



Prospects and challenges of teenage mothers' re-entry into secondary schooling at Chisalu folk development college, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Teenage motherhood is a global issue that affects both developed and developing nations. In Tanzania, teenage mothers were previously prohibited from returning to public secondary schools. However, under President Samia Suluhu Hassan, teenage mothers are now granted the opportunity to continue their education after giving birth. This study utilized a qualitative approach to examine the prospects and challenges of teenage mothers' re-entry into secondary schooling at Chisalu Folk Development College. The sample consisted of 27 participants, including 15 teenage mothers, 1 college principal, 3 non-teaching staff and 8 tutors. The findings indicated that a supportive and accommodating environment led to a high enrollment rate among teenage mothers due to the provision of quality services, such as financial aid and child care facilities, including daycare centers within the school. Additionally, the study revealed that there was a negative perception within the community regarding the return of teenage mothers to school. The study recommends that the government ensure teenage mothers receive appropriate support and care, along with equal opportunities as their peers. It also emphasizes the need for zero tolerance towards stigmatization, advocating for its complete eradication in all forms

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INTRODUCTION

Teenage mothers and their children represent a population at heightened risk for both physical and emotional challenges. The mothers face a variety of hazards, including poverty, food insecurity, pregnancy-related complications, and mental health issues such as depression and substance abuse (Treffer, 2003). Children born to teenage mothers are also more likely to encounter physical, cognitive, and emotional difficulties (Marende, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to identify the determinants influencing the outcomes of adolescent mothers and their offspring, with the aim of developing interventions that can positively impact their well-being.

Research by scholars such as Treffer (2003), Baa-Poku (2016), and Nwafor (2013) highlighted that teenage motherhood is a concern in both developing

and developed nations. Although it is less prevalent in developed countries, it poses significant challenges in developing countries, especially in Tanzania, where factors such as truancy, poverty, and negative peer pressure contribute to teenage pregnancies.

In Tanzania, teenage mothers were previously prohibited from returning to public secondary schools. However, under President Samia Suluhu Hassan, a new re-entry policy for teenage mothers has been implemented. This policy allows pregnant schoolgirls to continue their formal education after childbirth, as outlined in Education Policy No. 02 of 2021. Education Minister Joyce Ndalichako announced that girls are permitted to re-enroll within two years of giving birth or, if beyond that timeframe, to enroll in an alternative education center that offers an accelerated curriculum.

This study examined the factors influencing the re-entry policy for teenage mothers at Chisalu Folk Development College (FDC) in Mpwapwa District. The research explores aspects such as community psychological support, financial assistance, environmental support, and social attitudes toward the re-entry policy, as well as the prospects and challenges associated with its implementation. By investigating these factors, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of the re-entry policy and its impact on the well-being and educational opportunities of teenage mothers.

Literature review

A teenage mother is defined as a female under the age of 18 who becomes pregnant and gives birth within this age range. These pregnancies are often unintended, unplanned, and occur outside of marriage. Teenage pregnancy may arise due to early physical maturity and the onset of menstruation, which varies across individuals and can expose young girls to peer influences (Kawala, 2021). Several factors contribute to the prevalence of teenage pregnancies across both developing and developed nations, differing in prevalence over time and geographic location. The rapid population growth in the developing world, particularly in Africa, has also contributed to the increased incidence of pregnancies (Ede, 2011).

In some cases, teenage pregnancy results from insufficient knowledge about reproductive health and contraception within the context of early marriage (Esantsi et al., 2015). Managing unplanned pregnancies among teenagers can be a disconcerting and intimidating experience, often leading to depression, frustration, fear, and other emotional challenges. Thus, the heightened risk for educational difficulties and adverse outcomes in children of adolescent parents is associated not solely with the young age of the mother, but rather with the complex interplay of various sociodemographic factors. Many teenagers become pregnant after engaging in relationships due to curiosity and a lack of awareness about sexual health (Nwafor et al., 2018).

Kaufman (2001) noted that teenage pregnancy and parenting are primary reasons girls cite for

dropping out of school, as young mothers must navigate the logistical and financial challenges of motherhood while attempting to continue their education. Teenage motherhood occurs when a female in her teenage years becomes a mother due to pregnancy (Brady et al., 2012). Teenage pregnancies, which occur when the girl is under the age of 18 (Sambo, 2009), are often unwanted and unplanned, occurring outside of marriage. Children born to teenage mothers are less likely to receive adequate nutrition, healthcare, education, and cognitive and social stimulation. These challenges can lead to underdevelopment, poverty, and stigmatization of the child, hindering their ability to achieve academic goals. Many teenage mothers drop out of school, which may contribute to a cycle of limited opportunities and potential involvement in undesirable activities.

Teenage pregnancy may be linked to early maturity and the onset of menstruation, as well as exposure to peer influences (Baa-Poku, 2016). A mature adolescent girl may attract the attention of the opposite sex, as noted by Ede. Multiple factors contribute to the growth of teenage pregnancies across the globe, varying according to time and place. Efforts have been made to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancy, including other related social issues (Eke, 2011). The rapid increase in population in the developing world, particularly in Africa, has exacerbated problems such as unemployment, poverty, and hunger, as well as limited access to education (Nwafor, 2018; Mwanza, 2015 and 2018).

Winnicott and Nussbaum (2102) highlighted the negative impact of adolescent pregnancy on the health of the mother and child, as well as the overall health of teenage girls. These young mothers often face health challenges and economic difficulties, with some even considering extreme measures such as abortion or suicide.

Several sub-Saharan African countries have re-entry policies that permit teenage mothers to return to school after childbirth, such as South Africa and Namibia (Tewari and Ilesanmi, 2020; African Union, 2015a). In these cases, young mothers receive support in the form of social and financial aid, as well as access to contraceptive methods (Carnet et al., 2019). However, a lack of social support can lead to

stress, isolation, and decreased motivation to return to school (Samuel and Burger, 2020). Birungi et al. (2015) identified three categories of policies concerning pregnant teenagers in sub-Saharan Africa: expulsion, re-entry, and continuation. Expulsion policies remove teenage mothers from formal education, offering no possibility of return. Re-entry policies allow teenage mothers to take a leave of absence and then return to school. Continuation policies permit pregnant teenagers to remain in school as long as they take a leave of absence after childbirth.

For many years, teenage mothers in Tanzania were forced to drop out of school. In 2017, Tanzania implemented a ban that prohibited pregnant students from continuing their education in public schools and threatened nongovernmental organizations that challenged the ban. However, in November 2021, the Ministry of Education announced that teenage mothers could re-enroll in school immediately. The policy allows teenage mothers to return within two years of giving birth or, if later, to enroll in alternative education centers offering an accelerated curriculum. The goal of these policies is to support teenage mothers in achieving their educational aspirations. The policy aims to promote gender equality, as it seeks to address the disparity between the opportunities available to pregnant girls and their male counterparts. The policy provides teenage mothers with counseling, guidance, and support, empowering them to continue their education and make informed decisions.

Although the Tanzanian government published this policy in 2021, nongovernmental organizations have been implementing the "Skills Development for Young Women" program since 2019. This program targets young women who have dropped out of secondary school for various reasons, including pregnancy, financial difficulties, or disciplinary issues. The program allows participants to re-enroll in Folk Development Colleges (FDCs) and pursue secondary education informally for two years. Additionally, participants may choose from a range of vocational training courses offered at the college. This initiative, supported by the Karibu Tanzania Organization and the Ministry of Education, is

provided free of charge and includes child care services for young mothers.

In 2021, the Chisalu FDC enrolled 29 students, of whom 28 were registered for secondary education and one for post-secondary education. Ultimately, 15 students successfully completed their national examinations, four dropped out, and nine continued their studies the following year. In 2022, the college enrolled 25 students, 22 for secondary education and three for post-secondary education. Six students withdrew from the program, seven completed their national examinations, and 12 are expected to continue their studies in 2023.

The Tanzanian government's implementation of re-entry policies has the potential to positively impact teenage mothers and their educational and life outcomes. By allowing teenage mothers to return to school and providing them with resources such as child care centers and financial support, the government aims to empower young women to complete their education and pursue their career goals. This approach aligns with global initiatives promoting the rights and well-being of teenage mothers.

The outcomes of the "Skills Development for Young Women" program at Chisalu Folk Development College (FDC) demonstrate the efficacy of such initiatives. The program offers teenage mothers opportunities to pursue secondary education and vocational training, free of charge, in an environment conducive to their success. By incorporating child care services, the program helps young mothers balance their academic and parenting responsibilities, thus fostering higher levels of engagement and completion rates.

However, despite these positive steps, challenges remain. Teenage mothers may still face stigmatization and social isolation, which can hinder their progress and reintegration into the educational system. Furthermore, the success of re-entry policies relies heavily on consistent support from schools, communities, and policymakers to address the unique needs of teenage mothers effectively. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Schools must offer counseling services and tailored support to teenage mothers, while communities should work to eliminate stigmatization and promote inclusivity. Additionally,

continuous evaluation and refinement of re-entry policies are essential to ensure their effectiveness and adaptability to changing societal needs

■ METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study was qualitative, enabling an in-depth exploration of the human experience and data collection in natural settings. This approach was particularly suited to the study's aims, which sought to examine the factors influencing school re-entry among teenage mothers at Chisalu Folk Development College (FDC) in the Mpwapwa district. By using this approach, the study captured the interviewees' perspectives, experiences, attitudes, expectations, and opinions regarding the re-entry policy for teenage mothers.

The study utilized a case study design at Chisalu FDC, which is one of three public vocational training centers and among the institutions that have readmitted teenage mothers for secondary education. The other two centers are Dodoma VETA Central Zone and Munguri FDC in Kondoa district. Chisalu FDC offers courses in various disciplines such as Domestic Electrical Installation, Tailoring, Animal Husbandry, Motor Vehicles and Mechanics, Carpentry and Joinery, Masonry and Bricklaying, and a program known as Skills Development for Young Women (ELIMU HAINA MWISHO). This program re-enrolls young women who have left secondary education, including teenage mothers.

The study sample consisted of 15 teenage mothers, 1 college principal, 3 non-teaching staff, and 8 tutors. Data collection instruments included an in-depth interview guide, a focus group discussion guide, and a document analysis guide. Interviews were conducted with 15 teenage mothers, the college principal, and 3 teachers, while other 5 staff participated in the focus group discussion. Validity and reliability were maintained through trustworthiness, encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Data were categorized into themes and analyzed thematically, with findings organized under broad categories and subcategories aligned with the research objectives and questions. This thematic analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of

the re-entry policy's impact and effectiveness at Chisalu FDC.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role of a school conducive environment in high school enrollment rates

The first research objective aimed to examine the impact of a school-conducive environment on high enrollment rates in secondary schools. The study's findings demonstrate that a positive and supportive environment significantly contributes to increased enrollment rates, particularly for teenage mothers. This is achieved through the provision of comprehensive services, such as care for the mothers and their children, as well as access to learning materials and facilities.

The study highlighted the importance of giving teenage mothers priority in their respective classes through tailored timetables, which encourages them to re-enroll and engage in their studies. This strategy has been effective in increasing the number of enrolled students at the college, as it provides teenage mothers with the opportunity to balance their studies with their caregiving responsibilities.

Moreover, the college's scheduling accommodates day and night study sessions, ensuring that teenage mothers who may miss daytime classes can attend night sessions to keep up with their coursework. This flexible approach, along with the college's promotional efforts and the availability of learning resources, has a positive impact on reducing dropout rates among teenage mothers and improving their academic success. Through these targeted initiatives, the study emphasizes the crucial role of a supportive and accommodating school environment in enhancing the educational experience and retention of teenage mothers in secondary school.

The study employed a discussion group with a college course coordinator to examine the impact of daily timetables on teenage mothers and their high enrollment rates. Initially, in 2020, teenage mothers were allocated specific times to feed their children during the day and were compensated for any missed periods after class hours. Teachers would provide additional instruction, either after regular classes or during night preparation sessions. After classes

concluded at 3:30 pm, students engaged in extracurricular activities, while teenage mothers had the flexibility to participate in catch-up sessions or attend to their children.

As the program progressed to 2023, all learners eventually returned their children to their parents' homes, leaving the teenage mothers to focus solely on their studies. The flexible timetables were beneficial to them, allowing them to balance academic pursuits with other responsibilities. Additionally, the college facilitated business projects, which further supported the teenage mothers.

During the discussion group with students, it became clear that at the outset of the program, the option to re-enroll with their children provided a sense of stability for teenage mothers. Permission to occasionally visit their children at home also offered reassurance. A student's response highlighted this aspect: "We received permission to return home to check on our children whenever needed. The principal respected our circumstances as fellow mothers, providing support and guidance."

The college principal emphasized the program's efforts to create a nurturing environment for teenage mothers. These included offering counselling, bursary assistance, and treating them as adults with responsibilities towards their children. The principal remarked, "After readmission, I ensure they receive counselling on their past experiences, along with bursary support and other essentials."

The provision of teaching and learning resources, sponsored by the Karibu Tanzania Organization (KTO), was crucial to the program's success. These resources, including books, sports equipment, and computers, facilitated the teenage mothers' academic pursuits. One student expressed gratitude for the support, noting that they were "living, studying, and enjoying a fulfilling experience at the college."

Moreover, the college environment fostered a high enrollment rate not only among teenage mothers but also among other girls who had dropped out of secondary studies for various reasons. The numbers of re-registered students fluctuated over the years, with 29 students in 2021, 25 in 2022, and 30 in 2023. The college principal emphasized that the supportive college environment played a significant role in attracting more young mothers to the program.

The study supports the conclusions of [Wanyama and Simatwa \(2011\)](#), who advocated for counselling and guidance departments in schools to support girls who face teenage motherhood. This support helps shift perceptions and attitudes, enabling girls to approach their academics positively. The findings also align with [Undie and Birungi \(2016\)](#) and [Undie et al.'s \(2015\)](#) research, which emphasized the strategic role of school heads and teachers in implementing policies that support teenage mothers.

Lastly, the study resonates with [Pediatric International's \(2022\)](#) special journal, which highlighted five categories of supportive environments: individual support at school, baby care support, community awareness, and positive relationships with guardians, and mutual community support networks. These factors collectively contribute to school re-entry for adolescent students and minimize absenteeism.

Influence of social support on school re-entry among teenage mothers

The study aimed to examine the influence of social support on high enrollment rates among teenage mothers in secondary schools. The program was implemented in folk development colleges, provided opportunities for teenage mothers to achieve their educational goals. The study found that parents and guardians played a significant role in encouraging teenage mothers to return to school by providing support and taking responsibility for their daughters and grandchildren.

The study utilized open-ended questions to gather insights from 14 teenage mothers about their experiences balancing studies with caring for their children. One student highlighted the support she received from her parents, who took care of her child while she pursued her studies. Another teenage mother expressed gratitude for her parents' and relatives' support, which enabled her to attend the college comfortably. A third teenage mother noted that, despite initial challenges, her family continued to care for her and her child, allowing her to pursue her education. The study also explored the reasons why pregnant teenagers are more likely to drop out of school ([Runhare and Hwami, 2014](#)). Students cited factors such as fear of judgment, peer harassment, and the responsibilities of motherhood as reasons for

dropping out. Many students preferred to enroll in a different school rather than return to their previous institutions due to concerns about stigmatization. The findings revealed that community support played a crucial role in encouraging teenage mothers to return to school. Approximately 100% of students expressed that community support made them comfortable in their academic pursuits, while 71.4% emphasized the importance of attending a different school to avoid stigma. The study also applied an interview instrument with college principals to analyze how community leaders supported the re-entry policy for teenage mothers. Leaders such as village chairpersons and executive officers helped advertise the program and promoted the importance of education for young women.

The college principal highlighted the positive impact of community support on the program, including the involvement of local leaders in promoting the initiative and raising awareness about the importance of education for young women. The study found that community support was instrumental in providing care, counseling, and guidance for teenage mothers, as well as fostering positive attitudes toward their re-enrollment.

These findings align with the research of [Marende \(2022\)](#), who emphasized the role of social support in increasing enrollment rates through counseling, guidance, child protection, and parental empowerment. [Garcia et al. \(2018\)](#) also emphasized the positive relationship between resilience and success among adolescent mothers, which can be enhanced through counseling. [Kurgat \(2016\)](#) discovered a significant positive relationship between administrative support and the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary schools.

The study underscores the importance of social support in facilitating the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary schools. Collaborative efforts between schools and communities can improve awareness and acceptance, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for teenage mothers.

Role of financial support on school re-entry among teenage mothers

The third objective of the study was to assess the impact of financial support on the re-entry rates of

teenage mothers in folk development colleges (FDCs). This objective considered the availability of bursaries for school fees, food, and shelter for boarding students, as well as the financial implications of running the program, including the payment of teachers and provision of learning facilities.

A discussion group was conducted with college principals and six teachers to understand how school fees are managed for teenage mothers and whether they are charged the same as vocational education and training (VET) students. The study found that re-entry programs for young girls are free of charge, including fees for food and exams. This financial support is crucial in attracting young girls to re-enroll in school, as they do not need to contribute financially. The college provides adequate resources, such as water and electricity, which also appeal to potential students.

The college principal emphasized the significant influence of financial support on the success of the program, noting that it allowed the college to provide the program without requiring any financial contribution from the students. As a result, the program could offer boarding facilities and a favorable learning environment, which attracted many young girls to re-enroll in school.

This sentiment was echoed by 75% of the teachers during the discussion group, who mentioned that the program initially faced challenges due to the lack of financial support for teacher compensation. However, with donations from the Karibu Tanzania Organization (KTO) and government funding, the college was able to recruit part-time staff and improve the program.

The study found that financial support not only led to high re-enrollment rates among teenage mothers but also helped the institution establish training facilities, daycare centers, and live projects, which simplified the re-entry process and increased enrollment rates.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. A lack of financial support can hinder re-enrollment among teenage mothers, who may struggle to manage school costs and care for their children without the support of the fathers. All teenage mothers interviewed stated that their parents or guardians provided financial and emotional support, while none reported ongoing

communication or support from the fathers of their children.

These findings align with [Grant and Hallman \(2008\)](#), who found that teenage parents often face resource shortages and support challenges both before and after pregnancy. [Nyariro \(2018\)](#) also emphasized the importance of financial support for providing safe daycare centers, supportive environments, and monetary assistance for teenage mothers and their families.

Furthermore, [Marende \(2022\)](#) highlighted the impact of financial support on the enrollment of teenage mothers, particularly in terms of budget allocations for counseling, bursaries, and fee waivers. However, she noted that the Ministry of Education did not adequately budget for psychological counseling training for teachers, resulting in ineffective counseling practices. Additionally, there was insufficient communication between parents, guardians, and schools about alternative sources of school fees, such as bursaries, which could enable re-enrollment.

In summary, financial support plays a critical role in facilitating the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary schools. Addressing financial challenges and ensuring access to resources are essential for maximizing the effectiveness of re-entry programs and improving educational outcomes for teenage mothers

Attitudes and norms of community members towards school re-entry among teenage mothers

The study aimed to understand the impact of community attitudes and perceptions on the re-entry policy for teenage mothers in educational institutions. This policy seeks to provide young mothers with opportunities to continue their education after childbirth, despite the societal and logistical challenges they may face. The study assessed the attitudes and perceptions of various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and the broader community, during the implementation of the policy and in its aftermath at the college. Positive community attitudes were found to facilitate higher enrollment rates, while negative perceptions often hindered the re-entry of young mothers to either their original or alternative schools.

Community attitudes and perceptions after students become pregnant

The study found that the community often reacted harshly when a young female student became pregnant. These reactions could lead to feelings of shame and isolation for the young women, potentially prompting them to take drastic measures such as running away from home or contemplating suicide. Through discussion groups with teenage mothers, the study gathered first-hand accounts of the community's attitudes and perceptions following the pregnancy of female students. For instance, one participant described experiencing social isolation from her peers and enduring harsh treatment from the community, which contributed to feelings of hopelessness and self-blame. However, her situation improved when she learned about the re-entry program, providing her with an opportunity for a fresh start and renewed hope. Another teenage mother shared similar experiences, highlighting how the community's negative perceptions toward pregnant girls could lead to emotional distress, social isolation, and feelings of worthlessness. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Education's re-entry policy offered her and others like her a path to reclaim their education and rebuild their lives.

Impact of negative attitudes on teenage mothers

The study revealed that negative community attitudes significantly impacted the well-being of pregnant teenagers and young mothers. The stigmatization and social isolation they faced could lead to a range of negative outcomes, including psychological harm, conflicts within families, and social ostracization. In turn, these effects could contribute to academic difficulties, making it challenging for teenage mothers to pursue their education. The study's findings support [Omwacha's \(2012\)](#) assertion that negative attitudes pose significant challenges to young mothers attempting to re-enter their previous schools. The stigma and discrimination they face can hinder their ability to return to their original educational environments, pushing them toward alternative schools where they might experience less judgment.

Perceptions of teachers and students during implementation

Initially, the study found that some teachers were hesitant to register teenage mothers due to concerns

that their presence might disrupt other students and negatively influence their behavior. Additionally, some teachers worried that allowing young mothers back into the classroom could normalize teenage pregnancy and undermine the discipline and values of the institution. Despite these initial reservations, college administrators, with support from the Karibu Tanzania Organization (KTO), worked to educate staff and students about the re-entry policy and its benefits. They emphasized the importance of treating teenage mothers with respect and dignity, which helped change the perceptions of some teachers and students.

Evolving community perceptions and support

Over time, as the program continued and its benefits became more apparent, the community's acceptance of the re-entry policy increased. This shift in perception led to a more supportive environment for teenage mothers, which contributed to higher enrollment rates and better outcomes for young women seeking to continue their education. The study found that the Chisalu FDC now attracts students from various parts of the country, suggesting an improvement in community acceptance of the policy. This success is due, in part, to the collaborative efforts of the community, school administrators, and guardians, who worked together to promote greater awareness and backing for the re-entry policy.

These findings align with earlier research by [Ede \(2011\)](#) and [Onyago et al. \(2015\)](#), which emphasized the importance of positive community attitudes and traditions in supporting the education and re-entry of teenage mothers. Both studies highlighted the need for effective collaboration between the community, educational institutions, and families to ensure successful outcomes for young mothers seeking to continue their education. The study demonstrates that community attitudes and perceptions play a crucial role in the success of re-entry policies for teenage mothers. Positive community support can significantly aid the re-entry process and contribute to the academic success of young mothers, while negative perceptions may hinder their ability to return to school and achieve their educational aspirations. It is essential for educational institutions, policymakers, and community leaders to work

together to foster supportive environments that enable teenage mothers to pursue their education and achieve their full potential.

Challenges faced in college after re-entry among teenage mothers at Chisalu FDC

Despite the potential benefits and initial success of the re-entry policy for teenage mothers at Chisalu Folk Development College (FDC), the study identified several challenges and obstacles affecting both the academic performance of teenage mothers and the institutions implementing the policy. Though teenage mothers were allowed to resume their studies, the program faced ongoing hurdles.

On the second day of the study, a discussion group was held with five teaching staff members to assess the challenges and outcomes experienced following the implementation of the re-entry policy. During the discussion, several teachers noted persistent difficulties faced by the program. For instance, one teacher highlighted that many students who had re-enrolled at the college had previously dropped out due to pregnancy during secondary school, and subsequently some of these students experienced pregnancies again while attending the college.

Additionally, when asked about the challenges of the re-entry policy and the techniques used to recruit more teenage mothers, the college principal responded by noting: "We initially register many teenage mothers at the start of the academic year. As an administration, we must contend with truancy among teenage mothers, frequent requests for permission to return home to care for their children, and a lack of focus on their studies, all of which contribute to poor performance in their examinations."

Based on the information gathered, the study found that in 2020, 29 students were enrolled at Chisalu FDC, with 5 (17.2%) students leaving due to another pregnancy. In 2021, 29 students were registered, with 1 (3.4%) student becoming pregnant. In 2022, 25 students were enrolled, and 3 (12%) experienced pregnancy. However, in 2023, with 30 students enrolled, no students reported pregnancies, which may be attributed to overcoming previous challenges or a greater understanding of

reproductive health (Esantsi et al., 2015). Additionally, 8 (57.1%) students noted familiarity with the environment and continuity of their studies over two to three years at the college, which may have contributed to a reduction in pregnancies. However, the frequent granting of permission for students to return home to care for their children raises concerns about whether students may be using these opportunities for other purposes, which could potentially lead to further pregnancies.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for comprehensive measures to address the various factors affecting the re-entry policy, including enhanced education on reproductive health and closer monitoring of students' well-being to support their academic and personal success.

The study's findings also suggest the importance of ongoing support and counseling for teenage mothers as they navigate both academic and personal challenges. This support can include targeted programs to address the unique needs of teenage mothers, such as flexible scheduling, on-campus childcare services, and access to counseling and mentoring services. Such programs can help teenage mothers better manage their dual roles as students and caregivers, thereby enhancing their ability to succeed academically.

Furthermore, the study underscores the necessity of fostering an inclusive and understanding environment within educational institutions. This includes promoting a culture of acceptance and reducing stigma and discrimination against teenage mothers. Providing training for faculty and staff on how to effectively support and engage with teenage mothers can contribute to creating such an environment.

The data from the study also point to the need for collaboration between educational institutions, families, and community organizations to create a comprehensive support network for teenage mothers. Parents and guardians play a crucial role in providing emotional and financial support to their daughters, while community organizations can offer additional resources and advocacy for teenage mothers. In addition to support at the individual level, the study highlights the need for ongoing evaluation and refinement of the re-entry policy to ensure it remains effective and responsive to the

evolving needs of teenage mothers. This includes regular assessment of the policy's impact on academic performance, retention rates, and the well-being of teenage mothers.

While the re-entry policy has provided teenage mothers with valuable opportunities to continue their education, challenges persist. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from educational institutions, policymakers, families, and communities to create a supportive and enabling environment for teenage mothers. By doing so, the policy can fulfill its potential to empower young mothers to achieve their academic and personal goals and contribute positively to society.

■ CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified that a supportive and accommodating environment significantly contributed to increased enrollment rates among teenage mothers. The provision of essential services such as child care, teaching and learning resources, and scheduling adjustments prioritizing the needs of teenage mothers facilitated their successful reintegration into their studies. This favorable environment not only encouraged those who were not yet enrolled to join the college but also supported those who were already enrolled by offering flexible study schedules, including both day and night sessions. Moreover, teachers played a key role in this environment by acting as role models and providing counseling, coaching, motivation, and encouragement.

Data from interviews and focus groups indicated that parental and guardian support was instrumental in facilitating the return of teenage mothers to school. Parents and guardians assumed responsibility for caring for both the teenage mothers and their children, while also providing emotional and financial support. Community support also proved essential, as it created an environment where teenage mothers felt comfortable returning to school and pursuing their studies. However, some students expressed concerns about facing stigmatization if they returned to their previous schools, opting instead for enrollment in different institutions.

The findings also highlighted the importance of adequate financial support, which facilitated high enrollment rates among teenage mothers. The availability of training facilities, day-care centers, and other services for children within the school environment enabled easier program execution and participation. The introduction of free education further assisted teenage mothers in achieving their educational goals by removing financial barriers, although challenges remain for those from low-income backgrounds.

Despite these advancements, the implementation of the re-entry policy faced resistance from the community due to negative attitudes and stigma toward young mothers returning to school. This resistance created feelings of shame, isolation, and harassment among teenage mothers, prompting them to prefer enrollment in different institutions. However, as success stories emerged from those who re-entered school, an increasing number of teenage mothers took advantage of this opportunity.

In conclusion, while the Tanzanian government's implementation of the re-entry policy in secondary schools has shown success, challenges remain in addressing community and psychological attitudes toward re-entry among teenage mothers. Policymakers should consider integrating reproductive health education as a fundamental part of the curriculum to raise awareness among teenage students about the consequences of early sexual relationships. By doing so, they can reduce the occurrence of pregnancies and enhance the re-entry rate for teenage mothers. Furthermore, implementing comprehensive psychological counseling for affected teenage mothers would instill confidence and support their successful return to school.

■ DECLARATIONS

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Ethical approval

The authors declare that this study followed applicable research ethics. This study obtained approval from relevant authorities, including the Regional Education office and the St. Augustine University of Tanzania, who gave clearance for this study. Furthermore, all participants provided informed consent and agreed to participate in this study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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