



Transforming Learning Environments for Boys and Girls in Tanzania: Insights from the SEQUIP Alternative Education Programme

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Abstract: *Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP)-Alternative Education Pathway (AEP) is one of the Tanzania's most innovative responses to challenges which undermine the potential of learners, particularly girls and other marginalized groups in secondary education. Despite such response, limited research is documented on how the SEQUIP-AEP transformed learning environments for boys and girls. Therefore, this study specifically explores strategies used by SEQUIP-AEP to foster inclusive and gender-responsive learning environments; and assess impact of SEQUIP-AEP on boys' and girls' participation, engagement, and academic outcomes. The given objectives were achieved using pragmatic research philosophy, mixed approach and sequential design. The data were collected using documentary review, structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussion from 216 participants, sampled using purposive and stratified techniques. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, descriptive statistics and paired t-test. The findings reveal that the strategies used include flexible learning schedules, teacher professional development, mentorship and guidance, psychological support and learning materials and resources. Furthermore, clear improvements across all measured areas i.e. notable increased attendance, classroom engagement, and self-reported academic confidence. SEQUIP-AEP has successfully created inclusive and gender-sensitive learning environments by offering flexible schedules, teacher support, mentorship, psychosocial guidance, and access to essential learning materials, leading to higher attendance, greater classroom participation, and stronger academic confidence among learners who were previously excluded. These results emphasize the value of learner-centered and gender-responsive strategies in education to promote meaningful engagement, empowerment, and equity.*

Keywords: *Transforming, Learning environments, SEQUIP, AEP, Strategies, Participation, Engagement, Academic outcomes*

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1. Introduction

The quality of learning environments plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic success, engagement, and long-term retention in secondary education (UNESCO,

2020). In Tanzania, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, limited school infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers continue to undermine the potential of learners, particularly girls and other marginalized groups (World Bank, 2019; Institute of Adult Education [IAE], 2023). Studies have highlighted

that unsafe or non-inclusive school environments contribute to high dropout rates, early pregnancies, and diminished educational attainment (MoEST, 2023).

Secondary education represents a key stage in shaping young people's futures, giving them essential skills, knowledge, and opportunities to actively participate in social and economic life (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2019). In Tanzania, however, many adolescents especially girls continue to face serious challenges that limit their ability to remain in school (UNICEF, 2021; Institute of Adult Education [IAE], 2023). Factors such as teenage pregnancy, household poverty, gender inequalities, and a lack of adequate school facilities have long contributed to high dropout rates among secondary students (World Bank, 2019; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2020; IAE, 2023). Current statistics show that only about 45% of girls who begin lower secondary education manage to finish, compared with around 60% of boys, underscoring the persistent gender gap in educational achievement (World Bank, 2019; IAE, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

Tanzania has made notable steps in transforming its education system for all children, including those from marginalized groups to access quality learning opportunities, as the way of addressing the aforementioned challenges (World Bank, 2019). One of the Tanzania's most innovative responses to those challenges is the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP). Supported by the World Bank, SEQUIP seeks to transform secondary education by improving school infrastructure, enhancing teaching quality, and promoting equity across gender and socioeconomic lines (World Bank, 2024). In other words, one of the country's flagship initiatives is the SEQUIP, which seeks to tackle persistent challenges in secondary education, such as limited resources, infrastructure gaps, and gender disparities (World Bank, 2024).

A particularly innovative part of SEQUIP is the Alternative Education Pathway (AEP), which specifically targets students who have dropped out of school, especially adolescent mothers by offering them a second chance to complete their secondary education (IAE, 2023). The AEP provides a flexible, learner-centered environment tailored to the unique needs of its participants, combining academic instruction with life skills and social support (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). This approach is closely aligned with global priorities, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all and lifelong learning opportunities (World Bank, 2023a). By offering these "second chance" pathways, the AEP empowers young women and other out-of-school youth to finish their education, boosting both their personal development and long-term socio-economic

prospects (World Bank, 2023b). The AEP combines flexible academic instruction with life skills training, mentorship, and psychosocial support, allowing students to re-enter formal schooling or pursue alternative educational routes that fit their life circumstances (MoEST, 2023; IAE, 2023).

The impact of SEQUIP-AEP has been tangible and inspiring. Since its inception, the program has reintegrated over 10,000 adolescent mothers and other out-of-school learners into secondary education, while more than 1.4 million students have indirectly benefited from teacher training, modernized curricula, and improved school facilities (World Bank, 2023a; World Bank, 2023b). Schools participating in the program have constructed and renovated classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and boarding facilities, creating safer and more conducive learning environments for both boys and girls (MoEST, 2023). Stories from the field highlight remarkable successes: in Kagera region, more than 240 teenage mothers returned to school through the program, gaining not only academic skills but also confidence, social support, and hope for a better future (IAE, 2023).

Despite these achievements, there remains limited research documenting how programmes like SEQUIP-AEP transform learning environments for boys and girls, and what lessons can be drawn for broader educational reform. Therefore, this study evaluates the SEQUIP-AEP Programme transformed learning environments for boys and girls in Tanzania. It specifically explores the strategies (approaches) used by SEQUIP-AEP to foster inclusive and gender-responsive learning environments. This objective focuses on understanding how the SEQUIP-AEP Programme creates supportive spaces where all students, including adolescent mothers and out-of-school youth, feel welcomed and able to learn. It examines practical measures such as flexible learning schedules, professional teacher development, mentorship, and psychosocial support, which together enable learners to overcome barriers that would otherwise prevent them from succeeding in school (IAE, 2023; World Bank, 2023a). Secondly, the study specifically assesses the impact of SEQUIP-AEP Programme on boys' and girls' participation, engagement, and academic outcomes. Beyond SEQUIP-AEP Programme design, this objective investigates the tangible effects of SEQUIP-AEP on learners' experiences. For instance, it examines how reintegrating young mothers into school and providing additional support influences their confidence, academic achievement, and attendance. Real-life stories are used to demonstrate how second-chance education could restore hope and motivation, enabling learners to pursue both educational and personal growth (World Bank, 2023b; MoEST, 2023).

Achieving such objectives, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers

seeking to enhance secondary education in Tanzania and similar contexts. This study is essential for guiding policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in designing inclusive secondary education systems that leave no student behind. This study becomes the catalyst of motivating creation of safe, supportive, and gender-responsive learning environments. It likewise ignites improvement of academic outcomes but also restores hope and agency to youth who had previously been excluded from educational opportunities.

2. Literature Review

This section presents theories of study, empirical review, conceptual framework as well as synthesis and research gap.

2.1 Theories of the Study

Several theoretical frameworks provide a lens for understanding how learning environments can be transformed. In that sense, this study is guided by some theories which eventually ground its conceptual framework. These theories are Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), and Gender and Development (GAD) Theory (Moser, 1993). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasizes that learners' development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including family, school, community, and policy contexts. SEQUIP-AEP embodies this perspective by addressing both classroom learning and broader social support, such as community mentorship programs and parental engagement initiatives.

Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978) further informs the design of SEQUIP-AEP. By promoting active, learner-centered approaches such as peer mentoring, problem-solving exercises, and collaborative learning activities, the Programme encourages students to construct knowledge meaningfully, enhancing engagement and critical thinking. For example, learners in group discussions and interactive lessons help them understand complex concepts better than traditional lecture-based methods.

Gender and Development (GAD) Theory (Moser, 1993) highlights the importance of transforming institutional structures and social norms to achieve gender equality in education. SEQUIP-AEP integrates GAD principles by implementing gender-sensitive teaching practices, providing support for adolescent mothers, and promoting community awareness to challenge stigmas associated with early pregnancy and school dropout. Field narratives illustrate that these measures not only facilitate academic

success but also foster self-confidence and empowerment among girls, enabling them to envision a future beyond societal limitations.

2.2 Empirical Review

Recent empirical evidence highlights how the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP), and in particular its Alternative Education Pathways (AEP) initiative, has been reshaping learning environments for both girls and boys in Tanzania (World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2025; Songambe, 2025). A key priority of the AEP has been to make secondary education more accessible for young people who left school early, especially girls who were pushed out due to pregnancy, early marriage, or financial hardship (World Bank, 2019). Programme records show that new learning centres have been established, and tuition subsidies introduced, making it easier for vulnerable learners to re-enter education through flexible, self-paced and blended options (World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2023). These measures were deliberately designed to address patterns of female dropout and the need for more adaptable schedules (Ministry of Education, 2025). Studies in the field support this picture of inclusion, with qualitative findings showing that adolescent mothers in coastal regions have been able to return to education and regain a sense of hope and agency through AEP opportunities (Songambe, 2025). Teachers, students, and parents interviewed in these studies reported seeing learners re-enrolled and motivated to continue with their studies (Songambe, 2025).

Programme documents emphasise that the AEP is not just about academics, but also about creating supportive and gender-sensitive environments (World Bank, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2025). The "quality package" for learners combines classroom teaching with life-skills, health education, and psychosocial support, all aimed at ensuring that girls in particular are able to stay in school and complete their studies (World Bank, 2019). Reports show that the initiative has delivered textbooks, trained teachers to adapt their approaches for alternative pathways, and rolled out the Safe Schools strategy to make classrooms more secure and inclusive for female learners (World Bank, 2023). Evidence from both monitoring reports and field studies demonstrates that these non-academic supports such as counselling and flexible timetabling have been vital for keeping young mothers engaged in their studies (Songambe, 2025). When such supports are in place, girls report higher levels of confidence and are more likely to remain enrolled, but when these supports are inconsistent, barriers to sustained participation remain (World Bank, 2024).

Implementation records also provide a clearer picture of the scale of SEQUIP's contributions (World Bank, 2023). Millions of textbooks have been distributed, thousands of teachers deployed, and national learning assessments carried out to measure student progress (World Bank, 2023). These investments are seen as strengthening the education system not only for formal schools but also for AEP centres (World Bank, 2019). Early reports indicate that most of the initial targets for enrolment, learning resources, and outreach were met or even surpassed (World Bank, 2024). AEP information systems have also been enhanced to better track enrolments, transfers, and dropouts (World Bank, 2023). At the same time, progress updates caution that while access has improved, ensuring that all learners, especially girls in rural areas achieve equitable outcomes is still a challenge and will require sustained attention (World Bank, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

Field studies add another layer by pointing to broader community-level benefits of the AEP (Songambele, 2025). Teachers engaged in AEP delivery have gained extra income and experience, while families and communities have noted that young mothers are regaining opportunities for education, which has had positive ripple effects on household decision-making and community well-being (Songambele, 2025). Such findings suggest that SEQUIP's impact extends beyond learning outcomes to wider social and economic benefits (World Bank, 2019).

Even so, several challenges continue to shape the experience of learners within SEQUIP-AEP (World Bank, 2024). Reports highlight difficulties such as limited staffing in some centres, financial risks, and inconsistent delivery of the promised "quality package" (World Bank, 2023). In addition, stigma around adolescent mothers returning to school remains a barrier in some communities (Songambele, 2025). Evaluations warn that without stronger systems for teacher deployment, monitoring, and learning assessments, it will be difficult to convert improved access into meaningful academic achievement (World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Much of the current evidence on AEP outcomes is based on qualitative studies, case reports, or programme monitoring rather than rigorous impact evaluations, which makes it hard to establish long-term effects (Songambele, 2025; World Bank, 2019). While monitoring data such as enrolment figures are encouraging, longitudinal and mixed-method studies are needed to assess the sustainability of gains in learning and equity (World Bank, 2024). Researchers argue that these more robust studies will be essential for guiding future investment and scaling decisions (Songambele, 2025; World Bank, 2023).

From the above literature, the evidence presents a cautiously optimistic picture of SEQUIP's role in

transforming education for boys and girls in Tanzania (World Bank, 2024; Songambele, 2025). The programme has opened doors for many learners, particularly adolescent mothers, by offering flexible learning opportunities and reducing the barriers that once excluded them (World Bank, 2019). It has also strengthened teaching capacity and provided material support across the secondary education system (World Bank, 2023). Still, the task of making these gains durable requires consistency in delivery, stronger systems of monitoring and evaluation, and deliberate efforts to tackle stigma and cultural barriers (Songambele, 2025; World Bank, 2024). Rigorous impact studies are especially needed to measure the real effects on learning outcomes and equity (World Bank, 2023). Looking ahead, the evidence suggests that Tanzania should continue consolidating the AEP "quality package," strengthen evaluation systems, and build community support so that both boys and girls experience lasting improvements in their education (Ministry of Education, 2025; World Bank, 2019).

2.3 Synthesis And Research Gap

The above presentation of theories hints a certain synthesis and research gap. While existing literature emphasizes the importance of inclusive, flexible, and gender-responsive learning environments, there is limited research documenting how structured interventions like SEQUIP-AEP operationally transform secondary school settings in Tanzania. Most studies (Filippou, 2025; Xu, 2025; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2024; Le, 2024; Tong, 2024; Meland *et al.*, 2024) focus on student outcomes or programme coverage without exploring the mechanisms such as mentorship, flexible scheduling, and community engagement through which learning environments are improved. Moreover, there is a gap in integrating theoretical perspectives to explain how ecological, constructivist, and gender frameworks interact in practice. This study addresses these gaps by combining empirical evidence, field experiences, and theoretical insights to examine how SEQUIP-AEP transforms learning environments for boys and girls, offering lessons for policymakers, educators, and practitioners in Tanzania and similar contexts.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study builds its conceptual framework on three pillars: inclusive education theory, gender-responsive pedagogy, and alternative education practices. At its core is the SEQUIP Alternative Education Programme (SEQUIP-AEP) in Tanzania, which offers a valuable lens for examining how learning environments can be reshaped to meet the needs of both boys and girls. Special attention is given to marginalized learners such as adolescent mothers and out-of-school youth. The framework links together

program strategies, learner participation, and outcomes, while also highlighting the importance of reflecting on successes and challenges to guide future educational policies and practices.

The first focus of the framework is on how SEQUIP-AEP fosters inclusivity and gender sensitivity in schools (creating inclusive and gender-responsive learning environments). It emphasizes strategies such as flexible timetables, teacher training, mentorship programs, and psychosocial support all designed to reduce barriers to learning (IAE, 2023; World Bank, 2023a). By addressing both practical and emotional challenges, these interventions ensure that vulnerable learners, including adolescent mothers, not only gain access to education but also feel safe, supported, and motivated to succeed.

The second focus is on the programme’s impact. SEQUIP-AEP goes beyond access to measure how students engage and perform once they are back in school (strengthening participation, engagement, and academic outcomes). By providing academic support, mentorship, and pathways for

reintegration, the program helps learners, especially young mothers rebuild their confidence, improve attendance, and achieve academically (World Bank, 2023b; MoEST, 2023). These supports act as bridges between inclusive strategies and concrete outcomes, showing how thoughtfully designed interventions can boost not only grades but also learners’ sense of belonging and self-worth.

Using **Figure 1**, the conceptual Framework of SEQUIP-AEP for transforming learning environments, three domains are noted: 1. strategies for inclusion and gender responsiveness; and 2. engagement and participation. In summary, this framework suggests that SEQUIP-AEP’s inclusive and gender-sensitive strategies foster participation and engagement, which in turn enhance learning outcomes. At the same time, careful documentation of successes and challenges ensures continuous improvement, ultimately supporting evidence-based policymaking for a more equitable and effective education system in Tanzania.

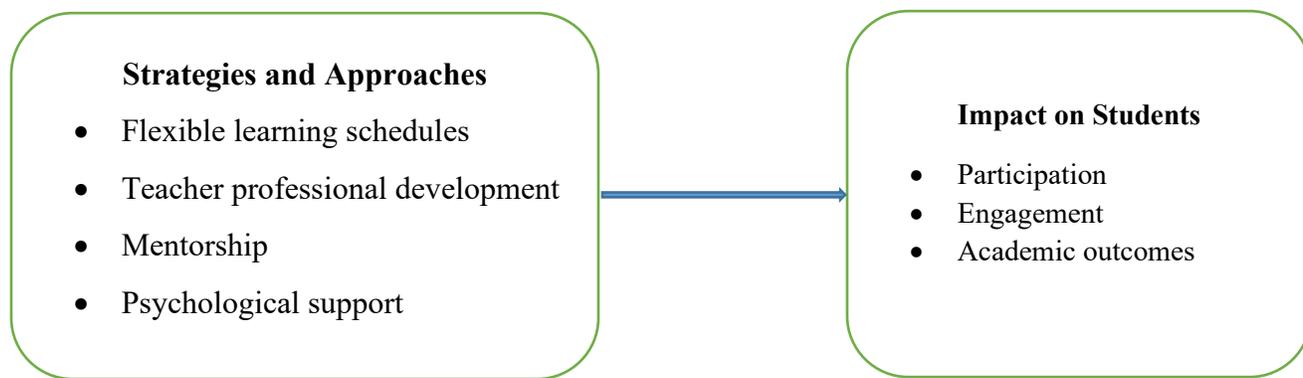


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Theoretical and Empirical Review, 2025

3. Methodology

The two specific objectives of this study were achieved using a particular methodology with relevant methods and procedures. Specifically, this study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, which emphasizes applying methods that best answer practical research questions. In the context of SEQUIP-AEP, understanding how learning environments are transformed for boys and girls requires a combination of quantitative measurement and qualitative exploration. Pragmatism enabled the researchers to capture both the measurable outcomes of the program and the lived experiences of learners, teachers, and administrators (Saunders et al., 2019).

Furthermore, this study used a mixed-methods approach. This approach was employed by combining numerical data on learner outcomes with rich qualitative insights from the field. Quantitative data measured participation rates, academic performance, and engagement levels, while qualitative data explored the strategies, experiences, and perceptions shaping the learning environment. This approach allowed for triangulation, providing a more complete and nuanced understanding of SEQUIP-AEP’s impact (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Moreover, this study used sequential design (exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory). Initially, quantitative data were collected to identify trends in learner participation and outcomes, followed by qualitative exploration to understand why and how these patterns occurred. This

sequencing enabled the research team to contextualize statistical findings with stories and experiences from students and teachers, creating a holistic view of program effects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The SEQUIP-AEP has been applicable in Tanzania as whole however; some regions are chosen for this study representatively. In that view, this study was conducted in Kagera, Mwanza, and Morogoro regions. These areas are where SEQUIP-AEP has been actively implemented. These regions were deliberately chosen for their diversity in socioeconomic conditions, urban-rural contexts, and educational infrastructure, which offered insights into how the program adapts to varying local realities (World Bank, 2023a). For instance, in Kagera, the program supports adolescent mothers returning to school after childbirth, while in Mwanza, emphasis is placed on mentoring boys and girls from remote villages to improve retention and engagement.

Participants included adolescent learners enrolled in SEQUIP-AEP, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and program implementers. A stratified purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure representation across gender, age groups, geographic regions, and learner types. For the quantitative component, 196 learners (98 boys and 98 girls) completed structured questionnaires assessing participation, engagement, and perceptions of school support. For the qualitative component, 15 in-depth interviews with teachers, administrators, and programme staff, along with 5 focus group discussions (30 learners), provided narratives illustrating challenges, successes, and transformations within learning environments.

Being that the case, the data collection methods of this study involved structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and documentary review. The structured questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data on learners' academic participation, engagement, and perceptions of inclusivity. For example, students reported how flexible timetables enabled teenage mothers to attend classes without missing childcare responsibilities.

Furthermore, the in-depth interview was used to explore the strategies and experiences of teachers and administrators, such as how mentoring programs and psychosocial support helped students overcome social stigma and improve confidence. Besides, the focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to capture learners' voices, revealing firsthand experiences, including stories of adolescent mothers in Kagera successfully balancing education and parenting, and boys in remote villages navigating long travel distances to attend school. As the base of the above, the document review used included SEQUIP-AEP monitoring reports, policy documents, and

school records to corroborate primary data and provide context to program outcomes.

Validity and reliability were as well ensured in this study. Validity was ensured through triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking during interviews, and careful document analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Reliability of quantitative measures was achieved by pre-testing questionnaires, standardizing survey administration, and calculating Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency with the rule of thumb, 0.07 (Field, 2018). For example, learners' responses were cross-checked with attendance records and exam results to ensure accuracy.

Due to the nature of the specific objectives of this study, data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, percentages, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (paired t-tests and multiple linear regression) to explore relationships between programme participation and learning outcomes. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed, capturing patterns and stories illustrating how SEQUIP-AEP strategies like mentorship, flexible learning, and improved facilities transformed classroom experiences and student confidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The combination of numerical and narrative data allowed for a nuanced understanding of how learning environments were improved for both boys and girls.

Although this study is informative and focused, it may have some limitations. While self-reported data may introduce bias and the study's regional focus may limit generalizability, the mixed-methods approach, triangulation, and rich field data strengthened the reliability and depth of the findings. Learner stories and real-world examples provided context, making the results meaningful for policymakers and practitioners aiming to improve secondary education environments.

With ethical considerations, studying how the SEQUIP Alternative Education Programme is transforming learning environments in Tanzania calls for strong ethical safeguards to protect those who take part. Because the focus is on adolescents, many of them girls who have faced school exclusion due to early pregnancy the study deals with groups that can be considered especially vulnerable, which means that respect, sensitivity, and fairness must guide every step of the research process (Songambele, 2025; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To begin with, participation in the study will be strictly voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained from everyone involved. For learners under 18 years of age, this means gaining both their assent and permission from

parents or guardians so that decisions are made with clarity and understanding (Bryman, 2016). Privacy will be carefully protected by removing names and other identifiers from interviews and survey responses, ensuring that no participant can be personally linked to the findings (Punch & Oancea, 2014). This is particularly important in small Tanzanian communities where girls who dropped out of school may already face stigma, and disclosure could add further pressure or discrimination (Songambebe, 2025).

Equally important is the cultural context in which the study will take place. Since issues like gender, pregnancy, and school re-entry can be sensitive, researchers will adopt respectful ways of asking questions and create safe, supportive spaces where learners can share their experiences without fear (Ministry of Education, 2025). Should any participant experience emotional discomfort while telling their stories, referral pathways for counselling and psychosocial support will be made available (World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2024). All collected data will be stored securely, accessed only by the research team, and disposed of responsibly once the study period ends (BERA, 2018).

Beyond protection, ethical practice also means making sure participants and their communities benefit from the research. Findings will not remain only in academic publications but will be shared with schools, local education officers, and policymakers in accessible ways so that the insights can shape better policies and practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; World Bank, 2019). In this way, the study respects the dignity of participants, while ensuring that their voices contribute to ongoing efforts to create fairer, more inclusive learning environments for both boys and girls in Tanzania.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Background Information

This study engaged a total of 216 participants, including 196 adolescent learners enrolled in SEQUIP-AEP and 20 other stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, programme staff, and community leaders. The sample was carefully selected to capture the programme's diversity and ensure that different perspectives across gender, age, education levels, professional experience, and geographic regions were represented.

Table 1 reveals that, among the surveyed learners, gender was evenly distributed, with 98 boys (50%) and 98 girls (50%). This balance is especially important given SEQUIP-AEP's strong focus on gender equity and its

efforts to support the reintegration of adolescent mothers and other marginalized girls back into the education system. Learners were drawn from both lower and upper secondary levels, with 110 (56.1%) in Forms 1–2 and 86 (43.9%) in Forms 3–4. This distribution provided a good mix of students at the early and more advanced stages of secondary education.

In terms of age, most learners were between 16 and 18 years (89 learners; 45.4%), while 72 (36.7%) were aged 13–15. A smaller group of 35 learners (17.9%) were 19 years and older, reflecting SEQUIP-AEP's role in giving second-chance opportunities to those whose education had been interrupted often due to early pregnancies, family responsibilities, or economic challenges. The inclusion of these older students highlights the programme's responsiveness to learners who may have otherwise been permanently excluded from education.

Participants were also geographically diverse, representing three key regions in Tanzania where SEQUIP-AEP has been rolled out. Mwanza contributed the largest share of learners (29.8%), followed by Kagera (27.7%) and Morogoro (26.5%). This spread allowed the study to capture different experiences of the programme across both urban and rural contexts, where challenges and opportunities for learners can vary considerably.

The non-learner participants ($n = 20$) brought in voices from those responsible for supporting or delivering the programme. These included 8 teachers/tutors, 4 school administrators, 8 programme staff, and 5 community leaders. Most of them had professional qualifications: 8 had diplomas or certificates (40%), 9 had bachelor's degrees (45%), and 3 had master's degrees (15%). Their work experience ranged widely: 6 had between 1–5 years, 7 had 6–10 years, and another 7 had more than 11 years of experience. This combination of newer and more seasoned professionals enriched the study, offering a range of insights into how the programme is implemented on the ground and how communities are engaged.

In general, this demographic profile demonstrates the inclusive design of SEQUIP-AEP. It demonstrates the programme's ability to engage not only boys and girls at different stages of schooling but also young mothers, older adolescents, and those whose education was previously interrupted. At the same time, the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and community representatives underscore the collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach that makes SEQUIP-AEP distinctive. This diversity provided a strong base for analyzing both the statistical outcomes and the personal experiences shared during interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 1: Background Information

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender (Learners)	Boys	98	50.0
	Girls	98	50.0
Class Level	Lower Secondary (Form 1–2)	110	56.1
	Upper Secondary (Form 3–4)	86	43.9
Education Level (Non-learners)	Diploma/Certificate	8	40.0 (of 20)
	Bachelor’s degree	9	45.0 (of 20)
	Master’s degree or above	3	15.0 (of 20)
Working Experience (Non-learners)	1–5 years	6	30.0
	6–10 years	7	35.0
	11 years and above	7	35.0
Age (Learners)	13–15 years	72	36.7
	16–18 years	89	45.4
	19 years and above	35	17.9
Location	Kagera	65	27.7
	Mwanza	70	29.8
	Morogoro	61	26.5
Nature of Participant	Learners (SEQUIP-AEP)	196	90.7
	Teachers/Tutors	8	3.7
	School Administrators	4	1.9
	Programme Staff	8	3.7
	Community Leaders	5	2.3

4.2 Strategies Used to Foster Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Learning Environments

The study examined how SEQUIP-AEP has fostered inclusive and gender-responsive learning environments for marginalized learners, including adolescent mothers and out-of-school youth. Results from 196 learners reveal that

the Programme’s strategies were widely recognized and appreciated. Flexible learning schedules were identified by 84% of learners as a key factor that enabled their continued participation, followed by teacher professional development (72%), mentorship and guidance (69%), and psychosocial support (65%) (Table 2). These findings imply that the SEQUIP-AEP programme effectively addresses both the academic and socio-emotional needs of learners, creating spaces where all students feel supported and valued.

Table 2: Strategies for Fostering Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Learning Environments

Strategy/Approach	Frequency	Percent
Flexible learning schedules	164	83.7%
Teacher professional development	142	72.4%
Mentorship and guidance	136	69.4%
Psychosocial support	128	65.3%
Learning materials and resources access	110	56.1%

Thematic analysis of learners’ responses highlighted four main approaches through which SEQUIP-AEP promotes inclusion. First, flexible learning schedules allow learners

to balance schooling with caregiving or work responsibilities. One adolescent mother shared:

“I can attend school at times that fit around my baby’s needs, which I couldn’t do before.”

This mirrors findings from Ilala District, Tanzania, where flexible classes and alternative learning methods were essential for young mothers to continue their education (Saleh & Amos, 2025). Second, teacher professional development and mentorship enhanced educators’ ability to create welcoming and supportive classrooms. Learners reported that trained teachers were more approachable, understanding, and capable of adjusting lessons to meet diverse learning needs (Ndale & Amos, 2025). These observations align with research showing that continuous teacher training and supportive supervision are critical for implementing inclusive education (World Bank, 2023a).

Third, mentorship and peer support help learners gain confidence and motivation. Mentors provided guidance on academic challenges and personal issues, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging continued engagement in learning. Similar mentorship initiatives in Tanzania and neighboring countries have been shown to increase student retention and motivation (GPEKIX.org, 2025).

Fourth, psychosocial support addressed learners’ emotional and social needs, helping them cope with stress, trauma, and other barriers that might interfere with schooling. Students noted that counseling services and supportive staff made them feel safe and valued in the school environment (The Guardian, 2025). This is consistent with studies emphasizing that psychosocial interventions can significantly enhance the academic persistence of adolescent mothers and vulnerable youth (Mensa, 2021).

Generally, these strategies demonstrate a comprehensive and learner-centered approach. By combining flexible schedules, teacher development, mentorship, and psychosocial support, SEQUIP-AEP not only facilitates attendance and engagement but also nurtures an inclusive school culture that recognizes the diverse challenges faced by marginalized learners. Learners’ experiences indicate that the program successfully removes barriers that might otherwise prevent adolescent mothers and out-of-school youth from succeeding academically. In doing so, SEQUIP-AEP contributes to sustained participation and advances gender equity in Tanzanian schools (IAE, 2023; World Bank, 2023a).

4.3 Impact of SEQUIP-AEP Programme on Boys’ and Girls’ Participation, Engagement, and Academic Outcomes

The results of this section are demonstrated in Table 3 (with its details in Table 4, 5 and 6) and Table 7. This study explored the effects of the SEQUIP-AEP Programme on learners’ school participation, engagement, and academic outcomes, focusing on a sample of 196 students, including adolescent mothers and out-of-school youth. The findings indicate clear improvements across all measured areas. Overall attendance increased from 63% before the program to 81% after implementation, with girls’ attendance rising from 62% to 82% and boys from 64% to 80%. These improvements suggest that SEQUIP-AEP successfully created opportunities for learners who previously faced barriers to regular school participation (World Bank, 2023b; MoEST, 2023).

Paired t-test analysis confirmed that these gains were statistically significant. Attendance improvements were highly significant, with t-values of 22.45 for girls and 20.87 for boys ($p < 0.001$). Classroom engagement also improved, with girls averaging 4.08 and boys 3.95 on a 5-point Likert scale, up from pre-program averages of 2.95 and 3.05, respectively ($t = 21.30$ for girls; $t = 19.85$ for boys; $p < 0.001$). Similarly, self-reported academic confidence increased from 3.05 to 4.12 for girls and from 3.08 to 3.98 for boys ($t = 23.10$ for girls; $t = 21.05$ for boys; $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that SEQUIP-AEP interventions, such as flexible schedules, remedial support, mentorship, and psychosocial services, had measurable, positive effects on learners’ experiences and outcomes (World Bank, 2023b; Mwakililo, 2025).

Qualitative feedback further illuminates the mechanisms behind these improvements. Many learners, particularly adolescent mothers, described how reintegration into school restored their confidence and motivation. One participant reflected:

“Before SEQUIP, I had given up on school. Now I attend regularly, engage in lessons, and feel capable of achieving academically.”

This illustrates how SEQUIP-AEP creates inclusive learning environments that foster both personal growth and academic achievement. Another important factor highlighted by learners was the role of teacher mentorship and professional development. Students reported that teachers were more approachable and responsive to their individual needs, making classrooms more engaging and supportive. Such findings align with research emphasizing the importance of trained, empathetic teachers and structured mentorship in supporting vulnerable learners (Mwakililo, 2025; World Bank, 2023b).

Psychosocial support also played a critical role. Access to counseling and guidance helped learners manage emotional and social challenges, enabling them to balance school with family responsibilities and other personal

demands. Learners indicated that this support contributed significantly to their confidence, motivation, and academic persistence. The World Bank (2023b) notes that integrating psychosocial support into education programs is essential for fostering resilience and improving learning outcomes, especially among marginalized populations.

Gender differences were also observed. While both boys and girls benefited from SEQUIP-AEP, girls showed slightly higher gains in attendance, engagement, and academic confidence. This suggests that the program’s gender-responsive measures, particularly those supporting adolescent mothers, effectively addressed specific barriers to education, such as childcare responsibilities and societal

stigma, promoting equity in educational outcomes (World Bank, 2023b; MoEST, 2023).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that SEQUIP-AEP has had a transformative effect on learners’ participation, engagement, and academic performance. By combining flexible learning schedules, mentorship, remedial support, and psychosocial services, the program not only enhances measurable educational outcomes but also builds learners’ confidence, motivation, and resilience. These results underscore the importance of second-chance education programs in fostering inclusive, supportive, and equitable learning environments for marginalized youth in Tanzania (World Bank, 2023b; Mwakililo, 2025; MoEST, 2023).

Table 3: Impact of SEQUIP-AEP Programme on Boys’ and Girls’ Participation, Engagement, and Academic Outcomes (Descriptive Statistics)

Indicator	Gender	Frequency	% of Learners	Mean Score	SD
Attendance (After SEQUIP)	Girls	102	82%	4.10	0.71
	Boys	94	80%	4.00	0.78
Classroom Engagement	Girls	96	75%	4.08	0.73
	Boys	84	70%	3.95	0.79
Academic Confidence	Girls	102	78%	4.12	0.70
	Boys	84	70%	3.98	0.75

Table 4. Attendance and Participation Before and After SEQUIP-AEP (n = 196)

Indicator	Before SEQUIP (%)	After SEQUIP (%)	Mean (After)	SD (After)
Overall attendance	63	81	4.05	0.76
Attendance (Girls)	62	82	4.10	0.71
Attendance (Boys)	64	80	4.00	0.78

Table 5. Classroom Engagement by Gender (5-point Likert Scale: 1 = Never, 5 = Always)

Gender	Frequency Engaged	% Engaged	Mean Score	SD
Girls	96	75%	4.08	0.73
Boys	84	70%	3.95	0.79

Table 6. Academic Confidence by Gender (5-point Likert Scale: 1 = Not confident, 5 = Very confident)

Gender	Frequency Confident	% Confident	Mean Score	SD
Girls	102	78%	4.12	0.70
Boys	84	70%	3.98	0.75

Table 7: Impact of SEQUIP-AEP Programme on Boys’ and Girls’ Participation, Engagement, and Academic Outcomes (Paired t-test)

Indicator	Gender	Mean Before	Mean After	SD Before	SD After	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Attendance	Girls	3.12	4.10	0.80	0.71	22.45	0.000	Significant increase after SEQUIP-AEP
	Boys	3.18	4.00	0.82	0.78	20.87	0.000	Significant increase after SEQUIP-AEP
Classroom Engagement	Girls	2.95	4.08	0.75	0.73	21.30	0.000	Significant improvement in engagement
	Boys	3.05	3.95	0.78	0.79	19.85	0.000	Significant improvement in engagement
Academic Confidence	Girls	3.05	4.12	0.77	0.70	23.10	0.000	Significant improvement in academic confidence
	Boys	3.08	3.98	0.79	0.75	21.05	0.000	Significant improvement in academic confidence

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study found that the SEQUIP-AEP programme has been highly effective in building more inclusive and gender-responsive learning spaces. By introducing flexible study schedules, strengthening teacher training, providing mentorship and guidance, ensuring psychosocial support, and supplying essential learning resources, the programme has enabled learners who were once left behind such as adolescent mothers and out-of-school youth to re-enter and thrive in school. These measures have translated into tangible improvements, including better attendance, more active participation in class, and stronger confidence in academic abilities. In doing so, SEQUIP-AEP has shown that creating access to education is not enough; addressing the real barriers learners face is key to lasting change.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Expand Second-Chance Education Opportunities

There is a clear need to widen access to second-chance education programmes like SEQUIP’s Alternative Education Programme so that more young people who have dropped out of school, especially girls, get the chance to continue their studies. These programmes should go beyond simply providing academic lessons by also offering counselling, mentorship, and social support. This makes it easier for learners to not only return to the classroom but also stay motivated and thrive.

5.2.2 Investing in Teachers and Learner-Centered Approaches

The success of flexible timetables and responsive teaching methods shows that teachers play a key role in helping students balance school with other life responsibilities. Ongoing training is essential so that teachers are well-prepared to use inclusive, learner-centered strategies. This includes understanding gender-sensitive teaching, using participatory methods, and supporting students who may have experienced stigma or difficult life situations.

5.2.3 Design Programmes that Truly Address Gender Needs

Education initiatives should be deliberately shaped to respond to the different needs of boys and girls. This means providing safe spaces, equal access to resources, and mentorship that helps learners build confidence. When programmes are gender-responsive, they do more than help individual learners, they contribute to breaking down inequalities in society and open the door for more equal opportunities in the long term.

5.2.4 Look at Long-Term Impact through Research

To fully understand how second-chance education changes lives, there is a need to follow learners over time. Tracking their journeys can show whether programmes like SEQUIP lead to better chances in further education, jobs, or community leadership. Long-term research would give a fuller picture of the benefits and challenges, helping

policymakers and educators make stronger decisions for the future.

5.2.5 Involving Parents and Communities in Supporting Learners

Education does not happen in isolation. Parents, families, and communities are vital in ensuring learners succeed once they re-enter school. When parents provide encouragement, share responsibilities such as childcare, and speak positively about education, learners feel more supported. Likewise, when communities welcome students back without judgment and actively advocate for their success, it reduces stigma and creates an environment where education is valued. Strong community and family support can make these programmes more sustainable and impactful.

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