

# ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION RE-ENTRY POLICY ON TEENAGE MOTHERS' RETENTION IN TANZANIA: A CASE OF KYELA DISTRICT

<sup>1</sup>SIMON WILLIAM MSIKO, <sup>2</sup>DR. GOODLUCK JACOB,  
<sup>3</sup>DR. PATRICK MANYENGO

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA.

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**Abstract:** This study assessed the impact of the Education Re-entry Policy on the retention of teenage mothers in schools in Kyela District, Tanzania, focusing on the challenges they face in continuing their education after re-entry. The research was framed by Liberal Feminism Theory (1987) and utilized a descriptive case study design. Data were collected from 245 respondents through questionnaires and interviews, with a pilot study involving five participants to ensure the reliability of the tools. Both narrative and quantitative methods (frequencies and percentages) were used for analysis. The findings revealed that financial challenges were the most significant barrier to education for teenage mothers, along with a lack of childcare support, societal stigma and negative attitudes toward teenage mothers. Additionally, the study highlighted insufficient psychological and emotional support, inadequate school infrastructure, inflexible schedules, lack of supportive facilities and the absence of specialized programs for young mothers as key contributors to the challenges faced by these students. The study recommends the introduction of financial support programs, such as scholarships or conditional cash transfers, specifically targeting teenage mothers. It also suggests partnerships with private sector organizations and NGOs to mobilize resources for their education. Schools should establish school-based counseling services to address emotional and mental health needs, train counselors and provide safe spaces for confidential support. Flexible learning arrangements, such as half-day classes, weekend classes or distance learning, should be adopted to improve school infrastructure. Schools should also be equipped with private facilities, such as changing rooms, to accommodate parenting students. Additionally, community-based programs should be launched to shift public perceptions about teenage pregnancy and education, involving religious, traditional and political leaders as advocates for girls' education. Finally, a monitoring and evaluation system should be implemented to track re-entry, retention and academic progress and local education authorities should conduct regular audits to ensure compliance and support.

**Keywords:** Education Re-entry Policy, teenage mothers, financial challenges, emotional support.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy significantly disrupts education globally, leading to higher dropout rates and limited opportunities for young mothers. Education is vital for breaking the poverty cycle and lack of access increases risks of economic hardship, poor health and reduced social mobility. Various countries have implemented education re-entry policies to support teenage mothers' retention in schools (Mwani & Orodho, 2020).

In developed countries, policies focus on supporting teenage mothers through education, healthcare, childcare and legal protections to reduce stigma and barriers. The United States (U.S.) has policies prohibiting discrimination against pregnant and parenting students in federally funded schools, ensuring their right to continue education. Schools provide accommodations like alternative schooling methods to help maintain studies (Jones & Edwards, 2020).

In the UK, policies support teenage mothers' return to education with childcare and financial aid (Schmidt & Bartels, 2019). In Australia, teenage mothers receive support through early childhood education and school-based traineeships, improving retention and educational outcomes (Mwania & Orodho, 2020).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, re-entry policies for teenage mothers are inconsistent due to cultural stigma, financial challenges and logistical issues (International Crisis Group, 2019). In Sierra Leone, despite a 2019 policy allowing pregnant girls to attend school, societal stigma and lack of support services hinder its effectiveness (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Kenya's 2017 policy allows teenage mothers to return to school, but limited childcare, transportation and financial support, especially in rural areas, complicate implementation (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Uganda's policy on re-entry faces inconsistent application, with schools in rural areas refusing to admit teenage mothers due to societal pressure (Muwanguzi & Nabunya, 2020).

Tanzania's 2021 policy promises to support teenage mothers' return to school, but local implementation varies. Challenges include negative attitudes, lack of daycare and infrastructure issues (Tanzania Women Lawyers Association, 2021). In Kyela District, a pilot program with UNICEF provides mentorship and flexible schedules for teenage mothers, but stigma and resource gaps remain (UNICEF Tanzania, 2019).

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of Tanzania's 2021 Education Circular in Kyela District, focusing on barriers and facilitators to teenage mothers' re-entry and suggesting improvements for policy

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teenage pregnancy significantly disrupts girls' education in Tanzania and while the 2021 Education Re-entry Policy (ERP) enables teenage mothers to resume schooling post-childbirth, its impact on retention in Kyela District remains undefined. Persistent challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, societal stigma and limited financial and childcare support, hinder successful re-entry and completion of education, potentially compromising their economic stability and well-being. This study therefore intended to evaluate the ERP's effectiveness in Kyela District to identify barriers and propose solutions for improved implementation and support for teenage mothers.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study was to assess the impact of the Education Re-entry Policy on the retention of teenage mothers in Kyela District, Tanzania.

### **Specific Objective**

The specific objective of the study was to examine the challenges faced by teenage mothers in continuing their education after re-entry in Kyela district.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

This study was grounded in the Liberal Feminism Theory. Liberal Feminism Theory, originally found and articulated by Joan Acker in 1987. The Theory advocates for gender equality through legal and political reforms that prioritize individual rights, autonomy and equal opportunities for women. This theoretical framework provides a lens through which to analyze how societal norms and policies influence the experiences of teenage mothers returning to education and society after childbirth (Schmidt, & Bartels, 2019).

This Theory contend that all individuals, regardless of gender, should have equal access to legal rights and opportunities. It seeks to remove legal barriers that hinder women's freedom, such as discriminatory laws in employment, education and reproductive rights. It further emphasizes that the state should treat all individuals as equals, regardless of gender and that women should not be subject to gender-based restrictions or discrimination. The Theory acknowledges that all individuals, regardless of gender, should have equal access to legal rights and opportunities like education. It further acknowledges that the state has to treat all individuals as equals, regardless of gender and that women should not be subject to gender-based restrictions or discrimination. The limitations of this Theory is that the Theory focuses on personal autonomy and legal rights which may encourage a view of feminism that is more about individual success rather than systemic change or communal transformation (Schmidt & Bartels, 2019). Based on this type of reasoning the researcher accepts this study to be guided by this Theory

### Empirical Review

Lemoine & Morel (2020) found that teenage mothers in France faced barriers like lack of childcare, economic insecurity and social stigma. They recommended flexible learning hours, specialized daycare, financial aid and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma. This study differs in location and timeframe from the proposed research.

Morris & Gupta (2019) identified financial difficulties, childcare balancing and unsupportive attitudes as barriers for teenage mothers returning to education in Canada. They recommended mentorship programs, childcare financial aid and teacher training for supportive environments. The study differs in location, time and objectives.

Chilufya & Mwansa (2021) found that teenage mothers in Zambia faced limited access to facilities, affordable childcare and cultural stigma. They recommended improving infrastructure and awareness campaigns. This study's location, timeframe and objectives differ from the proposed research.

Ochieng & Nabirye (2022) identified the lack of school support, financial difficulties and societal pressures as barriers for teenage mothers in Uganda. They recommended mentorship, financial support and policies to integrate teenage mothers into schools. This study differs in location and timeframe from the proposed research.

Shija & Mponda (2023) highlighted challenges for teenage mothers in Tanzania, including lack of childcare, poor academic performance and social stigma. They recommended daycare facilities, flexible schedules and teacher training. This study differs in objectives and timeframe from the proposed research

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding the subjective experiences of individuals in their social contexts. Interpretivism was ideal for exploring how teenage mothers perceived and were impacted by the Education Re-Entry Policy, providing deeper insights into personal narratives and societal influences that quantitative methods might miss (Ibrahim & Victoria, 2022).

A mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods was used. The quantitative approach assessed the impact of the Education Re-entry Policy on teenage mothers' retention in Kyela District through statistical analysis of numerical data from a large sample and qualitative data were collected through interviews to capture deeper insights.

The study used a descriptive case study design, providing an in-depth analysis of teenage mothers' experiences in Kyela District. It gathered data from multiple stakeholders, including teenage mothers, teachers, school heads and parents.

The study targeted 729 secondary school teachers, 36 school heads, 31 ward education officers, 11 parents and 11 teenage mothers re-enrolled in school after childbirth in Kyela District

This study used purposive and simple random sampling techniques to select a sample of 245 respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select 23 respondents including 11 teenage mothers, 1 district education officers and 11 parents based on the researcher's judgment of their relevance and experience. Frankael & Wallen (2009) suggest that purposive sampling allows researchers to choose participants who provide the needed data.

Simple random sampling was used to select 222 respondents from 729 secondary school teachers, 36 headmasters and 31 ward education officers. The researcher randomly pick names from separate boxes, with 203 names from the teachers' box, 10 from headmasters and 9 from ward education officers.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and documentary review. A Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to 234 respondents (excluding parents). The questionnaires were distributed and collected at a pre-arranged time after informing participants in advance. Structured face-to-face interviews was conducted with 11 teenage mothers, 1 District Education Officer and 11 parents to gather detailed information on the impact of the Education Re-entry Policy on teenage mothers' retention in Kyela District. Probing was used to clarify inadequate or unclear responses and additional data were gathered from documents such as attendance records, examination reports and other relevant materials to supplement the interviews and questionnaires. This provided a comprehensive view of teenage mothers' educational progress.

The validity of research instruments was tested using a pilot study with 5 respondents, followed by feedback to refine the instrument. A pilot study was also used to test reliability through Cronbach's Alpha, with a score of less than 0.7 which was considered acceptable.

Data was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 20. Frequencies and percentages were calculated, followed by narrative and content analysis. The Likert scale data were interpreted using the "Collapsing Response" method, combining similar responses (e.g., 'strongly disagree' with 'disagree').

Before conducting the research, the researcher requested approval from the Open University of Tanzania and local authorities. Confidentiality was maintained and respondents' identities remained anonymous. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and could choose not to participate without any pressure.

#### 4. FINDINGS

##### Respondents' Demographics Information

The study collected data from a total of 245 participants. These included 11 teenage mothers, 11 parents or guardians, 204 secondary school teachers, 10 school heads and 9 ward education officers. Among these, 234 respondents completed and returned questionnaires, which formed the basis for quantitative analysis. In addition, 11 respondents participated in interviews to provide more in-depth qualitative insights into the subject matter.

##### Findings of the Study

The study aimed to examine challenges faced by teenage mothers in continuing their education after re-entry. To achieve this objective five aspects which are teenage mothers face significant financial challenges in continuing their education after re-entry, teenage mothers often experience a lack of childcare support which hinders their ability to attend school regularly, stigmatization and negative societal attitudes towards teenage mothers affect their ability to continue their education, there is insufficient psychological or emotional support available for teenage mothers to cope with the pressures of school and parenting and inadequate school infrastructure (e.g., lack of flexible schedules or accommodating facilities) is a barrier to the continued education of teenage mothers after re-entry were used. Findings are presented on Table 1

**Table 1. Descriptive Data on Challenges faced by teenage mothers in continuing their education after re-entry.**

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
Teenage mothers face significant financial challenges in continuing their education after re-entry	13 (5.6%)	18 (7.7%)	5 (2.1%)	108 (46.2%)	90 (38.4%)
Teenage mothers often experience a lack of childcare support which hinders their ability to attend school regularly	4 (1.7%)	6 (2.7%)	8 (3.4%)	119 (50.9%)	97 (41.3%)
Stigmatization and negative societal attitudes towards teenage mothers affect their ability to continue their education	7 (3.0)	5 (2.1%)	11 (4.7%)	113 (48.3%)	98 (41.9%)
There is insufficient psychological or emotional support available for teenage mothers to cope with the pressures of school	8 (3.4%)	4 (1.7%)	3 (1.3%)	101 (43.2%)	118 (50.4%)
Parenting and inadequate school infrastructure (e.g., lack of flexible schedules or accommodating facilities) is a barrier to the continued education of teenage mothers after re-entry	14 (6.0%)	19 (8.1%)	9 (3.8%)	98 (41.9%)	94 (40.2%)

**Source: Field Data, 2025.**

Findings from Table 1 reveal that teenage mothers face significant financial challenges in continuing their education after re-entry in Kyela District. According to Table 1, 198 (84.6%) respondents agreed and 31 (13.3%) disagreed that financial challenges are significant, while 5 (2.1%) were neutral. When teenage mothers were asked to state the biggest challenges they face as a teenage mother trying to continue their education in Kyela District, one of them said

*She did not have money for school fees, uniforms, or learning materials because her family was struggling and she had to take care of her baby too. School fees, transport and basic needs become harder to afford (Interview: Teenage mother 07, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2025).*

On the other side when parents were interviewed on the biggest challenges teenage mothers face trying to continue their education in Kyela District, she reported as follows;

*We cannot afford school fees, uniforms and baby needs at the same time. Supporting a child through school is already costly. When the child becomes a teenage mother, the family must also support the baby to give food, clothing and medical care. All these need money. As a result some families are forced to choose between educating the girl and taking care of the baby or discouraging studies. (Interview: Parent 2, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2025).*

The study revealed further a lack of childcare support significantly hinders teenage mothers' ability to attend school regularly in Kyela District. Table 1 shows that 216 (92.2%) respondents agreed and 10 (4.4%) disagreed that childcare support is lacking, while were 8 (3.4%) neutral. When interviewing teenage mothers fs they felt there were enough childcare support systems or other resources available to teenage mothers to help them continue their studies in Kyela District, the responses from one of them was as follows;

*The school allowed her to return after giving birth and her relatives helped her with childcare. There was no community center that supports young mothers with both parenting and continuing their education. (Interview: Teenage mother 05, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2025).*

The study established that stigmatization and negative societal attitudes significantly affect teenage mothers' ability to continue their education in Kyela District. As per Table 1, 211 (90.2%) respondents agreed and 12 (5.1%) disagreed that stigma is a barrier, while 11 (4.7%) were neutral. During interview teenage mothers were asked to explain if they experienced any stigma or discrimination from teachers, peers, or the community regarding their status as a teenage mother and how had this affected their education. One of the reported that;

*She felt judged by some teachers. Instead of offering support, a few made comments that made her feel ashamed or embarrassed. She was bullied by her peer students and called names like irresponsible or fast. It really hurt her confidence. Some people in her neighborhood stared or gossiped when they saw her with her baby bumped or pushed a stroller. To her education it was tough, but the discrimination motivated her to work even harder to prove them wrong. (Interview: Teenage mother 10, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2025).*

On the other side when parents were asked if they had ever listened that teenage mothers were facing stigma from their teachers, fellow students, or community members because of being parents in young age and how this situation affected their education, he had this to say;

*Yes, he had heard that some teachers treat them differently, like they don't expect them to succeed, some of students gossip or isolate them, which makes school even harder, community members often judge them, which lowers their confidence and motivation. Because of the stigma, many of them drop out or avoid going back to school they feel embarrassed or ashamed, so they skip classes or don't participate fully. (Interview: Parent 2, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2025).*

The study revealed further that there was insufficient psychological or emotional support available for teenage mothers to cope with the pressures of school in Kyela District. Table 1 indicates that 219 (93.9%) respondents agreed and 12 (5.1%) disagreed that support is lacking, while 3 (1.3%) were neutral.

Parenting responsibilities combined with inadequate school infrastructure, such as a lack of flexible schedules or accommodating facilities, pose a significant barrier to the continued education of teenage mothers in Kyela District. Table 4.1 shows that 192 (82.1%) respondents agreed and 33 (14.1%) disagreed that parenting and inadequate school infrastructure (e.g., lack of flexible schedules or accommodating facilities) is a barrier to the continued education of teenage mothers after re-entry while 9 (3.8%) were neutral. When parents were asked if there was any specific barriers related to transportation, school fees, or materials that have made it difficult for teenage mothers to stay in school after returning, One of the parents said;

*They could not afford the transport fare every day, especially since she has to carry the baby too. She missed school because she didn't have a uniform and we couldn't buy a new one after she gave birth. There was no one to look after her child, so she had to stay at home. Even when she wanted to go back, the school wanted us to pay all the fees first and she was too ashamed to go back because of what other students and teachers were saying. (Interview: Parent 4, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2025).*

Teenage mothers when interviewed to state if there were any specific barriers related to transportation, school fees or materials that have made it difficult for them to stay in school after returning, one of them reported that,

*The school was too far from home and she could not walk that distance with a baby. Her parents could not afford the school fees anymore since they had to buy things for her baby too. She also found it hard to catch up without extra lessons and she could not afford to pay teachers extra time* (Interview: Teenage mother 08, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2025).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that teenage mothers encounter multiple, interrelated barriers that significantly hinder their ability to remain in or succeed at school after giving birth.

Financial challenges emerged as a predominant obstacle. The majority of respondents agreed that teenage mothers struggle to afford school fees, uniforms, transportation and learning materials expenses compounded by the additional financial responsibilities of caring for a child. These economic constraints often force families to choose between supporting the teenage mother's education and meeting basic household needs, leading to school dropout or irregular attendance.

The study also revealed a critical lack of childcare support, with over 90% of respondents confirming this barrier. Teenage mothers were often forced to stay home to care for their children due to the unavailability of affordable or accessible childcare options. Without consistent childcare support, regular school attendance becomes nearly impossible.

Stigmatization and negative societal attitudes toward teenage mothers were also identified as a major limiting factors to continued education. Teenage mothers reported experiencing discrimination, judgment and exclusion from teachers, peers and community members, which eroded their self-esteem and motivation. This emotional pain can lead to withdrawal from school or hinder academic performance.

The study established that insufficient psychological and emotional support contributes significantly to the educational challenges faced by teenage mothers. With little to no structured counseling or support systems in place, these young mothers were left to navigate the complex pressures of school and parenting alone, increasing their vulnerability to stress and mental health issues.

Lastly, the study revealed that inadequate school infrastructure, including inflexible schedules, lack of supportive facilities and absence of tailored programs for young mothers, was shown to intensify the difficulties of balancing motherhood and education. The rigid nature of the school system in Kyela District did not cater to the unique needs of teenage mothers, further marginalizing them within the education sector.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that Government and NGOs should establish on-site or nearby childcare centers at or near secondary schools, schools should adopt a school-mother model where supervised care is integrated into the education environment, financial support programs should be introduced targeting scholarships, supports, or conditional cash transfers specifically for teenage mothers.

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