



Effectiveness of the 2020 school re-entry policy on increasing expectant girls' and teenage mothers' access to education in Narok County, Kenya

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Abstract: The objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of school re-entry policy guidelines that were developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2020 in order to establish how the implementation has increasing access to education by expectant girls and teenage mothers in Narok County, Kenya. Convergence parallel design with cross sectional and hermeneutic phenomenology strands provided the blueprint for data collection and analysis. The target population comprised of 132 girls and mixed public secondary, 264 Guidance and counselling teachers, 3,300 non – guidance and counselling teachers, 300 form three students in year 2022, 264 teenage mothers and expectants girls in school, 264 teenage mothers and expectants girls out of school, 264 parents of teenage mothers and expectant girls, 8 Sub – County Directors of Education in Narok County, 36 health officers, 1 County Education gender officer and 6 Non – Governmental organisations. The survey included 720 respondents chosen using probability and non-probability sampling procedures. The study was anchored on Liberal Feminism and critical theories. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data while interview guides and FGD discussion guides collected qualitative data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The evaluation established that the school re-entry rate of teenage mothers is low ranging between 5% to 15% leaving about 85% out of school. This is attributed to factors such as lack of monitoring to track implementation status at the school level, unfavorable school environment, inadequate enforcement by the MoE, financial constraints, limited support by baby fathers and parents and poor record keeping. The evaluation makes key recommendations including the need for the MoE to undertake quarterly monitoring of the policy implementation at the school level, instituting and enforcing accountability mechanisms for stakeholders and adopting a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach to addressing challenges that affect the effective execution of the policy.

Key words: Effectiveness of school re-entry policy, Expectant girls, Teenage mothers, Access to education, Evaluation

1.1 Background of the study

Education is an inalienable human right that should be guaranteed to all irrespective of cultural, social, economic, and political status (CoK, 2010). All over the world, education is regarded as a key factor in the reduction of inter-generational poverty, and it ensures increased production, better health outcomes,

women's empowerment and alleviates gender disparities (Lewin, 2015). Governments all over the world therefore have an obligation of ensuring that all learners access education to address intergenerational poverty. Governments are also obligated to realize Sustainable Development Goal number four (SDG4), which provides for parity and quality education for everyone (United Nations, 2015).

Kenya has worked incredibly hard since independence to ensure boys and girls have equal access to education including making commitments to various international and regional policy frameworks. The government has enacted laws, developed policies, and initiated programs that seek to improve the right to education for all and alleviate gender inequality in access to education. One such policy is the school's return policy that was initiated in Kenya in 1994 (MoE, 1994 Guidelines for School Return Policy). The goal of the policy was to offer education for girls and assist the nation to attain Education for All (EFA) aspirations. According to Omwancha (2012), the 1994 return to school policy reiterates that girls who become expectant should be unconditionally readmitted to either their original school or another one of their choice. Additionally, it provides for a comprehensive and ongoing support and counseling to teenage moms who are expectant, their parents, and other students in the schools and that teachers should follow up on expectant girls to find out how they are doing. It also provides that those who make schoolgirls expectant should face the law while teenage fathers should be counseled.

Since 1994, the policy has been reviewed three times, thus, in 2003, 2007, and 2015 in an attempt to make it more relevant and applicable. The 2003 review re-emphasized the need for the re-admission of teenage mothers and enabling them to be admitted to a different school if they wish to avoid stigmatisation (Omwancha, 2012). Among the goals of the 2007 gender policy in education, which was an updated version of 2003, was to augment the engagement of underprivileged girls and women in education, guarantee gender equality and support the reintegration of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy and early marriages back to school (MoE, Gender policy in Education, 2007). The 2015 revision of the policy was informed by the need to align the policy with significant legislative, constitutional, and policy changes such as the Second Medium Term Plan (MTP II), the enactment of the Basic Education Act No. 14 of 2013 and the National Education Sector Plan of 2013-2018 as well as the aligning the policy with the 2010 Kenyan Constitution. The 2015 gender policy of the Education and Training Sector places emphasis on equal rights for men and women, boys and girls, in the pursuit of goal three of the Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, which is to eradicate regional and gender differences in Basic Education. It covers eight themes: equity; nurturing, mentorship, governance, and management; safety, security, and gender-based violence; access; and it offers an execution framework with roles and responsibilities of key players and implementation strategies.

One of the 2015 policy objectives is to minimize gender disparities in access, involvement, and success across all levels of education. Various scholars and educational stakeholders have postulated different concepts of access to education. Lewin (2015) stresses the need to have an expanded vision of access to education that goes beyond the narrow indicators for participation that are measured by enrolment rates to include judgments of both educational quality and process. Therefore, access to education includes resources to which students have access, the environment in which children learn, and educational outcomes with competencies and capabilities that are acquired and how they are valued. Therefore all these parameters of access to education should be taken into consideration to ensure that teenage mothers and expectant girls access quality education.

In addition to school re-entry policy, other measures that the of Kenya has adopted to reduce gender disparity include the introduction of affirmative action in the bursary allocations, capitation in secondary school fees, payment of exam fees and the establishment a gender division within the Ministry of Education to harmonize and ensure the realization of gender equality in Education. However, despite these interventions having achieved greater school enrolment rates, improved gender parities and increased opportunities for both girls and boys in schools, gender disparities still exist in accessibility, retention, and completing secondary school education for girls (MoE, 2020). Studies show that even though the school's return policy has been in place since 1994, it has not been properly implemented. This is evidenced by the fact that 17.7% of the adolescent who have ever been expectant 97.8% are out of school (Birungi et.al, 2015; Steitieth, 2021). Additionally statistics shows that only 2% of teenage mothers return to school in after delivery Kenya (NCPD, 2021). These statistics beg the answer on how effective the school re-entry policy has been implemented to increase access to secondary education for teenage mothers and expectant girls.

1.2 Statement of the evaluation purpose

The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey of 2022 showed that 28% of girls aged between 15 and 19 years in Narok County have had a pregnancy listing the county among the top five with the highest teenage pregnancies. The adolescent birth rate for females in Narok County aged between 15 and 19 years is 225 births per 1000 girls, which is more than twice that of the National level standing at 96 per 1000 adolescent girls making it the highest compared to all the 47 counties in Kenya (MoH, 2020). Review of literature shows that several studies on the return to school policy in Narok County have been conducted with the aim of gaining information on establishing determinants of teenage pregnancies, health-related challenges among expectant and teenage mothers, communication role of teachers, prevention of teenage pregnancies, effects of teenage pregnancy in girl-child education, as well as the role of stakeholders in putting the school's return to school policy into practice.

Few of these studies examined the extent to which the return to school policy has increased access to secondary education in Narok County based on the indicators of effectiveness such as the degree of awareness on the return to school policy, existence of an enabling environment, existence of a functional guidance and counseling department, existence of a functional M&E system, the number of expectant girls who have access to age-appropriate reproductive health, teenage mothers return to school rate for the years 2018, 2019 2021 and 2022, their retention and performance, number of cases reported to the children department of persons responsible for impregnating school girls and what has been done. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ministry of Education's development of new guidelines for the implementation of school return to school policies in 2020, few studies have been conducted in Narok County. Therefore, the objective of the study was to establish the extent to which the school re-entry policy been effective in increasing expectant girls' and teenage mothers' access to education in Narok County, Kenya post COVID -19 period and after the development of the implementation guidelines in 2020 by the Ministry of Education.

1.3 Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to assess the extent to which the school re-entry policy been effective in increasing expectant girls' and teenage mothers' access to education in Narok County, Kenya.

1.4 Review of related literature

The extent to which the school re-entry policy is effective in increasing expectant girls' and teenage mothers' access to education in Narok County, Kenya is influenced by a number of factors such as the attitude of the school principal towards the policy, sensitization and awareness of the policy, how the learning environment is conducive and how functional guidance and counseling services are. This section presents a review of the theoretical framework that guided the study, the evaluation model that was used and global, regional and national empirical studies that were used to validate the study findings.

1.4.1 Theoretical framework

The study was guided by philosophical principles of liberal feminism theory that was propagated by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797). The theory emphasizes people's basic right to freedom and their innate capacity for reason. It asserts that women empowerment is critical in ensuring that they attain their full potential, improve societal well-being, and thrive in their home obligations and that this empowerment can only be achieved through education. The fundamental tenets of liberal feminism that guided this study were gender equality, individual rights and freedom, equal opportunities, and rationalism. The principle of gender equality provides for equal accessibility to resources and opportunities regardless of whether one is a male or female. It is therefore imperative that the return to school policy for adolescent moms be implemented effectively in order to facilitate the advancement of gender parity in education.

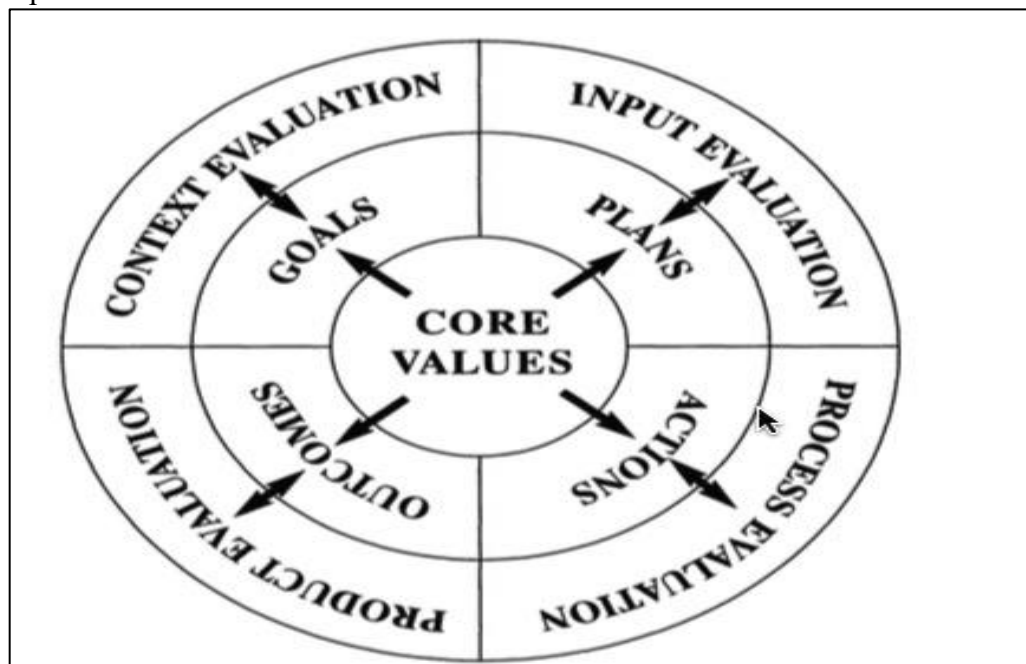
The theory tenet on promoting individual rights and freedom is fundamental to this evaluation. The theory asserts that access to education for women is a key factor in ensuring that women develop reason, which is key to their liberty, self-control, and self-governance. This implies that for the school re-entry policy to be effective and for the teenage mothers and expectant girls to realize their educational rights, basic access and an enabling environment should be accorded to them where parents, school, and the community work together to address issues that hinder them from continuing with education.

The principle of equal educational opportunities provides that education should be provided to all irrespective of gender, social status, religion, or location. According to Enyew and Mihrete (2018), legal and social policy changes have to be used to promote gender equality. The theory asserts that humans are born with skills, abilities, and a certain level of ability, which are mostly acquired and may not be modified. The principle of rationalism asserts that both men and women are rational human beings hence they are capable of thinking logically. It is social restrictions, not biological characteristics that limit their rights and ability to reason and think rationally to achieve self-governance. This was significant in understanding how the implementation of the re-entry policy has been effective in increasing expectant girls' and teenage mothers' access to education in Narok County, Kenya hence reducing gender disparities in education.

1.4.2 Evaluation model

The “Context – Input – Process – Product (CIPP) model that was developed by Daniel Stufflebeam in the late 1960s and updated in 2003 and 2007, guided the study. According to Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007), evaluation involves collecting, verifying, and applying information about an object's value, significance, and integrity to inform decision-making, ensure accountability, share effective practices, and enhance understanding of the phenomenon in question. The CIPP model conceptualizes four types

of evaluation thus Contexts, Inputs, Processes and Products (Stufflebean, 2003, p.31). This evaluation was a process evaluation that aims to collect data and inform decisions for policy improvement. Figure 1 presents the basic elements of the CIPP Model.



Source: *Stufflebeam (2003) The International Handbook of Educational Assessment*

The rationale for utilizing the CIPP process evaluation is that, the CIPP model is improvement-oriented. The model theme is that the most significant aim of the evaluations is not to prove but enhance (Frye & Hermmer, 2012). The model also adopts a circular causality of problems and their solutions. It is, therefore, best applied in complex, dynamic, and often non-linear relationships. The CIPP Model is grounded on democracy and fairness hence, key concepts in its application are stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders are individuals or groups who will utilize the evaluation results, those who are impacted by the evaluation, and those who are anticipated to participate in the evaluation process. Therefore, all stakeholders who are involved in the implementation of the school return to school policy were engaged in the participatory approach that was used to carry out this evaluation. CIPP model's epistemological orientations are objective in nature and are founded on the theories that moral good is impartial of individual feelings. Thus, the evaluation applying this model should be free from human subjective feelings, prejudice, conflict of interest, and upholds evaluation ethics. This evaluation therefore was conducted in a professional manner that ensured evaluation ethics and standards were upheld.

1.4.3 Review of empirical literature

At the global, regional, and national levels, numerous studies have been conducted to determine the efficacy of the return to school policy. In order to determine the educational resiliency elements influencing teenage mothers high school graduation rates in the United States, Watson and Vogel (2017) conducted a qualitative study using convenience sampling techniques to recruit six parenting teenagers for the study. The researchers failed to incorporate a quantitative design approach in the study, which could have provided quantitative data on how many teenage mothers graduated from high school due to

various resiliency factors. The quantitative data would have been useful in the triangulation of the findings. The research utilized a convergent parallel design of a parallel database variant, which is a Mixed-Method Research Design (MMRD) that makes it possible to gather and examine both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. The research was done in three Colorado high schools that were chosen based on convenience. Criterion sampling technique was used to sample six parenting teenagers for the study. In the current research, criterion and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 80 expectant girls and teenage mothers who took part in the research. The researchers collected data through interview that was recorded and transcribed, and data analysed through open coding to identify common emerging themes. The researchers failed to describe in detail how the data was analysed and presented. To fill this gap, the current study utilised descriptive statistics to analyse quantitative data.

Kennedy (2017) evaluated the implementation of Jamaica's policy for the reintegration of school-age mothers into school in Jamaica using a mixed-method approach. The researcher failed to indicate the specific MMR design that was used. This study was guided by convergent parallel design. Study participants were chosen utilizing the convenience sampling techniques. Semi-structured interviews and the distribution of questionnaires were used to gather data to teen mothers, women who had completed the reintegration program, guidance and counselors, and secondary school principals. The study found that from 2012 to 2016 only 34% of teenage mothers were reintegrated back into formal schooling. Factors such as financial constraints on the part of the teenage mothers and unaffordable daycare services support for teenage mothers were cited as the main hindrance to the policy implementation.

Baafi (2020) conducted a study to find out how the school return to school policy supports the educational progress of expectant students and young mothers in Techiman, Bono East Region of Ghana. The study found that because the policy does not take into account the physical, social, and economic effects of pregnancy and childbirth on the living situations of young mothers and their eventual return to school, the school return to school policy was not appropriately implemented. The present study was conducted in Narok County, Kenya. The researcher utilised analytical tools of gender, sexuality, and intersectionality to understand the barriers to the policy's successful execution. A qualitative research design was used that guided the collection of in-depth and contextual data to explore multiple perspectives and realities on the implementation of the policy. However, the researcher failed to specify which qualitative design was used. This study adopted a convergent parallel design of a parallel database variant to close this gap. The design had a cross-section survey strand to guide the collection of quantitative data while hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative design guided the gathering "and analysis of qualitative data". The study targeted 15 participants of whom 8 were young mothers who were out of school, 3 were parents of the young mothers, 3 were head teachers from primary and secondary schools and 1 was a Director of the Girls Education Unit. The researcher failed to document the sampling technique that was used to arrive at the study sample. This study used multistage random sampling, criteria sampling, and snowball sampling procedures to create a sample size of 720. Due to COVID- 19 pandemic, the researcher used online phone interviews, chats, and regular phone calls to collect data through the support of local research assistants.

Mutua et al. (2019) used a case study methodology and qualitative methods to gather data from the respondents in their study to determine the school return to school policy responsiveness to teenage mothers' right to education in Narok County. Given that this is one of the few studies on the return to school policy conducted in Narok County, the researcher should have used a quantitative technique to

produce numerical data to support the qualitative data and guarantee a deeper comprehension of the phenomena. This study filled this gap by using a Mixed-Method Research design (MMRD) that is a convergent parallel design of a parallel database variant. This allowed for the collection and analysis of various but complementary data to better assess the efficacy of the school return to school policy's implementation in Narok County. The study was guided by theoretical underpinnings of Human rights-based approaches and feminism theory. Theoretical perspectives of General System Theory, liberal feminism, and critical theory guided the “current study. The research was done in two secondary schools that were selected purposefully meaning that the findings could not be generalized in every secondary public school in Narok County. The researchers failed to indicate whether the schools were girls or mixed secondary schools. The current study targets girls and mixed secondary schools in Narok County where a representative sample of 20 secondary schools was drawn using a Multistage random sampling technique.

1.5 Evaluation design and methodology

The evaluation utilized a convergent parallel design, a Mixed Methods Research Design (MMRD) with cross-sectional and hermeneutic phenomenology strands. The design enabled the evaluator to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in one phase. The targeted population comprised of 132 girls and mixed public secondary, 264 Guidance and counseling teachers, 3,300 non – guidance and counseling teachers, 300 form three students in year 2022, 264 teenage mothers and expectants girls in school, 264 teenage mothers and expectants girls out of school, 264 parents of teenage mothers and expectant girls, 8 Sub – County Directors of Education in Narok County, 36 health officers, 1 County Education gender officer and 6 Non – Governmental organisations. Stratified simple random, criterion and snowball sampling techniques were used to generate a sample size of 720 respondents (20 principals, 40 Guidance and Counseling teachers, 330 Non – guidance and Counseling teachers, 200 form 3 students in year 2022, 40 teenage mothers and expectant girls who are in school, 40 expectant girls and teenage mothers who are out of school, 40 parents, 2 Sub County Director of Education, 1 Children Department Official, 4 Health Centres Officials, 1 County Education Gender Officer and 2 representatives of NGOs. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data while interview guides and FGD discussion guides were used to collect qualitative data. Descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative data was analyzed by use of phenomenological data analysis approach that involves clustering statements into themes, writing a textual description that provides what the participants experienced with the return to school policy, writing a structural description that provides how the experience happened, and finality developing the overall essence of the experience of the participants with the phenomenon by combing both textural and structural descriptions. Quantitative and qualitative data was triangulated to provide the breath and in-depth undertaking of the challenges affecting the implementation of the policy.

1.6 Findings and discussions

Response Rate

The section contains presentation, interpretation and discussion of the findings on the objective of the study. The first section shows the response rate of various stakeholders who were interviewed. The overall response rate was 90% as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Response rate for the Evaluation Respondents

Subjects	Sample	Response	%
School Principals	20	16	80%
Guidance and Counseling Teachers	40	30	75%
Teachers	330	312	95%
Form 3 students	200	160	80%
Teenage Mothers and Expectant Girls who are already in School	40	40	100%
Expectant girls and teenage mothers who are not in school	40	40	100%
Parents/Guardians of Expectant Girls and Teenage Mothers	40	40	100%
Sub County Director of Education	2	2	100%
Children Department Officer	1	1	100%
Health Officers from Health Facilities in Narok County	4	4	100%
County Education Gender Officer	1	1	100%
Representatives of Non-Governmental organisations that work to support Teenage Mothers	2	2	100%
Total Sample Size	720	648	90%

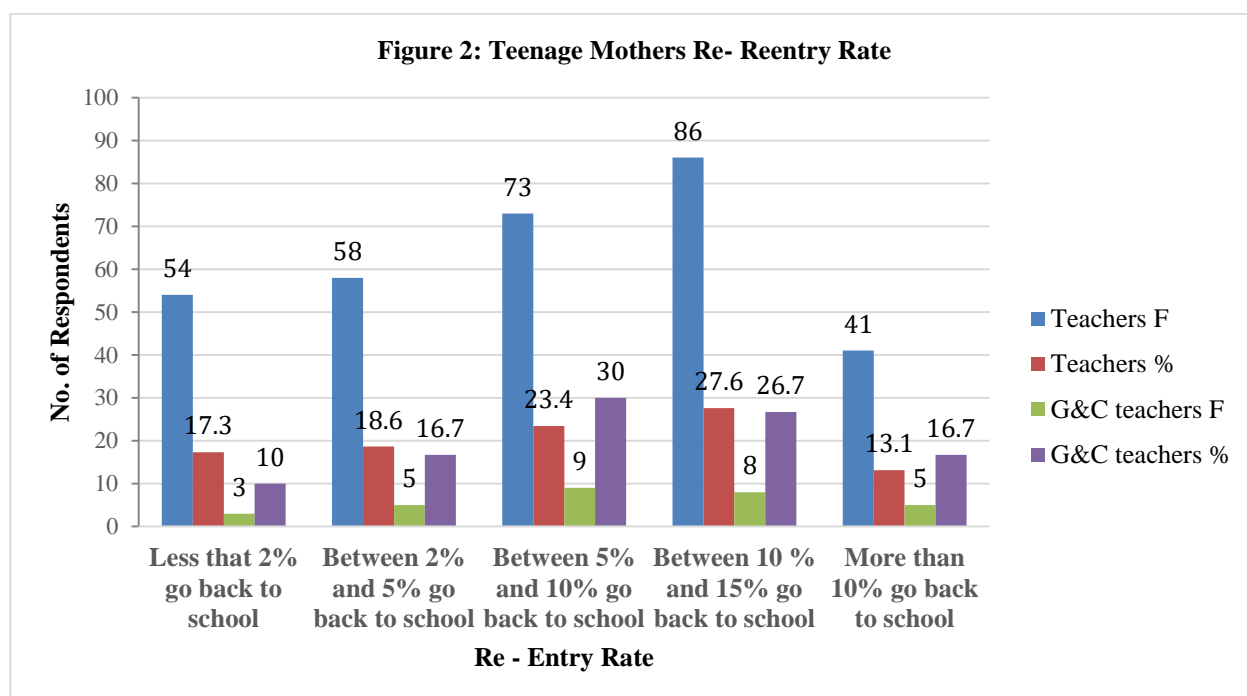
Source: Evaluator, 2023

Extent of the Effectiveness of the School Re –Entry Policy on Increasing Access to Education for Expectant Schoolgirls and Teenage Mothers in Narok County, Kenya.

The objective of the study was to determine the degree to which the return to school policy in Narok County, Kenya, has increased the educational opportunities for expecting girls and teenage mothers. In order to provide a thorough response, the study examined five factors that indicate how well the school re-entry policy has increased teenage moms' access to education. These were: the return to school rate of teenage mothers, changes in the return to school rate over the five years (2018–2022), the explanation for these changes, status of the return to school policy's implementation and perspective of teachers on the indicators of effectiveness.

School Re – Entry Rate of Teenage Mothers

Teachers were asked to rate the school re –entry rate of teenage mothers. The responses ranged from less than 2% of teenage mothers returning to school to more than 10% of mothers returning to school after giving birth. Figure 2 was used to display the descriptive analysis and percentages and frequencies of the data that were gathered.



Source: *Evaluator, 2023*

Results show that majority of teacher respondents 86 (28%) were of the view that between 10% and 15% of adolescent moms return to school after delivery. 8(27%) of the G&C teachers were of the same view. The largest proportion of G&C teachers accounting for 30% indicated that about 5% to 10% of teenage mothers go back to school after delivery. From the findings, 73(24%) of teachers were of the same view. The table also shows that various respondents indicated varying return to school rates for teenage mothers after delivery with 54(17%) of teachers and 3(10%) of G&C teachers indicating that less than 2% of teenagers went back to school after delivery.

It is noted that only the smallest proportion of teachers 41(13%) and G&C teachers 5(17%) were of the view that more than 10% of adolescent moms return to school after giving birth. These findings indicate that only 5% to 15% of teenage mothers in Narok County go back to school after delivery leaving a huge number of around 85% out of school. This means that the return to school policy is not being implemented effectively to ensure access to education of teenage mothers. These results show that gender disparities in educational access continue to exist in Narok County, primarily as a result of inadequate application and enforcement of the 2020 MoE-developed National Guidelines for School Return to school in Early Learning and Basic Education guidelines.

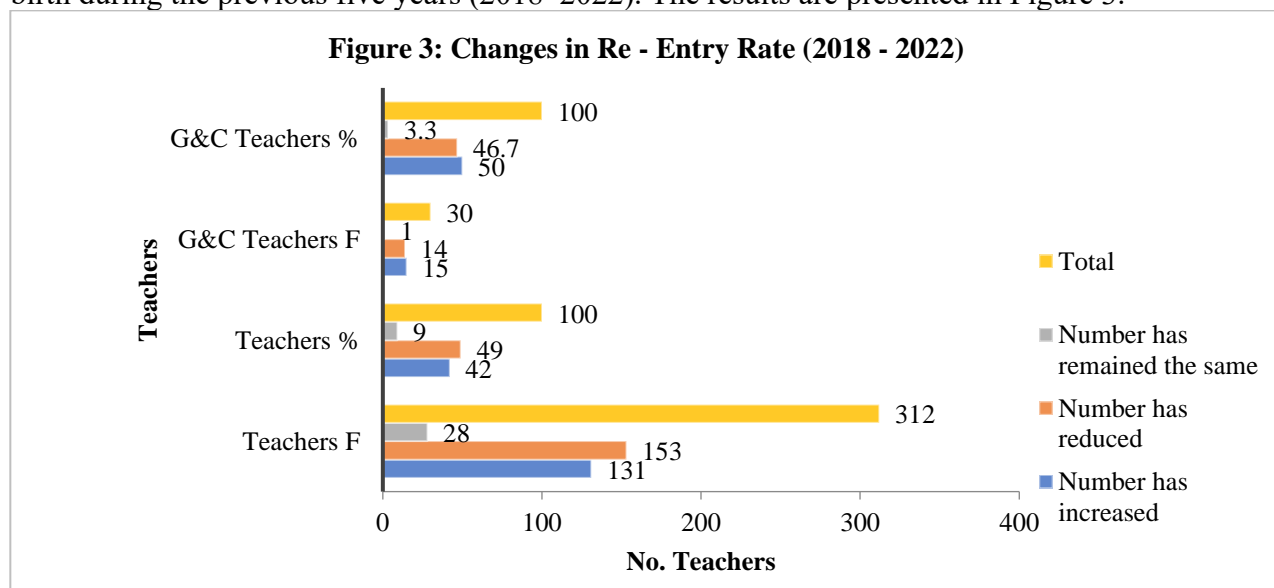
According to the policy, a commitment letter stating that the learner will return to school six months following birth must be signed by the learner, the school, and the parents or guardians of expectant learners. The evaluation results show that only 5% to 15% of teenage moms return to school after giving birth, which is indicative of a lack of commitment on the part of the school, parents/guardians, and adolescent mothers to pursue further education. In other words, in order for the MoE to achieve its objective of increasing engagement of all learners including those who are out-of-school in gender responsive education initiatives, a multi-stakeholders approach should be adopted where each should be

committed to taking up their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in the Return to school guidelines to ensure that teenage mothers and expectant girls continue with their education. Accountability procedures should also be in place to guarantee that those responsible for helping young moms complete their education fulfill their mandate.

These results are consistent with a number of researches that show school re-entry rate of teenage mothers is low. A study by Kennedy (2017) in Jamaica showed that within five years, from 2012 to 2016 only 34% of teenage mothers were reintegrated back into formal schooling, meaning that annually, only 7% were reintegrated back to school. The study cited factors such as financial constraints on the part of teenage mothers and unaffordable daycare services support as the main hindrances to the implementation of the policy. In their evaluation of the variables influencing the return to school policy's implementation in Nakuru County, Macharia and Kessio (2015) found out that few, if any, adolescent moms return to school after giving birth. The primary causes of adolescent moms not returning to school were reported in the survey to be shame, stigma, and a lack of parental support. The results of a study by Maritim (2018), which discovered that the return to school rate of teenage moms to secondary schools is low, corroborate these findings. These results also support the findings of Ajayi, et al. (2022), who investigated the experiences of teenage parents and expectant women in Blantyre, Southern Malawi. They discovered that, of 699 adolescent moms, 95% did not attend school, despite 75% expressing a wish to do so. The study suggested that by offering financial aid for school fees, allowing cash transfers to cover the cost of school supplies, and offering psychosocial counseling and childcare support, teenage moms could be encouraged to return to school and complete their studies.

Changes in Re-Entry Rate (2018 – 2022) in Mixed and Girls Public Schools in Narok County

The school re-entry rate was triangulated with another different questionnaire item among the same respondents. Respondents were to score how many adolescent moms returned to school following their birth during the previous five years (2018–2022). The results are presented in Figure 3.



Source: *Evaluator, 2023*

Results show that over half of the non-guidance and counseling teacher respondents (n=153, 49%) said that fewer adolescent moms had returned to school in the previous five years after giving birth. Conversely, fifty percent of the G&C teachers (15) said that there were more teenage moms returning to school after giving birth. The fewest of the respondents for both the non guidance and counseling teachers 28(9%) and G&C teachers 1(3%) indicated that the number of teenage mothers who went back to school after delivery stayed unchanged for the during the five years (2018–2022). This suggests that there were fluctuations in the proportion of adolescent moms returning to school following childbirth in Narok County. These findings correspond with those on return to school rate where a majority of teachers (28%) indicated a return to school rate of between 10% - 15% while a majority of G&C teachers (30%) indicated a return to school rate of about 5%-10% while 17% of teachers 10% of G&C teachers indicated a return to school rate of less than 2% (see figure 2). These variations could be attributed to several factors such as the level of commitment of various stakeholders at the school level in supporting teenage mothers to continue with education, the level of sensitization of teachers, parents, and community on the return to school guidelines, and the existence of comprehensive and accessible data on teenage mothers' return to school rates. Through the interviews with the school principals, most noted that the number of teenage mothers who had gone back to school between 2018 – 2022 had increased. This was attributed to various reasons as put by one principal;

“The proportion of teenage moms returning to school after giving birth has significantly increased. We are using this policy as a tool to sensitize and persuade parents of the affected girls to bring them back to school. Through the County interactions in seminars and meetings, we have been able to sensitize and emphasize the need for such girls to come back to school after delivery” [Interview, School Principal 2, KI 4, February 2023].

The children’s officer indicated that the number of girls who went back to school had increased as they had unleashed serious efforts to follow up on reported teenage pregnancies and motherhood. He posited;

“With the increased sensitization and support by the police and schools, we have been able to put more teenage mothers back to School in the last five years. Although I note that these are not the desired levels, we acknowledge that at least there is an increment” [Interview, Children’s Officer, KI 06, February 2023]

These findings are consistent with those of G&C teachers, which indicates that from 2018 to 2022, there has been an increase in the number of teenage mothers going back to school after delivery. These results suggest that, despite an improvement in admission rates in Narok County between 2018 and 2022, the rates are still very low, with only 5% to 15% of teenage mothers going back to school. This low return to school rate of teenage mothers impact negatively on their knowledge, skills, and attitude development, which subsequently narrow down their employability opportunities. The government faces challenges in achieving gender equality in education access, engagement, and accomplishment at all levels of schooling, as outlined in the 2015 Education and Training sector gender policy, due in part to the low return to school rates. These findings corroborate those of Kennedy (2017) who found out that in Jamaica, despite the introduction of Jamaica's reintegration policy, only 34% of teenage mothers were reintegrated back into school within a period of five years (2012 – 2016). The low reintegration rates were attributed to financial constraints on the part of teenage mothers and unaffordable daycare services for their children. Kennedy recommended a robust evaluation of the policy by the MoE to establish how

teenage mothers were benefiting from the policy and maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date database of teenage mothers including those who have benefitted from the policy. The results also support those of Kapsule and Kumar (2020), who demonstrated that in Malawi, "teenage mothers still drop out of school due to a lack" of material and financial support "despite the policy being in place.

Attribution to Changes in the Number of Teenage Mothers Who Went Back to School from 2018 - 2022

Teachers were asked to provide an explanation for their response about the changes in the number of adolescent mothers returning to school after giving birth over five years (2018–2022). Results are displayed in Table 2

Table 2: Attribution to Re – Entry Rates (2018 – 2022)

Attribution Factor	Teacher		G&C Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Increased awareness of the school return to school policy	38	12.1	7	23.3
Favourable school environment	44	14.2	9	30.0
Unfavourable school environment	59	19	5	16.7
Favourable home environment	29	9.2	2	6.7
Unfavourable home environment	24	7.6	2	6.7
Teachers and principals have a positive attitude towards expectant girls and adolescent mothers.	10	3.4	5	16.7
Teachers and principals have a negative attitude towards expectant girls and adolescent mothers.	20	6.5	0	0
Retrogressive cultural practices and social norms	37	12	0	0
Functional guidance and counseling department	13	4.3	0	0
Unfunctional guidance and counseling department	7	2.1	0	0
The unwillingness of expectant Girls and teenage mothers to continue with school	11	3.6	0	0
Any other factor	20	6	0	0
Total	312	100	30	100

Source: Evaluator, 2023

Table 2 reveals that the majority of teacher respondents accounting for 59/19%), attributed the decline in the number of teenage mothers who went back to school after delivery to an unpleasant school environment. The stigmatization of teenage mothers, the dearth of support from teachers to pursue education, the unfavorable attitudes of school administrators and teachers toward pregnant girls and teenage mothers, and the lack of material and financial support were all factors contributing to the unfavorable school environment. On the contrary, the largest portion of the teachers who had indicated that the numbers had increased attributed it to a favorable school environment that was characterized by better school infrastructure, student support, and lack of stigmatization of teenage mothers. These findings were consisted of the qualitative data of FGDs with form 3 girls. One FGD posited;

“The School principal and teachers have been nice to the girls who get expectant through advising them. Our School has a supportive guidance and counseling department where all affected girls are encouraged to visit in case, they have such challenges. The teachers also reach out and talk to us about our peers when they get expectant. The teachers told us that we should not hate or try to discriminate against them. This reduces stigma towards the expectant and teenage mothers in our school” [Interview, Girls Students School 2, FGD 03, February 2023]

The emphasis on the school environment and the return to school of teenage mothers was thus evident among various respondents. The creation of a favorable school environment majored in every aspect as it also related to other aspects including increased awareness of the return to school policy, school principal's positive attitude and teachers towards the teenage mothers and expectant girls, and functional guidance and counseling department. The research revealed that the school environment was a key motivator for school-age mothers return to school as 48% of the teachers” and 40% of the G&C teachers indicated it. These findings were also consistent with those of 75% of the health officers who were interviewed noting that;

The issue of return to school is mostly determined by how the teachers set up the School environment. While some schools have good working conditions that accommodate expectant girls in schools and even bring them to prenatal clinics, others always ignore them. Our role is offering services to everyone who appears at the clinic and may not necessarily entail going out to look for such girls. But are privy to the fact the girls need to return to School after delivery. The girls sometimes disclose to us that they fear being laughed at by their peers. At some point, one girl reported that she had experienced one harsh teacher at School referring to a teenage mother as “You mother” over there which demeaned the girl's self-esteem (Interview, Health officer 2, KI 010, February 2023)

The findings imply that the level of execution of the return to school policy differs amongst mixed- and girls' secondary schools in Narok County based on how well the institution creates a positive learning environment. In Narok County, the varying quality of the school environment either encourages or discourages teenage moms from pursuing an education. In schools where teenage mothers feel more accepted and less stigmatized, they are likely to go back. As per the return to school standards provided by the Ministry of Education, the Board of Management bears the obligation of ensuring an inclusive educational environment that is devoid of any discrimination or stigma. The guidelines also state that the BoM should uphold confidentiality regarding all matters affecting students, as well as create, enhance, and oversee the execution of strategic development plans for the school that promote a secure and welcoming learning atmosphere.

These findings reflect the arguments of Russel & Gilbert (2009) who posited that one of the key dimensions for access to education is an enabling environment that is characterized by adequate infrastructure both in school and at home, human resource support within and outside the school, and protection from retrogressive cultural practices. In addition to the positive school environment, a higher number of teenage moms returning to school was attributed in large part to heightened awareness of the school return to school policy. 38 (12%) teachers and 7 (23.3%) guidance and counseling teachers attested to this, saying that raising awareness has been the cause of the rise. 38 (12%) teachers and 7 (23.3%) of guidance and counseling teachers attested to this, saying that raising awareness has been the

cause of the increase. Qualitative information from one of the Sub-County Directors of Education was used to triangulate this conclusion. The Sub - County Director posted;

“ It is now evident and understood that it is our collective duty as stakeholders in the school system to see to it that the return to school strategy is carried out in this County. We have had a "bad" name as one of the leading counties in teenage pregnancies. This has created pressure within us, and are thus pushing further to avoid the effects of these pregnancies. All cases of girls reported to have gotten expectant are recorded and followed up. The return to school is facilitated through seminars with principals, chiefs, parents, and even students where possible. The principals are warned against sending home such girls when they go back to school, and even disciplinary action is taken against any person who tries to send away the affected girls. It is through this that we are assured of a favorable environment to encourage the Girls to go back to School after delivery” [Interview, Sub County Director of Education 1, KI 08, February 2023]

Status of Implementation of the School Return to school Policy

The assessment aimed to determine the degree of return to school policy implementation by non – guidance and counseling and G&C teachers in their respective schools as part of a triangulation process. On a 4-point Likert scale, where 4 represents complete implementation and 1 represents not implemented respondents were asked to indicate the scores. Figure 4 displays these findings

Figure 4

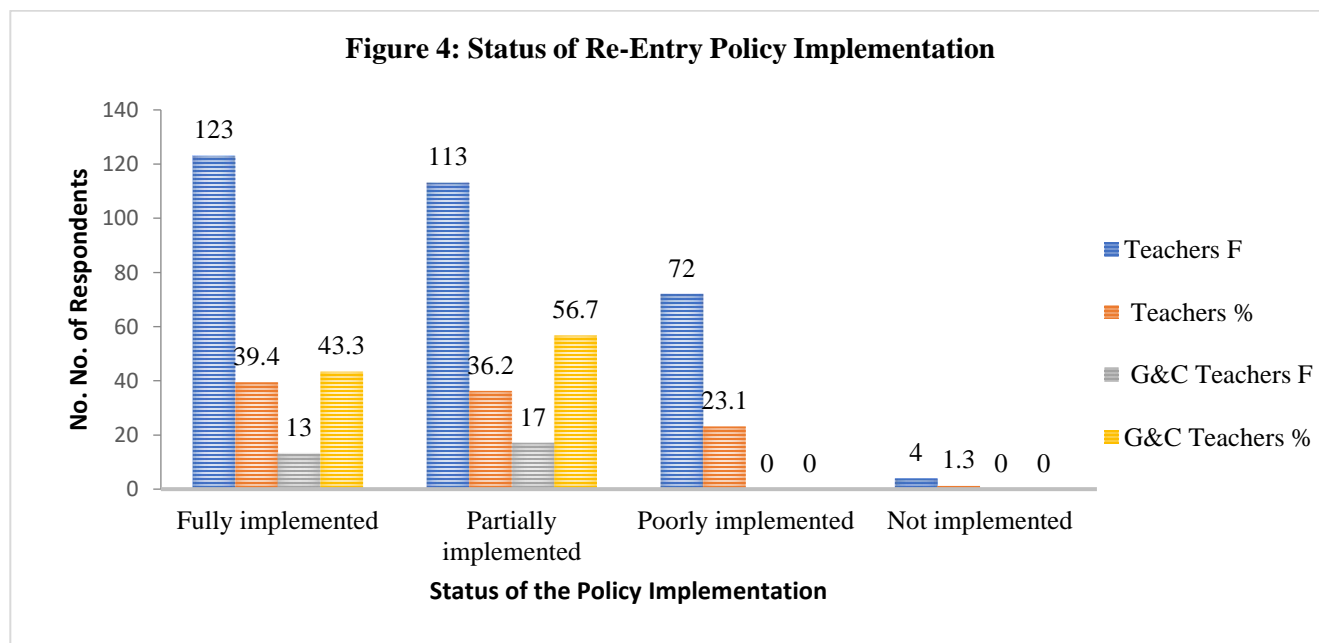


Figure 4 shows that the largest portion of non guidance and counseling teacher respondents 123(39%) indicated that the policy had been fully implemented while the largest portion of the G&C teachers 17(57%) indicated that the policy had been partially implemented. While some portion of the non guidance and counseling teacher respondents specified that the policy had been poorly implemented

72(23%) and not implemented 4(1%), none of the G&C teachers indicated that the policy had been poorly or not implemented at all.

The degree to which the school environment is welcoming and accommodating to expecting and teenage moms may be the reason for the differences in answers about the state of the implementation of return to school at the school level. These findings correspond with those of the evaluation construct on whether the return to school rate had increased or reduced within the five years (2018 – 2022) in Narok County which posted different responses that were based on the degree to which the school environment was favorable to expectant girls and teenage mothers. These findings suggest that the execution status of the return to school policy in Narok County girls and mixed secondary schools is at different levels of either being fully implemented, partially implemented, poorly implemented, or not being implemented at all. The main factor determining the level of implementation is how the school environment is conducive and accommodative to teenage mothers.

The divergent responses may also be attributed to differences in the awareness of Ministry of Education return to school guidelines between the non-guidance and counseling teachers and G&C teachers. It is more likely that the G&C teachers are more informed about the guidelines and the level at which the schools have adhered to them compared to the classroom teachers. The implication of these findings portrays a skewed execution of the policy in public secondary schools in Narok County. This is based on the level” at which the school environment is favorable for expectant and teenage mothers learning. This skewness disadvantages teenage mothers and expectant girls who may be willing to continue with education in schools where the environment is not conducive.

The School Board of Management (BoM) is responsible for fostering an inclusive environment free of stigma and discrimination, as per MoE return to school requirements. This is the school environment that the Education and Training Sector gender policy of 2015 regards as conducive for teenage and expectant girls' learning. There is a need for continuous monitoring by the MoE to ascertain the adherence” of School BoM to the return to school guidance to ensure there is uniform implementation in all schools.

The finding on the divergent opinion of the status of execution of the school return to school policy in Narok County are consistent with those of Wekesa (2014) in the county of Bungoma that found that there was diverged opinion on the level of implementation with 51.6% of the schools indicating that the level of implementation was average, 24.2% indicating it was high, 16.1% it was low and 8.1% indicating full implementation. The study cited varied levels of conducive school environment in schools and inadequate awareness of the policy amongst educational stakeholders as key factors contributing to the divergent opinions. The findings are also consisted with those of Ngabasa and Shefer (2013) there was inconsistency in the application school re-entry policy.

1.7 Conclusion

After carrying this evaluation, it is evident that the return to school rate of teenage mothers who drop out of secondary schools in Narok County is low. This means that the school reentry policy is not implemented effectively and this denies the majority of teenage mothers and expectant girls’ great opportunities to grow their careers. Key factors that are attributed to low return to school rates include

unfavorable school environments, financial constraints on the part of teenage mothers, unaffordable daycare services, and inadequate or lack of support from baby fathers, parents, guardians, and the school community at large. The county lacks annual records of reentry rates and therefore it is difficult to compare return to school rates over the years. The level of implementation of the return to school policy in Narok County varies in girls' and mixed secondary schools revealing a skewed implementation of the policy at the school level. The variation is mainly attributed to the extent to which the school environment is conducive to learning in the sense that it is free from the stigmatization of teenage mothers and expectant girls, the attitude of school principals and teachers towards teenage mothers, and the functionality of guidance and counseling services.

1.8 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the evaluator makes the following recommendations for a more effective implementation of the school return to school policy in secondary schools in Narok County. The MoE should through the County Director of Education plan and execute quarterly monitoring of the implementation of the policy at the school level to ascertain the adherence of school BoM to the return to school guidelines in all schools and how teenage mothers and expectant girls are benefiting from the policy. The MoE is recommended to institute and enforce accountability Mechanisms to ensure that all those obligated to ensure the successful implementation of the policy account for their actions. All school and education stakeholders should adopt a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach in addressing challenges that affect the effective implementation of the school re-entry policy. The MoE through the Board of Management should mount heightened sensitization of the school community on the re-entry policy. Each public secondary school should improve the process of record keeping and maintenance of a comprehensive database of teenage mothers, expectant girls, dropouts, and return to school rates to inform support and provision of services.

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