Assessing the Experiences of Teen Mothers under the Re-entry Policy in Secondary Schools: A Case of Uyui District Council- Tabora, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the experiences of teen mothers re-entering secondary schools under the re-entry policy in Uyui District. Guided by Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory, the study adopted a case study design appropriate for examining social realities within their natural contexts. A purposive sample of ten teen mothers who had returned to school was selected, and data were gathered through unstructured interviews. Thematic content analysis was used to interpret the data. Findings revealed significant barriers to successful reintegration, including financial hardship, psychological distress, and limited participation in social activities. The study recommends that the government and educational stakeholders implement targeted awareness campaigns in schools and communities to reduce stigma. These could include workshops, seminars, and public service announcements. Additionally, further research is recommended to examine how the implementation of the re-entry policy affects teen mothers' academic performance.

Keywords: *Teen mothers, re-entry policy, psychological distress, discrimination, re-entry programme*

Introduction

Teen motherhood has increasingly emerged as a global public health concern, affecting an estimated 16 million individuals aged 15 to 19 each year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), approximately two million girls under the age of 15 give birth annually, with 90% of these cases occurring in low- and middle-income countries. Nyangarika and Nombo (2020) identified several key factors contributing to adolescent pregnancy within secondary schools, including financial constraints, peer pressure, sociocultural taboos and norms, limited access to reproductive health information, and incidents of sexual assault. In the global effort to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, many countries face challenges in implementing effective re-entry policies. These policies are vital to supporting teen mothers' educational and professional aspirations and ensuring their reintegration into the learning environment. Despite advancements in technology and improved

access to reproductive health services and information, teenage pregnancy remains a persistent issue in several European countries, including Bulgaria and the United Kingdom. According to UNESCO (2014), Bulgaria recorded a teenage pregnancy rate of 9.99%, while the United Kingdom reported a rate of 2.6%. Contributing factors to teenage pregnancy in Europe include socio-economic hardship and low levels of educational attainment. In response to the growing number of adolescent mothers, countries such as the UK and Bulgaria have implemented re-entry policies to support young mothers in continuing their education and pursuing career aspirations (Imbosa *et al*., 2022). These policies aim to promote inclusion and reduce the long-term socio-economic disadvantages associated with early motherhood. According to statistics published by Elflein (2023), the birth rate in the United States among teenagers and young adult women aged 15-19 has declined from 61.8% in 1991 to 13.9% in 2021. This reduction in teenage pregnancy rates in the United States is largely attributed to effective preventive measures implemented by the government. These measures have led to increased contraceptive use among both male and female adolescents. Furthermore, the establishment of publicly funded family planning clinics has played a critical role by providing low-cost or free reproductive health services to adolescents. These clinics are part of broader initiatives designed to reduce teenage pregnancy and promote informed decision-making among young people.

Statistics indicate that infants born to adolescent mothers are more prone to prematurity and low birth weight. In contrast, adolescent moms frequently encounter prenatal hypertension and anaemia (ibid). Schools are forbidden from excluding an expecting mother from attendance, as mandated by medical regulations in the USA. The re-entry policy mandates that schools accommodate the unique needs of teen mothers by anticipating periods of absenteeism due to clinic visits, childbirth, and recovery. Upon returning to school, adolescent mothers are to be reinstated to the same academic and extracurricular status they held before their leave.

Additionally, schools must allow these students to make up any missed assignments, ensuring that their temporary absence does not hinder their educational progress. This provision aims to promote educational continuity and equity for young mothers. Additional support includes providing larger desks, private breastfeeding facilities, and daycare services near schools (Dowden & Grey, 2017).

In many African countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, teenage pregnancy remains alarmingly prevalent among adolescent girls, often reflecting a substantial unmet need for family planning services. In Zambia, this issue is further compounded by the exclusion of pregnant schoolgirls

from the education system. This practice frequently leads to early marriage. Cultural and traditional norms often pressure these young women into marital unions, perpetuating cycles of gender inequality. Consequently, this trend exacerbates poverty and undermines the socio-economic prospects of teen mothers, limiting their opportunities for personal and educational advancement. Following the 1995 conference organised by the Zambia Association of University Women, a proposal was made to the government advocating for the re-admission of all pregnant girls to school, contingent upon the assurance of child care (Moonga, 2014). The Zambia Association of University Women Conference successfully implemented the proposed agenda regarding teen mothers. In 1997, the Zambian government permitted these girls to take maternity leave and continue their education post-delivery. The implementation of the re-entry policy has faced significant challenges. Although 23% of students dropped out, only a small proportion of teen mothers returned to school, largely due to the stigma and ridicule they encountered from teachers, peers, and broader community members (Imbosa, 2022).

By EFA and SDG commitments, the Kenyan government formulated additional guidelines and legislation to enhance the re-entry policy, ensuring that expectant girls and teenage mothers can pursue their education with minimal disruption (Imbosa, 2022). The policy promotes the awareness of teachers, learners, and the broader community to support reintegrated adolescent learners. The Kenyan government's re-entry policy encountered several implementation challenges. Conversely, most principals were aware of the policy's existence yet lacked tangible evidence within the schools. The policy stated that learners who become pregnant shall be re-admitted unconditionally to the same class or grade they were in before leaving school for childbirth. The policy stipulates that if a learner desires to transfer to another school, the school head will assist her, in collaboration with the sub-country Director of Education, to facilitate her admission into a different institution. The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing and strengthening the capabilities of school leadership, educators, and the broader school community (Government of Kenya, 2013).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Tanzania mainland issued Education Circular number 2 of 2021, emphasising the government's commitment to promoting quality education for all. The re-entry policy is a step towards leaving no one behind. Moreover, in 2022, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, issued a Guideline to reinstate students who dropped out of primary and secondary education for various reasons, reflecting the provision. Before the policy change, an estimated 6550-15000 Tanzanian girls and adolescents were

forced out of school each year due to pregnancy. At the same time, thousands more were subjected to coercive pregnancy testing. According to the 2022 Demographic and Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey, 24.9% of schoolgirls in Tanzania dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy. While the national percentage of teen mothers has declined from 29.1% in 2005, the Tabora region continues to experience a rise in teen pregnancies, with a rate of 38%, making it the second-highest region in the country for teenage motherhood in 2022. A significant number of teen mothers who return to school eventually withdraw again or choose to continue their education through informal learning centres located within their communities. In light of this context, the present study aimed to explore the experiences of teen mothers who returned to school in Uyui District, Tabora Region.

Literature Review
Teen mothers face many obstacles when attempting to return to school, often resulting in high dropout rates due to the inability to manage these challenges effectively. This section reviews relevant literature from various countries to examine the experiences of teen mothers under re-entry policies and the factors influencing their reintegration into the education system. Additionally, the review explores the study's theoretical foundation, focusing on Critical Theory as the guiding framework. This theory offers insight into the structural and societal forces that shape the educational experiences of adolescent mothers and supports the study's goal of advocating for more equitable and supportive learning environments.

Financial Challenges
Financial constraints hinder teen mothers' experiences in attaining their educational needs when returning to school. The study done by Hugo and Olvera (2024) revealed that in Brazil, teen mothers are faced with financial constraints, leading to poor maternal and infant health. Scholars have portrayed that many teen mothers come from low-income families, which made them struggle to afford food, medication, childcare and educational expenses (Asumini & Mwila, 2024; Mmasy, 2023; Mgunda, Kano & Sungwa, 2023; Timothy & Juhudi, 2023). Moreover, Marende (2022) added that the school lacks sufficient financial support to effectively implement the re-entry policyMarende's study mentioned the need to allocate a budget for counselling the teen mothers who have returned to school, fee waivers and bursary support. Timothy and Juhudi (2023) added that teen mothers are getting minimal support from their parents and guardians, leading them to leave school and never return due to their inability to manage the logistics and finances of mothering and schooling effectively.

Stigmatisation and Discrimination

The teen mothers who returned to school are being faced with social challenges, including stigmatisation and discrimination from their peers and teachers. These situations create significant barriers to education and further affect their academic performance. For instance, the study by Mgunda *et al*. (2023) revealed that teen mothers experience negative attitudes and stereotypes from their peers and teachers, leading to social exclusion in various school activities and events. Fallis (2013) cemented that the cultural context of teen mothers may influence the degree of stigmatisation and discrimination that they experience. Thompson (2017) asserts that teen mothers who experience stigmatisation and discrimination are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, as well as feelings of shame and unworthiness. These emotional effects significantly hinder their ability to engage confidently in academic and social environments. Supporting this view, Niboye (2018), Mmassy (2023), Asumini and Mwila (2024), and Morgan *et al*. along with Anima, Wadei and Katey (2024) emphasise that stigma and discrimination from peers and community members have a detrimental impact on teen mothers' confidence and motivation to continue their education. This societal rejection not only isolates them but also perpetuates a cycle of marginalisation, making it more difficult for them to thrive academically and emotionally. Thus, the study explores how teen mothers accommodated stigmatisation and discrimination when they returned to school.

Furthermore, research carried out by Onyango *et al*. (2015) and Okondo (2018) in Kenya indicated that adverse perceptions from the community constitute one of the obstacles encountered by adolescent mothers upon their reintegration into the educational system. Timothy and Juhudi (2023) noted that the stigma associated with teen motherhood often results in some young mothers discontinuing their education post-delivery, which compels them to remain at home or seek alternative educational opportunities. The research conducted by Mmasy (2023) highlighted that the stigma and discrimination faced by teen mothers compel them to seek re-enrollment in nearby open schools affiliated with the Institute of Adult Education, which does not require school uniforms, irrespective of their identity.

Childcare Responsibilities

Gatsinzi (2021) highlights that the responsibilities placed on teen mothers have intensified, leaving them with limited time to manage their multifaceted roles effectively. A teenage mother is often expected to care for her child, handle household duties, and simultaneously meet the academic demands imposed by educational institutions. These compounded responsibilities significantly impact their academic performance. Similarly, studies by

Mgunda, Kano, and Sungwa (2023) and Niboye (2018) emphasize that adolescent mothers face considerable challenges in balancing motherhood and student life, which in turn may negatively affect their psychological well-being. Mmassy (2023) also notes that the inability to balance childcare and schooling, exacerbated by limited access to reliable childcare services, often leads to school absenteeism or dropout among teen mothers. Furthermore, Nguyen (2016) asserts that inadequate childcare and insufficient parental support hinder the well-being of teen mothers and the development of their children, who may lack the nurturing environment essential for healthy growth.

Emotional Problems
Furthermore, the study done by Mgunga, Kano and Sungwa (2023) added that teen mothers are at a high risk of facing emotional problems, including stress, anxiety and depression, compared to their non-pregnant peers. Life experiences such as financial hardship, social isolation, and a lack of adequate support in managing the responsibilities of motherhood contribute significantly to the stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by teen mothers. These challenges often become overwhelming, leading many to eventually drop out of school (Asumini & Mwila, 2024). Additionally, many teen mothers face emotional distress related to the father of the child. Some fathers deny paternity or refuse to provide financial support, even when they acknowledge the child. This lack of paternal involvement further exacerbates the mothers' psychological burden. Supporting these findings, Okondo (2018) highlighted that teen mothers experience considerable emotional and psychological distress due to the overwhelming nature of their responsibilities, most of which require financial resources to manage. These pressures collectively hinder their academic progress and compromise their overall well-being. Their family members are disowning most of them after discovering that they are pregnant. Moreover, the stigmatisation and discrimination that teen mothers face, leading them to be emotionally disturbed, make them feel unwanted and accepted in the school community and the home environment (ibid).

Theoretical framework
This study employed Critical Theory, originally developed by Max Horkheimer in 1937. The Theory is grounded in the objective of critiquing and transforming society by integrating normative ideals with empirically based analyses of social conflicts, contradictions, and systemic tendencies (Harney, 2012). Critical Theory aims to uncover domination, control, and suppression that often masquerade as neutral, progressive, or necessary (*ibid*). In the context of this study, the Theory is used to critically examine the implementation of the re-entry policy for teen mothers in secondary schools.

It enables the exploration of how existing societal norms and institutional practices may hinder rather than support the reintegration of adolescent mothers into formal education. Through such critique, the study aims to challenge and ultimately transform prevailing cultural attitudes and beliefs, advocating for more meaningful support structures that promote teen mothers' academic and professional advancement. Moreover, the Theory applies to the study as it helps inform the educational stakeholders on the needs of teen mothers, such as financial support and employment opportunities that can help accommodate home responsibilities. Furthermore, the Theory is applicable in the study as it criticises the re-entry policy and its implications within the school environment by identifying the challenges that teen mothers encounter caused by the school management, peers, community members, and policymakers.

Methodology
This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which enabled the researcher to understand the lived experiences of teen mothers returning to school (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The qualitative approach was particularly suited to exploring intangible variables such as cultural norms, socio-economic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion that directly influence implementing the re-entry policy for adolescent mothers. Within this approach, a case study design was employed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by teen mothers during their reintegration into the school environment. The study used purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research questions. In this case, the sample consisted of ten teen mothers who had returned to school following childbirth. This criterion ensured that the collected data reflected authentic and relevant insights into their lived experiences, contributing to a richer understanding of the re-entry policy's complexities. The selected teen mothers participated in semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes each. This format allowed participants to express their experiences about the study's focus. The data collected were analyzed using content analysis. This method allowed the researcher to identify and categorize recurring themes, including insufficient financial resources, psychological challenges, and limited participation in social activities. These thematic categories were derived through valid inference and interpretation of the participants' narratives. According to Creswell (2018), content analysis is a flexible and rigorous method of analyzing qualitative data, enabling inductive and deductive reasoning to draw meaningful insights. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study. This included obtaining formal approval for data collection, securing voluntary participation through informed consent, and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.

Findings and Discussion

During the semi-structured interviews, the participants raised a range of concerns regarding the challenges associated with implementing the re-entry policy for teen mothers in the Tabora region. These concerns reflect adolescent mothers' complex realities and lived experiences as they attempt to reintegrate into the formal education system. The qualitative nature of the study allowed for an in-depth exploration of these experiences, revealing both personal and systemic barriers to successful school re-entry. Based on the analysis of the interview data, the findings have been categorized into three overarching themes, representing the most salient and recurring issues identified by the participants. These themes are presented and discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

Lack of full participation in social activities

The findings from this study revealed that teen mothers are faced with challenges related to social isolation within the school compound. Teen mothers are being isolated from participating in various school activities, such as attending sports and game activities, debates and other activities within the school compound. The study shows that social isolation is associated with loneliness, emotional distress and depression symptoms among teen mothers, which sometimes may result in school drop-out. One of the interviewed teen mothers added that;

> I typically feel isolated when I am at the school compound; before this situation, I used to participate in playing netball and attending various inter-school activities; the situation changed after giving birth and none of the activities I was included in. Again, sometimes, it isn't easy to attend school activities due to the responsibilities I have as a mother. Most of the school activities are practised outside of class hours; I used that time to return home to take care of my newborn (Interview with the 2nd teen mother, 13th March 2024).

Another teen mother added that:

> Mhh! Being a mother at the school age actually changes the lifestyle of the teen mother; for instance, I don't prefer participating in the after-school activities that are being performed after class hours. I would rather prefer to use that time to complete the assignment given by the school and return home to take care of the child (Interview with the 5th teen mother on 14th March 2024).

The narratives above suggest that teen mothers experience limited participation in social activities within the school environment, primarily due to the dual responsibilities of motherhood and academic engagement. Participants consistently emphasized that their priority is the well-being and development of their children, which often takes precedence over engaging in extracurricular or peer-related activities. Many of the interviewed teen

mothers expressed a strong desire to participate in school-based social events, such as clubs, games, and group discussions, but cited time constraints and caregiving demands as major barriers. The findings further indicate that the lack of structured childcare support significantly contributes to their social exclusion. These results align with the findings of Mgunda, Kano, and Sungwa (2023), who reported that adolescent mothers struggle to participate fully in school life due to the absence of reliable childcare arrangements. Their study similarly highlighted that teen mothers often face the challenge of not knowing who to entrust with their child's care during school hours, which limits their ability to integrate socially within the school community. This lack of social participation not only isolates them but may also impact their emotional well-being and sense of belonging in the educational setting.

Moreover, the study by Kanana *et al*. (2021) revealed that teen mothers had limited time to participate in various co-curricular activities around the school compound; their study clearly shows that the presence of numerous responsibilities among teen mothers limits them from attending the co-curricular activities. Additionally, Niboye (2018) added that teen mothers encounter the challenge of insufficient time to fulfil all of their duties and responsibilities as mothers and students, which creates a limitation for them in participating in various school social activities. Similarly, Mgunda *et al*. (2023) added that most teen mothers tend to isolate themselves from their peer friends. This tension stems from feelings of shame about their action, which negatively affects their academic, social and emotional achievement.

The findings of this study align with the principles of Critical Theory, which served as a valuable lens for uncovering the hidden forms of marginalisation that teen mothers experience within the school setting. The theory was instrumental in revealing how the school environment, while appearing neutral and inclusive, often fails to accommodate the unique needs of adolescent mothers—particularly in relation to their participation in social activities. Although such activities are vital for personal development, emotional well-being, and the cultivation of talents, teen mothers are frequently excluded due to their caregiving responsibilities and lack of institutional support. Critical Theory emphasises the importance of challenging social structures that inhibit equitable participation and calls for transformative change to ensure that all learners, including teen mothers, can access opportunities for holistic development. In this context, the theory advocates for the creation of more inclusive school practices that enable teen mothers to engage in social activities and thereby realize their full potential.

Psychological Problem
The findings from this study revealed that teen mothers experience significant psychological challenges as a result of the life circumstances

surrounding their pregnancies and return to school. All ten participants reported that psychological distress began from the moment they discovered their pregnancies and continued throughout their reintegration into the school environment. These emotional struggles were often exacerbated by the negative treatment they received from key social groups, including members of the community, their parents, peers, and even teachers. Feelings of shame, isolation, anxiety, and low self-esteem were commonly cited among the participants. These psychological burdens not only hinder their academic performance but also affect their overall well-being and motivation to persist in their education. The findings suggest a critical need for psychosocial support mechanisms within schools to ensure that teen mothers are emotionally supported as they navigate their dual roles as students and parents. Being isolated from community activities, such as church services, creates depression among teen mothers. For instance, one of the interviewed teen mothers pointed out that:

> My life is full of stress and depression; most of the time, I think about the welfare of my child since my family provides little support for the child's well-being. I don't know how my child will grow, and his father did not provide any financial support to raise our baby. Lack of financial support has been leading to depression, thinking about the activities that I can engage in to acquire the money that will help to solve my problems (Interview with 6th teen mother, on 15th March 2024)

Moreover, another teen mother added that:

> I have been suffering from psychological problems, which I think it is caused by the responsibilities and duties I have as a teen mother. Since I returned to school, my grades have decreased, and sometimes, I fail to complete the assigned homework due to the responsibilities I have after class hours. Sometimes, I miss the classes due to the parenting responsibilities of taking care of the baby, like going to the clinic, …I sometimes fail to sleep during the night… the parenting issue is very stressful (Interview with the 4th teen mother on 13th March 2024)

The findings above highlight the psychological toll of systematic discrimination, aligning with Critical theory's emphasis on the need for structural change to address these inequalities. The findings revealed that life experiences, lack of social and financial support, and burden of activities have been linked as the factors that lead to psychological problems among teen mothers. The study revealed that teen mothers are faced with psychological problems starting from the moment their pregnancy is disclosed, and this situation persist even after they return to school. The most suffering students from psychological problems are those from lower-income families. The life experiences they encounter create challenges towards attaining their goals. For instance, participants in this study indicated that the life experiences they face—such as early motherhood, social stigma, and lack

of support—intensify their susceptibility to depression. This emotional burden directly affects their ability to focus and perform academically. Many of the teen mothers expressed that the psychological strain they endure hampers their concentration, motivation, and participation in school activities, ultimately leading to poor academic outcomes. These findings are in line with the study conducted by Mgunda, Kani, and Sungwa (2023), which revealed that teen mothers are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression due to the multifaceted challenges they encounter, particularly within unsupportive school and community environments. Such mental health struggles not only impact academic achievement but also pose long-term risks to the overall well-being of adolescent mothers This is due to the stigmatisation and discrimination within their community and school settings.

Moreover, Muthelo *et al*. (2024) added that teen mothers find it difficult to deal with parenting-related problems, which may result in feelings of low self-esteem and various mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, fear, depression and suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, Dahmen *et al*. (2019) added that depressed and anxious mothers may develop strong feelings of annoyance, which make it difficult for them to care for their newborns. Niboye (2018) added that teen mothers are not given breastfeeding breaks, which leads to their milk leaking from their breasts and staining their uniforms, which psychologically affects teen mothers. In relation to Critical Theory, its critique of societal structures and lived experiences helps illuminate how teen mothers are subjected to conditions that contribute to low self-esteem and mental health challenges. The theory exposes the underlying power dynamics and social stigmas that often go unquestioned, yet deeply affect the psychological well-being of these young women. The findings of this study clearly underscore the urgent need to integrate life skills education, along with guidance and counselling services, into school programs for teen mothers. Such interventions are essential in empowering them to cope with the emotional and psychological difficulties they face, and in fostering resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging within the school environment. By addressing these needs, the education system can move toward a more inclusive and supportive framework that aligns with the transformative goals of Critical Theory

Insufficient funds
The findings revealed that teen mothers face significant financial constraints, which stem largely from the increased responsibilities associated with both caregiving and academic demands. Many participants reported a decline in financial support from their parents or guardians upon becoming mothers. This lack of support made it difficult for them to afford essential school-

related expenses, including the purchase of learning materials, uniforms, and fees for remedial sessions. Some teen mothers noted that they were unable to obtain key school documents due to financial limitations. Additionally, the study uncovered that some parents refused to provide even basic necessities, arguing that they should not be responsible for supporting both their daughter and her child. As a result, teen mothers were often compelled to seek financial assistance from the child's father, a situation that further strained their emotional well-being and sense of independence. These financial challenges contributed to feelings of isolation and hindered their ability to fully participate in learning activities, ultimately jeopardizing their academic success. One participant shared that;

> I am facing difficulty in buying the school materials; this is due to the fact that soon after delivery, my parents had me choose whom my parents need to take care of between me and my child. In this case, I opted for my child to be under the hands of my parents and use other time to find money that would help me complete my schooling. Due to poverty within our family, my parents fail to support two people at once (Interview with the 4th teen mother on 14th March 2024).

The finding suggests that poverty is among the factors that affect the implementation of re-entry policy among teen mothers in secondary schools. In implementing the re-entry policy, teen mothers noted difficulties in affording school materials, and paying for remedial sessions, which made them miss important lessons, especially those students who are in the national examination year. In relation to the critical theory, the findings from this study identified lack of sufficient funds as the negative factor that affects the implementation and practices of re-entry policy.

Furthermore, the findings of this study align with those of Timothy and Juhudi (2023), who found that financial constraints represent a major barrier to educational attainment for teen mothers. Their research highlighted that teen mothers are often forced into a difficult position of having to choose whether financial support from parents should be directed toward themselves or their children. This dilemma not only places an emotional burden on the mothers but also contributes to long-term psychological trauma. As a coping mechanism, some teen mothers consider taking on part-time jobs to meet their personal and academic needs. Similarly, Onyango (2015) emphasizes that teen mothers struggle to manage the logistical and financial demands of both parenting and schooling. From the perspective of Critical Theory, these findings point to the need for systemic transformation. The theory critiques the social and institutional structures that marginalize vulnerable groups, such as teen mothers, and calls upon educational stakeholders to implement targeted interventions. This includes the provision of financial assistance, as well as flexible employment or income-generating opportunities, to help teen

mothers meet their educational and caregiving responsibilities more effectively.

Conclusion and implication of the study

The findings of this study highlight significant challenges in the implementation of the re-entry policy aimed at promoting Sustainable Development Goal 4—ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Despite the policy's intent to support teen mothers in continuing their education, its implementation in the Tanzanian context remains fraught with barriers. The study identified insufficient financial support, psychological distress, and limited participation in school social activities as the primary obstacles hindering the effective reintegration of teen mothers into the formal education system. Moreover, these challenges are often exacerbated by the attitudes and actions of key stakeholders in the implementation process, including teachers, parents, and peer students. In response to these findings, the study recommends that the government and educational stakeholders intensify community education and awareness campaigns to transform negative attitudes toward teen mothers. Reducing stigma and discrimination is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive school environment that prioritizes the emotional and academic well-being of adolescent mothers. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for clearer policy guidance and stronger monitoring mechanisms to ensure the consistent and effective application of the re-entry policy across schools. Without practical follow-ups and accountability structures, the policy risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative. Given the financial vulnerabilities highlighted, the study also calls for the provision of targeted financial support to teen mothers, whose responsibilities and needs have doubled with the presence of a newborn. Financial instability not only compromises their academic performance but also increases the risk of them relapsing into the same challenges that led to school dropout in the first place.

Additionally, there is a critical need for the establishment of structured guidance and counselling services in schools. These services should be tailored to address the specific emotional and psychological challenges that teen mothers face, thereby promoting resilience and long-term educational engagement. Finally, the study recommends further research into how the re-entry policy is being implemented in practice, particularly its impact on the academic performance and future prospects of teen mothers. Such research would contribute to a deeper understanding of policy effectiveness and inform more nuanced and inclusive educational reforms.

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