



Impact of Re-Entry Policy Implementation on the Academic Performance of Learners: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

Chanda Chansa Thelma, Edwin Vinandi Phiri & Enock Mutepuka

Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

*Corresponding Author: Chanda Chansa Thelma, Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

Co-author 1: Edwin Vinandi Phiri, P.O Box 440091, Isoka, Zambia

Co-author 2: Enock Mutepuka, Institute of Distance Education, University of Zambia

Abstract: *The study was conducted in order to establish the impact of Re-entry Policy Implementation for school girls. Zambia is one of the countries in the Sub-Sahara Africa that has an established Re-Entry Policy. The policy was declared in 1997 and requires all schools to grant girls maternity leave and readmit them to facilitate girls' education and aims to prevent the exclusion of young mothers from furthering their studies. The Conditions on the re-entry policy in Zambia are that; schoolgirls are supposed to get maternity leave and teenage mothers are supposed to re-enter six months after childbirth; teenage mothers are given two chances to re-enter. The aim was to create academically healthy learning institutions in which both girls and boys are free. The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The sample involved a total of 100 respondents which included; 1 officer from DEBS office, 4 head teachers, 16 teachers, 15 members of the community and 64 pupils. The respondents were obtained through purposive and simple random sampling. Data was obtained through interviews and questionnaires from the selected secondary schools. Data analysis consisted of content analysis of the interview responses and item analysis of the questionnaire responses. Data generated from the questionnaires was analyzed manually by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16) to come up with frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs. The findings indicated that the Re-Entry Policy has helped reduce gender discrepancies in terms of equity in education. The paper also reviewed that most re-entered girls their performance become poor especially in some subjects like English, Mathematics and Science. Additionally, the findings indicate that stigma, role conflict, lack of parental support and low self-esteem affected most of the girls under this study.*

Keywords: *Academic Performance, Education, Equity, Implementation, Policy and Teen-mother.*

INTRODUCTION

Zambia has had a re-entry policy since 1997 allowing girls to return to school after having a child. It was a positive step toward upholding girls' basic right to education, expanding their future job options, and contributing to the country's economic progress. The government has a national strategy plan to address Zambia's child marriage rates, which are among the highest in the world. The plan recognizes that encouraging adolescent mothers to return to school lessens the likelihood that they will marry before age 18, but this strategy can't succeed unless schools carry it out. For many years, Zambian girls were obliged to leave school permanently if they became pregnant. In 1997, the Government of the Republic of Zambia introduced the Re-entry Policy that requires all schools to grant girls maternity leave and readmit them to facilitate girls' education. Research on the policy's implementation and impact is scarce. One of the few studies of the policy found that, nationally, secondary school reentry rates among girls who became pregnant decreased from 79 percent in 2002 to 65 percent in 2008, where they remained until 2014 (Ministry of Education,

Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) 2002-2014).

Some African countries including Zambia introduced Reentry policy as a strategy to enable teenage mothers to continue their education. It was assumed that teenage mothers would take advantage of the Re-entry policy to continue their education after childbirth. This has not been the case as teen mothers' re-entry across countries including Zambia established that significant number of teenage mothers are not re-entering (Nyariro, 2018). Despite the existence of the policy in Zambia, re-entry of teenage mothers after childbirth is leaves much to be desired. Less than half of the school girls recorded to have fallen pregnant in primary and secondary schools in Zambia return to school and the problem is more pronounced at primary school level (MoE, 2017). This implies that failure to re-enter at primary school level disadvantages the teen mothers to further their education. Moreover, they end up not acquiring the basic numeracy and literacy skills to function in society.

Mwansa (2011) argued that, despite the policy in place, a considerable number of girls continued to drop out of school due to pregnancy and do not come back after giving birth. She claimed that the girls who come back after giving birth do not remain in school, they either leave or seek to change schools. He claimed that the girls who come back after giving birth do not remain in school; they either leave or seek to change schools. Wedekind and Milingo (2015) contended that, the lack of wide awareness of the policy saw the development of implementation guidelines which were instituted in 2010 by the Zambian government (MESVTEE, 2012). The revised guidelines were distributed to schools in order to inform students and teachers about the REP and to further inform other crucial stakeholders such as parents and guardians, a means to ensure the implementation of the policy. In the event of a girl being forced out of school due to pregnancy, the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) has provided guidelines to assist schools and other stakeholders, such as parents and guardians, to ensure that the girl is enabled to complete her education. How far such an expectation is achieved is one that requires further primary research to assess its implementation. Hence, the study aimed at analyzing the effects of re-entry policy implementation on the academic performance of learners in selected secondary school of Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of the school re-entry policy in Zambia from 1997, the challenges that hinder girls who re-enter secondary school appears not to have been pursued yet, leading to a continuation of a vicious cycle of high dropout cases among girls. These challenges seem to be one of the major causes of girls' dropping out among the selected secondary schools. According to the MoE (2005) 15,497 girls got pregnant in 2009 country wide but only 6,679 were readmitted in school and as such reducing the chances of nearly 9000 girls completing their education. It is important to know why such a number was unable to return to school. Despite the Re-Entry Policy being in existence for the past 25 years, its implementation has attracted a lot of debate and raised a number of public concerns over its effectiveness in addressing the initial concerns of the continuation of the affected girl's education. Such a concern has prompted the review of different literature

to assess the effectiveness of the REP given its intention, which was an intervention effort to improve education opportunities for the girls who fall pregnant while in school. The Re-entry policy has been said to be lacking the voice of the key primary beneficiaries, that is, teen mothers in voicing their felt needs to facilitate their re-entry (CSO, 2007). Teen mothers need to be engaged in a participatory approach to get their views on their re-entry. This was reaffirmed by the 2020 international day of the girl child commemoration theme of “my voice, our equal future”. Consequently, this prompted the researcher to conduct a study on the impact of re-entry policy implementation on the academic performance of learners in some selected secondary schools of Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the impact of re-entry policy implementation on the academic performance of learners in some selected secondary schools of Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify the factors affecting the re-entry policy implementation at the selected secondary schools in Lusaka district.
- Determine the awareness of the re-entry policy implementation at the selected secondary schools in Lusaka district.
- Analyze recommended ways of utilizing the re-entry policy implementation at the selected secondary schools in Lusaka district.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

Failure to re-enter school by some teen mothers has been attributed to many challenges. Apart from the top-down approach in its design (Mutombo & Mwenda, 2010), the outcomes of the Re-entry policy in Zambia have been linked to some policy implementation challenges. The Re-entry policy in Zambia was implemented without guidelines until 2004. There was no clarity as to how schools were to readmit the teen mothers in the first seven years of its implementation. This could have adversely affected the re-entry of some teenage mothers. Therefore, based on the objectives which have been formulated in this study, the meaning of re-entry policy among female students who become pregnant, Reentry Policy established a process by which maternity leave should be granted. To initiate maternity leave, the girl requesting the leave, the administration of the secondary school she attends, the girl's parents, and the child's father fill out a form stating the date on which the girl agrees to return to school. The Re-entry Policy also obliges schools to ensure a paternity leave of the same length as the maternity leave for the child's father, if he is a schoolboy, to facilitate joint caretaking of the infant. The girl's parents and the child's father are asked to sign the maternity leave form in order to mutually accept responsibility for caring for the baby and for supporting the girls return to school. Initially, the policy was not widely known or understood so the Zambian government commissioned a study in 2010 that led to the development of implementation guidelines in 2012. These guidelines aimed to improve the understanding and the meaning of re-entry policy (MESVTEE, 2012).

1.6. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of the study would help generate new information that would assist in the education of girls. Additionally, the findings would be used to evaluate the re-entry policy implementation from when it was introduced in 1997 and see either it has been effective or not. The study would also provide data to the extent in which the short comings of the policy may be addressed by the relevant authorities. Further, it is hoped that

curriculum experts, policy makers and decision makers in general, would use the findings from this study to introduce effective measures aiming at improving awareness, assertiveness of the policy and education among girls.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive design was considered appropriate as it also allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions. The study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research. The study was aimed at collecting information from respondents on the impact of re-entry policy implementation at the selected secondary schools in Lusaka district, Zambia.

2.2. Research Site

The research was conducted in Lusaka district in Zambia at some selected secondary schools from which respondents were also sampled.

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised of an officer from DEBS office, head teachers, teachers, members of the community and pupils at the selected secondary schools. The target population was 1000. The sample size involved a total of 100 respondents which included one (1) officer from DEBS office, four (4) head teachers, one from each selected school. Sixteen (16) teachers, four from each selected school. Fifteen (15) members of the community and Sixty-four (64) pupils, Sixteen (16) from each selected school. The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from the selected secondary schools.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively as the semi structured interviews schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi structured interviews schedules to structured ones. The data gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires was analyzed manually by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 26) and Microsoft Excel (Version 16). Frequency tables, charts and graphs were used to analyze data.

2.5. Ethical Issues

The researchers avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the researchers were fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researchers for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden. Permission from Rockview University, Council Chairperson and the District Education Board for Lusaka District was sought in carrying out this study. Interviews were not conducted on one-to-one basis; instead, participants were grouped and identified using their titles. An informed consent was sought before collecting information from the informants and guaranteed them with security of the information they provided. Furthermore, the main objective of gathering such information was made clear to the respondents.

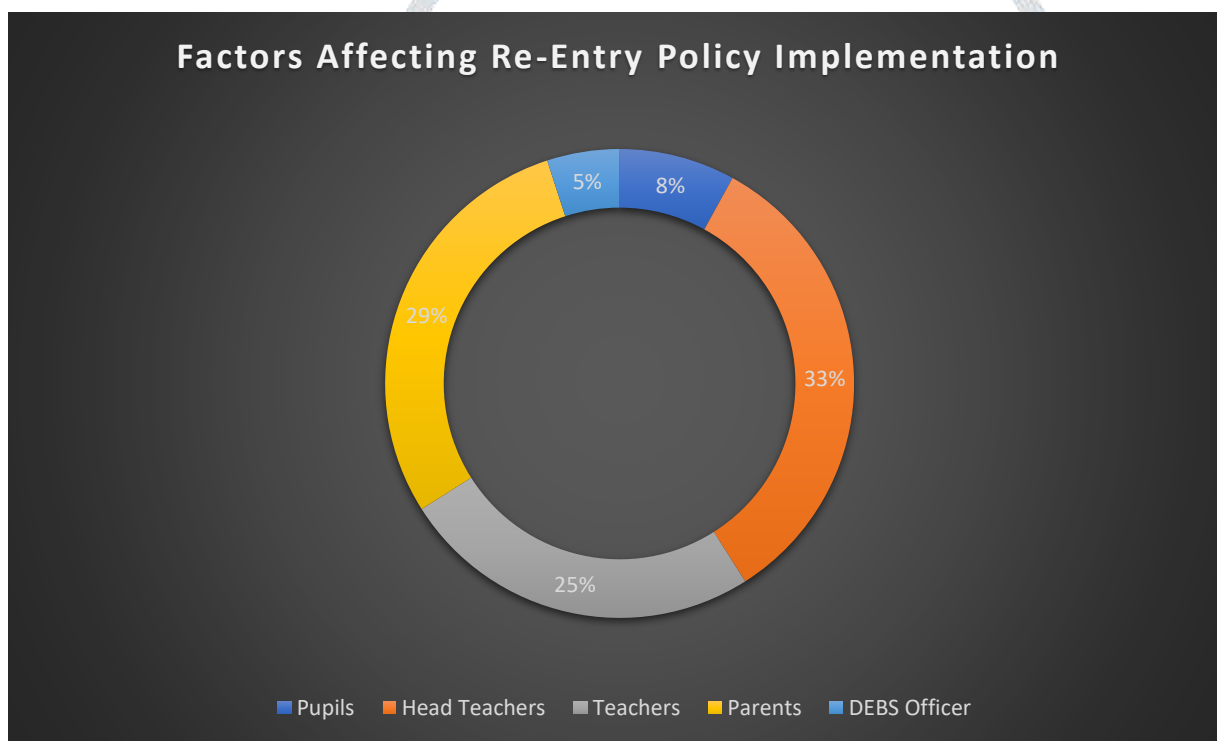
3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Factors Affecting Re-Entry Policy Implementation

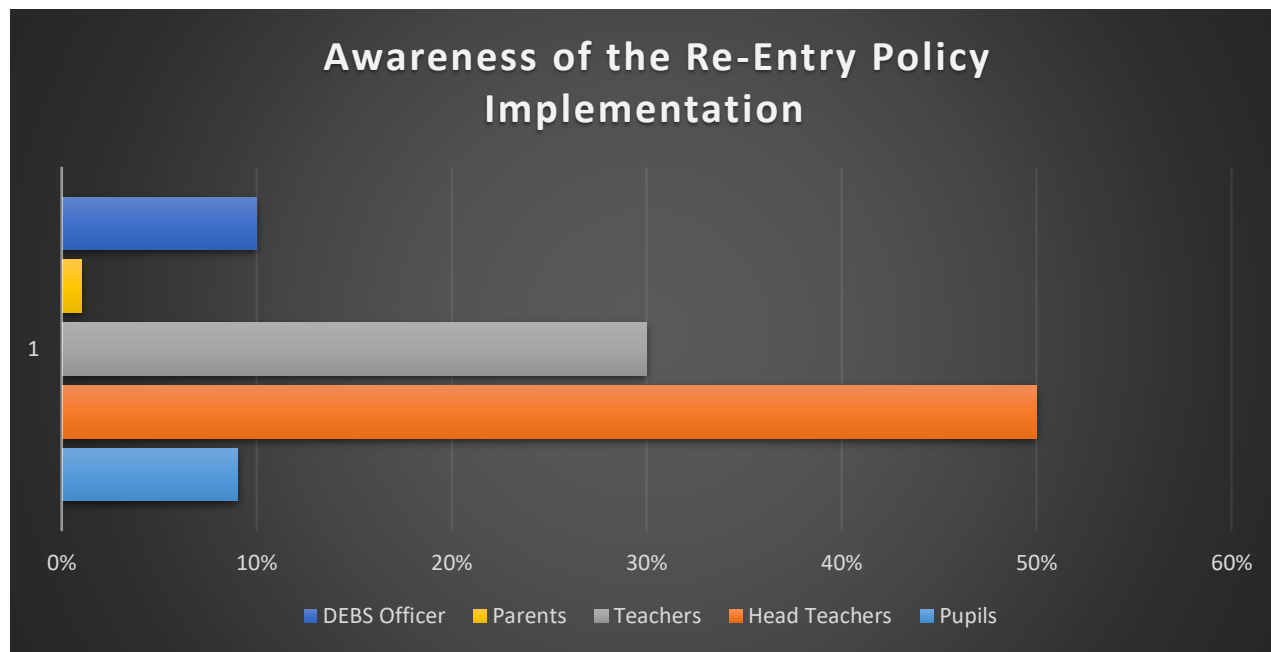
Head teachers (33%) for the selected secondary schools stated that stigma was the major challenge for teen mothers which affects their academic performance. Teachers (25%) narrated that most teen mothers perform poorly in some subjects such as English, mathematics and science. Parents (29%) stated that the teen mothers lack parental support and do not feel to be part of the school community and society. In addition, pupils (8%) responded that some teachers considered those girls who fell pregnant as being associated to people with immoral behaviors, being indifferent and condemned. Lastly but not the least, the officer from DEBS office (5%) explained that some teen mothers tend to drop out of school after giving birth.

Chart 1: Factors Affecting Re-Entry Policy Implementation



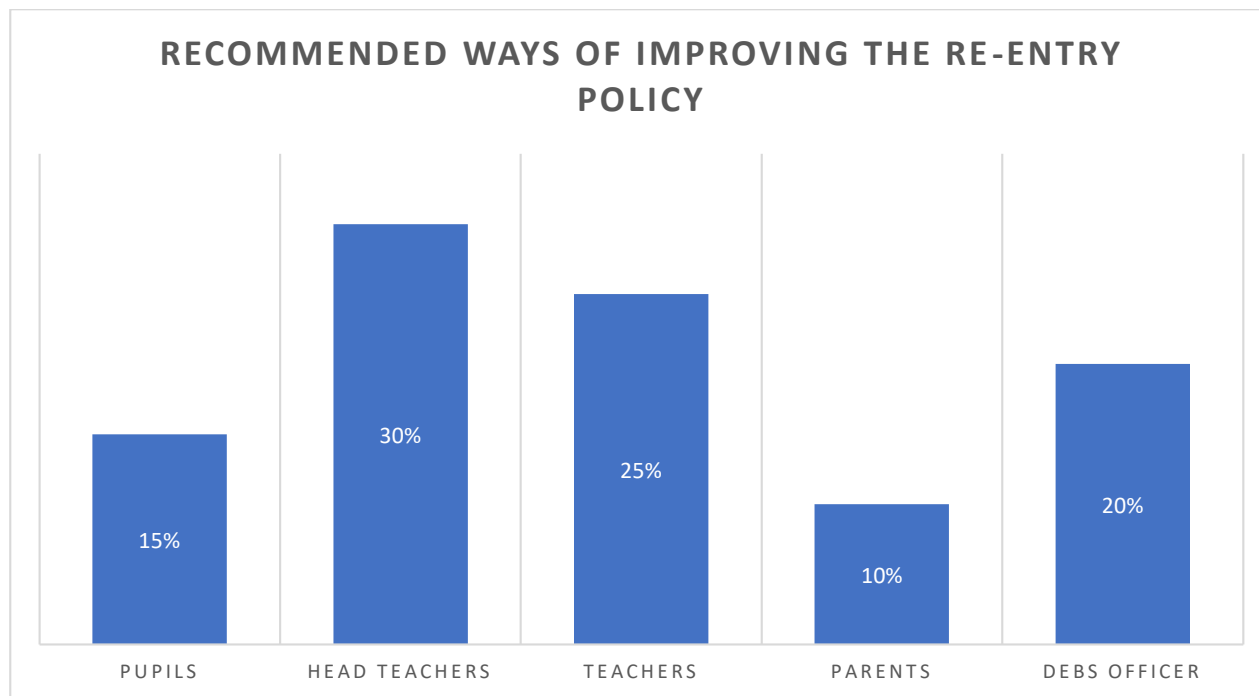
3.2. Awareness of the Re-Entry Policy

Pupils (10%) said that they got to know about the re-entry policy through the radio and television and had no idea of how it works. (30%) presented by the teachers narrated that they knew about the re-entry policy from seminars, fellow teachers, their head teachers and reading about it. Additionally, (50%) represented the head teachers stated that they knew about the policy from the Ministry of Education and they do talk to their teachers and pupils about the policy. The officer from DEBS office (9%) explained that the re-entry policy was made known to all head teachers and teachers by the ministry of education upon implementation. Lastly (1%) presented parents stated that they were not aware about the re-entry policy.

Figure 1: Awareness of the Re-Entry Policy Implementation

3.3. Recommended Ways of Improving the Re-Entry Policy

Research finding indicated (30%) presented head teachers stated that reentry policy can be improved by increasing the public's understanding about the scope of the problem and the harm it inflicts. In addition, (25%) presented teachers proposed that educating people about the policy should be done country wide through the all forms of media and all other public forums and meetings like churches. (20%) presented by the officer from DEBS office advised that the girls be given proper advice, counseling and full support in that, counseling would help the girls to accept their situation and new status and therefore be able to handle motherhood and student life better. The pupils (15%) acknowledged that they were able to go back to school because their parents were willing to send them back and also to take care of them and their children. The parents (10%) concluded that the Ministry of Education should establish and emphasize having very strong guidance and counseling departments in all secondary schools to change the attitude of teachers, pupils and the rest of the community.

Figure 2: Recommended Ways of Improving the Re-Entry Policy

4. CONCLUSION

From the discussion of findings, it can be concluded that the issue of re-entry policy needs a lot of attention especially when it comes to its implementation. To ensure successful implementation, re-entry policy would be improved by disseminating it since many people don't know about. In addition, creating awareness or sensitizing the pupils, parents, teachers and society at large through the media, seminars and workshops about the importance of re-entry and the existence of the policy. The findings also indicated that there is a lot of literature produced on the impact of the re-entry policy implementation on academic performance for school girls worldwide. However, little work has been done especially with regard to Zambia. As such, a report on the impact of the re-entry policy on academic performance for school girls in Lusaka District was a very important task. The report has successfully highlighted the impact of re-entry policy and an analysis has also been done. It must be mentioned that teen mothers heavily depend on this policy to achieve their education goals. This also means that stigma and shame hinders teen mothers and affects their wellbeing in the society. This consequently makes it hard for young mothers to get out of shame trap which in return affects the fully implementation of the policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The government through the ministry of education needs to create awareness on the existence of the re- entry policy at a national level and the public at large needs to be sensitized on the issues of re-entry.
- Policy makers need to come up with a clear and straight forward re-entry policy, giving the guidelines and procedures of dropout and re-entry.
- The Ministry of Education should regularly inform school management and oblige schools to regularly make teaching staff aware of the policy in order to encourage accurate implementation.

- Schools should regularly inform all learners about the policy, for example through weekly clubs or peer educators, assemblies, class registration and routinely teach school staff about it.
- Parents, schools and the communities need to address the bigger issue of teenage sex because this behavior not only leads to pregnancy but exposes them to other serious physical, emotional and physiological problems and diseases.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Chanda Chansa Thelma, specializes in civic education and has taught civic education at university level for seven years now. Currently, she is lecturing civic education, political science, religious studies, social sciences research methods and educational research at Rockview University in Lusaka, Zambia. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Civic Education, Master of Arts in Civic Education, Bachelor of Arts Degree; Civic Education & Religious Studies, Diploma in Education and several Educational Certificates. Currently, she is a coordinator for Open Distance Learning at Rockview University.

Edwin Vinandi Phiri, specializes in Natural Sciences, Adult Education and Education Management and Administration. He has taught in Secondary Schools for the past 17 years of which 14 years has been spent in Administration. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, Masters Degree in Education, Bachelors Degree in Education and a Diploma in Education.

Enock Mutepuka, Specializes in Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry. He is Currently pursuing a PhD in Environmental Toxicology at the University of Zambia. He Holds a Master of Science Degree in Environmental Management with interest in Environmental Toxicology and Public Health research methods, Bachelors Degree in Education with Chemistry and Environmental sciences. He has good knowledge of both quantitative and Qualitative research methods, Data analysis and interpretation using SPSS and Excel. Currently, he offers Consultancy in Proposal writing, Dissertation/Thesis writing, and Data Analysis and is a tutor of chemistry at Kapasa Makasa University in Chinsali District, Zambia.

