that used a convergent parallel approach.

**Place and Duration of the Study:** The research was conducted in Kenya in four counties namely: Trans Nzoia, West Pokot, Uasin Gishu and Elgeyo Marakwet. The variables of the study included challenges faced by teenage mother and academic performance of the admitted teenage mother. The study was conducted in 2022.

**Methodology:** The study used random, stratified and purposive approaches to select the 596 respondents from 102 schools in selected counties. Of this 458 responded to the questionnaire and interviews (72 Principals comprising 52 females and 20 males between 42 – 54 years; 74 Guidance and Counselling teachers 48 females and 24 males with an average age of 38 years; 66 Directors of Studies comprising 50 males and 16 females with a modal age of 36 years; 246 teenage mothers with an age range of 16 – 21 years).

**Results:** The study found out that the challenges the teenage mothers experienced were both from home and the school environment which contributed to their academic performance. The teenage mothers found support from teachers while in school upon being admitted.

**Conclusion:** Parents, schools and even other stakeholders should work in unity to ensure that the teenage mother do not go through challenges that can contribute to poor academic performance.

**Key Words:** Re-entry policy, academic performance, teenage mother, challenges

## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Government is committed to providing quality, relevant and inclusive education, training and research to all learners for sustainable development. Education and training equips learners with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for building self-reliance, as well as values for constructive intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup relations at the national and international levels [1]. The Education Sector is committed to ensuring that the school re-entry guidelines steer the development and implementation of interventions for learners who drop out of school. The comprehensive guidelines are necessary to provide these learners with an opportunity to continue with education [1]. The teenage mother re-entry policy is an intervention policy aiming at improving the academic performance of the affected learner arising from early pregnancy while school. The opportunity arising from the re-entry policy is to ensure that the girl learner goes back to school to continue with her education. In a study of a review of interventions to improve access and learning found that general interventions not targeted by gender were often among the most effective at boosting girls' education [2].

Most recently, there are low- and middle-income countries where girls' education is advancing [3]. Women's educational attainment more than doubled in 107 of 126 countries and increased by more than

five years in 70 countries. By 2010, women had more education than men in 36 of the 126 countries, and many more countries are well on their way to eliminating gender gaps in educational attainment. If these countries continue on their current trajectories, 45 countries will completely eliminate the gender gap in educational attainment by 2050 [3]. This situation has happened as a result of interventions undertaken by governments such as commitment to international goals and internal policy intervention policy formulation and implementations. When barriers to girls' education are addressed through policy, the academic performance attainment of girls can equal that of boys.

Study problem formulated stated that teenage pregnancy is a global concern (Psaki, Katharine, & Barbara, 2018) and interventions have been undertaken by governments to return them to school [2]. In Kenya, it is established that over 380,000 school girls between the ages of 12-18 get pregnant annually constituting 18.1% [4]. In the Counties of Uasin Gishu, Trans Nzoia, West Pokot and Elgeyo Marakwet, there was an upsurge in teenage pregnancy for between 2016 and 2020, the number rose from 18,805 to 30,163 [5]. However, no study so far have dwelt on the challenges that teenage mothers face after being admitted back to school which may have an influence on their overall academic performance compared to other learners.

The study objectives were to examine the challenges faced by the teenage mothers in the learning environment upon being re-admitted to school and its influence on their academic performance and to explore the family and community perception of teenage mothers and its influence on the academic performance of admitted teenage mothers.

Literature demonstrates that the admitted mothers do not get the necessary support they need. They however encounter challenges in their surrounding either from different people ranging from home to school environment. It was clearly noted that the re-entry policy was in itself not enough and might not protect the young- mother learners from the challenges related to mothering while schooling. Admitted mother learners who took advantage of this policy had to contend with a "hostile school environment, where they were isolated, humiliated and stigmatized by their fellow pupils; with hardly any effective interventions from the teachers" [6].

In Africa, the issue of admitted teenage mothers in schools still exist. In a country like Zambia, the Ministry of Education introduced re-entry policy in 1997 which allowed school girls who fell pregnant to return to school after giving birth [7]. Studies have been conducted on the school re-entry and despite the presence of the policy teen mothers who re-enter school continued to face many challenges in various communities and secondary schools [8, 9]. These challenges affected the re-admitted teenage mothers leading to truancy and high school drop-outs. According to [ 10] study on the challenges faced by teen-mothers who re-entered school in selected secondary schools in Kitwe district on the Copperbelt province of Zambia teen-mothers faced school environment challenges, economic challenges and personal related challenges.

Literature further demonstrates that Kenya, the Re-entry policy postulates that young girls who give birth should be allowed back to school if they seek re-admission. However, those who accepted to re-enter schooling faced a number of challenges mainly due to lack of support, stigma, social exclusion, poverty related issues, peer pressure and misunderstanding. Lack of support from teachers, parents and the community often hindered the young-mother learners from continuing with their education successfully [11]. Some communities regarded teenage pregnancy as a shameful event for the families of the teenage mothers [12].

There were very few individual teachers who were willing to help re-admitted teenage mothers to go through what they had missed because of motherhood. Most teachers were not willing to help them with lessons missed out saying that they are paid to teach those who went to school and not those who stayed at home no matter the reason. Teenage mothers, who returned to school after the birth of their children, experienced intimidation and marginalization and lacked support from educators. According to [6] teenage mothers did not receive support from their educators, for example when a learner had missed lessons due to infant related problems; teachers were not willing to go through the lesson.

The General Systems Theory developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1940's aimed to develop a framework for studying and understanding complex systems across various disciplines. Its main components or concepts included the system, subsystem, boundary, environment, feedback, hierarchy and holism. Many researchers had used the general systems theoretical framework to produce contextualized conceptual frameworks of factors affecting students' academic achievement. However, the factors vary from person to person and country to country. There were several factors that contributed to the academic performance of students in school. The researcher used the General Systems theory to understand the contribution of each factor which was based on the study objectives focusing on the teenage mother student and academic performance upon being admitted back to school.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Research design**

A research design serves as a roadmap for researchers, providing structure and coherence to their investigations, and ensuring the study is conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner. According to [13], a mixed-methods research design is a research design that has its own philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it includes philosophical assumptions to provide directions for the collection and analysis of data from multiple sources in a single study. 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 [13]. Two diverse approaches that is to say qualitative and quantitative methods are mixed to obtain the triangulated results in this design. The study adopted a convergent design within the Mixed Methods approach.

### **2.2 Target Population and Sample Size**

The study targeted learners in secondary schools in Kenya that had girls' population in their enrolment. The study was conducted in secondary schools in Kenya in counties of Trans-Nzoia County, West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Uasin Gishu.

In order to obtain the sample for the study, the schools were clustered as per the counties namely Cluster 1 Trans Nzoia County, Cluster 2 West Pokot County, Cluster 3 Elgeyo Marakwet County, Cluster 4 Uasin Gishu County. Stratified sampling was then done to obtain 6 categories of girls schools in the cluster namely girls' boarding schools, girls boarding and day school, girls' day school, mixed boarding and day, mixed day and mixed boarding schools. The Bartlett, Kotelik and Higgins Table for determining minimum returned sample size for a given population was used to obtain a sample size of 102 schools from a population of 672 at an alpha level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Proportionate sampling was carried out by taking the stratum population divided by the total population then multiplied by the sample size to get the required sample size for the individual strata (school category) in the cluster (county). Individual schools from the clusters (counties) were then picked using simple random sampling technique. After arriving at the individual school, the researcher purposively sampled 4 girls from each category of schools that were sampled. Every school category also had 2 teachers from the academic and guidance and counseling departments and lastly the principal of the sampled school category. This gave a sample size of 725 for the study.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

One of the challenges that teenage mothers faced after being admitted was lack of support from parents. The Directors of studies (Mean = 2.333, SD = 1.001, n = 66) and principals (Mean = 2.306, SD = 1.030, n = 72) agreed that these teenage mother learners lacked support. This was a challenge because the state of the girls that they were in requires support from everybody. The least that these students expected was for their parents to throw them under the bus. In schools, teenage mothers face learning environment that is not conducive and supportive as teenage mothers for there are no different rules for them to adhere to, hence a challenge while parenting as well as being student especially those in day schools as also found

by Autumin, Toews and Michael (2018). The support should also be positive not negative as such to enable teenage mothers to re-start their learning as indicated by [14].

All the respondents teenage mother learners (Mean = 3.442, SD = 1.138, n = 246), guidance and counseling (Mean = 3.811, SD = 0.871, n = 74), Directors of studies (Mean = 3.485, SD = 1.085, n = 66) all disagreed that there was lack of support for teenage mothers from the teachers. This finding implied that teachers were giving necessary support for the girls. These could be in form of academic, social and physical guidance to the girls. This was further supported by the interview response from County 102 that stated;

*“Teenage mothers are treated the same way as others and teachers do show a compassionate attitude”.*

This was contrary to the findings of [6] who affirmed that teachers can't sympathize with them because teen pregnancy was not rape but as a result of girls willing fully indulging in unprotected sex. This can be explained on the basis of the level of awareness of the re-entry policy as some studies were undertaken before the re-entry policy was a global commitment by countries as shown by [15].

Findings further indicate that teenage mother learners (Mean = 3.634, SD = 1.913, n = 246), guidance and counseling teachers (Mean = 4.000, SD = 0.702, n = 74), Directors of studies (Mean = 3.546, SD = 1.192, n = 66) and Principals (Mean = 3.611, SD = 1.193, n = 72) agreed to the fact that the school environment isolated them. This response may contradict earlier findings such as teachers were supportive. However, it is important to mention that the school environment is broad and encompasses various components such as the students, support staff, the schools administration the sporting culture just to mention but a few components. Therefore, there was a possibility that that the school environment in its entirety may not be that integrative to accommodate the teenage mothers. And that a few elements in the school environment such as the teaching fraternity may be amongst the few that supports teenage mothers. Related literature by [6].

Findings further indicated that the guidance and counseling teachers (Mean = 3.784, SD = 0.917, n = 74), Directors of studies (Mean = 3.303, SD = 1.150, n = 66) and Principals (Mean = 3.306, SD = 1.252, n = 72) disagreed that teachers fail to stop any form of stigmatization from fellow students. This finding implied that teachers had played a key role in ensuring that the teenage mothers were not discriminated in school. This was in line with the previous statements on teachers which indicated the critical role that they were playing to ensure that the teenage mothers were comfortable in school. The government of Kenya under policy guidelines and legal framework has made teachers to implement education policy as enshrined in the Kenyan constitution of 2010 [1].

In one of the interview the respondent in County 101 observed that;

*“Teenage mothers rarely attended all lessons due to parental responsibility, stigmatization and lack of support from the community. In some cases students are rejected by their family members”.*

This was affirmed by another respondent who pointed that;

*“Most teachers as much as they try to treat the teenage mothers as other students, there are those who still isolate and even go ahead to remind the teenage mothers of their mistake done and demotivating them”.*

Different views were raised by [16] saying that teachers actually perpetuated stigma and discrimination and that it was complex. According to the authors, teachers contributed to the stereotypes describing these young-mothers' learners as lazy, distracted, low-performing and also at risk of “contaminating other female classmates” with their behaviour. This was not what the present study found out but agreed with [17] that teachers were usually seen as people who are supposed to support and motivate girls to stay in school and perform well.

Findings indicated that students (Mean = 2.540, SD = 1.289, n = 246), guidance and counseling (Mean = 2.514, SD = 1.128, n = 74) and Directors of studies (Mean = 3.634, SD = .976, n = 66) all agreed that, teenage mothers were regularly absent from school. This finding showed that teenage mothers who were in boarding schools did not want to go and visit their kids' home. Likewise, teenage mothers who were in day schools did not report to school whenever their kids could be sick or go for checkups. This is related to the International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies (2015) which recorded that the teachers interviewed were of the view that teenage mothers missed school frequently and this eventually affected their performance as they could not manage to be always in school as they had many responsibilities of school and also to look after their children. Many teenage girls, who become mothers in their secondary school years, had many challenges ahead of them. The greatest challenge was that of striking a balance between caring for the baby and paying attention to their academic work. The schooling of teenage mothers was mostly characterized by absenteeism wherein one finds that they must attend to infant related problems, whether illness, baby clinics or collection of the child support grant.

Findings further indicated that students (Mean = 1.858, SD = 0.998, n = 246), guidance and counseling (Mean = 1.973, SD = 0.921, n = 74), Directors of studies (Mean = 2.000, SD = 0.784, n = 66) and Principals (Mean = 1.944, SD = 0.820, n = 72) all agreed that poverty was a challenge to majority of teenage mothers. This finding showed that most of teenage mothers came from humble backgrounds. It is critical to mention that some studies have related teenage pregnancy to poverty whereby girls who were from needy families were lured with money. Such girls lacked basic necessities making them vulnerable and easily manipulated with money. This relates to [18] who did a study on challenges experienced by young-mother learners upon re-entry to formal primary schools in one of the divisions of coastal region, Kenya. The aim of the study was therefore to find out how these young-mother learners experienced challenges associated with motherhood as learners and also looked at some ways that the young-mother learners used in order to cope with the challenges. It was evident that lack of the much needed financial, emotional and social support was a challenge for the young-mother learners in their coping with education successfully. Though the scope of the study was primary schools the present study felt that it still applied to secondary schools because the girls under study were below 20 years thus could impact also on girls in high school as regards the present study.

The study data showed that students (Mean = 2.195, SD = 1.043, n = 246), guidance and counseling (Mean = 2.0811, SD = 1.030, n = 74) and Directors of studies (Mean = 1.939, SD = 0.857, n = 66) all agreed that there was lack of financial support for the teenage mothers poverty was a challenge to majority of teenage mothers. This finding confirms the preceding statement on poverty. It further showed that teenage mothers may be lacking essential items in school and most important their fee balances may be huge. Similar sentiments were raised by Mweemba [10] who conducted a study on the challenges faced by teen-mothers who re-enter school in selected secondary schools in Kitwe district on the Copperbelt province of Zambia which revealed that teen-mothers faced school environment challenges, economic challenges and personal related challenges.

Findings indicated that students (Mean = 2.504, SD = 1.277, n = 246) agreed that few teachers were ready to assist teenage mothers on syllabus coverage where they had missed. Other respondents were indecisive such as guidance and counseling (Mean = 2.0811, SD = 1.269, n = 74) and Directors of studies (Mean = 3.060 SD = 1.188, n = 66). This finding indicated that it was only the students who agreed that just a few teachers assist students on syllabus coverage. It is important to note that the other respondents were all teachers and may not have wished to state anything that may taint their profession. This explains why they were all indecisive. [11] also postulated that in Kenya, the Re-entry policy postulates that young girls who give birth should be allowed back to school if they seek re-admission. However, those who accepted to re-enter schooling faced a number of challenges mainly due to lack of support, stigma, social exclusion, poverty related issues, peer pressure and misunderstanding. Lack of support from teachers, parents and the community often hindered the young-mother learners from continuing with their education successfully.

The study further indicated that students (Mean = 2.504, SD = 1.277, n = 246), guidance and counseling (Mean = 2.487, SD = 1.088, n = 74), directors of studies (Mean = 2.424, SD = 1.024, n = 66) and Principals (Mean = 2.500, SD = 1.175, n = 72) agreed that few schools had good guidance and

counseling departments to handle the issues of teenage mothers. This results showed that guidance and counseling departments were not well established in schools to manage students' issues such as teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood. This may be attributed to lack of capacity building and allocation of physical facilities such as offices to spearhead counseling programmes. It was evident that the teenage mother students need counseling upon re-entry to formal schooling as affirmed by [19]. He further pointed that guidance and counseling departments played a significant role in the socialization of admitted girls to schools since such girls were emotionally unstable because of the shame of having 'trespassed' the traditional norm of decency. The guidance teachers counselled those girls to concentrate on their studies if they were to perform better academically.

Lastly, the students (Mean = 2.919, SD = 1.161, n = 246), guidance and counseling (Mean = 3.000, SD = 1.122, n = 74), Directors of studies (Mean = 2.970, SD = 1.095, n = 66) and Principals (Mean = 2.806, SD = 1.083, n = 72) were undecided that most teenage mothers were not accepted by parents to go back to school. Teenage mothers came from communities which still had social and cultural practices and beliefs that might contribute to them not allowing girls to go back to school upon pregnancy when was established as opined by [19].

From the foregoing findings and discussion, what emerged was that one of the challenges that teenage mothers faced after being admitted was lack of support from parents. This was a challenge because the state the girls were in required support from everybody. The least that these students expected was for their parents to throw them under the bus. It was demonstrated that all the respondents' students disagreed that there was lack of support for teenage mothers from the teachers.

Further findings indicated that students, guidance and counseling teachers, directors of studies and Principals agreed to the fact that the school environment isolated them. Findings further indicated that respondents disagreed that teachers failed to stop any form of stigmatization from fellow students.

Findings indicated that teenage mother learners, guidance and counseling and directors of studies all agreed that, teenage mothers were regularly absent from school. This finding showed that teenage mothers who were boarder could want to go and visit their kids at home. Likewise, teenage mothers who were in day schools could not report to school whenever their kids could be sick or go for checkups. Poverty was a challenge to majority of teenage mothers as a result of this there was lack of financial support for the teenage mothers. Further findings indicated that teenage mother learners agreed that few teachers were ready to assist teenage mothers on syllabus coverage where they had missed. Few schools had an effective guidance and counseling departments to handle the issues of teenage mothers.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

By highlighting the importance of education to all especially those who had faced the challenge of teenage motherhood, stakeholders should encourage girls to pursue their education. Most teenage mothers face myriad challenges within and without school, hence the need for sustained support from all be put in place so as to improve teenage mother perception concerning schooling after getting pregnant. Schools should develop guidance and counselling units that are proactive towards teenage mothers and integration of them to normal learning environment to minimize stigma among other challenges.

The challenges the teenage mothers experienced were both from home and the school environment which contributed to academic performance of the teenage mother. The purpose of the re-entry policy was to ensure that the teenage mothers go back to normal schooling so as to complete their education. Parents, schools and even other stakeholders should work in unity to ensure that the teenage mothers do not go through challenges that can contribute to poor academic performance. There was need for consolidated efforts to create a learning environment for the teenage mother both at school and home.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researcher prior to undertaking this study did the proposal defense and was approved by the school of education, Moi University and thereafter got a research permit from National Council of Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and relevant letters to schools from the County Directors of Education.

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