

**ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF MALAWIS READMISSION POLICY
ON TEEN MOTHERS' RE-ENTRY INTO PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A
CASE STUDY OF KAMBILONJE ZONE IN NTCHEU DISTRICT**

**MSC THESIS IN TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

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MZUZU UNIVERSITY

JANUARY, 2026

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JANUARY, 2026

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis titled, “**Assessing the Effect of Malawi’s Readmission Policy on the Re-entry of Teen Mothers in Primary Schools: A Case of Kambilonjo zone in Ntcheu District**” has been written by me and is a record of my research work. All citations, references, and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Science in Transformative Community Development of Mzuzu University. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.



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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This Thesis, Assessing the effect of Malawi’s Readmission Policy on Teen Mothers Re-entry to Primary Schools: A case of Kambilonjo Zone in Ntcheu District is submitted with our approval as university supervisors for the MSc Transformative Community Development.

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Date.....

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DEDICATION

To my beloved parents, my supportive husband Jimmy, and my precious children Rejoice, Rutendo & Jotham you are the heart and soul of everything I do. Your unwavering love, encouragement, and faith in me have been my greatest inspiration. This work is a reflection of your presence in my life, and it is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for being my constant source of strength, joy, and purpose

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
CESA 16–25	Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025
CRS	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHO	District Health Office
DEO	District Education Office
EDM	Education Development Manager
EFA	Education For All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPE	Free Primary Education
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MG	Mother Group
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGES	National Girls’ Education Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PTA	Parent and Teachers Association
SMC	School Management Committee

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMC	School Management Committee
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TA	Traditional Authority
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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ABSTRACT

Despite the establishment of Malawi's Readmission Policy to promote girls' education, many teen mothers continue to delay returning to school after childbirth, leading to increased early marriages, poverty, and reduced educational opportunities. This study assessed the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy in facilitating the re-entry and retention of teen mothers in primary schools in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District. Specifically, it examined policy awareness among stakeholders, the influence of policy implementation on retention, and the psychological and material support available to re-admitted learners.

A mixed-method research design was employed, collecting data from 187 participants including teen mothers, parents, teachers, and education officials through questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 22, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicated that the awareness of the Readmission Policy was comparatively high (83%), but the implementation was poor, as the sensitization was deficient, and the support systems as well as cultural stigma. The percentage of teens mothers that were re-admitted successfully was only 7% which shows little impact of the policies. The study finds that delayed re-entry will persist in exposing girls to socio-economic disadvantages throughout their lives, depleting Malawi of its development towards SDGs 4 and 5. The study recommends that there should be more adoption of the Readmission Policy, community sensitization, psychosocial and financial assistance and put in place systematic follow-up mechanisms that would promote meaningful re-entry and retention of teen mothers in the Malawi primary schools.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Background

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of economic growth, social progress, and individual well-being (Hanushek et al., 2010; Aghion et al., 2009). Globally, education is acknowledged as a powerful tool for reducing poverty and promoting equality, with international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) emphasizing that every child, including girls who become pregnant, has the right to continue their education. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality, call for inclusive education systems that ensure equal learning opportunities for all, regardless of gender or circumstance (UNESCO, 2023). These commitments reflect a growing global consensus that education must be accessible to everyone, including marginalized groups such as teenage mothers.

However, despite these international commitments, significant challenges persist in translating policy into practice. The World Bank (2022) estimates that more than 132 million girls worldwide remain out of school, with teenage pregnancy identified as one of the leading causes of dropout in low- and middle-income countries. The Global Education Monitoring Report (2021) reveals that approximately 20 million adolescent girls give birth each year, and a substantial proportion of them never return to school due to poverty, stigma, lack of childcare support, and weak policy implementation. These statistics underscore a critical gap between global aspirations for inclusive education and the lived realities of millions of girls whose educational trajectories are disrupted by early pregnancy.

In sub-Saharan Africa, teenage pregnancy remains a major barrier to girls' education and a significant contributor to school dropout rates. Studies by Odejimi and Bellingham-Young (2016) and Wedekind and Milingo (2015) demonstrate that early marriage, poverty, and deeply entrenched social norms that undervalue girls' education continue to push many adolescent girls out of school prematurely. While several African countries, including Zambia, Kenya, and Tanzania, have adopted re-entry or readmission policies designed to allow teenage mothers to return to school after childbirth, the implementation of these policies has been largely ineffective. Cultural stigma, inadequate financial and psychosocial support systems, and limited awareness at the community level create formidable obstacles to successful re-entry (Karim, 2015). The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25) emphasizes that retaining young mothers in education is essential for building Africa's human capital and ensuring long-term sustainable development. Nevertheless, across the region, progress in addressing the structural, cultural, and economic barriers that hinder effective re-entry remains slow and uneven.

In Malawi, education has historically been recognized as a cornerstone of national development and poverty reduction (Watkins & Ashforth, 2019). The introduction of Free Primary Education in 1994 led to a significant increase in enrollment rates, expanding access to education for millions of children (Moussa & Omoeva, 2020). However, this quantitative expansion has not been matched by corresponding improvements in educational quality, and persistent gender inequalities continue to undermine girls' educational outcomes. Girls in Malawi face multiple intersecting barriers, including early marriage, teenage pregnancy, poverty, and social discrimination, all of which affect their ability to enroll in, remain in, and complete their education (Psak et al., 2017).

To address the specific challenge of teenage pregnancy and school dropout, the Government of Malawi introduced the Re-admission Policy in 1993, which permitted girls who became pregnant

to return to school after childbirth. Recognizing the limitations of the initial policy framework, the government revised the policy in 2006 and again in 2018 to enhance its effectiveness and inclusivity (Carrera, 2018; Barnett et al., 2020). In 2018, the Readmission policy was revised and it explicitly supports the re-entry for adolescent mothers, reducing bureaucratic barriers and emphasizing social support. The process of the revised one was meant to make re-entry easier, there is also provision for counselling and psychosocial support in schools for readmitted learners. It also states that, there must be assurance of safe custody for the child when the teen mother returns to school and also one re-entry opportunity in a girl's school career (MoEST, 2018). The primary objective of the Readmission Policy is to ensure that no girl is permanently excluded from education due to pregnancy. The revised policy framework encourages schools to provide comprehensive support services, including counselling, psychosocial support, and flexible learning arrangements, to facilitate the successful reintegration of young mothers into the education system.

Despite these progressive policy reforms, the implementation of the Readmission Policy remains weak and inconsistent across the country. Human Rights Watch (2014) documented that poverty, restrictive gender norms, and negative attitudes toward pregnant learners continue to prevent many girls from exercising their right to return to school. Education Management Information System (EMIS) data from 2016 indicates that only 37 percent of girls in Malawi reach Standard 8, reflecting high dropout rates, while early marriage remains widespread across the country. The situation deteriorated further during the COVID-19 pandemic, when approximately 40,000 girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy and early marriage, highlighting the fragility of educational access for vulnerable girls.

A critical gap in the existing literature is the limited attention paid to how the Readmission Policy functions in rural primary schools, where the challenges are most acute. For instance, Kumwenda (2023) focused primarily on urban secondary schools, thereby excluding the experiences and perspectives of rural learners who face more pronounced cultural pressures and weaker institutional support systems. Similarly, while Silver (2019, 2020) described the Readmission Policy as progressive in its design but weak in its implementation, his analysis focused predominantly on policy structure rather than examining the day-to-day realities of school-level implementation. These research gaps indicate that previous studies have not adequately explained why many teenage mothers continue to delay their return to school or fail to return altogether, despite the existence of a supportive national policy framework.

The challenge of implementing the Readmission Policy is particularly acute in rural districts such as Ntcheu, where poverty and traditional beliefs exert powerful influences on educational decisions. The Ntcheu District Health Office (2022) reported 2,601 cases of teenage pregnancy and 1,446 cases of sexually transmitted infections among youth between January and April 2022 alone. The Ministry of Education (2022) further recorded 4,384 female dropouts in the district during the same period, yet only a small fraction of these girls managed to return to school. These stark statistics demonstrate that while the Readmission Policy exists on paper, its actual impact on the ground remains severely limited.

Although the Readmission Policy was introduced in Malawi over three decades ago (1993), with subsequent revisions in 2006 and 2018, the rate of teenage mothers' re-entry into primary schools remains critically low, especially in rural districts such as Ntcheu. While existing literature has explored the policy's operation in administrative contexts and urban secondary schools (Kumwenda, 2023; Silver, 2019), there is a notable absence of empirical data on how the policy is

operationalized in rural primary school settings, where poverty levels are highest, cultural obstacles are most entrenched, and institutional support is weakest. This study is therefore urgently needed to address these critical knowledge gaps.

1.2 Problem Statement

Most teen mothers have not gone back to school despite having the Readmission Policy of Malawi which was first instituted in 1993 and revised later in 2018 supports to safeguard the educational rights of adolescent mothers while on the ground, its efficacy remains a problem. The policy has been in place for more than 20 years, however, the rate of teen mothers going back to the primary schools is at a very critical stage. Female learners in Ntcheu District alone were dropping out at 4,384 per year in 2022, and only 7 percent of those who dropped out came back to school after having a baby. Such continued dropout of teen mothers into education, despite a national policy that supports such a move, is a major setback to gender equality in education. Malawi risks perpetuating educational inequality and failing to meet its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5.

The main issue is that even though the Readmission Policy is on paper, and the awareness of its existence is comparatively high, the practical application of the Readmission Policy on the school and the community level is ineffective. The policy structure has been considered in previous studies (Silver, 2019, 2020) and the context of urban secondary schools (Kumwenda, 2023) but the reasons behind failures in policy implementation to lead to actual re-entry in rural primary schools with the most formidable barriers remain poorly understood. Human Rights Watch (2024) reports persistent deficiencies in implementation where many schools lack copies of the policy, requisite re-entry forms are not used consistently and psychological support services are largely absent.

Thus, the paper will fill the vital gap in knowledge by examining the following: What are the determinants of the ineffectiveness of the Readmission Policy in enabling the effective re-entry and retention of teen mothers in rural primary schools? Particularly, it investigates whether the issue is a lack of awareness, weak implementation mechanisms, insufficient support systems, or cultural and economic obstacles that entail implementation of policies.

Thus, this study critically examines the underlying barriers that prevent the 2018 Readmission Policy from delivering on its promise for adolescent mothers, with a view to informing more effective, equity-oriented policy reform. What is not well understood about the nature of these underlying factors is the key to effective implementation of policy, the support system built upon community, as well as ensuring that every young mother has an opportunity worth living beyond the poverty cycle and early marriage.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 Main Objectives

To assess the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy in facilitating the re-entry and retention of teen mothers in primary schools in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- 1) To determine the level of awareness of the Re-admission Policy among school management structures, teachers, parents, and teen mothers.
- 2) To examine how the implementation of the Re-admission Policy influences the re-entry and retention of teen mothers in primary schools.
- 3) To assess the nature and adequacy of psychological and material support provided to teen mothers after re-admission.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) What is the level of awareness of the Readmission Policy among school management structures, teachers, parents, and teen mothers?
- 2) How does the implementation of the Readmission Policy influence the re-entry and retention of teen mothers in primary schools?
- 3) What forms of psychological and material support are provided to teen mothers after re-admission, and how adequate are they?

1.5 Justification of the study

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development. Ensuring that girls who become mothers return to school is not only an equity issue but also a national development priority. Although the Re-admission Policy in Malawi was introduced to promote girls' continued access to education, its weak implementation has limited its impact, especially in rural communities. This policy for adolescent mothers is not only a national education framework but also a critical mechanism through which the country advances its global obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals. The policy directly aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable access to education for all children regardless of gender or socio-economic status. Delayed re-entry and low retention of teen mothers undermine these targets by widening gender gaps in learner participation, progression and completion. The policy is equally essential to the realization of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) which emphasizes the need to end discrimination and harmful practices that limit the empowerment of women and girls. Teen mothers often face stigma early marriage and economic dependency and SDG 5, Target 5.6 promotes access to reproductive health and rights which ensures that mothers can continue their education after childbirth. This contributes directly to breaking circles of

poverty and strengthening long-term gender equality outcomes. Therefore, the persistent delay or failure of teen mothers to return to school demonstrates that the policy has not achieved its intended goals. Understanding the reasons behind this challenge is crucial for improving educational equity and achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5, which focus on quality education and gender equality (United Nations, 2015).

Previous research, such as that by Kumwenda (2023) and Silver (2019, 2020), has examined the Readmission Policy mainly from policy and administrative perspectives, with little focus on how the policy works in everyday school settings. Similarly, studies by Odejimi and Bellingham-Young (2016) and Karim (2015) highlighted teenage pregnancy and cultural barriers but did not examine the actual process of re-entry or the factors that influence delayed return to school. These gaps mean that policymakers and educators still lack a clear understanding of how to make the Readmission Policy effective at the school and community levels.

This study is therefore justified because it addresses these gaps by focusing on the effectiveness of the Re-admission Policy in rural primary schools, where poverty, cultural norms, and social stigma strongly influence girls' education. The study will generate evidence on how factors such as policy awareness, community attitudes, school leadership, and psychosocial support affect the re-entry and retention of young mothers. The findings will help education authorities, school leaders, and community structures design more effective interventions to support young mothers, reduce dropouts, and strengthen the overall implementation of the policy.

Furthermore, this research contributes to national and global discussions on inclusive education and gender equality. For Malawi, it will provide locally grounded evidence to guide the Ministry of Education, district education offices, and development partners in refining policy strategies and

community engagement approaches. Ultimately, this study will support the broader vision of ensuring that no child regardless of gender or circumstance is denied the right to education.

Academically, the study fills a major gap in the literature by focusing on rural primary schools, where poverty and cultural norms strongly influence educational outcomes. By exploring the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District, it generates new empirical evidence to inform future research, guide program design, and influence education policy reforms within Malawi and other sub-Saharan African contexts facing similar challenges.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.6.1 Limitations

The following limitations were acknowledged:

1. *Geographical scope*: The study focused on one zone in Ntcheu District, which may limit generalizability to other districts with different socio-cultural contexts.
2. *Self-reported data*: Information from teen mothers relied on self-reporting, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability bias.
3. *Sensitive topic*: Teenage pregnancy is a sensitive issue, and some participants may have been reluctant to share full information despite assurances of confidentiality.
4. *Time constraints*: The cross-sectional design captured data at one point in time and could not track long-term retention outcomes.
5. *Limited male perspective*: The study primarily focused on female experiences, with limited inclusion of male perspectives (fathers of children born to teen mothers).

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy at the grassroots level.

1.7 Assumptions of the Study

The study was guided by the following assumptions:

1. Participants provided honest and accurate responses to interview questions and questionnaires.
2. The selected schools and participants are representative of the broader population in rural Ntcheu District.
3. The Readmission Policy framework provides a genuine opportunity for teen mothers to return to school, and any failure in re-entry is attributable to implementation challenges rather than policy design flaws alone.
4. Stakeholders (teachers, parents, community members) have some level of awareness about the Readmission Policy, even if implementation is weak.
5. Cultural and socio-economic factors significantly influence the success or failure of policy implementation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature related to the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy for teen mothers in primary schools. It examines the historical background of the policy in Malawi, its revisions, and its role in promoting girls' education. The chapter explores key themes, including the awareness of the policy among stakeholders, its impact on retaining school dropouts, challenges in its implementation, and the support structures available for teen mothers. Gaps in the literature are identified, providing a foundation for the current study's contribution to understanding the policy's effectiveness in rural areas.

2.1.1 The Evolution of Malawi's Readmission Policy: From Inception to Implementation Challenges

The Malawi Readmission Policy was adopted in 1993 based on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) that required the State parties to undertake every relevant step to ensure that those girls who get pregnant before finishing their studies can continue to study. Nevertheless, this policy has been criticized by scholars in terms of the timing and design.

Chikendenji (2021) states that although Malawi is one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to implement the re-entry policy, the one that was implemented in 1993 was progressive in theory but problematic in reality. The policy had a significant limitation, namely; it could only allow readmission once, which practically excluded girls who had repeat pregnancies, which was a major mistake, considering the high levels of early marriage and poverty in the rural areas (Human Rights Watch, 2014). As Silver (2019) notes, such a limitation was a manifestation of the social fear of making teenage pregnancy a norm instead of dealing with the causes of it.

The policy was made to follow international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which highlighted gender parity in education (Maluwa-Banda, 2004). It also funded the Malawi National Girls Education Strategy (NGES) that had a vision to see that all girls in Malawi will have access, attend, finish and perform well in all levels of education (MoEST, 2014c). Nevertheless, Psaki et al. (2017) remark that those frameworks gave good justification to the policy, but they did not cover the issues of practical implementation on the school and community levels.

Critics, such as Barnett et al. (2020) and Kumwenda (2023) have noted that the 1993 policy was not clear on the readmission processes, the functions of various stakeholders and support services to readmitted learners. In their comparative analysis of Zambian re-entry policies, Wedekind and Milingo (2015) found that these gaps are common to other African nations in the South and that the design of policies does not seem to be accompanied by other effective rules of implementation and sensitization of the stakeholders about the need to implement policies in transforming the lives of teen mothers in the country.

The ongoing criticism of the ineffectiveness of the 1993 policy was the reason why the Government of Malawi embarked on revisions and the policy was reformed in 2006 and then again in 2018 as a result of which the reforms are discussed in the next section.

2.1.2 Policy Revisions and Persistent Implementation Gaps: Scholarly Perspectives

The Government of Malawi made changes to the policy in 2006 and 2018 in response to universal criticism of the 1993 policy. The new policy, as stated by Carrera (2018), was focused on enhancing the school, family, and community-based support mechanisms, which the first policy had proved to be weak. It was radically changed in the 2018 revision that abolished the requirement of the one-time readmission and established counselling and psychosocial support options and flexible learning options (MoEST, 2018).

Nevertheless, there is still a controversy about whether the effect of these revisions has been accomplished. The policy that got revised, Silver (2020) refers to, is progressive on paper and weak in practice, which means that structural changes to policy articles do not necessarily lead to behavioral change in the implementers. Kumwenda (2023) also supports this opinion, as she discovered that even though the revised policy had clear guidelines, many school authorities, teachers, and parents are either not aware of the changes or know their role in their implementation.

Among the most significant changes in the updated policy, the streamlined readmission processes should be mentioned. The 1993 policy mandated the concerned students to submit three letters to the head teacher, Education District Manager (EDM) and the Ministry at the withdrawal and on re-entry (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Thindwa (2020) argues that this barrier was unwarranted by this bureaucracy and usually discouraged girls to make any attempts to re-enter. The updated one decentralized this procedure, placing increased power in School Management Committees (SMCs) and lessening administrative loads (MoEST, 2018).

The amended policy had also asserted a period of withdrawal taking a period of one year and had required that the SMCs and other school committees should provide conducive environments to the readmitted learners. It also incorporated counselling and psychosocial support into every

school (Barnett et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Martinez and Odhiambo (2018) warn that the policy provisions are of little use without the sufficient resources, trained staff, and the community buy-in. In their research study of various African nations such as Malawi, their findings revealed that structural obstacles such as poverty, stigma, and absence of childcare interfere with even the most mind-bending policies.

In spite of these revisions, there is empirical data that re-entry rates have shown little improvement. According to Ministry of Education (2022), a very minor proportion of girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy were able to resume school, especially in rural districts, such as Ntcheu. The same disparity between policy intent and the results of implementation is the main subject of this study since it aims to comprehend what factors continue to impede successful re-entry in spite of policy changes.

2.1.3 The level of knowledge of the readmission policy among school management structures, teachers, teen mothers, and parents

Headteachers in most schools are considered to be part of the management structure in a decentralized structure. According to Taurus, (2020), in her study targeting secondary schools in Kenya on the awareness of Readmission Policy which was guided by the social integration theory on student retention in schools. It was revealed that most headteachers were not aware of the readmission policy. The head teachers that were interviewed claimed that the Readmission Policy was within the ministry and had not yet been brought to them and that there was no official communication made to them on how the policy was to be implemented. The study findings revealed that school head teachers were not aware of or are ignorant of the re-entry policy at 67(34.2%). In another study by Mutua, Miriti and Mogeni, (2019), which focused on the implementation of the return to school policy for teenage mothers in Kenya. The researchers found

out that students in the targeted schools were not aware of the Readmission Policy. But based on incidences where some of their classmates have been able to return to school after delivery, they knew that it was possible for young mothers to get readmitted. Other stakeholders including teachers, head teachers, County Education officials, and representatives from the NGO and Ministry of Education officials had heard of or knew about the policy.

However, most that heard or knew about the policy had never seen the actual policy. And the policy was never present in most of the schools, this would make the implementation of the policy hard (Mutua, Miriti and Mogeni, 2019). According to a study by Kumwenda, (2023), which aimed to ensure that the readmitted teen mother receives the necessary support as per stipulated in the Readmission Policy document so as to improve teen mother retention and readmission. The researcher explored school structures in the provision of support mechanisms to the readmitted teen mothers in selected secondary schools in Mzuzu. Just like the two above studies the researcher used qualitative data. It was found that there is lack of awareness of the Readmission Policy among Ministry of Education (MOE) officials, head teachers, teachers, students as well as parents.

Thus, these three studies done by the scholars all having used qualitative data, which was collected through interviews both indicate that there is less knowledge about the Re-admission Policy among school management structures, teachers, teen mothers and parents.

2.1.4 The influence of the readmission policy on retaining school dropout girl

In a study done by Wedekind and Milingo (2015), which aimed at establishing why girls reenter secondary school after child birth at some schools and not at others. The researchers collected data through interviews and focus groups at two different schools (Mcenga and Tsidya secondary school in Zambia) that implemented the Readmission Policy. It can be concluded that the readmission policy has some positive influence in retaining dropout girls. The two schools allowed

for pregnancy detection and tests of the learners. Once the learners are found pregnant, they were given a maternity leave. For example, at Mcenga Secondary school, once the school management learns about a pregnancy, they ensure someone meets with the girl to encourage her to request maternity leave and return to school.

This person can be the teacher-mentor, guidance counselor, member of the guidance and counseling committee, parent-teacher association chair, or scholarship selection committee member (all of whom are involved in counseling and mentoring the girls). The school management then informs and invites the girl's parents and the child's father and his parents if he is a minor for a meeting. At the meeting, the head teacher explains that the parents and child's father are expected to support and look after the baby, and all parties sign the maternity leave form. At the meeting, the parties also agree upon the date on which the girl will return to the school. Girls are encouraged to stay in school as long as possible during the pregnancy and are told that they must notify the school if they cannot come back at the agreed time. If parents do not support their daughter's reentry, teachers or scholarship selection committee members meet with them.

It is worthy to note that in this study, Tsidya secondary school teachers never talked about the policy to the learners or parents. While at Mcenga secondary school there was orientation of the readmission policy to both community members, head teachers, teachers and the students. This might be the reason why over 80 percent of girls returned to school after maternity leave at Mcenga secondary school and only 30 to 60 percent returned at Tsidya secondary school respectively.

1.8 2.2 The challenges affecting the implementation of the readmission policy

Implementation of the Readmission Policy is a challenge, and this has been stated repeatedly in this discussion. In a study by Tarus (2020), which was earlier mentioned. It was found that there is low level of awareness by different stakeholders like parents, teachers and community members about the readmission policy and that this might hinder its implementation. According to Kumwenda, (2023), he covered much on the challenges affecting the implementation of the readmission policy and some of the challenges include the following:

2.2.1. Lack of Policy Clarity

Most of the readmission policies being implemented in Africa are ambiguous, difficult to understand and make implementation difficult and impossible (Kumwenda, 2023). According to Tarus (2020), as also discussed earlier in her research it was discovered that most stake holders only heard about the readmission policy but had not actually seen it. Headteachers of some schools were ignorant about the policy and the guidelines from the top officials on how to implement the policy were not given. There was a notable lack of awareness of the policy at various levels among the key stakeholders. This means that the intended beneficiaries and implementers are not conversant with the policy thus casting doubt on its proper implementation let alone success in achieving the intended policy objectives (Kumwenda, 2023).

2.2.2 Unsupportive School Environment

Pregnant learners need support and encouragement from their educators, it is however unfortunate that some educators consider pregnant and mothering teenagers“ problems as personal matters and none of their problems (Kumwenda, 2023). Also, according to research done by Wedekind and Milingo (2015) at Mcenga and Tsidya secondary schools community described school life after

reentry as difficult for the girls. Girls tended to experience stigma, such as being called names by fellow classmates (e.g., mother, parent, or old).

While most teachers appreciated the Re-entry Policy, some thought that letting girls return to school was a “waste of time and money” given the poor performance and frequent absence of many returning girls. In another study by Nsalamba and Simpande (2019), which aimed at exploring “Effect of re-entry policy implementation on readmitted girls’ academic performance in mathematics in selected secondary schools of Mufulira district in Zambia”. It was mentioned that “The people who are entrusted with the responsibility to ensuring the school environment is safe for reentered girls instead do the exact opposite. They take a leading role in labeling and stigmatizing the victims making the environment hostile for them. Policy makers are nonexceptional in this regard. For example, in the neighboring Tanzania, President Magufuli abolished and demonized the Re-Entry Policy. This and many other challenges are enough evidence that the mainstream education system is not conducive for teen mothers largely due to stigma, hence, justifying the reason why they lack concentration and subsequently reap poor results in key subjects like mathematics”.

Thus, from these studies it can be concluded that despite the Re-admission Policy being implemented in different schools there is a gap when it comes to provision of support to teen mothers within the school environment.

1.9 2.3 The Psychological and Mental Support Given to Teen Mothers after Re-admission.

The literature shows that despite the existence of the Readmission Policy in most countries, the teen mothers lack support from different stakeholders like parents, community members and even teachers (Wedekind and Milingo, 2015). According to study by Karim, (2015), which aimed at

exploring the challenges experienced by young mother learners upon re-entry to formal primary school. she stated that the Kenya re-admission policy is clear that girls who give birth should be allowed back to school if they want to be re-admitted. However, those who choose to be re-admitted face a number of challenges such as lack of support, stigma and social exclusion.

These challenges stated are likely to affect the teen mothers psychologically and so mentally. There seem to be a gap when it comes to mental and psychological support to teen mothers. As earlier stated according to Wedekind and Milingo (2015), teen mothers are called names by their fellow classmates like; old or parent. Also, some teachers that think re-admitting teen mothers is a waste tend to call out on the teen mothers on their situation like “you are already so old and you do not know the right answer”. Without doubt such scenarios vividly show that there is a gap when it comes to psychological and mental support to teen mothers.

In another study by Moonga, (2015), which also aimed at exploring challenges faces by teen mothers who re-entered school in selected schools in Zambia. The research targeted the guidance and counseling teachers and parents who have teen mothers under this policy and girls on this policy in selected secondary schools. he asked the teachers on counselling and guidance of teen mothers. One of the teachers responded that he is not a professional counselor and as teachers they only give career counseling. This means that, more likely teachers will be unable to give psychological and mental support to the teen mothers as this might be achieved with proper counselling.

In this study, teen mothers who re-entered secondary school, mentioned that the common challenge they faced was stigmatization or biased perception. They were unfavorably judged relative to their fellow pupils. The participant teen mothers in this study narrated that people

regarded them as misfits, problematic and young prostitutes or adults among fellow learners (Moonga, 2015).

1.10 2.4 Summary of Literature Review and Research Gaps

The studies read have recommended that there is a need to ensure that the Red-admission Policy is implemented fully in all schools. The government has to put in tracking mechanisms to ensure that the policy is being implemented well. Also, there is a need for sensitization among various stakeholders about the Re-admission policy so that teen mothers get the required support. Most of these studies focused on secondary schools and less on primary schools. Also, most of these studies focused much on government schools and not private schools. Thus, there is a need to also explore on the implementation of the Re-admission Policy by private schools.

1.11 2.5 Theoretical Review

The literature review has identified significant challenges in the implementation of the readmission policy, particularly stemming from inadequate support from various stakeholders. To address these complexities, this research is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Path-Goal Theory and the Developmental Crisis Theory. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding both the leadership and support mechanisms required for effective policy implementation, as well as the broader developmental consequences when educational policies fail to achieve their intended outcomes.

2.5.1 The Path-Goal Theory

The Path-Goal Theory, originally proposed by Robert J. House (1971), offers a dynamic framework that emphasizes the role of leadership in clarifying paths to achieve goals and removing

obstacles that impede progress. This theory is particularly relevant to the context of readmission policies for teenage mothers, as it provides a structured approach to examining how leadership styles, support mechanisms, and motivational factors influence educational outcomes for young mothers attempting to return to school.

The Path-Goal Theory posits that effective leaders clarify the paths to achieving goals, provide necessary support and resources, and systematically address obstacles that hinder progress (House, 1971). In the context of readmission policies for teenage mothers, school leaders—including head teachers, deputy head teachers, and education officials—play a pivotal role in creating an enabling environment that fosters academic success and social reintegration. Leadership styles that align with the specific needs of teenage mothers, such as supportive leadership (providing emotional and practical support), participative leadership (involving stakeholders in decision-making), or achievement-oriented leadership (setting challenging yet attainable goals), can positively impact their motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence in pursuing education (Northouse, 2018).

Furthermore, the Path-Goal Theory emphasizes the importance of adapting leadership styles to accommodate individual characteristics and situational factors (Northouse, 2018). Teenage mothers represent a particularly vulnerable population with unique and complex needs, including access to childcare support, flexible scheduling to accommodate their dual roles as students and mothers, counseling services to address psychosocial challenges, and protection from stigma and discrimination. A leadership approach that recognizes, validates, and systematically accommodates these needs can significantly enhance the effectiveness of readmission policies and improve retention rates among young mothers.

By applying the Path-Goal Theory to this study, the researcher seeks to examine how leadership behaviors and support structures within educational institutions and the broader community can either facilitate or hinder the readmission and retention process for teenage mothers in rural primary schools. Specifically, this theory guides the investigation of how school administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders can remove barriers (such as stigma, financial constraints, and lack of childcare) and provide clear pathways (through counseling, flexible learning arrangements, and community sensitization) that enable teenage mothers to successfully return to and remain in school.

2.5.2 Developmental Crisis Theory

The Developmental Crisis Theory provides a complementary theoretical lens for understanding the broader implications of failed or poorly implemented readmission policies. This theory posits that when critical developmental needs are not met during crucial life stages, individuals and communities experience a developmental crisis that can have long-term negative consequences for human capital formation, economic productivity, and social well-being (Erikson, 1968; UNDP, 2020).

In the context of this study, the developmental crisis manifests in multiple dimensions. At the individual level, when teenage mothers are unable to return to school or successfully complete their education, they experience truncated human development, limited economic opportunities, and increased vulnerability to poverty and social exclusion. Their children, in turn, are more likely to experience poor developmental outcomes, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and limited education (World Bank, 2022).

At the community and national levels, high rates of school dropout among teenage mothers represent a significant loss of human capital and potential economic productivity. When large numbers of girls are permanently excluded from education due to pregnancy, communities lose future teachers, nurses, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. This creates a developmental crisis characterized by reduced economic growth, increased poverty rates, persistent gender inequality, and weakened social cohesion (African Union, 2016).

The developmental crisis is particularly acute in rural districts such as Ntcheu, where poverty levels are already high and institutional support systems are weak. The failure to effectively implement the readmission policy exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and deepens the development deficit. As documented by the Ministry of Education (2022), with 4,384 female dropouts in Ntcheu District and only a small fraction returning to school, the district faces a growing crisis of undereducated youth, particularly young women, who lack the skills and qualifications necessary for meaningful economic participation.

By incorporating the Developmental Crisis Theory into this study, the researcher aims to highlight the urgent need for effective policy implementation and to demonstrate that the challenge of teenage mothers' school re-entry is not merely an individual or family issue, but a critical development concern with far-reaching implications for Malawi's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

2.5.3 Integrated Theoretical Application

Together, the Path-Goal Theory and the Developmental Crisis Theory provide a comprehensive analytical framework for this study. While the Path-Goal Theory offers practical insights into how

leadership and support mechanisms can be optimized to facilitate successful readmission and retention of teenage mothers, the Developmental Crisis Theory situates this issue within the broader context of national development challenges and underscores the high stakes involved in policy failure.

This integrated theoretical approach enables the researcher to:

- Examine micro-level factors (leadership styles, support mechanisms, individual motivations) that influence readmission outcomes
- Analyze meso-level factors (school policies, community attitudes, institutional capacity) that either enable or constrain policy implementation
- Understand macro-level implications (human capital loss, economic consequences, gender inequality) that result from inadequate policy implementation

By employing this dual theoretical framework, the study aims to generate both practical recommendations for improving policy implementation at the school and community levels, and strategic insights for addressing the broader developmental crisis created by educational exclusion of teenage mothers in rural Malawi.

1.12 2.6 Identified Knowledge and Research Gaps

Although several studies have been conducted on girls' education and teenage pregnancy in Africa, there are still important knowledge gaps on how re-entry policies work in practice, especially in rural primary schools. For example, Odejimi and Bellingham-Young (2016) focused on the general causes of teenage pregnancy in Africa but did not explain how school policies can support girls to return to school after giving birth. Wedekind and Milingo (2015) studied the implementation of

the re-entry policy in Zambia but only at the secondary school level, leaving out the experiences of young mothers in primary schools. Similarly, Karim (2015) examined the challenges of young mothers returning to school in Kenya but did not look at how school leadership and community attitudes affect policy success. In Malawi, Kumwenda (2023) explored support systems for teen mothers but focused only on urban secondary schools and not on rural settings where poverty and cultural barriers are stronger. Other local studies have mainly described the policy itself but have not assessed its actual effectiveness or reasons for delayed re-entry among primary school learners. This gap shows that more research is needed to understand how the Readmission Policy is being applied in rural primary schools like those in Kambilonjo Zone, and what social, cultural, and institutional factors continue to prevent teen mothers from returning to school despite the policy being in place. This study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by assessing the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy in supporting the re-entry of teen mothers into primary schools in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District, focusing on awareness, policy influence, and support mechanisms that affect their return and retention.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

1.13 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used to assess the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy on the re-entry of teen mothers into primary schools in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to gather comprehensive data. Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys were employed to collect insights from a range of participants, including teen mothers, school staff, and community members. The chapter also outlines the sampling methods, data collection tools, and analytical techniques used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process to safeguard participants' privacy and rights.

3.2 Study Area

Kambilonjo Zone in Ntcheu District serves as the focal study area for this research. Ntcheu District is located in the Central Region of Malawi and is predominantly rural, with the majority of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture. The district faces significant socioeconomic challenges, including high poverty rates, limited access to healthcare and educational facilities, and strong adherence to traditional cultural practices that often disadvantage girls and women. The Kambilonjo Zone is particularly representative of these rural conditions, making it an ideal case study for examining the implementation of the Readmission Policy in contexts where teenage pregnancy rates are high and school re-entry rates are low. With 2,601 reported cases of teenage pregnancy in 2022 alone (Ntcheu District Health Office, 2022) and persistently low re-admission rates, Kambilonjo Zone exemplifies the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional

factors that hinder effective policy implementation in rural Malawi

MAP OF NTCHEU SHOWING STUDY SITES

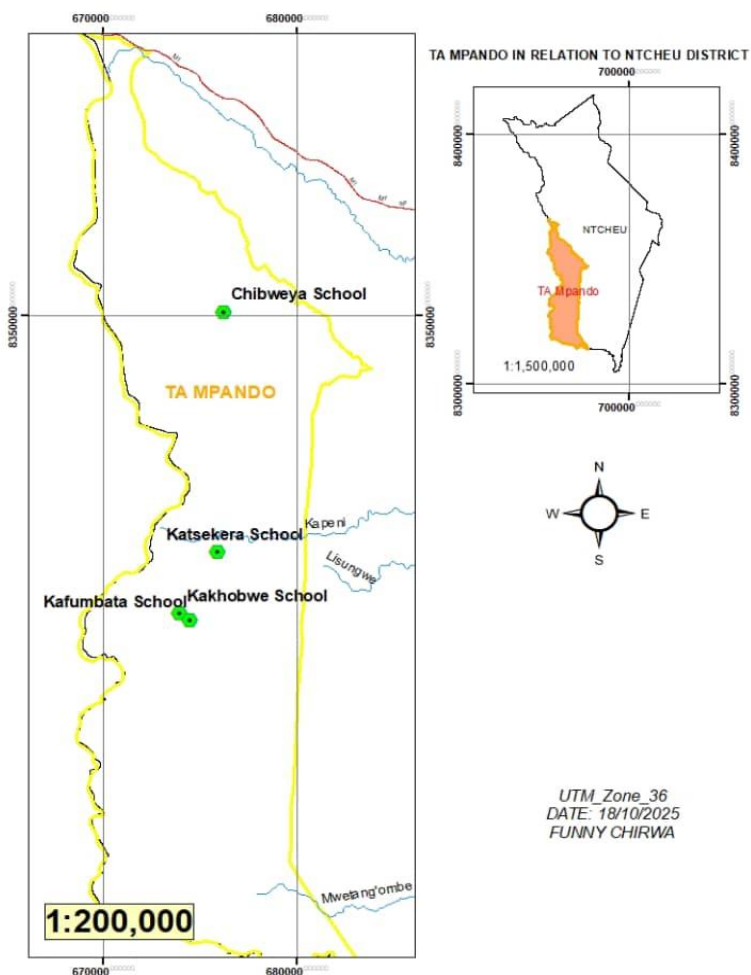


Figure 1: Map showing Ntcheu Primary Schools in Kambilonjo Zone

3.3 Study Design

This is a cross-sectional mixed-method research design. A case study approach has been chosen influenced by a constructivist epistemology. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research leaning towards qualitative methodology. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, et al, 2018)

3.4 Study Population

The study focused on the teen mothers still in school and those out of school, parents, Pupil Education Advisers (PEA), head teachers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) committees, and Ministry of Education officials.

3.5 Sampling Methods and Sample Sizes

The study employed a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques to ensure comprehensive data collection from diverse participant groups. The choice of sampling methods was guided by the nature of the research questions, the characteristics of the target population, and practical considerations of accessibility in the study area.

3.5.1 Probability Sampling

Probability sampling procedures were employed to guide the selection of schools, teen mothers, and parents who participated in the study. Stratified random sampling was adopted as the primary technique, given its suitability for contexts where subgroups within a population differ in size or

characteristics. In the Kambilonjo Zone, the four schools vary considerably in their numbers of teen mothers as well as in their socio-cultural environments. By stratifying the sample according to these schools, the study ensured proportional representation of each institution, thereby enhancing the overall representativeness of the sample.

Within each stratum, random selection procedures were applied to minimize potential selection bias. The use of random sampling ensured that all eligible teen mothers had an equal probability of being included in the study, a strategy that strengthened the generalizability of the findings while limiting the influence of researcher subjectivity. This approach also contributed to the statistical integrity of the study, allowing the quantitative data to be analyzed rigorously using statistical software (SPSS) to identify patterns and relationships.

More specifically, simple random sampling was used to select individual teen mothers from the sampling frame. As noted by Taherdoost (2016), simple random sampling provides every unit in the population with an equal chance of selection, thereby maintaining objectivity and bolstering the credibility of quantitative research outcomes.

3.5.2 Non-Probability Sampling

This study also employed purposive sampling and snowball sampling to identify key informants and focus group participants. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select individuals who held significant institutional roles or possessed specialized knowledge critical to understanding the readmission policy. These included head teachers, Ministry of Education officials, the Primary Education Advisor, and PTA committee members. As Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024) note, purposive sampling remains highly effective for selecting “information-rich cases” and for

targeting participants based on their relevance to the research question. Moreover, Tajik, Golzar, and Noor (2024) emphasize that though purposive sampling can introduce bias, it's particularly valuable for obtaining deep contextual insights.

Snowball sampling complemented this purposive approach by enabling recruitment of otherwise hard to reach individuals like teen mothers who had dropped out of school and parents who were difficult to locate. This method was especially valuable because of the sensitive nature of teenage pregnancy in rural settings. Snowball sampling allows access to hidden or stigmatized populations via existing participants (Khan, 2014), and its use has been reaffirmed in recent methodological literature (Doaj, 2025). Indeed, snowball sampling is now widely recognized as a purposeful method in qualitative research when sampling vulnerable or marginalized populations. As discussed by Mulisa (2022) in his review of sampling with human subjects, combining non-probability methods like purposive and snowball sampling can address many limitations associated with access and representativeness.

The integration of both probability and non-probability sampling strategies enabled methodological triangulation, thereby increasing the depth, credibility, and validity of the findings. As Babbie (2010) notes, combining multiple sampling approaches can enhance the robustness of social research by capturing diverse perspectives that might not be accessible through a single method alone.

1.14 3.6 Sample Size Determination

The sample size for teen mothers was determined using Slovin's formula (1960), which is appropriate for finite populations where the total number of cases is known.

Slovin's Formula

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

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (83 teen mothers across 4 schools)

e = margin of error (0.05, representing 95% confidence level)

3.6.1 Justification for Using Slovin's Formula

1. *Known population size:* The District Education Office (DEO) records indicated a total of 83 teen mothers across the four selected schools—Chibweya (21), Kafumbata (11), Kankhobwe (20), and Katsekera (31). Since the population was finite and enumerable, Slovin's formula was appropriate (Israel, 2013).

2. *Practical and cost-effective:* Slovin's formula provides a scientifically acceptable sample size without requiring the complexity of power analysis or large-scale sampling, making it suitable for master's-level research with limited resources.

3. *Acceptable margin of error:* A 5% margin of error is standard in social science research and provides a balance between precision and feasibility (Taherdoost, 2016). This resulted in a calculated sample size of 69 teen mothers.

4. *Widely used in similar studies:* Slovin's formula has been used in comparable education research in Malawi and other African contexts where populations are identifiable but relatively small (Moussa & Omoeva, 2020).

Calculation

$$n = 83 / (1 + 83(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 83 / (1 + 83(0.0025))$$

$$n = 83 / (1 + 0.2075)$$

$$n = 83 / 1.2075$$

$$\mathbf{n \approx 69}$$

Therefore, 69 teen mothers were selected using simple random sampling. Proportionate sampling was then applied to distribute this sample across the four schools based on their respective populations, as shown in Table 1.

Participants		Participants Number	Number of FGD	KII	Total
MOE	Officials			3	3
	Head teachers			4	4
Teen	Chibweya	17			17
mothers	Katsekera	26			26
	Kafumbata	9			9
	Kankhobwe	17			17
Parents		69	7sessions		69
PTAs			4 Sessions		40
PEA				1	1
Total		138			186

Table 1: shows the study sample size is apportioned as above

The probability sampling followed a three-stage sampling procedure. The first stage was to list the number of schools in the Zone. Then a simple random sampling procedure was administered to the selected zone to select 4 primary schools. The second sampling procedure was to list the names of teen girls in the 4 selected schools and zones to establish the sampling frame (N). Thirdly, a simple random sampling was administered to the sampling frame to select girls using the random sampling in Excel where random numbers were generated against the sampling units.

1.15 3.7 Data Collection and Management

The study collected both primary and secondary data through document reviews. Several methods of data collection were used, and this included key informant interviews, survey using semi-structured questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions as well as document reviews. Variables

studied through these tools were age of teen mothers, grade dropped out, assets in the household, size of family, guardian of teen mother, literacy level of teen mother, standard assessment for following up teen mothers, process of readmission, level of knowledge about policy, level of effectiveness about policy and also attitudes of teachers, learners/community towards the policy.

3.7.1 Key Informant Interviews

Standard open-ended interviews were used to obtain in-depth information from the Ministry of Education (MOE) officials, head teachers, Pupil Education Advisers (PEA), and parents. For each school, interviews were undertaken with 4 Headmasters. Included in the key informants were the 2 MOE Officials and the PEA making a total of 7 Key informants. These were chosen for their first-hand knowledge of the schools in which they work every day (Khan, 2014). Interviews were conducted orally using an unstructured questionnaire. In this type of interview, the researcher had a better chance of obtaining from interviewees opinions, views, perceptions, and experiences on the implementation of the readmission policy. Further, face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to clarify any ambiguities and important points (Khan, 2014). The interviews were audio-taped (with permission from the participants) to preserve an accurate account of the interviews which were replayed for analysis.

3.7.2 Survey Questionnaire

Data from teen mothers was collected digitally using the Kobo application and was electronically synchronized to a Kobo server to remotely receive the data even when the enumerator is still in the field. Each questionnaire was developed into a Kobo digital questionnaire and deployed into an Android phone ready for data collection. Once the enumerator collected the data, the data was sent right away electronically to the Kobo account server database which will be set in advance of the data collection.

3.7.3 Interviews

Data from teenage mothers was collected using Semi-structured interviews with which were used to obtain deeper insights into the lived realities of adolescent mothers. The open-ended questions were designed to capture the young girls' experiences and lived realities by presenting them as narratives. This is an in-depth interview with people who know what is going on in the community (schools) and helps to collect first-hand information about the study. A sample size of 69 teen mothers was interviewed from the 4 schools - Chibweya, Katsekera, Kafumbata and Kankhobwe.

3.7.4 Focus Group Discussions

FGDs were conducted with the parents of teen mothers and PTA committees from all 4 schools. The 4 Committees were interviewed and 7 groups of parents across the schools met for Focus Group Discussions. The discussions were facilitated by a moderator with the help of a note-taker. With consent from participants, the FGDs were audio-tapped for transcription to aid qualitative analysis.

3.7.5 Document Reviews

The researcher conducted a literature review of documents to content analyze studies done on the same topic and analyze any relevant statistics. Documents include education statistics of Ntcheu district, MOE documents on enrolment and dropouts, Ntcheu district development documents, and any other documents from Google Scholar.

3.8 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and after the coding and arranged in themes (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 producing descriptive statistics and frequencies, charts, and graphs (to display the analysed data). SPSS

version 22 application was used to clean the data which involved running preliminary frequencies for each variable to check for consistency and completeness of the response. Triangulation of Qualitative and quantitative data was used to reduce research bias from the Investigator as well as the usage of a single method.

3.8.1 Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 22. Data was first organized and exported to Excel, then appropriate variables and labels were assigned. Data cleaning was also done to check for missing values and inconsistencies. This was followed by coding and validation. Then the data was displayed through descriptive statistics in a form of graphs, pies and tables. (Field, 2013).

3.8.2 Qualitative Data

Data that was collected through FGD and Interviews went through a systematic process in order to get accurate results;

- Transcription: Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, capturing participants narratives, emphasis and significant notes. This provided insights into practical implementation of the Readmission policy
- Initial coding: Transcripts were read repeatedly in order to identify key ideas and patterns related to policy awareness, re-entry challenges and support systems
- Theme identification: Codes were grouped into broader categories based on similarities and relevance to the research objectives. For example, awareness of the readmission policy, attitude of teen mothers
- Inter-coder reliability: To enhance the validity of the findings, two researchers coded the transcripts separately and compared their results until consensus was reached.

- Final thematic analysis: Finally, the themes were agreed upon in relation to the research objectives. This analysis provided in depth insights into the barriers preventing effective policy implementation

1.16 3.9 Ethical Considerations

Consent to carry on this study was sought from Mzuzu University Research Ethical Committee (MzuniRec), the District Commissioner and the District Director of Education, Youth and Sports for Ntcheu District. Informed Consent was sought from all participants aged 18 and above while assent was sought from parents of teen mothers below 18 years of age. The research also strictly respected privacy and confidentiality of the participants and their particulars. Among other ethical principles, all relevant information and objectives of the study were explained to the participants to help them make an informed decision whether to participate in the study or not. The right to withdraw from the study at any stage was also explained.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study, focusing on the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy for teen mothers in primary schools within Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District. The findings are organized according to the study's key objectives, including the level of knowledge about the policy, its influence on school retention, the challenges faced by teen mothers, and the support provided after re-admission. Both quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy's impact on re-enrollment rates and the barriers to successful implementation.

1.17 4.2 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The study was conducted to characterize the status of the readmission policy by soliciting information from teen mothers who drop out of school due to pregnancy. Generally, the sample included 69 teen mothers who dropped out of school because of conception. Out of the 69 teen mothers who participated in the interview, it was found that 26 of them, 38% came from Katsekera school, 25% came from Kakhobwe and Chibweya school and the remaining per cent came from Kafumbata school.

The study further documented the age of respondents who participated in the interview. The age was captured by creating categories. As shown in Table 1, it can be observed that out of 69 teen mothers who participated in the interview, 48 were in the age category of 16-20 years old, representing 70% of the total participants in the survey. Furthermore, out of 69 teen mothers who participated in the interview, 15 were teen mothers who are in the age category of 12-15 years,

representing 22% of the total teen mothers. The least was that of age of 21-25 years of age. 16-20 registered a higher number of pupils who dropped out of school because of pregnancy.

Sample disaggregation by TA has it that out of 69 teen mothers, 30 came from TA Phambala, representing 44% of the total. The remaining 57% were from Mpando TA.

Variable	Frequency	Per cent
	(n)	(%)
<i>School</i>		
<i>Kafumbata School</i>	9	13
<i>Chibweya School</i>	17	25
<i>Kakhobwe School</i>	17	25
<i>Katsekera School</i>	26	38
<i>Age category of the student</i>		
<i>12-15 Years</i>	15	22
<i>16-20 Years</i>	48	70
<i>21-25 Years</i>	6	9
<i>Traditional Authority</i>		
<i>Phambala</i>	30	44
<i>Mpando</i>	39	57
<i>Source of income</i>		
<i>Farming</i>	27	39
<i>Business</i>	10	15
<i>Piece work/ganyu</i>	32	46
<i>Household head</i>		
<i>Mother</i>	39	57
<i>Father</i>	8	12

<i>Both</i>	21	30
<i>Child headed</i>	1	1
<i>Total</i>	69	100

Table 2: Respondent's demographic information

In terms of sources of income, the study found that 39% sourced money from farming activities, 15% sourced from businesses, and 46% sourced from piecework/ganyu. The highest source of income according to the survey was ganyu.

1.18 4.3 Status of readmission to school

Table 3 summarizes results on the status of teen mothers concerning school attendance. This time, the study attempts to establish the proportion of teen mothers who have gone back to school after giving birth. As shown in Table 3, it can be observed that 93% of the 69 teen mothers reported not attending school again.

Variable	Frequency	Per cent
	(n)	(%)
Still in school		
<i>Yes</i>	5	7
<i>No</i>	64	93
Total	69	100
Current Grade		
<i>Grade 5</i>	2	40
<i>Grade 6</i>	2	40
<i>Grade 8</i>	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 3: above showing the Status of the respondent in terms of school attendance

1.19 4.4 Reaction to Pupils' Pregnancy

The study also investigated reactions to pupils' pregnancy by soliciting attitudes from teachers, fellow pupils, parents, and the community in general. The results in Table 3 show that 55% of teen mothers reported that they were encouraged by their teachers whereas 45% reported their teacher did nothing as a reaction to their pregnancies.

The results also indicate that 51% of the teen mothers reported that they were encouraged by their fellow pupils when it was known about their pregnancy whereas 46% reported that nothing happened from their fellow pupils. Only 3% reported that they were mocked by their fellow pupils.

It has been further observed that parents reacted also differently and more positively than the rest. It can be observed in Table 3 that 75% of the teen mothers acknowledged that they were

encouraged by their parents when they got pregnant, whereas 25% of the surveyed teen mothers reported that their parents did not do anything as a reaction to their pregnancies. The results also show that most teen mothers (58%) confirmed that the community did not do anything, while 38% felt that they were encouraged by the community, and 4% felt mocked by the community.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
	(n)	(%)
<i>Teachers' reaction to pupil's pregnancy</i>		
<i>Nothing</i>	31	45
<i>Encouraged me</i>	38	55
<i>Pupils' reaction to their peer pregnancy</i>		
<i>Nothing</i>	32	46
<i>Encouraged me</i>	35	51
<i>Mocked me</i>	2	3
<i>Parent's reaction to pregnancy</i>		
<i>Nothing</i>	17	25
<i>Encouraged me</i>	52	75
<i>Community's reaction to pregnancy</i>		
<i>Nothing</i>	40	58
<i>Encouraged me</i>	26	38
<i>Mocked me</i>	3	4
<i>Total</i>	69	100

Table 4: above showing reaction to pupils' pregnancy

4.5 Action taken by the school after pregnancy.

Although the reaction of most of the people surrounding the pupil who get pregnant is positive, the actions taken are not appealing. After pregnancy, the pupil is supposed to undergo an acceptance process that involves several steps. One of the processes is the actual counseling of pupils who get pregnant. Table 4 shows that out of 69 teen mothers who were interviewed, only 17% underwent counseling, meaning that a large number (83%) did not undergo any form of counseling at school.

In line with little presence of counseling at school, it was also discovered that the school authority which is a committee involving parents association did not do a good job in bringing hope to the pupils who got pregnant at school. The results show that 81% of the school authorities did not do anything in terms of taking action for the pupils who got pregnant. Only 10% of the surveyed teen mothers reported that they were encouraged to go back to school after delivery, and 4% reported that they were encouraged to take good care of the baby.

Sometimes presence of mother groups would be an opportunity for pupils to interact with the mother groups on issues affecting their sexual lives hence get some counselling in an event that things have gone wrong. The results show that 57% of teen mothers are aware of the presence of teen mothers in the schools selected. However, of the 39 teen mothers reporting presence of mother groups, 54% affirmed that these mother groups do nothing in terms of counselling and other initiatives regarding being re admitted after delivery. Only 36% reported that the mother groups encouraged them to go back to school after delivery and 10% reported being encouraged to take care of the baby instead of going back to school.

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Counselling at School</i>		
Yes	12	17
No	57	83
<i>Actions Authority took after got pregnant</i>		
Non	56	81
Encouraged to Return to School	10	15
Take care of the baby	3	4
<i>Presence of mother groups at school</i>		
Yes	39	57
No	30	44
Total	69	100
<i>Actions taken by mother groups</i>		
Keep the Pregnancy	4	10
Nothing	21	54
To continue school	14	36
Total	39	100

Table 5: above, showing action taken after the pupil got pregnant

1.20 4.6 Awareness of the re-admission policy

The study also assessed the knowledge on awareness of the re-admission policy. The results indeed show that 83 per cent of the teen mothers interviewed are aware of the existence of the policy. In this case awareness of the policy is not a problem to most teen mothers as most of them have ever heard about it. Furthermore, most of teen mothers are fully informed about the benefits of the re-admission policy in Malawi, citing that it gives second chance to teen mothers to advance their education. This is an initiative geared at promoting girl's education for it has been long left out in the past.

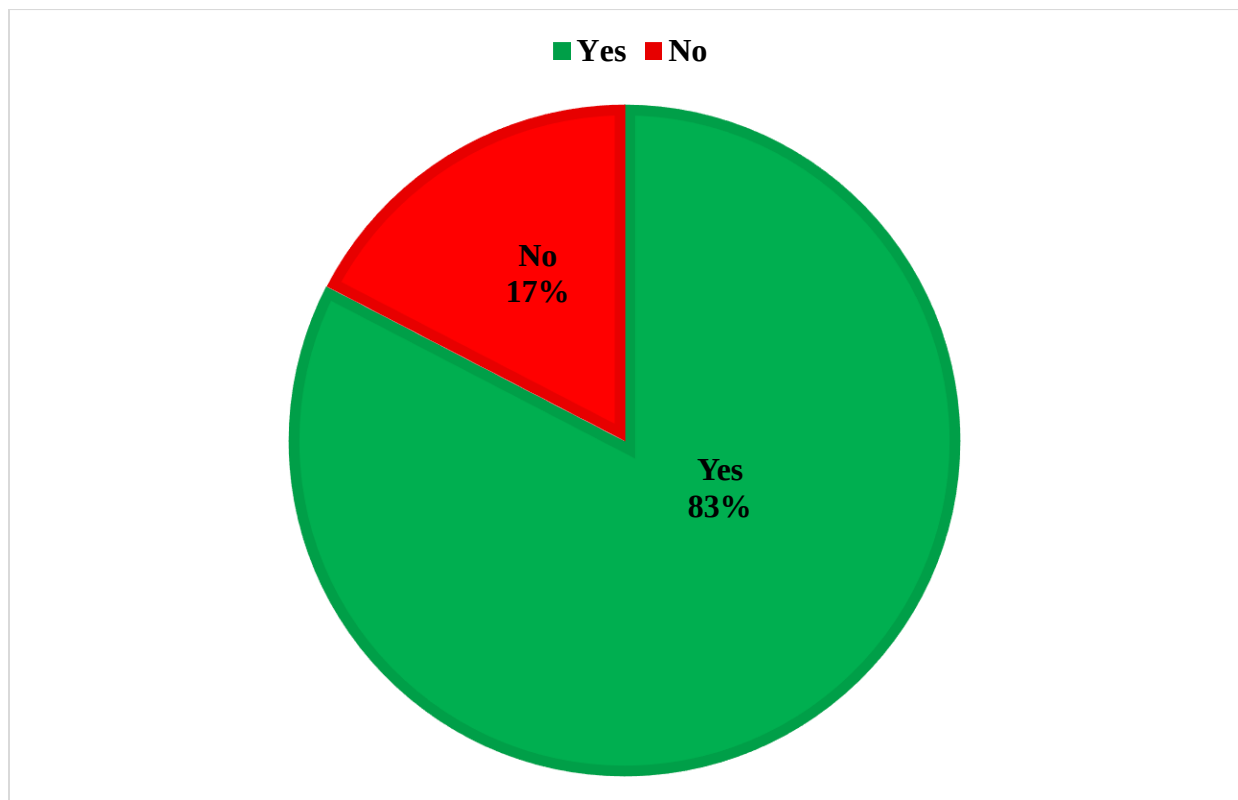


Figure 2: Percentage of learners who are aware of the re-admission policy.

1.21 4.7 Sources of information on awareness of re admission policy

On sources of information on awareness of the policy, it was observed that 26% of the teen mothers acquired information from their teachers. Teachers were able to tell pupils about existence of the re admission policy in Malawi. Furthermore, 22% of the surveyed teen mother reported that they had acquired such information from community meetings. Also, 15% accessed information from family and friends whereas 13% accessed the information from radio.

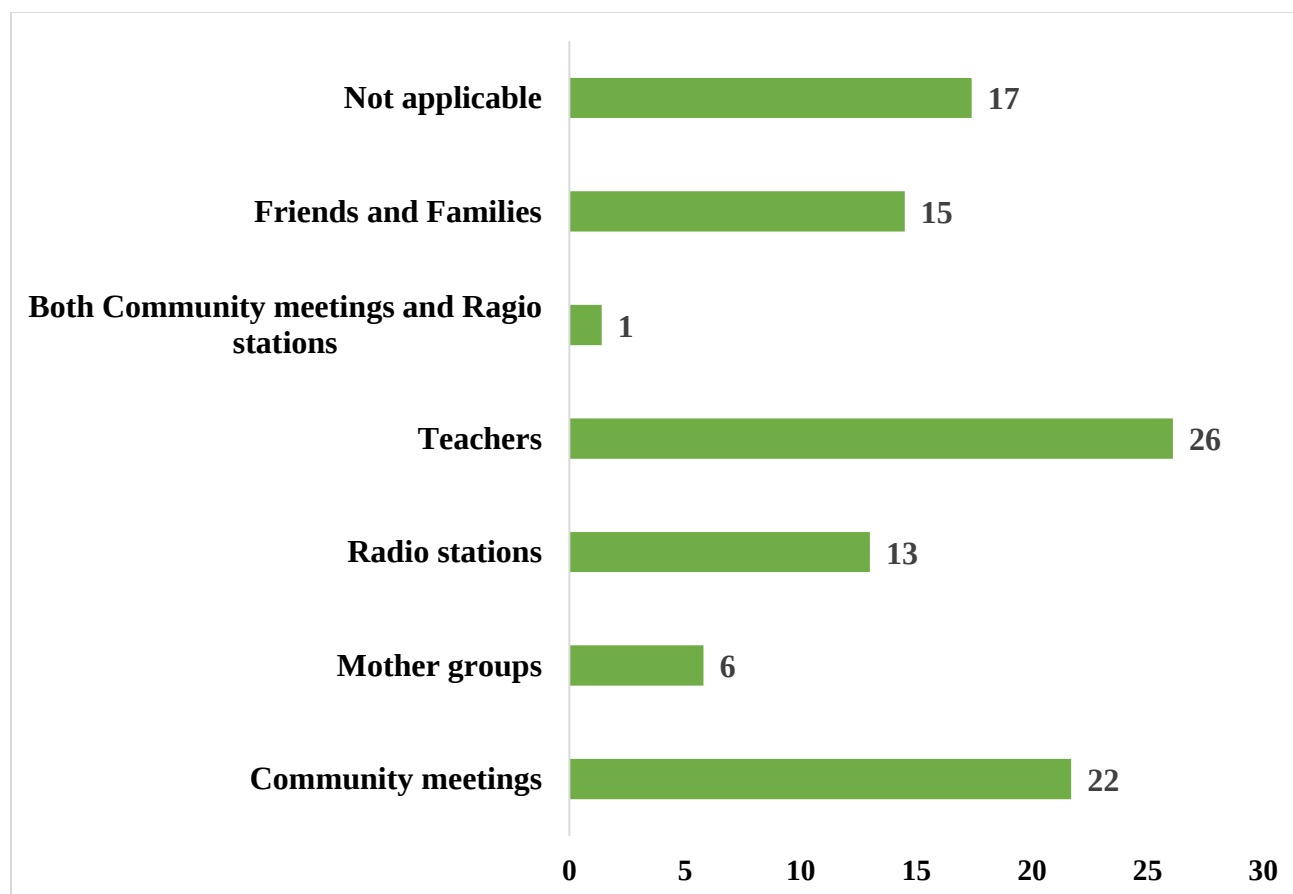


Figure 3: Sources of information on awareness of the re-admission policy

It was further observed that the community is currently not doing anything regarding pioneering of readmission policy of the teen mothers. With the terrain of the roads, it is apparent that even the community has not yet benefitted from the awareness and sensitization of the teen mother's

readmission policy. The focus group discussion interviews further revealed that there is less commitment from the girls to go back to school as observed in the following statement.

“Most of the girls feel so grown up after getting pregnant and they do not see the importance of going back to school” (FGD, Parent at Kafumbata Primary School)

meaning that most girls feel that they have now grown up after giving birth, see no need to go to school. Previous scholars such as Opondo et al. (2017) observe that teen mothers’ attitudes towards guidance and counselling is one of the important predictors of girl’s re-admission into school.

1.22 4.8 Knowledge on opportunities provided by the re-admission policy

Another important variable that was included in the analysis was the knowledge on opportunities offered by the readmission policy. The results show that 74% of respondents are indeed aware of the opportunity offered by the readmission policy. Most teen mothers interviewed acknowledged that the policy offers the opportunity for teen mothers to go back to school. Only 26% reported that they do not know any opportunity that the readmission policy offers to the teen mothers.

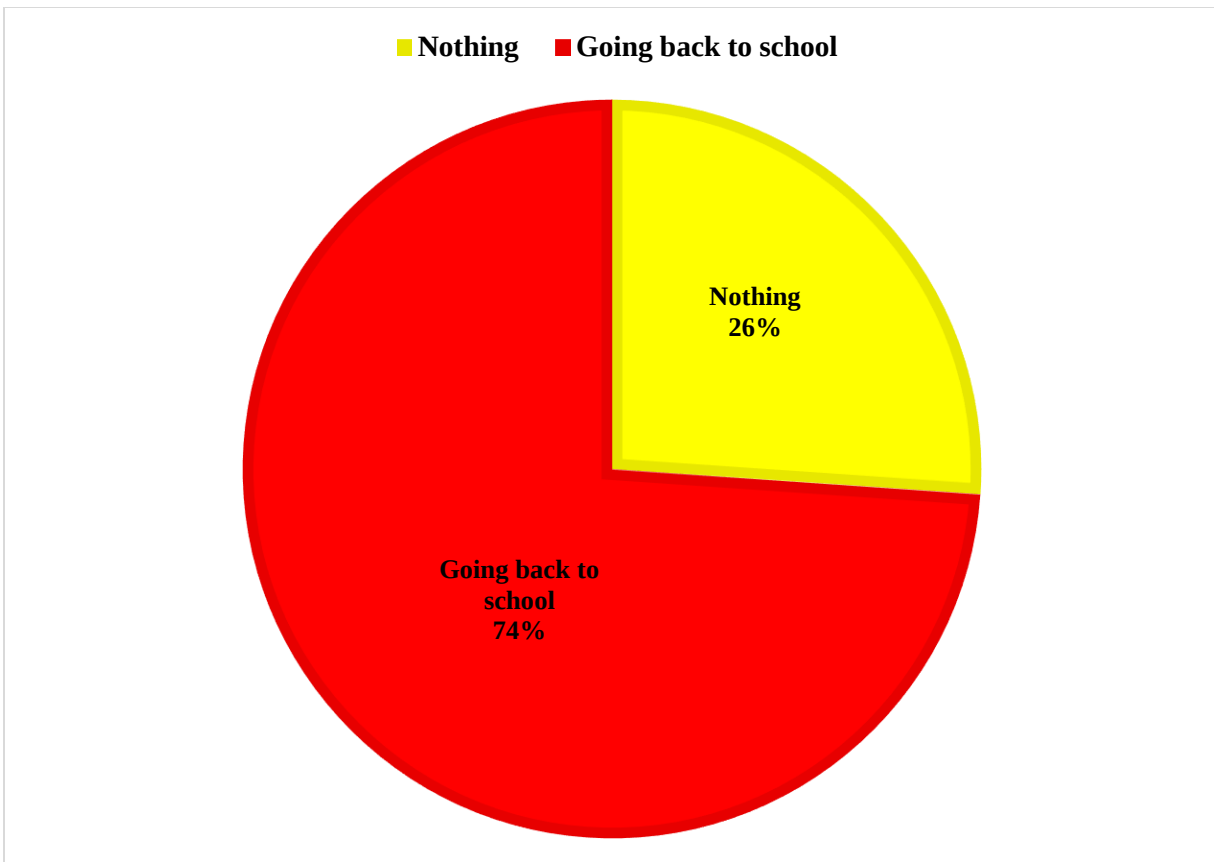


Figure 4: Knowledge on opportunities provided by the re-admission policy.

1.23 4.9 The role of various actors in re-entering the student.

It is imperative to know the role of that their fellow pupils play in support for the readmission of teen mothers. The study findings show that 45% of learners support their fellow students in re-entering through encouragement. In addition, 32% of learners provide other forms of support to their fellow learners who would want to be re admitted at school. With regard to the role of teachers on re admission of learners after delivery, it has been observed that 39% of learners reported being encouraged by teachers to get re admitted back to school. The results also show that 44% of teen mothers get encouraged by their teachers. The encouragement is a form of counselling where teachers teach a leading role in encouraging learners to go back to school after delivery. The findings also revealed that most teen mothers (77%) reported that they get encouraged to go back

to school after delivery. Results also show that most headteachers take a leading role in encouraging learners to come back to school after delivery. To that effect, Figure 4 show that 74% of the surveyed teen mothers got support from their respective head teachers on reentry to school after delivery.

Another observed challenge according to the key informant interviews is that the readmission policy is very slow in terms of implementation.

In my opinion, the speed at which the policy is being implemented is quite slow for there are extremely few incidences where the teen mothers are being readmitted back. (Key informant, Kambilonjo Zone PEA 2024)

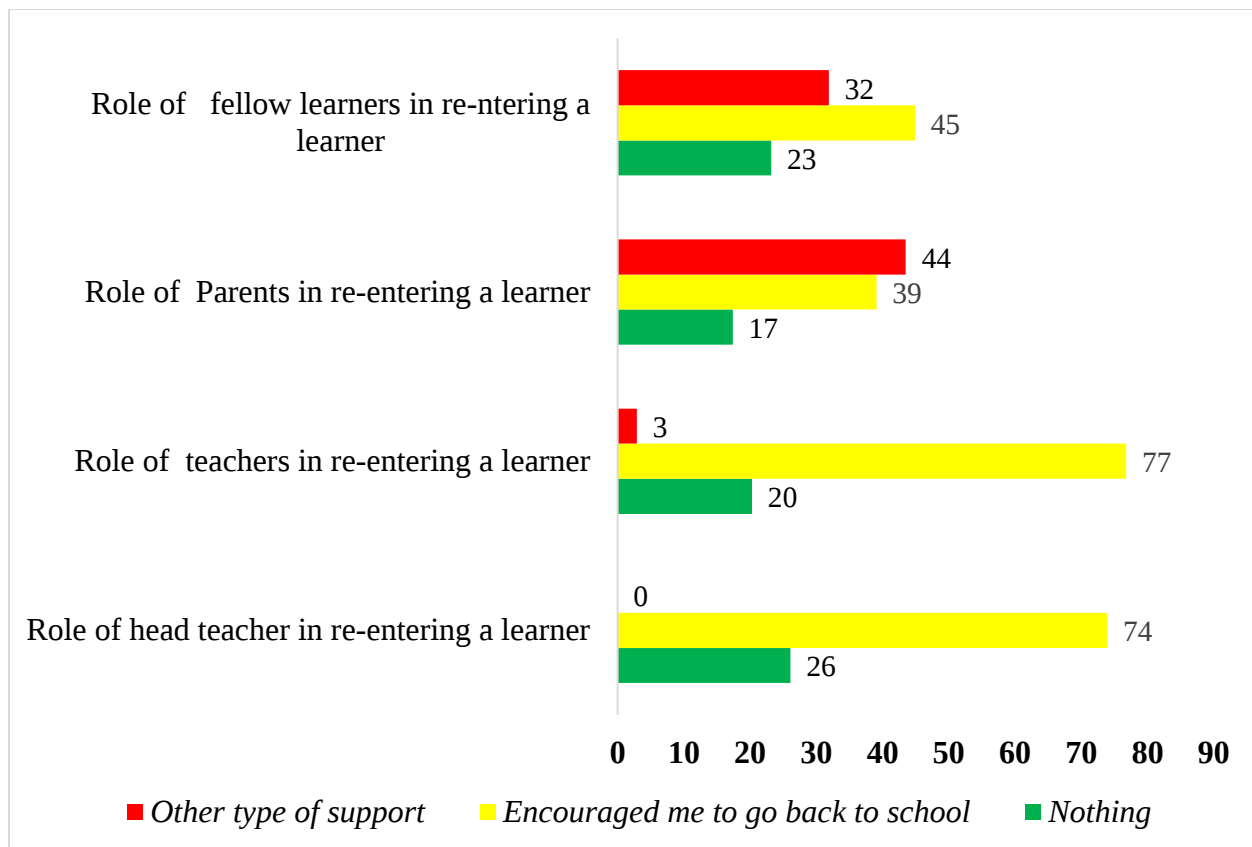


Figure 5: The role of various actors in re-entering the student.

4.10 Challenges faced by the readmitted learners.

With regards challenges that teen mothers face after they have enrolled, it was observed that out of 69 surveyed teen mothers, 35% of teen mothers reported that lack of financial support is their major challenge in getting readmitted to school. The results further show that 24% reported that inadequate learning materials is the second major problems that teen mothers face.

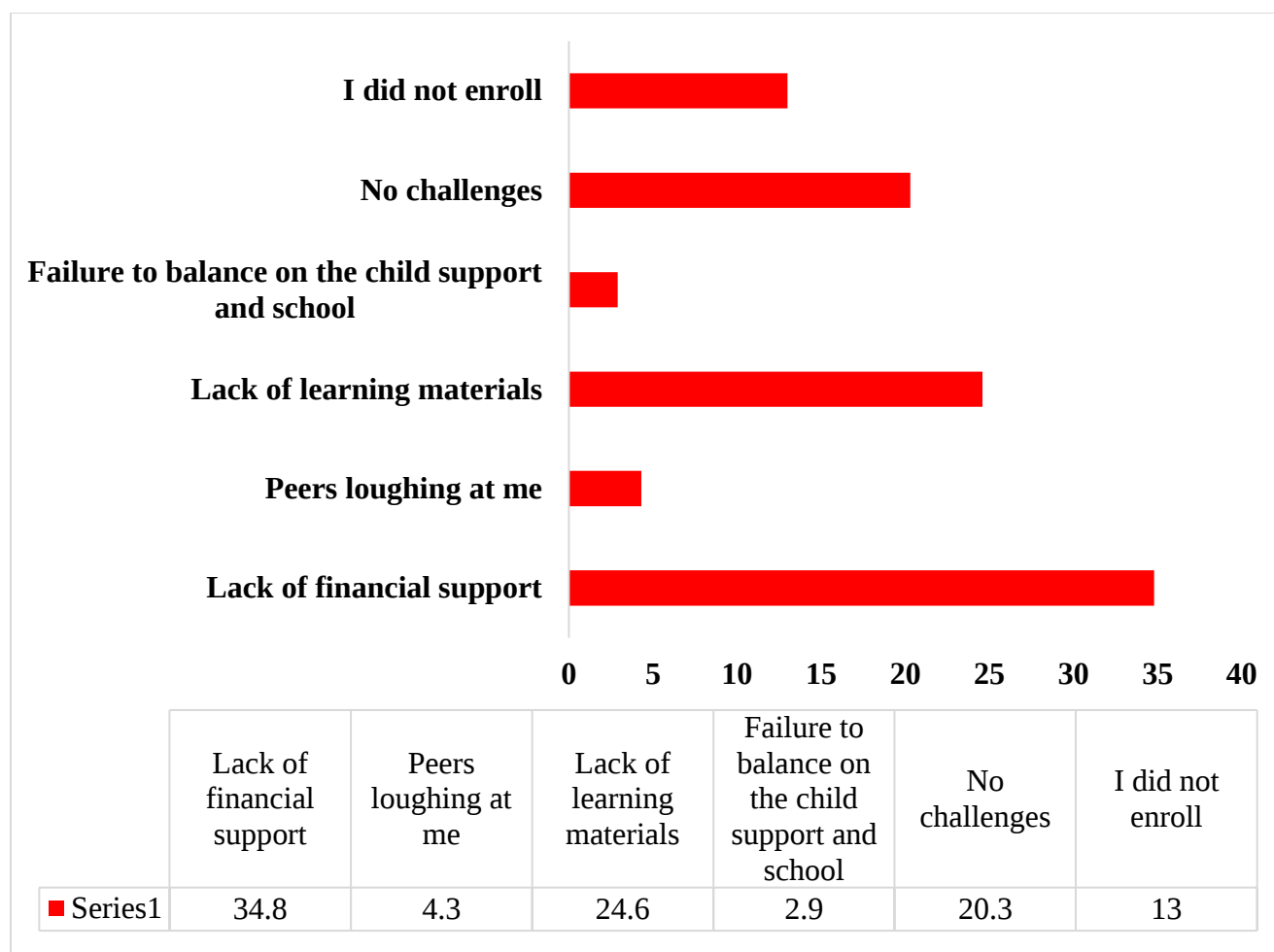


Figure 6: Challenges faced in the readmission process.

From the discussion with parents it also fully shows that, there are problems within the community where attitude of most parents also has contributed to the ineffectiveness of the readmission policy. Furthermore, it was observed that although to some extent there is some psychological support to girls who get pregnant and would want to go back to school, it seems the present structures are not effective in carrying out this role.

The following quote attests to this statement:

“In the past this community, we used to have what we call secret mothers. When a young girl gets pregnant, they would follow the child and support the girl through counselling but random people from the community said “Is the child yours?” why are you following the girls like that?” So, such comments made the secret mothers to stop the follow ups”. (FGD, Parent at Katsekera Primary School)

During focus group discussion interviews as quoted below, another parent commented as stated;

“Most girls do not have enough clothes to support their school so they just conclude that our parents do not have money and some girls feel like their friends will be laughing at them so they just drop school” (FGD, Parent at Chibweya Primary School)

The observation generally has a serious implication on performance of the readmitted teen mother. Lack of material support renders girls to undergo trauma as they are in most cases laughed by their peers. This further exacerbates the situation by creating another challenge.

Another key challenge observed according to the key informants with mother groups is that some structures in the society such as parents frustrate the initiatives of such groups to implement the readmission policy. For example, the quote below presents scenarios where some initiatives have been frustrated. The quotes say the moment mother groups hear that some girls have become pregnant in their communities, the mother groups have in most cases tried to identify the girls and send them to school after counselling. However, some parents frustrate the whole process by encouraging girls to get married instead of going back to school.

“When we hear a girl is pregnant, we do our research and sometimes we have met scenarios where the parents have helped the girl to terminate the pregnancy and then write exams and most of them drop out after that but it is not common and practical here to follow up a child from pregnancy to the point the girl delivers a baby” (FGD, PTA at Chibweya Primary School)

These findings clearly indicate that awareness of the policy alone does not translate into effective implementation. There are practical challenges that the community is facing and has led to limited follow up mechanisms, societal stigma and insufficient psychosocial support which undermines the policy's capacity to ensure school re-entry and retention.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

1.24 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings regarding the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy on teen mothers' re-entry into primary schools in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District. The results are analyzed in relation to the study's objectives and compared with existing literature. The discussion highlights key themes, such as the level of awareness of the policy, its influence on school retention, challenges in implementation, and the psychological and material support provided to teen mothers. The chapter critically examines how these factors affect the success of the policy and provides insights into potential improvements that could enhance its impact.

5.1.1 Assessing the level of knowledge of the readmission policy among school management structures, teachers, teen mothers, and parents.

One of the key findings about the readmission policy is that most people are indeed aware of the readmission policy. Nearly all teachers are quite aware of the policy so too is the school authority. More importantly, it has been observed that most learners (83%) are quite aware of the readmission policy. The surveyed teen mothers are similarly aware of the existence of the opportunities that the policy confers to them. This was noted when teen mothers expressed the benefits of the policy where they are given a chance to the continuation of their education despite the pregnancy. From the findings, it is apparent that a considerable number of parents, teachers, and teen mothers' express knowledge about the existence of the readmission policy.

Mbugua (2015) also highlights that awareness of the existence of the readmission policy teen mothers in Kikuyu district in Kenya is not a problem, but the implementation guidelines were found not to be fully known among the parents and learners. This was clearly shown in how the

schools and community handled teen pregnancies from onset to the time of delivery. The proper guidelines as stated in the Readmission policy were not followed and this revealed the knowledge gaps in the implementation guidelines. Kumwenda (2023) also explored about school structures in the provision of support mechanisms to readmitted teen mothers in Secondary schools in Mzuzu, the researcher found a lack of awareness of the readmission policy among MOE Officials, headteachers, teachers, students as well as parents which really means that as much as the awareness of the policy in Kambilonjo zone is there, there is still some gaps in the implementation guidelines as it has also been revealed on the lack of awareness of the Policy in Mzuzu.

Path Goal Theory also states the four primary types of leader behaviours and these relates to the findings above. Achievement oriented leadership style would build the readmission policy where the Ministry of Education working hand in hand with the schools would help to achieve the goals of the policy. The directive path goal clarifying leadership will play a role where the leaders in the education sector mention will strategically direct the responsible people to effectively work towards bringing the teen mothers back to school which shall mean the community and the school will be responsible to help improve such gaps in the policy. Supportive and participative leadership style will help to guide how the teachers, all the schools' structures and the community including parents would help the teen mothers in bringing them back to school. Since this type of leadership style is lacking, it brings these gaps in most Malawian societies as indeed most people are aware of the policy, but there are gaps in the implementation guidelines.

The study also found a mixed reaction to actions taken after pregnancy where most of these groups interviewed did not directly respond to what the policy states. It should also be put into context that a similar study by Zuilkowski et al. (2019) in Zambia where teachers were asked to provide their views on the readmission policy. The study found mixed views on the re admission policy.

Some teachers claimed that the pupil should bare consequences for falling pregnant at an early age and should not be brought back to school, for they believed that bringing the pupil back to school would encourage other pupils to do the same thereby creating moral chaos in education system. The same notion might be applied in Malawian teachers. The diversity of African culture is the foundation of the effectiveness of the re admission policy. Some teachers are worried that the policy alone is not enough for it can create a precedence where getting pregnant and going back to school becomes a norm, thereby distorting the moral functions of the education system.

Furthermore, focus group discussion results indicated that most school authorities are not fully aware of the implementation guidelines of the readmission policy despite being aware of its existence. The result is in tandem with Thwala et al. (2020) who also confirmed that the parent association lacked full awareness on the roles and responsibilities that they are supposed to play in implementation of the re admission policy in Eswatini Kingdom. The observed knowledge gap on implementation guidelines is a clear indication that there exists a gap among the policy implementers.

5.1.2 Analyzing the influence of the readmission policy on retaining school dropout girls (teen mothers)

One pertinent finding of this study is that readmission policy is not effective as evidenced by number of teen mothers who have been readmitted to school. The results show that out of 69 teen mothers who participated in the interviews, only 7% reported that they have been readmitted. This shows that of the 69 teen mothers surveyed only 5 were re-admitted. The study has established several reasons why the policy is ineffective in readmitting the teen mothers. It seems there is little sensitization of being readmitted to school. Mutua, Miriti & Mogeni (2019) did a study on the implementation of the Return to school policy for teen mothers in Kenya and the study showed

that most students in the targeted schools were not aware of the Readmission policy but based on incidences where some of their classmates have been able to return to school after delivery, they knew that it was possible for teen mothers to get readmitted back to school. This means that if the Policy can be well sensitized with all the detailed procedures of how the implementation should be carried out then the Policy will put much influence on the implementation of the policy which will increase the numbers of the returnees and achieve high education levels for most teen mothers.

Unlike in other areas, the Kambilonjo zone suffers from little sensitization of the policy because of the less presence of NGOs who can bring sensitization about the issue. The focus group discussion interviews with the PTA revealed that the area is hard to reach as such most NGOs are quite reluctant to reach out to the areas thereby denying the needed sensitization. The worsening condition of the roads in the area which is shared by the three governmental demarcations (TAs) has significantly contributed to this issue. The substandard roads have created logistical challenges and increased transportation costs, discouraging many NGOs from initiating development projects in that area (Kambilonjo Zone) and this has been expressed through all the committees during the focus group discussions as well the PEA who also shared on the same. This hinderance doesn't solely affect the research topic at hand but rather extends to various sectors of developments striving for progress within the community. This has affected a broader spectrum of development activities as a result exacerbating the overall struggle for advancement and growth.

It was further observed that the community is currently not doing anything regarding pioneering of readmission policy of the teen mothers. With the terrain of the roads, it is apparent that even the community has not yet benefitted from the awareness and sensitization of the teen mother's readmission policy. The focus group discussion interviews further revealed that there is less commitment from the girls to go back to school as most girls feel that they have now grown up

after giving birth, so no need to go to school. Previous scholars such as Opondo et al. (2017) observe that teen mothers' attitudes towards guidance and counselling is one of the important predictors of girl's re-admission into school. The attitudes of girls with respect to re-admission policy rests on the social problems that emerge after delivery, as some girls are not ready to face those challenges. PTA bemoaned that the girls themselves refuse to go back to school after they have given birth for, they think that after giving birth to their first child anything to do with education ends there. Therefore, their minds completely shift from education to finding a stable marriage. Due to this mindset, some parents completely fail to support them to go back to school. The results concur with Noshir (2017) who also found that lack of family support significantly affected teen mothers' decisions to return to school. It should be noted that teens who have once delivered, would be regarded as vulnerable (Muli et al., 2023).

5.1.3 Examining the psychological and material support given to teenage mothers after re-admission.

There is also little presence of psychological and material support given to teenage mothers after re-admission. In most cases, when teen mothers fall pregnant, they are not given adequate support in terms of counselling, encouragement, and material support. These learners were not appropriately encouraged to go back to school thereby worsening the late readmission of the teen mother to school. This is in tandem with the study findings of Mbugua (2015) who also found that lack of psychological and material support candidly affected readmission of teen mothers to secondary schools in Kenya. Without proper sensitization, the community might have a negative attitude of learners who have fallen pregnant, labelling them as immoral girls. Furthermore, it was observed that although to some extent there is some psychological support to girls who get

pregnant and would want to go back to school, it seems the present structures are not effective in carrying out this role.

The findings have shown that out of the 69 teen mothers interviewed, only 17% underwent counseling while the rest did not receive any type of counseling after getting pregnant. This shows that the teen mothers have not been well prepared and mentored on how they should carry themselves whilst pregnant and that there is still hope after giving birth. The findings confirm that a higher percentage of teen mothers lack direction in their educational careers and most of them do not value this aspect since no one has enlightened them and encouraged them to go back to school during this time. As a result, most of the teen mothers have ended up in early marriages where they think there is hope for survival with their kids. If counseling was well offered to teen mothers, most of them would value themselves, go back to school, and work hard for their future.

Path goal theory style of leading could also help facilitate the readmission policy to improve. If a supportive and participative style of leadership could be employed in helping the teen mothers get back to school and make this policy a success and relevant. These two styles of leadership will help the community and the school authorities implement the policy implementation guidelines by supporting them and making sure that all parties involved play their part to make sure that the teen mother gets her support and also the child is also provided with the necessary support both from the school and the community be it parents. The two styles of leadership can largely contribute to the assessment and action next steps on whether the psychological and material support is being offered after readmission. This approach can also help in making sure that teen mothers, parents, and school authorities are participating in the implementation process.

As much as they are aware of the readmission policy, they are still lacking psychological and material support to support their education further. The daily demands and responsibilities of teen

mothers radically increase with the addition of a child in the household. This has switched their focus to childcare, searching for basic needs rather than looking for means of getting educated. Maria Mayzel et al. 2009 did a study in Mangochi on Teen Mothers and they talked about getting a teen mother back to school requires extensive outreach with the teen mother herself, her family and her community where others would include the schools and NGOs if any. They talked about NGOs providing basic school needs for teen mother and the community providing childcare and breaking the vicious cycle in which young women have few real options except early marriages or exchanging sex for money. In relation to this study findings, most teen mothers are lacking the psychosocial support which when they get, they become women of value, self-worth increases and the interest of readmitting to school becomes an option for success than the temporary solutions that later destroy their future and that of the born child. The Mangochi study further found that Malawi's MoE was instrumental in educating staff to roll out of the teen mother policy in the district. It was the District Education Officer who sensitized staff and encouraged a welcoming environment for returning teen mothers. A strong policy environment paired with mobilization proved to be the correct formula for successful program (Marial et al, 2009). Out of the Mangochi study, it means that if all the school structures especially the mother groups can really take a big role in psychosocial support to the teen mothers and have consistent follow ups, there can be positive change in embracing change in the increase of readmission rates by the teen mothers which will also play a big role in contributing to the global sustainable development goal 4.

5.1.4 Assessing the challenges affecting the implementation of the Readmission Policy in primary schools.

Teen mothers who are already readmitted also face several challenges despite sheer encouragement from parents, teachers, and head teachers. Most of them face financial constraints in furthering their education. They also lack learning materials at school. These grossly affect the performance of those teen mothers to continue with their education.

Another key challenge affecting the readmission policy is lack of financial support to support their education and the child. This is very true with people residing in rural areas where most families live in extreme poverty. This therefore prompts the teen mothers to get married instead of going to school. This finding has also been observed in the study of Mbugua (2015). The study documented that there have been several episodes when teen mothers complain about financial support for them to continue their education. According to Mbugua (2015)'s study, financial support to girls after delivery of the baby is twofold. First, financial support solely for supporting the baby; and the financial support to the teen mother back to school both for fees and material support. This is very common in countries like Malawi where poverty levels are alarming.

The observation generally has a serious implication on performance of the readmitted teen mother. Lack of material support renders girls to undergo trauma as they are in most cases laughed by their peers. This further exacerbates the situation by creating another challenge. The spillover impact of the scenario is global as information about such circumstances is easily diffused throughout the community thereby frustrating the whole process of readmission policy implementation. Gladys and Alex (2019) also opined that socio-economic support has in most cases affected girls' status of not being readmitted to school. The scholar further acknowledges that some parents completely

ignore the teen mothers who would want to go to school. This shows that sometimes this becomes the initiatives of teen mothers to go back to school. Already this is a discouragement to them.

The study agrees with Psaki et al. (2022) who also observed that parents render inadequate support in helping their girl children to get readmitted. This might be associated with the level of poverty in most African societies including Malawi.

The study further documents that lack of role model in most of the areas play a pivotal role in undermining the implementation of the readmission policy. This literally shows that most of the ladies have not gone higher with education to motivate other teens in the area. In Zambia, a similar finding was observed by Wedekind and Milingo (2015) who found that lack of role models in most of the communities in Zambia has derailed the implementation of readmission policy. In Malawi, Ntcheu district specifically, Kambilonjo zone are hard areas to reach where it is difficult to find even one model who can motivate the rest to go back to school. And it was discovered that there are few female teachers in most of these schools in the zone and this also contributes to lack of role modelling to the young teen mothers.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.25 6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conclusion of the study on the effectiveness of the Readmission Policy for teen mothers in primary schools in Kambilonjo Zone, Ntcheu District. It summarizes the key findings, emphasizing the challenges in the policy's implementation and the limited success in re-admitting teen mothers. Based on these findings, recommendations are offered to improve policy sensitization, strengthen support systems, and address socio-economic barriers. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of community involvement and targeted interventions to ensure the policy achieves its goal of increasing educational access for teen mothers.

6.1.1 Conclusion

The re-admission policy is one of Malawi's most important policies, and it continues to be a funding priority to ensure that teen mothers' rights to education are not overlooked. However, the Malawi readmission policy is paradoxical because it jeopardizes the notion that a school is a place for sanctified childhood.

Teen mothers are particularly vulnerable to the gender discrepancy in school dropouts and readmission due to a variety of issues such as peer scorn, a lack of family members to care for the infant, family support, low self-esteem, and poverty, among others. However, mitigation methods have been implemented by many educational actors, but most adolescent moms have not been reintegrated into school. This shows that either the re-admission process or its implementation was unsatisfactory. The purpose of this study was to investigate the readmission process and the efficacy of the readmission policy among community members and young mothers in the sampling area. Malawi's Ministry of Education implemented a re-admission policy in 1993. However, since

its adoption, research investigations have found that most teen mothers have not been re-admitted to the educational system. The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a re-admission policy on the education of adolescent mothers in primary schools in Ntcheu, Malawi. The study evaluated the level of understanding of the readmission policy among educational structures, teachers, teen mothers, and parents, analyzed the impact of the readmission policy on keeping school dropout girls, examined the challenges affecting the Readmission Policy's implementation in primary schools, and determined the psychological and material support provided to teenage mothers after re-admission.

The study finds that the readmission policy is not effective in the study area. The study finds that very few teen mothers (7%) were readmitted to school. It appears that there is minimal concern about getting readmitted to school. Unlike other places, the study area has low sensitization due to the lack of NGOs who can raise awareness about the issue. The focus group discussion interviews with parent associations stated that the area is difficult to reach, thus most NGOs are hesitant to reach out to the areas, denying the necessary sensitization.

It was also discovered that the community is currently doing nothing to pioneer the readmission policy for teen mothers. Given the geography of the roadways, the community has yet to gain from the awareness and sensitization of the teen mother's readmission policy.

The attitudes of girls toward re-admission policies are based on the social problems that arise after birth, as some girls are not prepared to face those challenges. The parent group lamented that the girls themselves refuse to return to school after giving birth, believing that anything to do with education ends with the birth of their first child.

There is also lack of understanding about implementation guidelines. One of the significant conclusions about the readmission policy is that most people are aware of it. Almost all teachers are aware of the policy, as is the school administration. More importantly, it has been discovered that most learners (83%) are well aware of the readmission policy. The surveyed teen mothers are also aware of the presence of the options that the policy grants them. The study also found that there is limited psychological and material support to help readmitted learners further their education.

6.1.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings on Assessing the effectiveness of the Readmission policy on Re-Entry of teen mother to primary school in Kambilonjo Zone in Ntcheu District. The study proposes the following recommendations. These aim to ensure the effectiveness of the Readmission policy to teen mothers

6.1.2.1 Strengthen Policy Awareness and Implementation Capacity

Although there is general awareness of the readmission policy, there still remains some critical gap in understanding its operational procedures. The ministry of Education in collaboration with district education offices and NGOs, should intensify policy dissemination through structured training sessions, simplified policy briefs and school level guidelines. This should include clear responsibilities for school management, timelines for re-entry, child care arrangements and procedures for counselling and follow up

6.1.2.2 Enhance Community Sensitisation and Social Support Systems

Sensitise the community on the readmission policy and make it knowledgeable about the policy to be a supportive community which is crucial for successful re-entry. Continuous sensitisation campaigns should involve chiefs, faith leaders, parents and community based organisations should aim to address stigma, challenge negative gender norms and promote shared responsibility for supporting adolescent mothers. Schools should also integrate community counselling and parental engagement structures to strengthen social support for re-admitted learners.

6.1.2.3 Support Attitude Change and Re-engagement Among Teen Mothers

Findings show that many adolescent mothers lose interest in returning to school after child birth. Therefore, there should be targeted behaviour change strategies including mentorship programs, life skills training and peer support groups led by older adolescent mothers who returned to school. These can help build motivation, self-esteem and a positive orientation toward continued education.

6.1.2.4 Improve Rural Infrastructure and Accessibility

Lobby for an improvement in road networks in order to improve accessibility of the areas in the study areas. The Government of Malawi working with development partners should prioritise investment to improve access to schools and health facilities. Kambilonjo Zone has been denied some development that come with NGOs in encouraging the girl child to work hard so these poor road networks in hard to reach areas limit NGO presence, policy outreach and service deliver.

6.1.2.5 Foster School and Community partnerships to sustain long term support

Schools and communities should jointly support plans for re-admitted mothers including child care options, follow up mechanisms and psychosocial support. The Mother Groups, School Committees and youth clubs can help in building a sustainable network of actors committed to supporting teen mother's education continuity.

6.1.2.6 There should be Financial Initiatives for Teen Mothers

There should deliberate initiatives to financially support teen mothers after delivery so that they can go back to school. The financial support could complement the existing financial effort to the baby so that teen mothers can go back to school. This should be done jointly with the parents of the teen mother and the community at large

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APPENDICES

1.26 Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Teen Mother Interviews

Section A: Demographic data

1. Name.....
2. Age 1. 12-15 2. 16-20 3. 21-25
3. Religion: 1. Christian 2. Moslem 3. Other
4. Traditional Authority; 1. Phambala 2. Mpando
5. How many are you in your family? 1. 1-3 2. 4-8 3. 9-12 4. 12-15
6. What is the source of income of your family?
 1. Farming 2. Business 3. Piece works/ganyu 4. Remmitances
7. Who take care of the family needs?
 1. Mother 2. Father 3. Both 4. community

Section B. Dropping out

8. Are you still in school?
 1. Yes 2. No
- 1b. What grade are you currently attending... *if Q8=Yes*
 1. Grade1 2. Grade2 3. Grade3 4. Grade4 5. Grade5 6. Grade6
 7. Grade7 8. Grade8
9. How old were you when you got pregnant?
10. What was the reaction of the teachers? pupils? Parents and the community when you fell pregnant?
11. Did you receive any form of counseling at school?
12. What action did the school authorities take when you got pregnant?

13. Do you have mother groups in this school?

1. Yes 2. No

14. What action did they take towards your pregnancy?

Section C. Readmission

15. Are you aware of the Readmission policy that allows teen mothers to come back to school after delivery?

1. Yes 2. No

16. If yes, how did you know about it?if Q1=Yes

17. What opportunities does the readmission policy provide to the teen mothers?

18. Do you think girls/teen mothers should be allowed to go back to school after delivery?

1. Yes 2. No

19. In your opinion how is this policy implemented?

20. What role do the following people play in you re-entering school?

a) Head teachers b) Teachers c) Parents d) Pupils

21. What challenges did you face in the readmission process?

22. What can be done for most teen mothers to go back to school?

23. What challenges do you face at a) school? B) home and how are they addressed?

24. What do you think can be done to enhance the effectiveness of the policy

Section A. Demographic

- ## Section B. Drop outs

- 80

2. How has the girls' performance been after readmitting back to school?

Section C. Policy

3. Are you aware of the readmission policy? *if No then skip to Q14*

1. Yes 2. No

4. What do you know about the Policy?

12a. Is the school sensitized much on the Readmission Policy?

1. Yes, enough 2. Yes, but not enough 3. Not at all

12b. How was the sensitization done?

5. Is the policy practical in your school?

1. Yes 2. No

6. How is the policy implemented in this School/zone?

7. What opportunities does the policy offer;

(a) Teenage mothers

(b) Schools

(c) Communities

8. What challenges are there during implementation of the readmission policy?

a. To the teen mothers

b. The school and the community

9. What is/are the major reasons for teenage mothers not re-entering school?

10. What have you done to follow up on those who do not re-enter school?

11. What are the gaps in the policy?

12. What support systems can be developed to enhance the effective implementation of the policy?

13. Do you have other programs apart from the policy in helping readmission of teen mothers?

1. Yes 2. No

22a. If yes, what are the programs?

22b. If yes, how are they done?

1.28 Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Key Informants/PEA

1. How many schools do you have in your zone?
2. How many female and male teachers do you have in your zone?
3. Do you have strategies of dealing with drop outs in your zone?
 1. Yes 2. No
- 3a. If yes, explain the strategies, *if Q3=yes*
4. Are the Schools in your zone aware of the Readmission Policy?
 1. Yes 2. No
- 4a. If yes, what have you done to make sure that your zone is well knowledgeable on the readmission policy?..... *if Q4=yes*
- 4b. If no, why?*if Q4=No*
5. What programs/initiatives are being done to promote readmission of teen mothers?
6. Which stakeholders or structures are you working with to promote readmission of teen mothers back to school?
 1. Mother groups 2. PTA 3. School Management Committee (SMC) 4. Chiefs/GVHs/TAs 5. Religious leaders 6. NGOs 7. Govt 8. Other
- 6a. Specify other
7. What is your capacity as a zone/PEA, to support interventions being implemented in schools?
8. What are the gaps in the Readmission Policy?
9. What are the main areas of improvement you think are needed if Readmission Policy is to be enhanced in your Zone and District as a whole?
10. How could you support such improvements? What will be your role?

11 Do you feel the policy is effective?/ why?

12 Do you have other programs apart from the policy in helping readmission of teen mothers?

1. Yes 2. No

13 Any Comments/ Additions that help the study?

1.29 Appendix 4: Interview Guide for Key Informants/ MOE Officials

Name of respondent.....

Position

1. How many learners/teen mothers have dropped out annually for the past 3 years?
2. How many have readmitted back to school?
3. What is the MOE policy on teenage pregnancy?
4. How is the readmission policy implemented in schools?
5. What opportunities does the policy offer teenage mothers' schools, family and communities?
6. What are the challenges faced by the PEA and the schools in the readmission process?
7. How are these addressed?
8. How do you monitor the schools in the implementation of the readmission policy?
 - 8a. Do you have tools used to monitor the implementation of the policy?
 - 8b. what tools do you use?
9. What support systems can be developed to enhance the effectiveness of the policy?
10. What role does your office play to ensure that the schools are well informed about the readmission policy?

1.30 Appendix 5: Focus Group Guide with parents

Number of participants.....

Theme 1: Background information

- ✓ Location (Traditional Authority)
- ✓ Level of education?
- ✓ Number of children and sex

Theme 2: Teen Pregnancy and support

- ✓ Experience when child got pregnant.
- ✓ What was the reaction in the community/family when a teenage gets pregnant?
- ✓ What was the reaction in the community/family when the teenage mother gets back to school?
- ✓ Any support from mother groups, community during and after delivery
- ✓ Any support from School during and after delivery
- ✓ Type of support given

Theme 3: Readmission policy

- ✓ Awareness of the policy
- ✓ What do you know about the policy?
- ✓ Implementation of the policy? Is it good?
- ✓ How can it improve?
- ✓ What opportunities does the policy offer to teen mothers families?
- ✓ Does the community support the readmission of teen mothers to school?

Theme 4: Challenges

- ✓ Of teen mothers
- ✓ Any challenges encountered in your efforts to ensure readmission of teen mothers.
- ✓ Factors leading to failure of readmission of teen mothers.
- ✓ Challenges of Teen mothers in school and out of school and how it affects their education.

Theme 5: Interventions

- ✓ Are there other interventions in your community structures that are helping girls to go back to school.
- ✓ Which organizations do you work with to help in the readmission of out of schoolgirls in your area?
- ✓ What is the community in the community/family when the teenage mother refuses to go back to school?
- ✓ Do you community/family value the education of girls other than boys?
- ✓ Do you think the policy is effective in achieving its goals? Why?

Thank you for your participation. End of Interview

1.31 Appendix 6: Ethical Clearance



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

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MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/82

12/07/2023.

Faith Kanyika,

Mzuzu University,

P/Bag 201,

Luwinga,

Mzuzu 2.

faithkanyika@gmail.com

Dear Faith,

**RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR
PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/82: EFFECTIVENESS OF READMISSION
POLICY ON THE READMISSION OF TEEN MOTHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS; A
CASE OF KAMBILONJO ZONE IN NTCHEU DISTRICT.**

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) in a format that is available at the Secretariat. Once the study is finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee with a final report of the study. The Committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

Committee Address:

Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2;

Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



Gift Mbwele

SENIOR RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR

For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIREC