



From Policy on Paper to Re-entry in Practice: Integration of the Re-entry Policy for Teen Mothers into School Policies and Regulations in Day Secondary Schools in Kakamega North Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: *The right of adolescent mothers to return to school after childbirth is an important equity measure, but re-entry does not necessarily translate into effective reintegration. This study assessed the extent to which the re-entry policy for teen mothers was integrated into school policies and regulations in day secondary schools in Kakamega North Sub-County, Kenya. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Thirty heads of institutions from sampled day secondary schools provided quantitative data through questionnaires, while open-ended responses supplied qualitative explanations. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies and percentages, were used to examine policy integration, support mechanisms, implementation barriers and monitoring practices. The overall integration score was moderate ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.95$) on a five-point scale. Only 60% of schools had a written re-entry policy. Counselling was available in 67% of schools and flexible schedules in 50%, whereas parental programmes and financial assistance were reported by only 33% and 27%, respectively. Resource shortages were the most frequently reported implementation barrier (60%), followed by stigma (50%) and community resistance (40%). Monitoring was uneven, averaging 1.97 methods per school, with follow-up being the most common approach (70%). Qualitative evidence reinforced the quantitative findings, emphasizing inadequate funding, insufficient staff preparation, stigma and the need for stronger institutional monitoring. The study concludes that the national re-entry policy has not been translated uniformly into school-level practice. Written school guidelines, dedicated resources, regular staff training, systematic monitoring and anti-stigma interventions are therefore needed to move re-entry from policy entitlement to meaningful educational reintegration.*

Keywords: *Teen mothers, School re-entry, Policy integration, Secondary schools; Kakamega North*

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1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right, and this right extends to adolescent mothers who become pregnant while of school-going age. International commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the

Rights of the Child provide a normative basis for protecting girls' access to education irrespective of pregnancy or motherhood. Yet adolescent pregnancy continues to interrupt schooling, particularly where poverty, limited access to reproductive health information and services, early marriage, gender inequalities and social stigma intersect. The educational consequences are especially

severe when pregnancy is followed by permanent withdrawal from school rather than supported return and continuation.

Across low-resource settings, adolescent motherhood is closely associated with educational disruption. Evidence reviewed in the thesis indicates that adolescent pregnancy and early childbearing are shaped by socioeconomic and cultural conditions, while the responsibilities of motherhood can make sustained participation in education difficult. The problem is not simply whether an adolescent mother is permitted to return to school; it is whether the school environment, rules and support systems enable her to remain and participate. Where schools lack flexible arrangements, childcare support, counselling and appropriate monitoring, formal entitlement to re-entry can coexist with practical exclusion.

School policy is therefore central to translating the principle of re-entry into everyday educational practice. The literature reviewed in the thesis shows that school policies can either facilitate or constrain adolescent mothers. Pillow (2006), for example, argued that inflexible educational policies and inadequate provision for teenage parents may marginalize young mothers. Similarly, SmithBattle (2006) emphasized the importance of supportive relationships and school environments in overcoming stigma and social isolation. Comprehensive approaches have also been recommended, combining academic assistance, counselling, childcare and flexible arrangements to address the multiple demands faced by adolescent mothers (Gordon et al., 2018).

The Kenyan policy context recognizes the right of teen mothers to return to school after childbirth. The thesis notes that Kenya's re-entry policy was introduced in 1994 and was intended to promote the return of girls to education after delivery. However, policy existence does not automatically guarantee effective implementation. In Kakamega County, teenage pregnancy remains a substantial educational concern, with the thesis reporting approximately 9,000 cases in 2024 compared with about 14,000 in 2023. The study area is particularly relevant because Kakamega North Sub-County has a substantial concentration of mixed day secondary schools and persistent concerns about the adequacy of support for re-admitted teen mothers.

Evidence from rural Kenya further suggests that stigma, limited institutional support and weak monitoring may undermine educational continuation after pregnancy. Mutua et al. (2019), as reviewed in the thesis, identified stigma, reproductive health education challenges and poor monitoring of re-entry policies as constraints affecting teenage mothers' education in rural Kenya, including Kakamega. Thwala et al. (2022) similarly reported that implementation of re-entry policy in an African context could be weakened by stigma and monitoring challenges.

These findings suggest that policy integration should be examined not merely as awareness of a national directive but as the extent to which school policies, regulations, support mechanisms and monitoring arrangements reflect the specific needs of teen mothers.

Despite growing attention to teenage pregnancy and school re-entry, an important empirical gap remains. Much of the literature reviewed in the thesis addresses the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy, stigma, psychosocial support, childcare or educational outcomes, while fewer studies quantify the extent to which the re-entry policy is embedded in school-level policies and regulations in rural day secondary schools. The present study responds to this gap by focusing specifically on the first objective of the larger thesis: assessing the integration of the re-entry policy for teen mothers into school policies and regulations in day secondary schools in Kakamega North Sub-County. The study is significant because it shifts attention from policy entitlement alone to the institutional conditions required to make that entitlement workable.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's re-entry policy provides a formal pathway for teenage mothers to return to school after childbirth yet return to school does not necessarily mean effective reintegration. The thesis identifies persistent absenteeism, stigma, childcare responsibilities, inadequate institutional support and long periods away from school among teen mothers in Kakamega North Sub-County. Although teenage pregnancy cases in Kakamega County reportedly declined from approximately 14,000 in 2023 to about 9,000 in 2024, the educational challenge remains whether schools are sufficiently prepared to support girls after they return. In particular, it is unclear to what extent the national re-entry policy has been translated into written school policies, flexible arrangements, support mechanisms, staff preparation and systematic monitoring. Existing literature has documented barriers to re-entry and the importance of support services, but limited evidence has quantified policy integration at school level in rural Kenyan day secondary schools. Without such evidence, policy implementation gaps may remain hidden behind the formal existence of the national re-entry policy. This study therefore examined the extent to which the policy had been integrated into school policies and regulations in day secondary schools in Kakamega North Sub-County.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of this article was to assess the integration of the re-entry policy for teen mothers into school policies and regulations in day secondary schools in Kakamega North Sub-County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored in Feminist Theory (Butler, 1990). The theory draws attention to power relations, gender inequities, and social structures that create conditions of discrimination and marginalization. Applied to teen mothers, the perspective is useful because pregnancy and motherhood can place girls in a socially disadvantaged position in which gender expectations, reproductive status, poverty, and cultural norms shape access to education. The study specifically associates the theory with Judith Butler and emphasizes stigma, gender roles, and reproductive rights as important dimensions of understanding school re-entry (Fergusson, 2017). From this perspective, a re-entry policy should not be judged only by whether a rule exists; it should also be examined in terms of whether institutional practices challenge or reproduce barriers experienced by young mothers. The theory therefore provides a useful lens for examining written policies, flexibility, staff preparation, monitoring, and social attitudes that may influence how the policy is implemented.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Research reviewed in the thesis indicates that school policy can be a significant determinant of whether adolescent mothers are able to resume and sustain education. Pillow (2006) observed that educational policies and school procedures may marginalize teenage mothers where they lack specific provisions such as flexible schedules and childcare arrangements. SmithBattle (2006) similarly highlighted stigma from peers, educators and communities as a barrier to school return, suggesting that policy implementation requires supportive institutional cultures rather than formal permission alone. These studies provide a basis for examining whether schools have moved beyond broad entitlement to return toward practical arrangements that accommodate the realities of motherhood.

Other studies emphasize the need for comprehensive support. Gordon et al. (2018) argued for re-entry approaches that combine childcare, academic coaching, counselling and flexibility, while Sadler et al. (2007) reported positive outcomes from school-based childcare and parent-support programming. Terzi et al. (2013) also associated on-site childcare with improved educational retention. Such evidence suggests that policy integration is multidimensional: a school may recognize re-entry formally while still offering limited practical support. The current study therefore examined the presence of written policy alongside the specific mechanisms through which policy could be enacted.

Literature also identifies stigma and resource constraints as persistent implementation barriers. Fraser et al. (2019) identified stigma as a major challenge in the school

experiences of teen mothers, while Mollborn (2007) showed the importance of material resources in shaping the educational experiences of adolescent parents. In rural African settings, Thwala et al. (2022) found that teachers perceived re-entry policy implementation as constrained by stigma and inadequate monitoring. Mutua et al. (2019), in rural Kenya including Kakamega, similarly identified stigma and weak monitoring of re-entry policy as constraints to education for teenage mothers. These studies point to a gap between policy intent and implementation capacity.

Although the reviewed studies establish the importance of supportive policy environments, several limitations remain. Much of the evidence originates outside Kenya, focuses on broad educational outcomes, or discusses individual barriers without measuring the degree of institutional policy integration. The thesis specifically notes that previous studies did not sufficiently examine whether school-based support services and policy provisions were adequate in rural Kenyan contexts. The present article addresses this gap by quantifying policy integration among 30-day secondary schools and combining institutional-level descriptive evidence with qualitative explanations from heads of institutions. The contribution is therefore an empirical account of how a national re-entry entitlement is translated into school-level rules, support arrangements and monitoring practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design to assess the implementation of the re-entry policy. It was conducted in Kakamega North Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya.

3.2 Sample Size and Sampling

A total of 51 mixed-day secondary schools were targeted and 30 schools were sampled. The primary respondents were 30 heads of institutions who provided data on integration of re-entry policy.

3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

Interview guide questions were used to collect the qualitative data. In addition, a structured questionnaire assessed whether schools had written re-entry policies, the extent of policy integration on a five-point scale, available support mechanisms, implementation challenges, monitoring methods, external collaboration, and staff training.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The study reported a 96.75% overall response rate across the wider study and a 100% response rate among heads of institutions. Instrument validity was enhanced through

expert review and pilot testing, while internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha; the overall quantitative instrument yielded $\alpha = .813$, and the Head of Institution re-entry-policy scale yielded $\alpha = .842$.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed and summarized using means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages, while qualitative responses were examined thematically and used to explain the quantitative patterns.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures included informed consent, confidentiality and protection of participant privacy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptives

Descriptive statistics are presented in two tables, namely, Table 1 and Table 2, which present the continuous and categorical variables, respectively. The results give information regarding the degree of policy integration, mechanisms, obstacles, and monitoring.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables Related to Re-Entry Policy Integration

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Integration Level	3.30	0.95	2	5
Challenges encountered	2.03	1.40	1	5
Monitor Methods	1.97	1.40	1	4
Collaboration Extent	3.23	0.97	1	5
Staff Trained (Yes=1/Occ=0.5/No=0)	0.62	0.43	0	1

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Variables Related to Re-Entry Policy Integration

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Has Policy	Yes	18	60
	No	12	40
Support Mechanisms	Flexible Schedules	15	50
	Counseling	20	67
	Parental Programs	10	33
	Financial Aid	8	27
	None	5	17
Challenges	Stigma	15	50
	Resource Lack	18	60
	Community Resistance	12	40
	Policy Conflicts	9	30
	None	3	10
Monitor Methods	Follow-ups	21	70
	Mentorship	15	50
	Meetings	12	40

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Staff Trained	None	3	10
	Yes, regularly	15	50
	Occasionally	9	30
	No	6	20

The results show moderate integration of the re-entry policy for teenage mothers into school policies and regulations among day secondary schools in North Sub-County of Kakamega. From the findings above, the mean level of integration of the re-entry policy was 3.30 (SD = 0.95), indicating partial integration of the policy in the respective day secondary schools. Various support mechanisms that exist include counseling services and flexible class schedule in over half of the institutions (67 percent and 50 percent, respectively). Financial assistance and parents' program exist in 27 percent and 33 percent, respectively. There are challenges in implementing the policy due to lack of resources and stigma among others.

Additionally, monitoring procedures were variable in number (mean = 1.97; SD = 1.40) per school, while follow-up practices had the highest frequency (70%). The collaboration level had a mean of 3.23 (SD = 0.97), indicating moderately high external involvement, but the availability of staff training was also moderate (mean = 0.62), which represents 62% effectiveness in recording. Insights from open-ended questions validated the quantitative data, where HOIs recommended increased workshop attendance and funding as ways of integrating the policy. In conclusion, this study answers Research Question 1 through demonstrating that policy integration is partial and inconsistent and largely dependent on the limitations of resources and society, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to enhance policy adoption and effectiveness in supporting teen mothers' re-entry.

In addition to further enriching the quantitative data on policy integration, qualitative data gained through open-ended questions in the HOIs' questionnaires gives more insight into the actual experience of school leaders in relation to the policies. Three quotes of selected principals show themes such as lack of resources, stigmatization, and recommendations for improvement, which support the level of policy integration.

One of the principals stressed the significance of cooperation as a factor that led to partial success of the policies.

"Our school has tried to integrate the re-entry policy through basic counseling sessions, but without dedicated funds, we can't expand to flexible timetables or proper staff training."

This quote reflects the dependence on scarce internal resources, as indicated by the 60 percent presence of resource scarcity as a problem. Another administrator was concerned with social obstacles, showing how stigma influences both policy implementation and day-to-day functioning.

"Stigma from the community and even some teachers make it hard to fully embed the policy; parents resist, and teen mothers feel unwelcome, leading to poor monitoring."

This answer points out the interpersonal issues that have led to a stigma prevalence rate of 50%, elaborating on the inconsistency in monitoring approaches (average count 1.97) and urging for culture sensitization.

The third principle made positive recommendations for improvement, in reference to the moderate level of collaboration (average 3.23).

"To improve integration, we need more MOE workshops and NGO funding to train staff regularly and reduce conflicts with existing school rules."

This insight reflects the 50% of schools with regular staff training while proposing actionable steps, which could address the uneven support mechanisms, like the low 27% for financial aid, and potentially elevate overall policy effectiveness.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The moderate integration score of 3.30, together with the finding that only 60% of schools had a written re-entry policy, suggests a meaningful implementation gap between policy entitlement and school-level institutionalization. A national policy can establish the right of a teen mother to return, but its educational value depends on whether school-level regulations translate that right into workable arrangements. The finding is consistent with Barcelos & Gubrium (2018), whose work highlighted the limitations of policies that do not provide specific arrangements for teenage mothers. In the present setting, the absence of written provisions in 40% of schools suggests that implementation may depend substantially on individual school leadership rather than on standardized institutional procedures.

The pattern of support mechanisms further demonstrates the unevenness of policy integration. Counselling was relatively common at 67%, while flexible scheduling was available in half of the schools. However, parental programmes were reported by only one-third of schools and financial assistance by just 27%. This pattern supports the argument that re-entry is multidimensional and that formal permission to return is insufficient when practical barriers remain. Gordon et al. (2018) emphasized comprehensive re-entry support, and parent-support programming. The current findings suggest that schools in Kakamega North have adopted some elements of such support, but not at a level that could be regarded as comprehensive or standardized.

Stigma emerged as a major barrier, with half of the heads of institutions identifying it as a challenge and 40% reporting community resistance. This finding aligns with Jain et al. (2023), who associate stigma from peers, educators and communities with isolation and difficulties in educational continuation. It also corresponds with Fraser et al. (2019), who identified stigma as a significant challenge in the experiences of teen mothers returning to school. The Kenyan context adds an important institutional dimension: stigma was not merely an individual experience but was reported as affecting policy embedding, parental cooperation and monitoring. This suggests that policy integration requires deliberate anti-stigma strategies alongside administrative procedures.

Resource constraints were the most frequently reported barrier, affecting 60% of schools. This finding reinforces the importance of implementation capacity. Policies that require counselling, flexible scheduling, financial assistance, childcare, or specialized monitoring may remain largely aspirational when schools lack dedicated resources. Mollborn (2007) emphasized the role of material resources in shaping the educational experiences of adolescent parents, while the thesis relates similar resource limitations to the rural socioeconomic context of Kakamega North.

Monitoring was also inconsistent. Schools reported an average of 1.97 monitoring methods, with follow-up used by 70%, mentorship by 50% and meetings by 40%, while 10% reported none of the listed methods. This pattern resonates with the Kenyan and African evidence reviewed in the thesis concerning weak monitoring of re-entry policy implementation. Thwala et al. (2022) similarly identified monitoring challenges in an African school context. The implication is that policy integration should include a clear accountability component: schools need identifiable procedures for tracking re-admitted learners, responding to prolonged absence and coordinating with parents and other support actors. Without systematic monitoring, schools may know that a learner has re-entered without knowing whether the policy is functioning in practice.

The finding that only half of the schools reported regular staff training indicates that policy integration is also a professional-capacity issue. Teachers and school leaders may be expected to implement re-entry provisions without adequate preparation for the educational, emotional, and social needs of adolescent mothers. The qualitative recommendation for Ministry of Education workshops and NGO-supported training is therefore consistent with the quantitative evidence. Taken together, the findings suggest that strengthening re-entry policy implementation in rural day secondary schools requires a shift from a narrow compliance model toward a whole-school approach involving written rules, trained personnel, resources, monitoring and community sensitization.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that integration of the re-entry policy for teen mothers into school policies and regulations in day secondary schools in Kakamega North Sub-County was moderate and inconsistent. Although the national policy provides a critical framework for the educational return of teen mothers, only 60% of the sampled schools had a written re-entry policy, while supporting mechanisms, staff training and monitoring arrangements varied considerably. Resource shortages, stigma and community resistance emerged as central barriers. The principal contribution of the study is therefore the demonstration that the existence of a national re-entry policy does not, by itself, guarantee institutional readiness to support teen mothers. Effective policy implementation requires translation of the national framework into explicit school-level procedures and adequately supported practices.

5.2 Recommendations

1. School-level re-entry guidelines should be formalized in every day secondary school and should specify procedures for re-admission, flexible scheduling, support, monitoring, and referral.
2. The Ministry of Education and county education authorities should provide targeted implementation guidance and regular capacity-building workshops for school leaders and teachers on the educational and psychosocial needs of teen mothers.
3. Schools should establish systematic monitoring mechanisms, including scheduled follow-ups, attendance reviews, and coordinated meetings with parents or guardians, so that prolonged absence is identified and addressed early.

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