

## **Implementation of Girl Mothers' Re-Entry Policy in Selected Primary Schools in Mungwi District, Northern Province, Zambia**

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### **Abstract**

In 1997 Zambia enacted the re-entry policy that allows girls to return to school after giving birth. The re-entry policy was enacted based on the concepts of equal education for all and equal opportunities for all, thus expanding the prospects of job opportunities for girls. Despite having the policy to allow girls to have access to education, Zambia has been consistently recording a high rate of pregnancy in primary schools with low re-entries. This study explored the school administrators' and teachers' implementation of girl mothers' re-entry policy in selected primary schools in Mungwi district, Northern province of Zambia and thus intended to determine: The awareness of school administrators and guidance and counselling teachers about the re-entry policy in primary schools. A qualitative study within the interpretivism paradigm drawing on a phenomenological design was used. Social integration theory was used to guide the study. Five head-teachers and five guidance and counseling teachers in 5 different schools were purposively sampled to participate in the study. One-on-one interviews and unstructured questionnaires were used to generate data. Data was analyzed thematically. The findings of the study revealed that primary schools lack professionally trained counselors, and there is non-uniform implementation of the re-entry policy among Guidance and Counseling teachers and administrators in schools. Teachers showed low awareness levels, while the school administrators exhibited high levels of awareness of re-entry policy. The study concludes that the re-entry policy is not bearing the expected fruits because of low-levels of awareness by the guidance and counseling teachers and non-uniform implementation of the policy. The study recommends that advocacy efforts for policy sensitization and awareness in primary schools should be maximized by the Ministry of education, primary schools should have professionally trained guidance and counseling officers. The Ministry of Education should foster school-community partnerships through Parent/teachers association (PTA) and teacher group meetings to keep the teachers informed about changes to the re-entry policy and other guidelines to enable the effective implementation of the re-entry policy.

**Key words:** *Re-entry policy, Girl Mothers, Education Access, School-Community Partnership, Teenage Pregnancies*

## 1.0 Introduction

The Zambian government prioritizes education in its development efforts, ensuring every Zambian has the right to an education through the Ministry of Education. (Ministry of Education, 2008). Expanded community schools in Zambia have increased access to education, but many school-aged girls have dropped out as a result of early pregnancy (UK Essays, 2018).

### 1.1 Background of the study

Early pregnancy is a worldwide problem. About 16 million girls between the age of 15 and 19, and, under the age of 15, two million become pregnant every year worldwide (United Nations Population Fund, 2015). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2019), reported that globally about 262 million or 18% of all children aged 6 to 17 years were out of school in 2017. The dropout rate from Grade 1 to 7 in the year 2018 in Zambia was 1.9 percent for girls. Which indicated a higher dropout rate than for boys which is 1.4 percent in primary school (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2020). According to United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2019), reported that most countries are falling far short of meeting international educational commitments. United Nations Population Fund (2021) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021), adds that the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may cause nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls, to drop out of school.

In the report by Human Rights Watch (2018), many African governments have made considerable efforts in recent years to allow pregnant girls and mothers to attend school. Equatorial Guinea, and Sierra Leone, on the other hand, continue to prohibit pregnant girls from attending government schools. A growing number of African Union nations such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger have passed education policies and strategies protecting girls' right to continue attending school while pregnant or caring for their children (United Nations Population Fund, 2017). There are several good policies and practices in many countries that allow girl-mothers to go back to school after maternal leave, countries such as Kenya that safeguard young mothers' access to education in national law or policy than discriminate against them. These countries that have policies that allow girl mothers to go back to school (re-entry) can encourage countries that lack such policies. Although there is a strong trend toward more governments deciding to retain girl mothers in school, implementation of laws and policies frequently falls short, and overall supervision of girl mothers' re-entry to education remains insufficient (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Zambia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review by the Ministry of National Development Planning (2020), states that Zambia has demonstrated commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals by endorsing the 2030 Agenda and mainstreaming the Sustainable Development (SDGs) into its national development frameworks, building on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite this, achieving sustainable development

goal number 4 on quality education, (SGD 4) in Zambia remains a challenge because SDG4 is about inclusive and equitable quality education. However, many girls are dropping out of school and other several girls who are dropping out cannot access education again. Zambia is categorized as one of most gender unequal country (UN Human Development Report, 2019).

It is noted in the education and Skills Sector Plan by the Ministry of General Education and the Ministry of Higher Education (2021), that the gender parity index (GPI) in Zambian schools is declining. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of this decline, especially given that the government has implemented both the re-entry and 50:50 policies, as well as providing financial support to promote girls' attendance in schools. However, early pregnancies, which number over 15,000 per year, have contributed to the expulsion of girls from school. Most Zambian schools are characterized by a GPI that favors boys. The ideal GPI is one, indicating that both males and females attend school equally. However, given Zambia's demographic profile, which has slightly more females than males in the population, a GPI of slightly higher than one is desirable, indicating that slightly more females than males attend school, unfortunately, in most of the provinces, the GPI favors boys than girls (Educational Statistical Bulletin, 2020).

Ministry of Education et al., (2004), state that the Ministry of Education has implemented various strategies to facilitate access to education for girl-mothers, including a policy for girl re-entry. At the national level, Zambia has embedded the girl re-entry policy into the Education Act of (2011), Cap 1, section (25), which states that a learner who becomes pregnant while schooling should be re-admitted after the baby is delivered. Zambia is a signatory to the United Nations platforms for action, United Nations Conversations on Elimination against Women, and Millennium Development goals. Hence, the re-entry policy was enacted as a strategy in line with the international policy and national policy declaration (Ministry of Education et al., 2004)

According to Mushibwe (2018), one striking discovery was that primary schools had more pregnancies than secondary schools. Sinkala (2021), adds that teenage pregnancies in schools have had a significant impact on the girls' dropout rate in Zambian schools. The study further stated that the failure of some girl mothers to re-enter school has been attributed to several factors associated with the policy implementation challenges.

### ***1.2 Statement of the problem***

In 1997 Zambia enacted the re-entry policy that allows girls to return to school after giving birth. The re-entry policy was enacted based on the concepts of equal education for all and equal opportunities for all, thus expanding the prospects of job opportunities for girls. The statistics below indicate pregnancies and re-admissions by grade groups in the Zambia Gender Status Report by the Ministry of Gender.

**Table 1.1: Number of pregnancies and re-admissions by grade groups, 2014–2020.**

Year		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Primary Schools</b>	Pregnancies	13 275	11 989	11765	10684	11453	11502	12330
	Re-admission	5322	5217	5423	5527	4917	5669	5078
<b>Secondary Schools</b>	Pregnancies	3103	3136	3457	2956	3576	4222	4089
	Re-admission	2069	2047	2230	2052	2488	3158	2876

Source: (Zambia Educational Statistical Bulletin 2020)

Despite the enactment of the re-entry policy many years ago, girl-mothers' re-entry policy seems to be effectively implemented in secondary schools but not in primary schools as illustrated in Table 1.1. The policy that allows girls to re-enter after giving birth both in secondary schools and primary schools in Zambia exists, but many girl mothers in primary schools are not re-entering despite the primary schools experiencing a high rate of pregnancy cases.

Therefore, this study explored administrators and teachers' experiences of implementing the girl-mothers' re-entry policy in selected primary schools.

### ***1.3 Purpose of the study***

The purpose of the study was to explore administrators and teachers' experiences of implementing the girl-mothers' re-entry policy in selected primary schools in Mungwi District, Northern Province, Zambia

### ***1.4 Research question***

What are school administrators' and teachers' experiences of implementing the girl-mothers' re-entry policy in selected primary schools in Northern Province in Zambia?

### **1.6 Theoretical framework**

This study is anchored on social integration theory (1897). Emile Durkheim, a French philosopher, and sociologist was one of the pioneers in developing the concept of social integration. Durkheim is known for having lived from 1858 to 1917. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005), defined Social Integration as a dynamic, ethical process in which all participants engage in conversation to establish and uphold peaceful social relations. Social integration theory can be summed up as a set of rules that govern how individuals and groups interact with one another in a larger society.

Some key features of the social integration theory include participation, how people accept and interpret social rules within society and the inclusion of diverse groups in social settings based on gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity.

Ineffectiveness in the re-entry policy implementation is a social phenomenon. It is caused by different factors that involve a wide range of actors from social settings with different values, beliefs, gender identity, age, locations, occupation, race, ethnic group, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation. The study identifies administrators and guidance and counseling teachers as key players in enforcing the girl-mothers' re-entry policy in primary schools, involving various actors from society. Therefore, this study used social integration theory to make meaning of the findings.

### **2.0 Literature Review**

According to Kost & Henshaw (2016), research indicates that the United States is not immune to early pregnancies and girl-mothers dropping out of school without knowing about re-admission opportunities. Pan America Health Organization and United Nations Population Fund (2017), stated that making early pregnancy visible and raising awareness among policymakers, community leaders, and the public makes its drivers, impact, and most impacted populations more visible. According to Almeida & Packard (2018), different public high schools in Ecuador have introduced an intervention program known as "Text Me Maybe". In 2013-14, two teenage pregnancy components were introduced among public high school students. The first involved a peer-to-peer education program, training student leaders on sexual and reproductive health, gender roles, and stereotypes, and the second involved mobile phone text messages. The program was introduced to raise awareness and prevent early pregnancy as a school-based intervention. According to Cuevas et al., (2015), attending a Text Me Maybe school boosted the number of people who are currently studying and awareness of re-entry.

According to Akporehe et al., (2021), two head-teachers believe advocacy efforts are insufficient for successful implementation of a re-entry policy. Girl-mothers, students, parents, school heads, teachers, and MOE officials reported varying levels of awareness, with most parents being rarely

sensitized or unaware of the policy. Jeffrey (2016), states that among other things, the lack of parental awareness regarding the goals and advantages of the re-entry instruction provisions is one of the reasons why girl-mothers do not return to school after giving birth.

Kiptanui (2020), alluded that there is a lack of information concerning the re-entry policy and many of the participants agreed. The interviewed head-teachers indicated that they were ignorant of the policy and emphasized that puberty catches most teenagers off guard, and by the time they are aware of the changes in their bodies, they are already pregnant. According to research conducted by the Population Council (2021), states that in many Kenyan communities, parents of girl-mothers are uninformed of their rights to return to school. Kawala (2021), states that participants acknowledged that they were aware of the re-entry policy, which was implemented as a directive to permit girl mothers to take exams. However, policy management issues remain unresolved.

Kapasule & Kumar (2020), reported that girls had heard about the re-entry policy. Other girls claimed to have heard it on the radio, while others claimed to have heard it through friends or teachers. Chiyota (2020), reported that several schools did not have re-entry policy rules, and that most teachers were ignorant about the policy. Muyunda (2021), adds that many school heads are unaware of the policy guidelines.

Chiyota (2020), reported that several schools did not have re-entry policy rules, and that most teachers were ignorant about the policy. Muyunda (2021), adds that many school heads are unaware of the policy guidelines. Nsalamba et al., (2019), alluded that the teachers lack understanding of policy rules, goals, and roles, and lack clear communication from school head-teachers or district educational board secretariat officials. Schools fail to adequately educate students on preventing early pregnancy, leaving many uninformed about the re-entry policy and its criteria. According to Ntambo and Kabubi (2017), teachers acknowledged awareness of the policy and the ability to define what it was. Some participants also stated that in some cases, even students are unaware, which is why many do not re-enter or return after pregnancy (Chiyota, 2020). Students of girl-mothers expressed dissatisfaction with school's re-entry policy, with teachers rarely providing extensive information. They learned about the re-entry policy from friends, media, circular policy, teachers, and parents, highlighting the need for increased advocacy efforts (Ntambo & Kabubi, 2017).

### **3.0 Materials and methods**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, adopting the interpretivism paradigm. Qualitative research is a method that seeks to explore and comprehend the significance that individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study

utilized a phenomenological design to understand the experiences of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of re-entry policies.

### ***3.2 Research area***

The research was conducted in Mungwi district located in the Northern Province of Zambia. The district consists of 151, 058 population of people. 49.5% are males while 50.5% are females. Mungwi district shares boundaries with 5 other districts. The dominant ethnic and cultural (tribe) group is Bemba which practices extended family relationships. The village headmen/women lead the rural communities which are organized based on the villages.

### ***3.3 Sample size and sampling methods***

The study employed non-probability sampling. This study selected participants based on their characteristics, experience, and knowledge of the re-entry policy through purposive sampling criteria. Purposive sampling is the process in which researchers select the cases to be included in the sample based on their decision and essential characteristics (Cohen, 2007). The population for the head-teachers was 95. Only 5 five head-teachers were selected to participate in the study. Out of 190 teachers, only five guidance and counseling teachers participated in the study.

### ***3.4 Research tools***

According to Creswell & Poth (2016), a phenomenological study requires a standardized or streamlined data collection method that includes only one or more interviews with participants. This study applied semi-structured interviews (one on one interviews), document analysis, and unstructured questionnaires. The use of these tools for data collection and multiple participants enabled the researcher to maximize the study's authenticity as well as to view issues from different participants' perspectives.

### ***3.5 Ethical consideration***

The researcher obtained university (Moi University) board approval and District Education Board Secretary (DEBs) permission to conduct research in Mungwi district. Participants were requested to consent by signing a consent form presented to them. Throughout the research process, ethical conduct was ensured, privacy, confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent, and anonymity.

### ***3.6 Data analysis***

Thematic data analysis was used in this study. Braun & Clark (2006), state that thematic analysis provides adaptable and beneficial research methods that have the potential to generate comprehensive and extensive study data. Thematic analysis was performed on data from semi-structured interviews, unstructured questionnaires, and document analysis by getting Familiarized

with the Data, Generating Initial Codes, searching for patterns or themes within the coded data, and reviewing and refining the identified themes. The researcher ensured that each theme captured a coherent and meaningful pattern within the data. Clearly defining and describing each theme in terms of its content and relevance to the research question was done.

## **4.0 Results and Discussion**

### ***4.1 Awareness levels regarding girl-mothers' re-entry policy***

The researcher sought to find out the awareness level of the girl-mothers re-entry policy in primary schools in Northern Province, Mungwi district. Under this theme, the researcher wanted to establish if the respondents are aware of the policy and can articulate what it entails. The findings indicate different levels of awareness regarding girl mother re-entry policy. It is worth noting that all the participants accepted that the Ministry of Education provides the girl-mothers re-entry policy guidelines and other necessary documentation.

### ***4.2 Pregnancy Detection in primary schools***

Effectiveness in the re-entry policy implementation requires awareness by its implementers and execution of guidelines. Pregnancy detection is one aspect of the girl mother's re-entry policy. The girl mothers' re-entry policy implementers were required to show the ability to articulate what the re-entry policy is and the researcher further wanted to establish if, in primary schools, the re-entry policy implementer conducts a routine procedure as guided in the implementation guidelines. The findings indicate that primary schools do not conduct routine checkups as guided by the Ministry of Education. The participants revealed that in most cases guidance and counseling teachers get to know about the pregnancies from the peers of the pregnant learners. Below are some of the responses from the participants.

“The Ministry of Education provides a copy of re-entry policy guidelines. In most cases, if a child is pregnant, we get to know that a child is pregnant from peers and rumors around school and we call the child to ask, but many of them usually open up that yes, I am pregnant in privacy.” (FT6G&C)

“When we find that a child falls pregnant, we call the parents then the next thing we do is guidance and counseling. Knowing if a child is pregnant, we get the information from friends” (MT8G& C)

“In terms of pregnancy detection in school, we do have female guidance teachers that help us to identify the girl who is pregnant and sometimes we do arrange with the ministry of health to come and conduct voluntary and non-voluntary pregnant tests. Especially, when we suspect that a certain child is pregnant. Once we find that a child is pregnant, we ask a child if it was by consent or rape, and after establishing the fact we now guide and counsel the child.” (MT10G&C)



“Yes, we have the re-entry policy guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education both in soft copy and a hard copy. Usually, we have had cases of pregnancies, if we see that a girl is not looking ok, we call the child and try to inquire. We don’t have a program in school for pregnancy detection” (MT9G&C)

The quotations above show variations in the articulation of the procedure to follow for the detection of the pregnancy and the steps to follow after the detection. Variation in the articulation of the procedures to follow for pregnancy detection by the girl mothers’ policy implementers may result in the ineffectiveness of the policy and to some degree it indicates low awareness levels for guidance and counseling teachers about the re-entry policy implementation in primary schools. Some participants showed ignorance on how they should implement the policy on the issue of conducting the pregnancy test using the provided guidelines. This is in line with Chiyota (2020) and Kiptanui (2020), who noted that there is a lack of information and most teachers were ignorant about the policy.

### ***4.3 Social-cultural practices influence on girl-mothers’ re-entry policy implementation***

Social-cultural practices influence is one of the major concerns on the implementation of the girl mothers’ re-entry policy. This study sought also to discover the procedures the primary schools follow to report pregnancies within primary schools and outside schools. Most of the participants exhibited knowledge on early pregnancy case reporting. However, participants revealed that sociocultural practices play a negative influence on pregnant case reporting. According to the findings, some of the learners involved in the issues of early pregnancy are minors (under-age). The findings indicate that pregnant cases involving minors are reported to the relevant authorities such as One Stop Centre, Victim Support Unit, and DEBs. In the case where it is the teacher responsible for the pregnancy, the school administration reports the case to the DEBs office. Pregnant cases which happen within the school and it is the learner responsible for the pregnancy, such cases are reported to the school administration through the office of the Guidance & Counseling teachers’ office. Thereafter, the parents or the guardians and the learners are summoned by the G&C teacher, and instructions stipulated in the girl mothers’ re-entry policy are explained to the parents of both the girl-child and the boy-child. The pregnant learner is granted maternity leave and the boy responsible for the pregnancy is sent home and comes back when maternity leave for the girl child end. Below is the quotation from one of the participants:

“If it is the fellow pupil responsible for the pregnancy, we send both home, the boy comes back to school when the child delivers as guided in the policy” (FT6G&C)

Another participant reported that they only send a girl child on maternity leave, not a boy child. Below is the quotation.

“We only send the girl home because the boy is not the one carrying the pregnant.” (MT8G&C)

The above two quotations indicate that there is no uniformity in the girl mothers’ re-entry policy implementation by its implementers. However, Socio-cultural practices play a greater influence especially when it is the member of the community responsible for a pregnancy. Social-cultural

practices exert greater influence on implementing the girl mothers' re-entry policy because of the customary norms and social practices that contradict statutory laws. One of the participants revealed that;

“We had a case in which a child was a minor (under-age) and because the child had already reached puberty, she was regarded as someone fit to be a mother. The parents of that child were not cooperative, they tried to cover up the issue and they changed the age of the child that she was 16 years old. Luckily, as the school, we had the school register and it was indicated that the child was in grade 6 and she was 12 years old. We reported the case to the police and we left the case in the hands of the police officers.” (FT2AD)

Findings revealed that pregnancy cases become highly complicated if it involves the members of the community, the village headmen, and the community at large having their perception of early marriages and pregnancy. The participant revealed the following:

“In most cases when we follow up on the case the community fails to disclose that the child is pregnant and the person responsible for the pregnancy. We also engage the village headmen but it is very difficult. They expect us to respect their cultural practices and follow community protocols. Village headmen are reluctant in such cases. If we follow it up it becomes so difficult for us to do our part because the community regards these children as women who are ready to get married hence, they do not cooperate. Some of such cases go unattended. But for those cases, we manage to talk to the village headmen we usually submit the cases to the relevant authorities” (MT9G&C)

Another participant revealed that;

“When we find that a child is pregnant, we get to listen to the child and if it is an adult involved in the case, we write a report to the DEBS office but unfortunately parents are not willing to come forth and reveal the truth. In most cases, parents get the money or goats or the man promises that he will marry the girl, in such cases parents choose not to cooperate with the school. In such cases, the DEBS office has advised that we write a report without consent from the parent but there is backlash (great negative opposition) to that,” (MT5AD).

The task of reporting early pregnancy for effective implementation of the girl mother's re-entry policy is an imperative issue, especially when a learner impregnated is a minor (under age). According to the findings, customary norms and social practices are the points of issues in that they contradict statutory laws. Cultural practices play a big role in some rural areas and therefore still pose a big challenge. Thus, when girls come of age, they stay in their huts and are directly or indirectly encouraged to engage in sexual activities to prove their womanhood and this makes it easy for them to fall pregnant. Other traditions instill fear in the children, discouraging them from speaking and only listening to adults. Such children ended up failing to express themselves as it was seen as disrespectful to adults (Phiri et al., 2022). In line with Chitempa (2017), who noted that the biggest difficulty in the campaign against child marriage and early pregnancy in Zambia is the presence of a dual legal system comprised of traditional (customary) and constitutional law (statutory laws). According to customary law, there is nothing wrong with marrying a child who has reached puberty because the law automatically qualifies her to be a woman who is ready for

marriage. Phiri et al., (2022) noted that sometimes informal negotiations between the responsible male and the pregnant girl's family were often preferred and the school failed to re-admit such girls, thereby defeating the purpose of the policy.

According to Chitempa (2017) and Girls not Brides and plan Zambia (2015), there is a disparity in the statutory and customary law, the two systems always come into conflict when addressing the issue of early pregnancy and marriage in rural areas, traditional (customary) law prevails over statutory laws. Simaata (2018), postulates that the issues of customs and cultures that hinder girls' advancement in rural areas should be addressed. Some of these practices impede the advancement of the girls' education including initiation ceremonies in which girls are isolated and are taught how to take care of homes and spouses when they marry. Chitempa (2018), realizes that traditional practices are degrading a girl child and putting her in danger and at risk of early marriage, practices like elongation of labia minora at the age of 10, teach the girls how to bring more satisfaction to the husband. Such practices persuade the girl child to begin testing on them, which results in early pregnancy. The societal perception that marriage is a great achievement in the life of a girl and the source of wealth is critical to these elements, hence being pregnant develops a path to enter marriage rather than education (Mushibwe, 2018, & Simaata, 2018). Phiri et al., (2022) emphasize that the ineffectiveness of the re-entry Policy is a result of different challenges of which the main ones include cultural beliefs and practices whereby the girl child is expected to get married soon after reaching puberty.

#### ***4.4 Coordination among the policy implementers***

As indicated earlier, all the schools selected for this study had the documents necessary for re-entry policy implementation. All the respondents reported that the Ministry of Education provided all the necessary documents. According to the findings, the school administrators clarified that there is no limit to the number of re-entries as guided in the guidelines. However, some G&C teachers did not show clarity or they were not sure about the number of times a girl child can re-enter if one particular child gets pregnant concurrently. Below are some of the participants' responses:

“We only allow a child to re-enter once.” (FT7G&C)

“We do not allow the child to re-enter more than two times.” (FT2AD)

The above quotations suggest that among the re-entry policy implementers, there is a lack of coordination. The findings also indicate a lack of coordination on the length of time for re-entry after delivery. On the length of time for re-entry, there was a disparity from the Guidance and counseling teachers and the administrators. The participants reported that:

“It depends on the vulnerability of the girl. If she has a supportive family even at three months can do. But normal is six months.” (FT4AD)

“At least 6 months except those in examination classes.” (FT3AD)

“6 months.” (FT1AD)

Most of the administrators reported 6 months as the length of time for re-entry after delivery in line with the stipulated guidelines. Contrary to the stated length of time, G&C teachers stated different lengths of time. Below are some of the responses from some participants:

“The length of time after delivery is 2 years”. (FT7G&C)

“2 months is the length of time allowed”. (MT10G&C)

Guidance and counseling teachers showed low levels of awareness on a different aspect of the re-entry policy while the head teachers who participated in the study exhibited high levels of awareness of the girl mother re-entry policy. Head teachers were able to articulate the re-entry policy. Another participant (Guidance and counseling teacher) reported that:

“It is difficult to state the length of time for re-entry after delivery because it depends on an individual, others can re-enter after a month, others after 6 months, and others after a year”. (FT6G&C)

According to Muyunda (2021), the lack of a well-defined policy guideline is another barrier to the implementation of the re-entry policy. Lack of well-defined results in different awareness levels amongst the girl mothers’ re-entry policy implementers which yields a lack of coordination in the implementation of the policy. Mushibwe (2018), emphasizes that re-entry policy may not be achieved because of a lack of Cooperation or allowing non-uniform implementation and the development of non-supportive processes by expected implementers. Lack of Cooperation or coordination mechanisms among service providers has also been reported to be one of the major concerns in the fight against early marriage (Fischer et al., (2015).

#### ***4.5 Availability of guidance and counseling services in primary schools***

Effective implementation of the girl-mothers’ re-entry policy requires active availability of guidance and counseling services in schools. The girl mothers’ re-entry policy states that each school should have a female-trained counselor for girls and a male for boys. The participants revealed that guidance and counseling services are available in primary schools. Nevertheless, all the schools that were sampled for the study did not have professionally trained counselors. Most of the appointments are done based on different factors including the number of experiences one has in teaching service, maturity level, and personality. One participant mentioned that:

“We don’t have any professionally trained guidance and counselors. As teachers, we have been appointed to take the role and provide these services. But in most cases, you will find that we usually have a lot of classes to teach in most cases, if there is an urgent case to attend to, one would just call the G&C teacher while teaching and learning are taking place.” (MT8G&C)

The above quotation suggests that not only lack of professionally trained guidance and counselors in school, but most of the appointed teachers to take the role of guidance and counseling are also

occupied with different roles within the school. The findings revealed that Guidance and Counseling teachers usually don't have the required time to provide guidance and counseling services. In line with Mufalo & Kabeta (2019), who noted that schools had no trained counselors to handle counseling services and contrary to the point that secondary schools lacked counseling and guidance services. Further, Chiyota (2020), confirms that guidance and counseling services were available in schools despite having some challenges of not having trained counselors and the teachers who have taken a role or have been appointed usually have limited time because of work overload, teaching, managing examination related work, and other tasks. Mushibwe (2018), suggests that well-trained guidance and counselors are required for effective girl mothers' re-entry policy implementation in schools.

## **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Guidance and Counseling teachers have limited or low knowledge about the girl-mothers' re-entry policy, thus leading to non-uniform implementation of girl-mothers' re-entry policy and overlooking important aspects of the policy for effective implementation in primary schools. The study also concludes that the school administrators are more knowledgeable about the girl mothers' re-entry policy.

Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that advocacy efforts for policy sensitization and awareness in primary schools should be maximized by the Ministry of Education: Stakeholders to be sensitized about the re-entry policy frequently. The Ministry of Education should be closely monitoring the implementation of the re-entry policy. Government and Non-governmental organizations through the Ministry of Education should fund guidance and counseling departments: Girl-mothers to be supported materially. Primary schools should have professionally trained guidance and counseling officers employed on a full-time basis to spearhead guidance and counseling departments and teachers taking the role of guidance and counseling should be trained in primary schools for professional counseling services required by girl-mothers.

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### **Acknowledgment**

The authors appreciate the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and East and South African-German Centre of Educational Methodologies and Management (CERM-SA) for all the financial and other support rendered for the success of this study. Further acknowledgement goes to Mungwi District Education Board Secretary and all the participants.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare

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