

Effect of the Implementation of Girls' Re-Entry Policy by the Headteachers on Students' Retention in Masinga Sub County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study explored the effect of the implementation of girls' re-entry policy by the head teachers on students' retention in Masinga sub county Kenya. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The target population was 50 head teachers, 50 deputy head teachers and 5022 form three and four students. Purposive, stratified proportionate sampling were employed to sample 25 head teachers, 25 deputy head teachers and 370 students. Data collection was done by use of questionnaires, interview guides and document analysis. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic approach. Validity of the research instruments was ascertained through expert judgment and piloting. Reliability was achieved through test re-test method where the instruments were piloted in a time interval of two weeks and the two results were correlated using Pearson's product moment correlation method. The hypothesis was accepted or rejected at 0.01 level of significance. The study found out that headteachers' implementation of the girls' re-entry policy has a positive influence on students' retention ($r = 0.76$; $p = 0.00$), hence the hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis accepted. The study concluded that focusing on the effective implementation of the girls' re-entry policy by the head teachers can be a key strategy for improving students' retention. The study recommended that policy makers should prioritize supporting headteachers through training, allocation of resources and guidance to help them fulfil this policy implementation.

Keywords

Girls' Re-Entry, Headteachers, Policy, Students' Retention

1. Introduction

According to UNESCO institute of statistics, 250 million children and youth

remain out of school globally (UNESCO, 2023). Among the out of school children are those who have never been enrolled in school or have dropped out before completing a full cycle of education. Pregnancy, both in and out of marriage is a key contributor to the non-completion of schooling by girls in the sub-Saharan region. In this region, laws, policies or measures protecting adolescent girls' education during pregnancy and motherhood are in place in 38 out of 54 countries (Wamahu & Musembi, 2023).

Access to education among teenage mothers is still a problem even in industrialized nations (Rumberger, 2020). Today nations have customized the re-entry policy into suitable key actions to guarantee good and exemplary educational pursuits of their teenage students (Zajac & Komendant-Brodowska, 2019). These policies explain how school age girls should be supported to remain in school while pregnant and go back to school after maternity break. To reduce wastage in education, countries should ensure that teenage mothers continue with education during pregnancy and after child birth (Amin & Ntembe, 2021).

New York city has a school re-entry policy which stipulates that teenage mothers should be permitted in school to attain their goals, but 70% of the teenage mothers still do not participate in school after child birth due to inadequate support from community, negative self-image and stigmatization (Webber, 2018). India has a school re-entry policy aimed at readmitting teenage mothers to school after maternity leave. India has prospered in executing this school re-entry policy due to targeted support offered by most learning institutions to teenage mothers during pregnancy and after child birth (Prakash *et al.* 2019).

School re-entry in South Africa allows teenage mothers re-admission (Tewari & Ilesanmi, 2020). Support in form of accommodation and administration accorded to teen mothers improved their engagement in education. The needs of teenage mothers that were addressed by the school administration were however not specified. South Africa has succeeded in implementing this policy by providing social and financial support for teenage mothers and access to various contraceptive methods (Carney *et al.*, 2019).

In Kenya every individual has a right to an education (The Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The re-entry policy to help young mothers return to schools came into law in 1994. The re-entry policy campaign aims at encouraging students who dropped out of schools to return to schools after giving birth. Ogola (2021) revealed that the re-entry policy implementation in Kenya had several weaknesses. The teenage mothers faced a lot of challenges. The study findings revealed that in terms of practice a lot more needed to be done by the policy makers. Implementation is not well addressed since the policy guidelines are not available in learning institutions. Absence of clarity on the guidelines has forced the head teachers and principals, who are the implementers to use their own discretion. The study recommended that there is need for qualified trained, guidance and counseling teachers to provide quality services to the teenage mothers. Students, parents and the communities need comprehensive sensitization on the re-entry policy

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Student retention rate has been a major concern for education institutions around the world. Most countries have laws, policies or measures protecting adolescent girls' education during pregnancy and motherhood. Adolescent pregnancy and child care have remained the biggest courses of school dropouts and failed readmission among girls (McFairLand *et al.*, 2018). Each year thousands of adolescent girls become pregnant (UNFPA, 2022). Kenya has a policy in place to cater for the continued education of girls returning to school after giving birth. Despite the policy being implemented, many young girls continue to drop out of school due to challenges encountered in their pursuit of education. This study seeks to investigate the effect of the implementation of the re-entry policy by the head teachers on students' retention.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to determine the effect of the implementation of the girls' re-entry policy by the head teachers on students' retention in secondary schools in Masinga sub county, Kenya.

1.3. Research Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between implementation of the girls' re-entry policy by the head teachers and students' retention

2. Literature Review

Several studies have been done to establish the effect of the re-entry policy and students' retention. A study done by Okwany and Kamusiime (2017) revealed that despite the re-entry policy in Ghana, young mothers are still out of school unable to continue their primary and secondary education. The reintegration education policies for pregnant school girls who leave school purposely for child birth have not been realized as most of these girls remain home. Scholars suggest that stigmatization against pregnant school girls and young mothers is a significant factor influencing the decision of young mothers never to return to school after child birth (Birungi *et al.*, 2015).

In Tanzania, the government introduced a re-entry policy in 2021, allowing mother students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy to return (United republic of Tanzania, 2021). However, there was some political interference towards this plan, which impacted its implementation and effectiveness. Studies by Momsen (2019) and Erete *et al.* (2021) highlighted the pervasive sexual oppression and violence faced by girl children in these domains. This oppression creates an environment where some girls find themselves vulnerable to early pregnancies leading to detrimental consequences such as dropping out of school.

Thwala *et al.* (2022) found out that re-engaging teenage girls who have left school due to pregnancy involves actively reintegrating these young mothers back into formal education, providing support, tailored programs and a welcoming

environment to empower them to continue with their studies and pursue their educational goals. It entails identifying and removing the obstacles that contributed to their disengagement, creating effective interventions to encourage their return and giving them the tools and encouragement they need to continue their education (Kubek *et al.*, 2020).

Marende (2022) established that schools were yet to succeed with re-entry policy because only 16% of girls who took maternity leave from schools reenrolled after child birth. The study recommends for teacher training on psycho social support for teenage mothers and school support on acquisition of bursaries and parental empowerment for involvement in the academic pursuit of teenage mothers.

A study done in Narok by Azumah *et al.* (2022) revealed that the implementation and manner of implementation of the re-entry policy is at the discretion of head teachers. The study pointed at the failure of the policy to account for the significant amount of time lost while trying to catch up with their studies upon their return. Chiyota and Marishane (2020) emphasized the nation benefits of girls' education, referring to research that shows that educating females produces far reaching profits for girls and women themselves, their families and the societies in which they live. He further remarked that indeed, during his tenure as a chief economist of the world bank he became persuaded that once all the benefits are acknowledged, investment in the education of girls may well be the highest profit venture obtainable in the developing world.

Mulenga and Mukaba (2018) found that schools did not have specific programs meant to help re-entered girls and that most girls decided to stop schooling. According to Musili *et al.* (2020) most of the teenage mothers come from poor backgrounds that could not offer basic needs for the mother and her baby. In Kenya most principals were reported to have no adequate experience in the proper implementation of the readmission policy of girls after teenage pregnancy in public secondary schools (Musili *et al.*, 2020).

Omondi & Onyango (2008) report that school heads fear allowing the return to school of girls who give birth because of the stigma associated with having mothers in a student environment. Omondi & Onyango (2008) observed that at the launch of the report on teenage pregnancy and school girl dropout, school heads talked of ostracism faced by schools who have implemented the ministry of education policy on readmitting the girls who give birth in the same school. Omondi & Onyango (2008) noted that other schools derogatorily refer to institutions that accept teenage mothers as "maternity schools" and openly encouraged isolation of our girls in social gatherings.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study employed a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a method for gathering information about a population, situation or phenomenon to describe it accurately and systematically.

3.2. Target Population

The study had a population of 5122 participants. The study population included 50 headteachers, 50 deputy headteachers and 5022 form three and four students of the fifty public secondary schools in Masinga sub-county. The researcher chose form three and four students because they had spent a considerable time in the school and so were information rich.

3.3. Sample Size

The sample size for the students was computed using Yamane 1973 formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = sample size;

N = population size;

e = margin error (0.05);

1 = constant.

Hence,

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{5022}{1 + 500(0.05)^2} \\ &= 370. \end{aligned}$$

3.4. Sampling Technique

Sampling is a method, process or procedure used to select a subset of a population to take part in the study. It is the process of choosing a large number people for a research in a way that ensures the chosen people accurately reflect the larger population from which they were chosen (Matula *et al.*, 2018). This study used purposive sampling technique to select 25 deputy headteacher and 25 headteachers. The researcher further employed simple random sampling to select 370 students.

3.5. Instruments

The researcher made use of three instruments to collect data from the headteachers, deputy headteachers and the students. These included questionnaires, interview guides and document analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

Validity assess whether content in a questionnaire is able to measure what is intended to be measured (Orodho, 2004). For this study, departmental supervisors examined the content validity of the questionnaire then provided the researcher with the necessary advice. According to Mugenda (2008), reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials. The study applied the test retest method to establish

the reliability of the items in the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient was computed using Pearson's product moments correlation. The questionnaires had a correlation coefficient of 0.70 which was considered acceptable (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

3.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis deals with working with the data breaking and synthesizing in search of patterns and attempting to discover what the important issues are (Babu-Nyarko, 2019). Data analysis was done using SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) version 22.0. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means and percentages summarized demographic characteristics and key variables.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

The National Council of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOST) as well as university of Nairobi provided permission for the study. Permission was also sought from the County Commissioner Machakos County and sub-county director of education Masinga Sub-county. The researcher ensured voluntary participation by the respondents and assured them of the confidentiality of the information collected.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Response Rate

A total of 370 questionnaires were administered to students while 25 questionnaires were administered to the headteachers. Only 350 questionnaires were returned for analysis by the students which formed 95% return rate. Similarly, 25 out of 25 headteachers and deputy headteachers responded hence a response rate of 100%. The questionnaire return rate is shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. The questionnaire return rate.

Category	sampld	Returned	Not Returned	Percentage
Head teachers	25	25	0	100
Deputy Headteachers	25	25	0	100
Students	370	350	20	95

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The researcher analyzed the demographic characteristics of the headteachers and deputy headteachers.

4.2. Distribution of Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers by Age

Data displaying the distribution of headteachers and deputy headteachers by age is summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Distribution of headteachers and deputy headteachers by age.

Age	Headteachers		Deputy Headteachers	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
35 - 39	2	8.3	5	20.83
40 - 44	9	37.5	13	54.16
45 - 49	8	29.2	6	20.83
50 - 55	3	12.5	1	4.18
Above 55	3	12.5	0	0

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

Table 2 shows that majority 9 (37.5%) of the head teachers are aged between 40 and 44 years while 8 (29.2%) are aged between 45 - 49 years. 3 (12.5%) are aged 50 - 55 years. Richter (2011) asserted that teachers between the ages 30 - 49 years are keen on trying new ideas, have hope in the system and aggressively seek to produce results and are likely to be appointed for leadership. The implication here is that majority of the headteachers were in the right age to implement the girls' re-entry policy because they were keen on trying new ideas. The deputy head teachers were equally of the right age to implement the re-entry policy.

4.3. Gender of the Respondents

As shown in **Table 3**, the study sought to establish the gender of the respondents.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by gender.

Category	No of male	Percent	No of female	Percent	Total & percentage%
Head Teachers	19	76	6	24	25 (100%)
Deputy Head Teachers	16	64	9	36	25 (100%)
students	150	42.8	200	57.2	350 (95%)

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

As shown in **Table 3**, majority of the headteachers 19 (76%) were male while 6 (24%) were female. In addition, majority of the deputy head teachers 16 (64%) were male while 9 (36%) were female. The gender ratio clearly show that more males were appointed in positions of leadership as compared to the females. In contrast there were more female students 200 (57.2%) as compared to the male students 150 (42.8%)

4.4. Professional Qualifications of Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers

Data displaying qualifications of headteachers and deputy head teachers is summarized in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Professional qualification of head teachers and deputy head teachers.

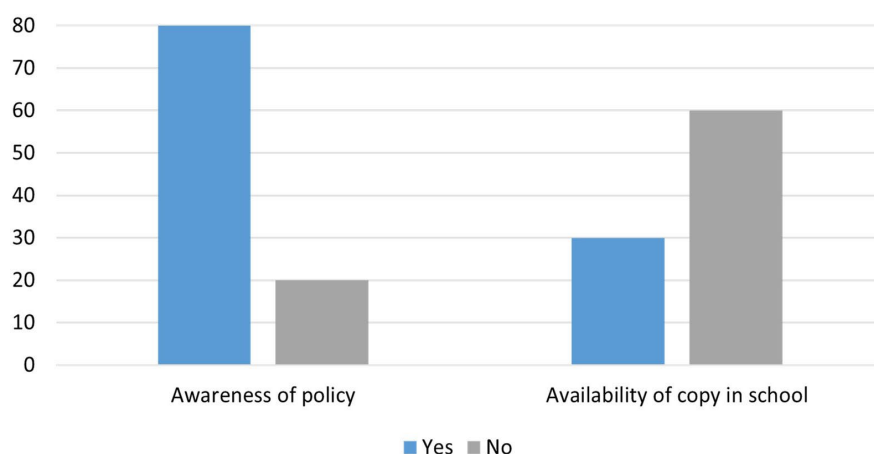
Category	PHD%	Masters%	Degree%	Diploma%
Head Teachers	-	6 (25%)	16 (66.7%)	-
Deputy Head Teachers	-	2 (8.3%)	20 (83.3%)	-

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

The findings in **Table 4** indicate that majority 16 (66.7%) of the Head Teachers were degree holders while 6 (25%) were master's holders. 20 (83.3%) of the deputy headteachers had attained a degree while 2 (8.3%) had attained a master's degree. The implication here is that majority of the head Teachers and the Deputy headteachers had the necessary qualifications of a degree in education for effective implementation of the re-entry policy secondary schools.

4.5. Headteachers Awareness of the Re-Entry Policy

Headteachers had been asked to state whether they were aware of the re-entry policy. Their responses are presented in **Figure 1**.



Source: fieldwork, 2022.

Figure 1. Headteachers responses on awareness of re-entry policy and students' retention.

Findings in **Figure 1** indicate that majority 80% of the headteachers knew that there was a governments re-entry policy for teen mothers. Conversely 20% of the headteachers had never heard about the policy, or rather they gathered through media that expectant students and teen mothers should be supported to complete secondary education.

4.6. Number of Students Retained from 2018 to 2023 by the Headteachers

The headteachers responded on the number of girls retained in school from 2018 to 2023. Their responses are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Number of girls retained from 2018-2023 by the headteachers and students' retention.

Year	No. of Expectant learners	No retained	No. that dropped	% Retained
2018	26	21	5	80.7
2019	23	20	3	86.9
2020	90	75	15	83.3
2021	19	17	2	89.4
2022	21	17	3	80.9
2023	22	21	1	95.4
Total	201	171	29	

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

Findings in **Table 5** indicate that majority of the expectant students were retained to continue with school. This implies that the re-entry policy by the government of Kenya had a positive impact on retention of expectant students. These findings are in agreement with Imbosa *et al.* (2022) who found out that the re-entry policy was a major positive step towards achieving retention of expectant and parenting students.

4.7. Effectiveness of Re-Entry Policy on Students' Retention

The headteachers were requested to rate the effectiveness of the re-entry policy on student's retention. Their responses are shown on **Table 6**.

Table 6. Effectiveness of the re-entry policy on students' retention.

	Frequency	Percent
Very effective	3	12
Effective	18	72
Less Effective	4	16
	25	100

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

Majority 18 (72%) of headteachers indicated that re-entry policy was effective in increasing girls' retention while 3 (12%) indicated that the re-entry policy was very effective. In addition, 4 (16%) indicated that the re-entry policy was less effective in increasing students' retention.

4.7.1. Mean and Standard Deviation for Effective Implementation of the Re-Entry Policy

	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Effective implementation of the re-entry policy	25	20.2000	6.35741

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

To test whether relationship existed between effective implementation of the

government re-entry policy, the following null hypothesis was formulated as follows.

HO₁: there is no significant relationship between implementation of the girls' re-entry policy by the headteachers and students' retention. The hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson correlation and the results are as given in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Correlation between effective implementation of government re-entry policy and students' retention.

		Effective implementation of re-entry policy	Students retention rate
Effective implementation of government re-entry policy	Pearson correlation	1	0.761
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	25	25
Student retention rate	Pearson correlation	0.761	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	25	25

Source: fieldwork, 2022.

Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Results in **Table 7** show that there is a significant strong correlation between effective implementation of government re-entry policy by the headteachers and students' retention ($r(23) = 0.76$, $P = 0.00$).

Null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis adopted. This suggests that increase in effective implementation of government re-entry policy by the headteachers will lead to increase in retention rates. These findings are supported by [Kearney et al. \(2019\)](#) who found out that the re-entry policy has a positive impact on the girls' education. Kearney reported that South Africa had succeeded in implementing the re-entry policy by providing social and financial support for teenage mothers and access to various contraceptive methods. [Prakash et al. \(2019\)](#) established that the re-entry policy in India prospered due to targeted support offered by most learning institutions to teenage mothers during pregnancy and after child birth.

[Webber \(2018\)](#) established that 70% of the teenage mothers still do not participate in school after child birth due to inadequate support from community, negative self-image and stigmatization.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that focusing on the effective implementation of the girls' re-entry policy by the headteachers can be a key strategy for improving students' retention. The study also concluded that although policy measures have been put in place to ensure the return of teenage mothers to school, a considerable number of girls who get pregnant are unlikely to return to school. Poor implementation of the re-entry policy in many countries has led many girls to drop out of school. The girls' unfriendly school systems and stigmatization associated with teenage

pregnancy make it difficult and almost impossible for pregnant girls to re-enter or re-enroll to continue their education after child birth. Awareness creation of the policy must be intensified, strong processes of implementation with clear roles and responsibilities must be spelled out, school environment must be equipped to be suitable for teenage parents. The headteachers did not receive any formal training on implementation of the re-entry policy, in addition, headteachers lacked policy documents on the re-entry policy.

The study concluded that the implementation of the re-entry policy may have long term societal benefits such as increased literacy rates, gender equality and economic empowerment of the girl child. The implementation of the re-entry policy is faced with several challenges, including lack of awareness among headteachers, stigmatization, resources constrains and negative cultural beliefs. The study will contribute to understanding policy implementation roles in improving educational outcomes, especially in contexts with high teenage pregnancy rates.

6. Recommendation of the Study

The study recommended that policy makers should prioritize supporting headteachers through training, allocation of resources and guidance to help them fulfil this policy implementation. The study recommended that the ministry of education should allocate a budget for the roll out and implementation of the re-entry policy. The study also recommended that the government create adequate awareness of the re-entry policy. This should be done through availing copies of the re-entry policy documents. Further the study recommended that it was necessary to include the re-entry policy in the curriculum so that both learners and teachers could have adequate knowledge of the re-entry policy.

Limitations of the Study

The study faced difficulties in the process of data collections, first some of the respondents were unwilling to provide information for fear of portraying negative image about them. The researcher addressed this by assuring participants that the information they provided was solely for academic purposes.

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Suggestion for Further Studies

Based on the findings of this study the researcher suggests that further study should be done on the teenage mothers' perspectives on re-entry policy in Machakos, Kenya.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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