

## Assessment of Cultural Aspects That Affects the Re-Entry Policy of Teenage Mothers to School in Bungoma County Kenya

Cherui Rodgers<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Lydia Kipkoech<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Kitainge Kisilu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dphil Candidate, Candidate University of Eldoret, Mussco Towers, Off Elgeyo Road, Eldoret, Kenya

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, School of Education, University of Eldoret, Mussco Towers, Off Elgeyo Road, Eldoret, Kenya

### \*Corresponding author

*Cherui Rodgers*

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**Abstract:** In equality in girl's education has been a subject for many developing countries. The Kenyan government developed the policy of the re-entry of the teenage mothers to school in 2001. The policy allows teenage mothers to re-enter schools after delivery. Despite the policy being in place, very few teenage mothers have been returning to school. This study sought to find out the cultural aspects that affects the implementation of the re-entry policy of teenage mothers to school in Bungoma County. The main objective of the study was to find out the various aspects of culture that affected the re-entry policy of teenage mother to schools in Bungoma County. The critical theory by Habermas was adopted as the theoretical framework. The convergent parallel mixed method research design was used. The research population comprised of teenage mothers, student girls, head teachers, principals, Guiding and Counselling teachers, Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. The main data collection instruments were Questionnaires and Interview schedules. Questionnaires were administered to the Teenage mothers, school girls, Guidance and counselling teachers, while the interview schedule were administered to Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers and head teachers. Pilot study was carried out in Trans Nzoia County. Reliability index of 0.79 was obtained. Quantitative data was coded and presented using tables and analyzed through frequency distribution and percentages. Qualitative data was organized and broken into themes synthesized to search for patterns and meaning. This study was significant for it identified various cultural factors that affected the implementation of the re-entry policy. The study revealed various cultural factors that hindered the effective implementation of the policy included, attitudes, prejudice, gender discrimination and traditional customs. There is therefore a need to address these cultural factors so as to enable these teenage mothers to reenter school.

**Keywords:** Culture, Teenage Mothers, Reentry Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

There are a number of global organizations and declarations that are committed to the elimination of gender inequalities in education such as Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Education for All (EFA), The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Millennium Declaration of 2000, The Beijing Platform for Action, United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Girls and women education has been embedded in these international visions of development priorities [1-9].

At the United Nations (UN) summit in 2000, elimination of gender inequalities informed goal number two on universal education and goal number three on gender equality, expressing the need to provide universal access to education and to eliminate gender disparities in education by 2015. Goal number two

aimed to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling [10, 1]. Salvi [10] further observed that goal number three focused on gender by encouraging countries to eliminate disparities in primary and secondary education, by 2005 and at all levels of education. These goals were developed from 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and expanded in the follow up World Education Forum (WEF) [1, 10-12].

All children have a right to quality education, and realizing this right for girls goes a long way in ensuring a healthy family and a healthy nation. Educated girls grow into women who tend to have healthier and better nourished babies [1, 13, 12] and who most likely will do everything to have their own children attend school as well, thus breaking the vicious cycle of poverty. On the same breath, they observed that educated girls can better protect themselves against

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), human trafficking and various forms of abuse [11, 12]. It also means that as a woman, she is empowered and more likely to participate in development efforts, political and economic decision-making. Women who went to school usually manage to increase the household income. The advantages of girls' education thus do not stop at the boundaries of a single child, but ripple through families, communities, and nations.

One important issue affecting girls' education is low enrollment in many developing countries indicating aspects of social injustice and gender inequality in education. A number of reasons have been identified for learners dropping out of school leading to low enrolment. These include disenchantment with school, lack of support at home, negative learning experiences and having to repeat years because of poor performance [14]. However, not all girls face the same challenges in educational participation. Pregnant school girls and young mothers' learners in school face unique challenges in ensuring that their new mothering roles and identities do not translate into premature exit from formal education [15].

Teenage pregnancy has been identified as one of the main causes of low enrollment of girls in school. It's evident from research, that pregnancy is one of the major reasons for girls dropping out of school especially in many developing countries [16-19, 6, 20]. It has remained a tangible source of concern as it occurs during those years generally devoted to formal schooling and as such, motherhood is likely to cause conflicts with human capital investment, thereby, raising the opportunity cost of time spent in education. Subsequently it's listed among the main causes of school dropouts where it accounts for approximately 18% of all female dropouts in secondary schools and 7.3% in both secondary and primary school [21, 22]. In Kenya for example, it was estimated that between 10000 and 13000 girls leave both primary and secondary schools each year due to pregnancy alone [20]. This is better than in South Africa where by the age of 18 more than 30% of the teenage girls had given birth at least once [23].

The policy of the re-entry of teenage mothers to school is one of the outcomes of the Beijing conference of 1995, a conference in which the women's movement drew up its own priorities and action plan. The conference demanded that girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy should be readmitted [24]. By allowing pregnant teenagers to remain in school and return after giving birth is both considered significant in delaying a second birth and also in offering young women increased opportunities to get education and increase their economic standing [25, 24, 26].

On paper, Kenya has a very progressive "return to school policy" for teenage mothers introduced in 2001. A girl that gets pregnant is really supposed to be allowed to remain in school until she is about to be due. After delivery, she is supposed to be allowed to come back or be given support to gain admission into another secondary school where she feels comfortable and not stigmatized or discriminated against. The policy also says that pregnant school girls and their parents should receive counselling to enable them cope with their new status of their teenage mothers [27]. In their study, Koskey, Changach and Kipsoi [28] identified first-hand information from teenage mothers and other key respondents on challenges facing teenage upon readmission to school. They exposed the difficulties of simultaneous parenting and schooling despite the teenage mothers' tender age and inexperienced health and emotional issues related to premature birth which pose great difficulties in the learning process.

The term culture is defined differently by different authors. Spencer-Oatey [29] defines culture as a set of basic assumptions and values orientation of life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people and that influence each member's behavior and their interpretation of the meaning of other people's behavior. Matsumoto [30] defines it as a set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next generation. Culture is that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. It's everything that people have, think and do as members of society [29, 31]. Culture affects behavior and interpretation of behavior. The interpretation takes time to be learnt so as to give the correct response. It's learned as people interact and socialize and can also be taught by the explanation people receive from natural and human events around them [32, 33, 31].

Education as part of culture has twin functions of conservation and modification or renewal of the culture. Education can impart knowledge, training and skills as well as inculcate new ideas and attitudes among the young. Cultural tendencies impact the way children participate in education, the influence of culture on beliefs about education, the values of education and participation styles cannot be overemphasized [34]. There are several factors related to culture norms, traditional beliefs and practices that can have a strong influence on girl's enrolment, persistence and performance in schools. Societies regard the pregnancy of unmarried daughters as culturally shameful. To avoid embarrassment, parents in some rural areas give their daughters to marriage as soon as they reach the age of puberty and sometimes

earlier [35]. Early marriages as a norm in different cultures contributes to increasing early child bearing because some of the girls engage in sex and fall pregnant in the hope that the fathers of their children will marry them. Culture contributes to a lot of frustrations that already surround these mothers. Thus once married, it's very unusual for girls to continue with their schooling as they are considered as adults and cannot participate in school activities which are considered childish [36, 37].

In some societies, initiation ceremonies are performed when children reach the age of puberty, which is considered to be the onset of adulthood. During the ceremony, knowledge and values concerning procreation, morals, sexual skills, birth control and pregnancy are passed onto the girls concerned. The impact was perceived to be greater for girls schooling because it's often considered shameful for them to return to school after initiation unlike the case of boys [35]. Pregnancies in schools have been worsened by initiation ceremonies. This is because it comes with social conditioning which itself jeopardize girls' chance of continuing with education because of the aspects that they are taught. Some of these aspects include not to say no to a man and how to sexually satisfy him. It has been observed that after being initiated the performance of many girls at school deteriorate, others drop out of school or are expelled for becoming pregnant [38-40].

Most of the world societies are patriarchy societies. These are societies that are dominated by males and they are the determinant of major decisions to be made in the family. Socio cultural factors in the environment predispose young mothers to dropping out of school thus denying them education which could provide for their livelihood and escape from exclusion. Onyango, Kiuli and Nyambedha [41] while carrying out a research in Muhoroni Kenya, found out that there are a number of socio cultural factors that constrained school entry of school mothers after pregnancy. The factors they identified are traditions, patriarchy, bride wealth, early marriages, economic factors religion and school environment. Their study identified the above factors to have militated against the return of teenage mothers to class after delivery.

In her study of re-entry policy in Botswana, Chilisa [42] found out that the policy falls short of challenging and transforming existing gender relations. This is because they are still bound to traditional ideologies that encourage domination and oppression of women by men. She concludes that the re-entry policy in Botswana has had minimal success, mainly because it scarcely addressed the cultural practices that reinforce unequal power relations between the men and women.

In Tanzania, sexuality is loaded with traditional norms and values since it's majorly a

patriarchal society. Those against the re-entry policy base their arguments on perceived cultural norms and beliefs about sexual appropriateness. For them, any girl who violates traditional norms regarding sexuality deserves the burden and torture accompanying rearing their baby alone [7].

WHO [43] and UNICEF [44] have demonstrated how pregnant students and young mothers have difficulties in continuing their education within a system which discriminates the group due to taboos and how the presence of these mothers in classroom is disruptive. Education policies established to support young mothers in completing their studies are proved to be ineffectively enforced raising attention to the violation of basic human right in terms of education access [45].

In addition to laws and regulations, social structures such as pressure from families and stigma in society add up to make further education unreachable for thousands of young mothers [44]. Niskanen [46] said that the revising of such policies is feasible in Tanzania given that the island of Zanzibar education Act has enabled girls to return to school after childbirth, although this has not yet been applied to Tanzania.

Cultural attitudes account for school administrators' actions because of their belief that more students will become pregnant by the influence of peers who have given birth leading to current expulsion [47]. Individuals against the idea of young mothers returning to school often base their perception on how inappropriate it's for them to be in the classroom as punishment for violating gendered expectation of being abstinent [7].

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Bungoma County in Western Kenya. The study adopted constructivism as its epistemological perspective. Constructivism claims that meaning does not exist in its own right, rather it's constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretation. It recognizes that reality is a product of human intelligence interacting with experience in the real world. Constructivism accepts reality as a construct of human mind and therefore reality is perceived as subjective. For constructivism reality is socially constructed [48, 49]. Constructivism was used since the researcher relied on participant's view of the situation being studied. It sought to generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. The study population was used to present their views about the re-entry policy of teenage mothers the perception of the policy and cultural practices that tend to inhibit effective implementation of the policy. In this study, Convergent parallel mixed method research design was used. It is used when the researcher uses concurrent timing to implement the quantitative and

qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process, prioritizing the methods equally and keeps the strands independently during analysis and then mixes the results during the overall interpretation in other words, it collects and analyses two independent strands of qualitative and quantitative data at the same time in a single phase. The methods are prioritized equally and keeps data analysis independently, mix the results during the overall interpretation. The researcher tries to look for convergence, divergence, contradictions or relationship of the two phases [50]. The study targeted the Teenage mothers, 40866 School girls, 1015 Head teachers, 1015 Guidance and Counselling teachers

and 9 Sub County Quality Assurance Officers (SCQASO). A Simple random sampling, purposive sampling and Snowball sampling technique were used to identify the samples. Gay [51] said that 10% of the population sample is representative enough when dealing with survey. Gay [51] and Krejcie and Morgan [52] Table was used to identify the sample size. There are a total of 9 sub counties in Bungoma County. 2 SCQASO were selected using simple random sampling. 10 primary schools, 2 girls' schools and 1 mixed secondary school were selected using simple random sampling.

**Sample Frame Table**

Respondents	Population size	Sample size
SCQASO	9	2
Primary Schools	797	90
Sec School (Girls and Mixed Sch)	208	27
Students (Girls)	19826	378
Pupils (Std 6, 7 And 8)	21040	378
Head teachers (Primary)	797	90
Principals	208	27
G/C Teachers	1005	117
Teenage Mothers	-	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>1129</b>

Source: Bungoma County Education Office, 2016.

The main instruments for collecting data were questionnaires and interview schedule Validity of the research instruments was tested for the content validity and face validity. Test retest method was used to determine the reliability of the research instruments. The correlation coefficient was computed and the Spearman rank order correlation co-efficiency was used to determine reliability. A correlation coefficient of 0.79 was gotten and was considered high enough to judge the reliability of the research instrument. The analysis of qualitative data assumed the descriptive and explanatory analysis. Explanatory analysis involves examining and explaining relationship between variables while Descriptive analysis includes the aspect of examining, organizing and identification of categories, themes and patterns. Qualitative approaches

used include indexing, manual and verbatim or writing and organizing data into themes. Quantitative data were coded analyzed using multiple analysis of variance since there were several independent variables against one dependent variable [48, 53], and were then be presented using tables.

**FINDINGS**

The research question sought to find out the aspects of culture that affects the re-entry of teenage mothers to school policy in Bungoma County. The questionnaires were administered to the school girls, the teenage mothers and the Guidance and Counselling teachers. The data from the school girls is presented in the Table below.

**Aspects of culture that affect re-entry policy of the teenage mothers.**

Aspect of culture	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Attitude (Once you have a child no more education)	250	33.1
Prejudice (Girl's education is not important)	196	25.9
Gender Discrimination (Early marriages)	145	19.2
Custom (Initiation)	95	12.6
Don't know	70	9.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Data

The analysis of data revealed that 33.1% (N=250) school girls said that once a teenage mother has a child there's no more education for her, this point

out to the aspect of attitude, 25.9% (N=196) said that girls education is not important, this points out to prejudice, 19.2% (N=145) said early marriages, this

points out to gender discrimination, 12.6% (N=95) said initiation ceremonies, this point out to customs while 9.2% (N=70) were not sure which aspects of culture affects the re-entry of teenage mothers.

This response corresponds with the guidance and counselling teachers who said that the main cultural aspect that impedes the implementation of the policy is attitude and cultural perception where once a girl has a child, she is treated as an adult and therefore given increased responsibilities. Another reason mentioned is the belief that girls are meant for marriage, the family resources should be channeled to the boy child and lastly early marriages. This point out to gender discrimination and prejudice against the girl child. Socio cultural practices that support patriarchy structures have been acknowledged to have negatively affected the education of not only the young mother's learners but of girls in general. As such the mothers to the young mother's learners could not intervene on behalf of the young daughters. Young mothers feel that they are socially excluded because they are pregnant at their ages, and actually in many cultures and religion, girls were supposed to get married once they are discovered they were pregnant [54, 55, 35].

From the Head teachers and Principals interviews, the cultural aspect that came out that affects the re-entry policy include early marriages. One head teacher said:

*"We are really concerned that girls are getting married at a very tender age. We have raised this issue with the chief but we are not getting any help because he says it's the culture of this place. As you can see my enrollment of girls in class six is high but it drastically falls in class seven and eight."*

Another cultural aspect is once the girl gets pregnant she's ready to be married. This points out to the aspect of attitude. Most parents feel "relieved" of the duty to pay school fees and begin to harass the girls so that they can leave the home and get married. One principal observed that:

*"Most people in these community are poor and they really struggle to fend for their family in terms of food and provide education for their children. Once a girl gets pregnant it's a relieve for the family it means paying less fees and the only option is to go and join the family of the father of the child meaning again less mouth to feed. In-fact, when you try to negotiate that this girl should come back to school the parents don't take it positively."*

It was also observed that there is a feeling among the parents that once the teen gets pregnant she's "ripe" for marriage despite their age. One head teacher said:

*"I tried to reason out with one parent on the importance of forgiving the daughter and to see the sense of sending her back to school and the parent said if she's old enough to engage in sexual matters then she's old enough to get married. I can't keep somebody's 'wife' in my house."*

Another important observation that was made is there are a lot of cases of underage marriages that go unreported. One head teacher said:

*"It pains to see young girls dropping out of school to get married. You might think the girls are sick and that why they are not in school but absenteeism becomes rampant and before you realize you are informed that the girl got married. You try to intervene but you find out they are already expectant. What do you do?"*

Pregnancies in schools have been worsened by initiation ceremonies. This is because it comes with social conditioning which itself jeopardize girls' chance of continuing with education because of the aspects that they are taught. One Head-teacher said:

*"Though the campaign against FGM has borne fruits, there are still others who undergo the practice in secret and once they are circumcised, they drop out of school to get married for they feel they are now women"*

During these ceremonies, girls are taught various aspects of culture. Some of these aspects include not to say no to a man and how to sexually satisfy him. It has been observed that after being initiated the performance of many girls at school deteriorate, others drop out of school or are expelled for becoming pregnant [38-40].

There's also an element in the community that educating a girl child is a waste of time and resources. One Principal said:

*"I once confronted a parent who had terminated studies for a very bright girl in standard seven. The parent told me there's no need to educate a girl child because even after all the struggle she will end up being somebody's wife. Why invest in somebody's wife?"*

The girl child is therefore disadvantaged especially in families with high poverty level and also where the parents are illiterate. From the above responses it seems that the girl child is only given one chance to learn and if she messes with the chance she will never be given a second chance. This has led to underage marriages which were reported to be rampant and has contributed to the inequity in education especially for girls in the study area.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that attitude towards the teenage mothers is the main aspect of culture that affected the re-entry policy, followed by gender discrimination, then customs and finally prejudices. This collaborated the interview schedules from the guidance and counselling teachers and the head teachers interviewed. A lot of under age child marriages were reported.

This resonates with the findings from Sinead [56] who said that there are number of obstacles that are clearly identifiable that are limiting young parent's opportunities to participate in education and training. These include family, social and cultural obstacles, including a lack of parental or familial support, social constructions of good mothering, cultural values, feelings of stigmatization and exclusion and structural and institutional obstacles including exclusion from mainstream schooling, negative school experiences, childcare affordability, financial needs including secondary benefits, barriers to accessing existing alternative education and training opportunities such as age criteria and lack of external counselling and support programs. Community and family values may impact upon young parents' decision whether to remain at home or return to education or employment. Communities may differ on the most acceptable option of young mothers staying at home with their child while others may prioritize participation in employment or return to some form of paid education.

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