

## **Investigation of Re-Entry of Student Mothers in Secondary Schools in Kenya**

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this research was to assess the factors that influence the implementation of the re-entry policy. The objectives of the study were to investigate the level of awareness of the re-entry policy in secondary schools; identify the policy gaps; determine the factors that influence implementation of the re-entry policy and seek ways in which the re-entry policy can be improved to ensure successful implementation. The research was based on the rational system approaches and the functional process model. This was a descriptive research yielding both quantitative and qualitative data. The research was carried out in Nakuru County which had 43 mixed and purely girls' secondary schools. The study was involved 8 of these schools. A sample size of 225 respondents was obtained using the systematic and purposive sampling techniques. The participants included the County Director of Education, Assistant Education Officers, head teachers, teachers, parents and students. The data collection instruments used included survey questionnaires and key informant interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed and presented in frequencies, tables, percentages and graphs while the qualitative data was organized into thematic categories according to the objectives of the study. The research established that about half of the students were aware of the policy's existence while the others were not. Electronic media was found to be the most effective method of disseminating information on the policy. The research findings would be useful to the Ministry of Education, schools, Non - governmental organizations, parents and other stakeholders in education.*

**Key words:** *re-entry, student – mother, access*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, in 1948 by the United Nations Organization embraced education as a basic human right. Kenya subscribed to and still is a signatory to this declaration as well as to the International protocols that established Education for All (EFA) agenda in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and Dakar, Senegal in 2000. This right to education was also provided for in various Kenyan policy and legislative documents like the Basic Education Act (MOE 2013) where the Cabinet Secretary was to ensure the implementation of the right of every child to free and compulsory basic education. The consequent Government of Kenya policy initiatives focused on the attainment of EFA by 2015.

Secondary education is an important sector in national and individual development because it prepares students for vocational and professional training. This is the reason why the government made secondary education part of basic education and introduced Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008. During the launch of FSE, an initial Kshs 2.9 billion was released to get the Programme going, out of which, each secondary school student was allocated a yearly subsidy of Kshs 10,265 to cover tuition and administrative costs. The efforts in this sub-sector helped increase enrolment, retention and completion rates of both girls and boys. FSE opened doors to thousands of secondary school children countrywide to acquire education (Achoka et al., 2007; CSA, 2008; MOE, 2006).

### **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

One of the most significant challenges to attaining the EFA goals, and which gravely affects the education achievement of girls is teenage pregnancy and subsequent dropouts. When these girls are unable to return to school, they lose their already low opportunity of continuing their education and eventually being gainfully employed. The dropouts also lead to great financial and material wastage with the nation losing billions of shillings annually in financial, policy and man power investment (MOE, 2005).

Empirical studies established that despite introduction of the re-entry policy a significant majority of the adolescent mothers were still not attending school Taffa, et al ( 2003); (GoK,2014 ) . This pointed

to a gap or missing link between the stipulated policy and the actual practice on the ground. It was believed that understanding the implementation of the re-entry policy could help understand this missing link between the policy and the practice. According to (FAWE News, 2004) it was evident that there were factors that were hindering the implementation of the re-entry policy. Previous studies pointed out that a policy's content and provisions; awareness of the policy and the stakeholders were factors that could influence the implementation of a policy. This study therefore sought to assess implementation of the re-entry policy to identify the factors that were influencing it as they were making it less likely that the re-entry policy's objectives would be achieved and adolescent mothers would realize their full rights to education.

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study was guided by the following objectives

To investigate the level of awareness of the re-entry policy in secondary schools; to determine the factors influencing the implementation of the re-entry policy and to seek ways in which the re-entry policy can be improved to ensure successful implementation.

#### **3.1 Philosophical Framework of the Study**

This research was based on the rational system approach and the functional process model. Elmore (1980) argues that a variety of frameworks should be deployed in analysis and implementation; and that policy making, if it is to be effective in implementation terms, must adopt multiple frameworks. When implementers are skillful and they are committed to apply themselves to using their discretion, the policy objectives are realized and implementation is said to be successful (Parsons, 1996; Sabatier, 1986).

#### **3.2 Review of Related Literature**

Successful efforts in countries to achieve Universal Primary Education greatly reduced the number of out-of-school children and resulted in greater demand for secondary education. In 2009 for example, 88% of children enrolled in primary schools globally reached the last grade of this level of education. Secondary education was seen as critical because it not only linked initial education to higher education but also connected the school system to the labour market (FNBE, 2012; UIS 2010b; UIS 2011).

One of the EFA goals was to achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. In the period between 1999 and 2009 participation of girls improved globally with their total secondary enrolment growing from 43% to 48%. Although progress toward gender parity in education was particularly rapid in 2008 women still represented two-thirds of the world's 759 million illiterates and 60% of countries were still yet to attain gender parity – a goal that had been set for 2005. In Africa, the male GER increased from 22% - 31%, while the increase of the female GER was more modest (from 18% to 24%) in the period between 1999- 2009. This may have been due to the fact that in countries with limited access to education, more priority is given to men (Achoka et al., 2007; UIS 2010; 2011).

According to a survey by the Centre for the Study of Adolescents conducted among secondary school students revealed that three in 10 adolescents begin childbearing by age 18. Generally about 30% of all adolescent girls deal with issues of teenage pregnancy and school dropout. (Brown 2010; CSA, 2008). In a study by Murgor (1998), 93.2% of all respondents interviewed said that the pregnancy was not intended while only 6.3% were intended.

The girl who gets pregnant is usually then forced to drop out due to the ridicule, stigma and hostility faced in school. In some cases the girls seek marriage or are forced by their parents as a way of legitimizing the pregnancies and childbirth (Njau & Wamahiu, 1994; Okungu, 2003; UNICEF, 1998; Wekesa, 2010).

Many educational policies have been made by presidential decrees while others have been part of election campaign promises. Many of these decisions have interfered with the running of education and have marginalized the role and contribution of professionals therefore impacting negatively on policy formulation and implementation. The directives have rarely been linked to any real tangible output, nor are they embedded in strategic priorities (Boit, 2009; Penny & Poston, 2003).

### 3.3 Research Design

The study used the descriptive design using a cross-sectional survey strategy. This is because a descriptive survey helps assess participants' attitudes or views towards individuals, organizations and procedures. The design also employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems. One of the main advantages of using this method was that using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data types increased validity as the strengths of one approach compensated for the weaknesses of the other (Creswell, 2003; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The research was carried out in Nakuru County, a County in the former Rift Valley Province. The CBS (2004), survey showed that Rift Valley Province had the highest percentage (31%) of teenage pregnancy and motherhood of all the provinces in the country (CSA, 2008). A total of 225 respondents participated in this study; they included head teachers, teachers, parents and students from eight selected schools and Ministry of Education officers

### 3.4 Reliability

The data from the pilot study was used to calculate the coefficient index. The coefficient index for the teachers' questionnaire was 0.75 and that of the students was 0.8 both of which were found to be acceptable. The minimum is usually

## 4. DISCUSSIONS OF THE KEY FINDINGS

When the students were asked how many girls they knew who had dropped out of secondary school due to pregnancy, less than a quarter of the respondents mentioned 2 girls; about 19% mentioned 3 girls; 12 % mentioned 4 girls; 9% mentioned 1 girl; 6.9 % mentioned 5 girls and 6.4% mentioned 10 girls. On average each student knew about 4 girls who had dropped out of school. The numbers presented reveal that teenage pregnancy is prevalent with the vast majority saying they knew at least one girl who had dropped out. Some of the respondents said they knew as many as 10 girls who had dropped out which possibly means that the country has surpassed the previous estimates of 13,000 students (CSA, 2008; Gachukia, 1992)

As seen in Table 1 a vast majority of the students sampled knew between 0 and 2 girls who had returned to school after delivery. More significantly 39.9% of the student respondents knew no girl who had returned to school after delivery.

**Table1.** *Students who returned to school after delivery*

| Number | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| 0-2    | 173       | 92         |
| 3-5    | 12        | 6.4        |
| 6-8    | 3         | 1.5        |
| Total  | 188       | 100        |

On average the students knew only one girl each who had returned to school. If on average students know four girls dropping out and only one girl returning to school it would imply that only a quarter of the girls are able to return to school. This is consistent with what CSA (2008) established that about one girl in three goes back to school after delivery. These statistics confirm what a study by Bhuyan et al (2010), established that a significant majority of the adolescent mothers had not returned to school.

When the students were asked to rate their attitude on adolescent mothers and re-admission to school, 39.6% of the students approved or strongly approved readmission, while 24% either disapproved or very disapproved. About 36.50% of the students were neutral on the matter as Table 2 reveals.

**Table2.** *Attitudes of students and teachers towards readmission*

| Response | Strongly Approve | Approve | Neutral | Disapprove | Strongly Disapprove |
|----------|------------------|---------|---------|------------|---------------------|
| Students | 21.00%           | 18.60%  | 36.50%  | 17.40%     | 6.60%               |
| Teachers | 33.30%           | 33.30%  | 16.70%  | 5.60%      | 11.10%              |

According to the head teachers the positive attitude portrayed by the students was due to the fact that the other students did not know about the pregnancy since the girls were usually new students. In the vast majority of schools adolescent mothers were treated like any other new students. They were generally well received and accepted and the other students were very supportive and helped integrate

them into the school community. Almost a quarter of the disapproved re-entry, this students would most likely not be too welcoming of any girl whom they knew had returned after delivery.

A significant majority of the head teachers did not talk about re-entry in the schools. The head teachers believed that if they talked about re-entry openly, they would be encouraging and condoning the pre-mature sexual activity so some of them just quietly re-admitted the adolescent mothers. Shame and stigma was the leading reason why adolescent mothers did not go back to school. There was lack of support from parents. Some parents felt betrayed and their dreams were shattered, this discouraged them from taking their daughters back to school.

To ensure successful implementation, re-entry would be improved by making the disseminating the policy since many people don't know about. Based on the findings that half the students had not heard about the re-entry policy and that the head teachers did not talk about re-entry in the schools it is logical to conclude that there are adolescent mothers who have failed to go back to school because of ignorance thus institutional environment is important in ensuring re-entry.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the findings and conclusions above the following recommendations were made that:

- The government needs to create awareness on the existence of the re- entry policy at a national level. The public at large needs to be sensitized on the issues of re-entry. This could be done through nationwide campaigns using the print and electronic media, chief's barazaa, seminars, parent /teacher conferences and all other public gatherings. The head teachers should also speak out on pregnancy and re- entry and facilitate such discourse in schools.
- The government should strengthen and expand guidance and counseling departments in schools. Their teaching load and duties should be reduced and one or two teachers per school should be appointed solely to offer guidance and counseling. Schools should offer guidance and counseling services to all parties concerned. including the girl, her parents, the baby's father, the entire school community where possible.
- The Government can set up alternative schools or centres that would help cater for the girls and their babies. The vocational schools could also be used to help them get their school certificates. The adolescent mothers may also be better served if they are admitted in different schools from the ones they were in.
- Schools should keep current records of the drop outs and re-entry need to be kept and all those who drop out should be followed up. The school should follow up any girl who drops out of the school especially. They should keep an eye on the situation especially in the case of pregnancy and encourage the adolescent mother to go back to school once the baby is old enough to be left behind.
- Parents, schools and the communities need to address the bigger issue of teenage sex. This behaviour not only leads to pregnancy but exposes them to other serious physical, emotional and physiological problems and diseases. Introducing sex education in schools would be a good place to begin.

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