



**Perspectives of Managers on how Girl Re-entry Policy Should Be Managed –to Deter Re-Entered Girls from Falling Pregnant Again. A Case of Some Selected Secondary Schools in Lusaka District.**

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**Abstract.**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the views of head teachers, guidance and counselling teachers and district guidance and counselling coordinators on how girl re-entry policy should be managed in secondary schools in Lusaka district. The girl's re-entry policy was introduced with the view of helping a girl child who had been a victim of dropping from school due to pregnancy while the boy child continued with school which contributed to inequality on the attainment of education between boys and girls. The policy is in line with the world education framework "Education for All" and Zambia's national document, "Educating our Future". The study used phenomenological research design of qualitative research approach with a sample of thirty five (35) participants of which 17 were head teachers and 17 school guidance and counselling coordinators and a district guidance and counselling coordinator. The findings of the study on the views of managers on how the policy should be managed seemed to suggest that most of the respondents were not satisfied with the way the policy is managed. The managers seem to have suggested that they are of the view that the achievements of the policy surpasses the failures and that the policy came at the right time to help a girl child continue her education. The further study found that the policy document lack clear directions and that it does not stipulate the times that a girl can be re-entered. The study recommended that the government should evaluate the policy and addresses the loopholes found in the policy and that the government should ensure that copies of the policy document are distributed in schools. The study further recommended that policy should be interpreted in detail to the community as well as teachers and top implementers and also there should be an established link between health facilities and schools were they can termly do inspections on school girls. Finally there is need to promote training or workshops on guidance and counselling in schools.

**Key words: Re-entry, Teenage-mothers, counselling, policy.**

## **Introduction**

The attainment of Education For All (EFA) has suffered some setback especially on the aspect of girl child education both in urban and rural communities though the urban areas like Lusaka were largely affected. Margaret (2019) has indicated in her book, that the goals for the future of gender differences in education are to reduce the gender gap in terms of graduation and dropout rates and to create a curriculum that is free of gender bias. This means that these innovation such as re-entry policy should be looked at and developed properly so that it helps with the reduction of the gender gap in the education achievements. During the 80s and 90s girls who fell pregnant during school were expelled from school thereby increasing the number of girls dropping out of school. This widened the gap between boys and girls attaining education. Fortunately enough, in 1997, the Zambian government made a milestone by formulating a policy that provide continued education allowing girls who fell pregnant during school to take leave and go on maternity and then continue with their education after giving birth. This policy is called the girl re-entry policy. According to FAWEZA (2004) the effective implementation of the re-entry policy for girls after delivery is a good policy because it brings girls back to school by taking into account that some girls become pregnant through rape cases, peer pressure and poverty issues. Sometimes girls fall pregnant through being forced by their own parents (Mulenga and Daka, 2022; Daka, Mwelwa, Chibamba, Mkandawire and Phiri, 2020) and in most cases decades ago, it was the girl who suffered the consequences. While the girl child who became pregnant during school was thrown out of school and is not allowed to go back to school after delivery the boy responsible continued with school. From literature reviewed it is important to stress that most of the schools in Zambia and particularly in Lusaka district are implementing the re-entry policy (Sifuniso, 2006). However, the implementation seems to lack clear guidelines on how effective the policy can be executed and managed so that it does not spring into multiple problems in the education of a girl child. It is observed that the behaviour of girls in schools is worrying because they feel they can fall pregnant at any time and still get back to school and possibly continue school with their intake mates. This may be a conduit of moral decay in schools if not well investigated. With the above stipulations, the study seeks to investigate the views of managers on how girl re-entry policy should be managed in secondary schools in Lusaka district. The purpose of this study was to investigate the views of head teachers, guidance and counselling teachers and district guidance and counselling coordinator on how girl re-entry policy should be managed.

## **Reviewed Literature**

Different scholars from different disciplines such as sociology and psychology among others have come up with different approaches to policy formulation and administration. According to Kodek (2012) the success of every policy is dependent upon its formulation. Policy makers and planners use different approaches in policy formulation and administration. For instance stipulations by Lewin (2000) identify the top-down approach as the most familiar approach of planners and policy makers in the globe. Lewin further states that an alternative view of policy formulation is a bottom-up approach, which starts from individual and social needs rather than a governmental view of priorities for development. Thus, the idea of policy formulation and administration differs from country to country while in the Zambian context as in relation to most developing countries policy administration can either be looked as a single decision or group decisions which are sent from the ministry level through to the end point which is the school level so that practitioners begin immediate implementation. These decisions are somewhat made without consultations with the lower levels such as schools and traditional leaders who are the major stakeholders in the implementation of policy especially in rural areas (Daka, Phiri, Chipindi and Nachimwenda, 2021). It is unarguably that the policy process such as the re-entry policy has often been thought of as a cycle with three stages which includes policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation.

The girl's re-entry policy strives in ensuring that the girls who become pregnant during their schooling are given opportunities to continue with education after giving birth. Mwansa (2011) asserts that nearly all countries that embraces re-entry policy ensure that the girls involved are given a maternity leave which acts as a leave of absence from school and it implies that, the same girls are re-admitted in the same schools or else some girls are re-admitted or re-entered in the same grade they were at the time they got pregnant. With the girls whose pregnancies are discovered at the end of the school year, the victims should be allowed to write their examinations without any disturbance from any person so long as they feel strong enough to do so.

Literature shows that in order for the attainment of a comprehensive policy implementation, participation is an essential requirement if individual school managers and teachers are to feel that they are part of the change and not just being asked merely to implement changes developed by others in the education sector. The argument by Orodho (2003) vividly stipulates that if managers learn about change

through the medium of memoranda and circular, then they will not gain that sense of ownership which is crucial if change is to be truly successful. Mulenga and Daka (2022) in their recent study found that local community's bye – laws in collaboration can positively help in the implementation of the re- entry policy. A research conducted in Zambian schools by Mwansa (2011) with head teachers concerning the management of the re-entry policy the informants reported that policy management is difficult due to the fact that policy making processes by the ministry of education were non-inclusive as a result it faces rejection and lack of reinforcement when it comes as a directive for schools to implement. Lack of measures put in place has brought a tandem that the policy has created problems at home and in school because the girls and boys no longer fear getting pregnant or making one pregnant knowing that they will continue with their education.

The literature reviewed does not give clear and standard measures that are put or should be put in place to deter re-entered girls from falling pregnant again. Now the question should be how many times can we allow a girl who becomes pregnant in school? Therefore this study brought out deeper understanding of how the re-entry policy should be managed and explore measures that can be put in place to deter re-entered girls from becoming pregnant again.

In the Zambian context the re-entry policy management came as planned by the Ministry of Education (MOE) who proposed re-entry guidelines for adolescent mothers. Under the re-entry guidelines a pregnant girl is allowed in class during pregnancy, she then leaves to deliver when she is due and would be allowed back to school a minimum of 12 months after delivery. The proposed guidelines also provided, among other things, that the girls be re-admitted to the same/alternative school to reduce psychological and emotional trauma. According to MOE in order to effectively manage the re-entry policy teachers, pupils and the whole school community were to be sensitized to support the re-admitted girls (Gichaga, 2003; Mpesha, 2000).

Research carried out in selected secondary schools in Mufulira on Copperbelt province of Zambia by Nsalamba & Simpande, (2019) indicates that some head teachers are of the view that the management of the policy is good and could not have come at a better time than this when society has evolved to value the contribution of women socio-economic growth and development. They further stressed that the policy should be improved in order to meet the pressing needs of

teenage mothers. In the same research paper it was noted that some head teachers perceived the management of the policy to be a source of moral decay among school going girls.

## **Methodology**

The researchers used phenomenological research design of qualitative method because they wished to capture accurate in-depth views, opinions and motivations from the participants on how the re-entry policy should be managed in schools. In this study, the targeted population comprised of 10 zones that made up of a total of 17 public secondary schools in Lusaka district. The total participants were 17 head teachers, 17 career and guidance teachers and 1 district guide and counselling coordinator.

In this study, an ethical clearance was obtained by the researchers and permission to conduct this study was sought from the Lusaka District Education Board of Secretary (DEBS). The researchers interviewed the head teachers, school guidance and counselling teachers from the 17 schools and district guidance and counselling coordinator from DEBS. It was also the researcher's interest in keeping integrity, promises and agreements with respondents which is an act of sincerity; strive for consistency of thought and action for responsible publication in order to advance relationship for further research. Informed consents were sought from respondents by informing them the essence of the about and their benefits in participating.

The researchers used thematic analysis where the preliminary stage involved grouping or classifying responses that were familiar then followed by coding and then eventually contrastive comparison of categories where the description of each character of each category and similarities between categories was done in order to come up with similar emerging themes in line with the objectives.

## **Findings**

The results have been presented in themes that emerged from the data collected through interviews and document analysis. Generally it was found that the most respondents showed that the current management of the policy in schools was in tandem with guidelines given by the government in the policy though these guidelines are shared through meetings with the district guidance and counselling coordinator due to lack of the policy guideline copies in schools.

Giving the general response on how the re-entry policy is currently being managed in secondary schools one of the head teachers said:

*..... we adhere to government policy which includes the re-entry policy, which we started implementing some years ago. We invite parents on a particular day where the policy is explained to parents so that they are moving at the same pace with the school.*

Concerning responses on roles of the implementers it was found that managers' roles included ensuring that the girls were given counsel on the come back to school after delivery and making sure that re-entered girls are not stigmatised.

One head teacher to the above statement saying:

*My role is basically to make sure that from time to time I remind during the staff meetings my colleagues especially the grade teachers that as they get to class once in a while they should be able to remind the girls that there is no need to expel oneself from school on the account of been pregnant. The government have made a provision that even if some falls pregnant they can still continue with school.*

The district guidance and counselling coordinator's office stipulated that their role was to explain and roll out the policy by interpreting it to schools. This is what was said:

*When we receive the policy from those who made it ours is to understand it and explain to those who will be using it in this case it is the school. So ours is first of all to understand it and to explain the content of this in its detailed form. It is our role to ensure that the policy is correctly understood.*

It was found in this research that most of the schools used observation, reports from peers and the girls who have fallen pregnant to detect pregnancy. One of the guidance and counselling teachers stated that they are able to know that a child is pregnant by noticing changes in health for example one becomes just sickly and more absenteeism at school. Through observation it was reported to the researcher that the moment they (teachers) see a girl start withdrawing from her friends and become isolated then they

probe further and often times the results has shown pregnancy. In some cases schools have detected pregnancy through the invitations of pupils in groups to make them aware of the policy.

It was found that the emerging themes on the procedure the schools followed to maternity leave was first the identification of the pregnancy followed by reporting and counselling/talking to the girl and the parents then allowing them to fill in the maternity form and proceed with leave. Some respondents indicated that they equally summon the boy responsible of the pregnancy to counsel him before they proceed to granting leave to a girl child. It emerged during the research that schools vary in terms of maternity leave given to a pregnant child. Some schools give one year, others give eight months and others give six months. However, this was found to be a different case for a girl in an examination class who is told to continue more especially those who could have paid the examination fees

Submission by the district guidance coordinator states that there are clauses that make it difficult to manage and monitor the policy. She said:

*There is a clause which entails that a boy should also be sent home. Another clause in the policy allows the girl to go on transfer to a school that is of her choice how do you monitor the policy this way?*

Commenting on the management of the policy the district guidance and counselling coordinator's office revealed that implementers do not fully understand the policy in most of the schools because the copy of the policy document is not availed to them. As a result it was felt that there was need to avail copies to the school to enhance the management of the policy.

One of the views from the respondents was that the policy had reduced abortion cases which used to threaten the lives of the girl child. Other respondents indicated that the policy has allowed females continue learning while pregnant. The achievement are seen to be more because others said that the policy has reduced cases of girl child dropout rate due to pregnancy. Those who talked about failure of the policy indicated that the policy records failure on discipline which has been compromised.

Responses on the failures of the policy included that it does not take care of girls who fail to come back to school after delivery due to lack of caretakers at home. Other

respondents indicated that the policy is a failure because it encourages absenteeism and moral contamination, bad influence on other girls. Lack of proper communication of the essence of the policy, no punishment on the boy child was also cited as failures of the policy and as such it has been abused.

On the measures stipulated in the policy document to deter girls from falling pregnant again while in school and also by finding out how we can best ensure that pregnant girls do not fall pregnant again while in school. It emerged from the study that the policy document does not state how many times a girl should fall pregnant and be given a chance again and these are the same sentiments shared by the district guidance and counselling office that the policy has left a loophole as to how many times a girl should be given chance hence resulting into moral degradation. Respondents also indicated that there are no clear guidelines that are stipulated in the policy to deter girls from falling pregnant again while in school. After being asked as to how many times should the girl be allowed to re – enter, the participants proposed the maximum of two as more than this would create more problems for care givers to take care of more than two children from the same mother.

## Discussion

The discussion has been done under the main themes derived from the results and relating to research questions. In making sure that the policy is not forgotten the managers usually have talks with the girls to sensitize them. Schools seems to have well-coordinated system of handling the policy in order to help. Upon seeing that a child is pregnant most respondents indicated that they talk to them so that instead of a child going to sit at home they need to go to the guidance and counselling office and sensitize them. The dialogue that schools have embraced between a girl child and her teachers in charge of the detecting pregnancy status of a girl is a great milestone in managing the re-entry policy. Supporting the above Hope and Sally (2002) cited in Mulenga (2018) argued that through dialogue a person shares a lot of useful information and issues which are needed to be dealt with. Concerning the roles of the implementers results have shown that the roles of implementers varied with the main roles being implementation and counselling. Findings further showed that their roles included ensuring that the girls are given counsel and come back after delivery and making sure that re-entered girls are not stigmatised.<sup>[u1]</sup> This is in agreement with Sekelani, Mbozi and Daka (2021) where the trio in their study found out that for



comprehensive sexuality education to be effective in schools, the implementers who are career and guidance teachers should give counsel to girls and boys in schools.<sup>[u2]</sup>

For the detection of pregnancy, the results indicated that most of the schools used observation, reports from peers and the girls who have fallen pregnant to detect pregnancy. Phiri, Musonda and Daka (2020) also stated that reports from peers help get information about those pregnant though in their study, they added that traditional counsellors were of great help. In some cases schools have detected pregnancy through the invitations of pupils in groups to make them aware of the policy. This is contrary to the study conducted in Switzerland by Qand'elihle, S'lungile & Mamba (2013) noted that schools fail to detect teen pregnancy and some learners are only discovered when they are due. This may bring a challenge if pregnancy is not detected because most girls may start falling pregnancy with the view that they would hid the pregnancy from the school authorities. This may undermine the role of managers in schools. It is therefore, important that school authorities up their detection mechanism of pregnancy.

For the procedure to maternity leave that the schools followed was first the identification of the pregnancy followed by reporting and talking to the girl and the parents allowing them to fill in the maternity form and proceed with leave. This is in line with MOE (2004) policy guidelines for girl re-entry policy. School seems to have variations in terms of maternity leave given to a pregnant child some schools give one year, others give eight month and others give six months. These are supported by the leverage that the policy document give of up-to one year but it would be ideal that all schools gave the same months of maternity leave in order to bring harmony in public school. On the case of a girl in an examination class can continue more especially those who could have paid the examination fees and still put on the watchful eye of the guidance counselling teacher or class teacher till she is due and still allowed to write her examinations.

The views of the managers/implementers on how the girl child re-entry policy should be managed in secondary schools were found in terms of the general views of the policy, achievements and failures of the policy, the common challenging behaviours that are associated with re-entered girl and issues of morality among the learners.

Results revealed that most of the respondents were of the view that the policy was good but lack wide explanations as a result it is abused. The prevailing situation however, shows that the Ministry of Education now Ministry of General Education (MoGE) has not lived according to its initial plan which stated that in order to

effectively manage the re-entry policy. In some cases according to the study by Chilonga and Daka (2021) some of the perpetrators of these pregnancies were the male teachers themselves because they were not well sensitised. This implies that there is need to ensure that the society is fully sensitized on the goals and mission of the re-entry policy.

Results indicates that from the study the policy document does not state how many times a girl should fall pregnant and be given a chance again at school and these are the same sentiments shared by the district office that the policy has left a loophole as to how many times a girl should be given chance hence resulting into moral degradation. Other respondents also indicated that there are no clear guidelines that are stipulated in the policy to deter girls from falling pregnant again while in school. Other respondents further stressed that there is need to give the girls and boys sex education and also to link them to health facilities. It was admitted in the results that it is not easy to come up with measures that could deter girls from falling pregnant again because of the current status of this generation. Therefore, the only way out is to keep bringing to them what is the policy is about, talking to them, encouraging them to remain in school. Emphasis must be placed on round the clock counselling and surely that way it helps them not to fall pregnant again.

## **Conclusion**

From the results it is clear that the current management of the policy done by following the policy guidelines. The implementers have a great role of counselling the children, give the maternity leave and see to it that they come back to school after they deliver. In order to detect pregnancy managers use observations, reports from the parents, peers, and the victims themselves. In some cases schools work hand in hand with the health team to detect pregnancy. This path has though proven to delay detection in the case that the health team does not show up at a school after a long time.

It was noted that most respondents were of the view that generally the common challenging behaviour of the re-entered girl is good except a few who indicated that some girls after delivery tend to lose respect on male teachers especially those who look young and some re-entered girls tend to isolate themselves. Shockingly, it was noted that some girls tend to develop interest in early marriage and this was in agreement with Mulenga and Daka (2022) findings in their study. The research has presented and discussed that the policy document lack measures to state how many

time should a re-entered girl fall pregnant while in school. There are also no clear guidelines that are stipulated in the policy to deter re-entered girls from falling pregnant. The suggestions are that giving children in secondary school sex education and linking them to health facilities will help in pregnancy deterrent.

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