

Factors Associated with Adolescent Mother Return to School: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

The status of Adolescent mother education stands as a pivotal concern for sustainable development across the continent. The Sub-Saharan Africa region has disproportionately the highest number of teenage pregnancies but also, the lowest number of teen mothers who return back to school. This further undermines the potential of women to escape from poverty and contribute significantly to economic development and Sustainable Development Goals. This is despite most governments in the Sub-Saharan Africa region having adolescent mothers return to school policy. Using a sample of 28 empirical published peer-reviewed journals, this paper utilizes a systematic review methodology to evaluate factors that influence adolescent mothers returning to school in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Factors identified by a sample of four quantitative papers include single-sex as being more accommodative in terms of re-integration of girls who return to school and family factors as being significant in the participation of teenage mothers who return to school. Additionally, other factors include the role of family, school and community factors in the successful re-enrollment of adolescent mothers to school, and completion rate. This review paper finds that prior qualitative and quantitative research highlights how pervasive poverty influences adolescent mothers returning to school and completion, with sprawling Africa's urban informal settlements and remote rural areas being disproportionately affected. However, there is limited research on the educational resilience of adolescent mothers who braved themselves to return to school, and, successfully completed basic education against the odds. Studies on the resilience of adolescent mothers have the potential to uncover insights on the gaps in the current return-to-school policy and interventions necessary to foster gender equity, equality, and the empowerment of marginalized and vulnerable young women, thereby achieving sustainable development goals.

Key Words: *Adolescent Mother Return to School, Factors, Challenges, Support, Sub-Saharan Africa*

1.0 Introduction

Adolescence is defined as the transitional period from childhood to adulthood, accompanied by physical, psychological and emotional changes. It is during this period that many young people begin experimenting with their sexuality and, in the process, adolescent pregnancy occurs. Adolescent pregnancy has been defined as pregnancy in girls aged between 10 and 19 years. Historically, and in the contemporary global community, teenage pregnancy and motherhood have been associated with gender inequality in education. Though education enables people to make rational choices and provides them with greater opportunities, teenage childbearing interferes with girls' educational attainment in many settings which marks the end of their schooling. Lack of education leads to poverty, diseases, unemployment, hopelessness and underdevelopment. Therefore, providing girls with education is one of the fundamental rights that they deserve. It not only develops their human

capacities but also enables them and the nations in which they live, to advance both socially and economically for society advancement.

Global statistics compiled by the World Health Organization indicate that approximately, 12 million girls aged 15 to 19 years and at least 777,000 girls under 15 years of age give birth each year in developing regions (UNFPA; 2015). At least 10 million unintended pregnancies occur each year among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years in the developing world. Nearly one-third of all women in low- and middle-income countries get to motherhood during adolescence. Prior studies indicate that a total number of girls giving birth is projected to rise in Sub-Saharan Africa if the current trends persist. Today, the number of girls under 15 who give birth is expected to rise from 2 million a year to about 3 million a year by the year, 2030. Births by teenage mothers account for more than half of all the births in this region: an estimated 101 births per 1000 women aged 15 to 19 with the majority of countries with teenage pregnancy levels, above 30% being in sub-Saharan Africa. (Bright Opoku Ahinkorah, et al., 2019). Therefore, government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have attempted to address this via policies and other initiatives.

In Kenya, 15% of women aged between 15-19 have already had a birth, and 3 % of them, are expecting their first child. The percentage of women who have begun childbearing increases rapidly with age, from about 3 % among those aged 15 to 40% among those age 19(KDHS 2022). The recognition of teenage pregnancy as both an individual and national challenge, due to its related socio-economic costs, the Kenyan government formulated the “return to school” policy for teenage mothers in 1994. The policy was developed and adopted in order to ensure that more girls can enroll, stay on and complete education at both primary and secondary school levels. The "return to school" policy for teenage mothers provides for the teenage mother to be allowed, after delivery, to go back or be given support to gain admission into another school if she feels there are issues of stigma and discrimination. Further, the Basic Education Act of 2013 was formulated to ensure learners who drop out are provided with the opportunity to continue with their education. However, the Re-Entry policy for pregnant school girls in Kenya has supposedly encountered inconsistent implementation due to insensitive school environment, parental attitudes to educating girls and, social environment. Whereas many girls wish to return to school after delivery, they prefer to transfer to other schools like day/boarding mixed schools, day/boarding girls' only schools, public, private or faith-based.

The 2020 National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Education provide a framework for enhancing re-entry of learners who dropped out of school, including those with disabilities. The guidelines offer an opportunity for all such learners to acquire re-entry and access quality education in learning institutions. They provide modalities and mandate of stakeholders involved in implementation of the entry policy. Lastly, Kenya's 2009 National Health Policy allows pregnant school girls to stay in school to continue with their studies if it is possible with them. However, the same is not implemented effectively.

2.0 Literature Review

Return to School Policy in Other African Countries

In Zambia, the return to school policy process dates back in June 1995 when the Zambia Association for University Women organized a conference on the situation of the girl child in their county. The conference proposed to the government then, that girls who became pregnant ought to be re-admitted into school once care for the child was assured (Ministry of Education, 2005). This set ground for the Re-entry policy in the year, 1997. Since then, the Zambian government through the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) has allowed girls who become pregnant, to take leave and proceed for maternity and then continue with their education after delivery. The Re-entry policy was grounded in the outcomes of the Beijing Conference of 1995, a conference in which the Womens' Movement drew up its own priorities and action plan. The conference demanded that girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy should be readmitted after delivery. The re-entry guidelines implementation guide was developed and commissioned two years after, to strengthen operationalization. The guidelines were distributed to schools, stakeholders, parents and guardians to enable them facilitate school girls to complete their education after delivering.

In Malawi, re-admission policy was enacted in the year 1993 by the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology with the sole aim of promoting teen mothers' continuity with formal education. In 2006, the policy's implementation guidelines were revised with an intention of elucidating the handling of the school-boy father responsible for pregnancy, safety of the baby and clarification of the re-admission procedures. The policy provided a second chance to teen mothers to return to school after one academic year upon application. The chance depended on proof of safe custody for the child. In the same measure, if a male is responsible for the pregnancy, he is also drawn from school for one

academic year. It further states that the chance for re-entry is available once in one's school career (Revised Re-admission Policy Procedures, 2006, pp. 2).

In Tanzania, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, undertook resolute measures to address this dropout problem in various ways. For instance, in June 2021, the Government of Tanzania announced that school dropouts including pregnant girls were to be offered opportunities to return to school through alternative colleges. Later in November 2021, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology issued Education Circular No. 2, 2021 expressing that the Government will readmit drop-out students back to formal schooling. Furthermore, in February 2022, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology again issued a Re-Entry Guideline for Students who dropped out of Primary and Secondary School. The new set of Re-Entry Guidelines was titled, "*Mwongozo wa Kurejesha Shuleni Wanafunzi waliokatiza Masomo katika Elimu ya Msingi na Sekondari kwa Sababu Mbalimbali.*"

In South Africa, in the year 2012, the Constitutional Court ruled against the DBE's Pregnant Learner Management Policy that subjected adolescent mothers to a two-year postpartum ban from school, so they could look after their babies. The court was of the view that the policy excluded adolescent mothers from exercising their constitutionally protected right to education in South Africa. In 2021, Cabinet approved the National Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools. The new policy seeks to retain pregnant learners and adolescent mothers in school; thus, it does not impose any ban on them. Instead, it obligates schools to put measures in place for retaining pregnant learners and reintegrating adolescent mothers into the schooling system in the postpartum period.

Eswatini (Swaziland), has no stand-alone re-entry policy. Practices vary from school to school, but generally, a pregnant adolescent girl has to drop out of school although those who become pregnant may be allowed to return to write their exams at the same school or they may be advised to find another examination centre. The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy of 2011 (EDSEC) explicitly states that 'every child, irrespective of their life circumstance has the right to be re-integrated into the same institution that the girl was previously attending.'

Progress with Right to Education Policy in African Countries

Education is a right to every child and Article 11(6) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child affirms that “state parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that girls who become pregnant before completing education are able to continue with their education”. According to Human Rights Watch, 2018, there were around 26 African countries that had policies, laws, or strategies for guaranteeing schoolgirls re-entry back to school after pregnancy. By the year 2021, the number increased to 30 African countries that possessed re-entry policies prescribing education rights for pregnant schoolgirls. They included: Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In addition, countries that had national laws referring to pregnant school girls right to education with policies or strategies providing for continuation were Cabo del Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon. those with national laws relating to pregnant schoolgirls’ right to education like Benin, DRC, Lesotho, Liberia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone enable pregnant schoolgirls the right to education at varying degrees. Lastly, Mozambique, Sao Tome e Principe, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe have all removed restrictive policies, but still have a policy gap. The gap is evidenced by data in record that around the world, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67 million of upper-secondary school age (UNICEF). While across sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 34 million adolescent girls of secondary school age remain out of school (Leora Klapper et.al 2023). Further in Kenya data on estimated girl - drop out is 13,000 girls per year (Ikamari, 2013).

Recently, robust research addressing teenage mother re-entry to schooling has been conducted. The present review focused on answering three important questions: 1) What are the Individual level factors associated with Adolescents Return to School and Continuation to completion? 2) What are the Community level factors associated with Adolescents Return to School and Continuation to completion? 3) What are the school level factors associated with Adolescents Return to School and Continuation to completion?

3.0 Methodology

Study Design and Search Strategy

This systematic review was conducted following the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines. The text words were combined with medical subject headings such as pregnancy OR birth OR delivery with adolescent OR teen AND School

AND Education AND return to school AND School re-entry to search WILEY Online library, EBSCOhost, emerald insight, JSTOR, OECD, SAGE journals and Taylor & Francis Group. The Boolean operators included the use of "Teenage mother AND Education," "Adolescent mother AND education," "Teenage mother AND School re-entry," "Adolescent mother AND return to school," and "Adolescent mother AND Health."

Study Selection

Primary studies (both qualitative and quantitative) that reported, or contained relevant data, on teenage mother education were included in this review. The study excluded reviews, editorials, grey research, systematic reviews, feature articles, thesis and dissertations. Citations retrieved from database searches were exported to the Master Excel sheet from where duplications were deleted.

Document Selection and Eligibility Criteria/ Search Outcomes

The search yielded 200 materials related to adolescent mother education, 15 Grey literature and websites were removed and after 70 duplicates were removed, 115 full texts remained. A bibliography was compiled after reviewing the abstracts of the remaining 115 which saw 87 papers remain. Assessment of full texts excluded a further fifty - nine papers which had weak rigor, those whose geographical context was out of Sub-Saharan Africa region, and those that followed mixed methods leaving 28 papers for final review.

Quality Appraisal Framework for Literature

A total of 28 studies reviewed included 24 qualitative studies and 4 quantitative studies. All articles addressed teenage mothers' education. Inclusion criteria: articles published between 2005 and 2024, focus on Adolescent mother and education and enrollment outcomes written in English, Journals needed to have significant alignment with the research questions; Studies published in peer-reviewed journals; Studies employing quantitative research methods; Publications in English.

Exclusion criteria: articles published before 2005, studies not directly related to adolescent motherhood education, opinion pieces, editorials, articles not available in English, and duplicate studies, systematic reviews, Articles on adolescent pregnancy.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extracted from each journal in the sample included: research questions, theories mentioned, any diagrammatic conceptual framework/Theoretical framework, research design, target population, Where/Geographical context, Sampling Techniques, Name of DV, Data collected for DV, List of IVs,

Data collected for each IV, Data collection Tool Used, Reliability/Validity tests, KII /FGD Participants, Qualitative data collected, Qualitative data analysis method Used, Inferential statistical analysis followed, KEY highlight from Conclusion, FRIN, statistical assessment of reliability and validity of tool .

Descriptive statistics were used to tally and summarize outcomes of focus by the study in each Country. In addition, Frequency Distribution using Excel was used to assess gaps of each outcome under different scenarios: outcome per county/ region, target population per Country, indicators per Country, Independent variables per Country, theory per Country, research design per Country, hypothesis tested Country, inferential statistics analysis per country, moderating IVs per Country and mediation variables per Country. For the 24 qualitative journals, expert analysis of the research questions was used to distil the summary of categories of focus of issues by the prior qualitative researchers.

Expert analysis, critique, and synthesis of findings was used to identify gaps in empirical knowledge: Gaps in the Status of empirical knowledge on the Outcome as a result of what consider to be less explored Social Contexts; Gaps in the Status of empirical knowledge of the Outcome as a result of differences - Controversies in Indicators / Measures followed by different Countries; Gaps in the Status of empirical Knowledge of the Outcome as a result of Contradictions / disagreements of Within Outcome Theories followed; Gaps in the status of empirical knowledge of the Outcome as a result of Variables that you feel have received less attention (least Assessed) yet they have potential to yield new insights in the Outcome of Interest; Gaps in the Status of empirical Knowledge of the Outcome in the form of research questions around the Outcome that require research design different from research designs that Prior Scholars have followed; Gaps in the status of empirical knowledge of the Outcome as result of research questions around the Outcome that require Inferential Statistical Approach different from those utilized by prior Scholars; Gaps in the status of empirical knowledge of the Outcome as result of Variables whose statistical significance as Moderating relationship between Outcomes and IVs investigated has not been assessed by prior Scholars; Gaps in the Status of empirical Knowledge of the Outcome as result of Variables whose statistical significance as Mediation has not been assessed by prior Scholars.

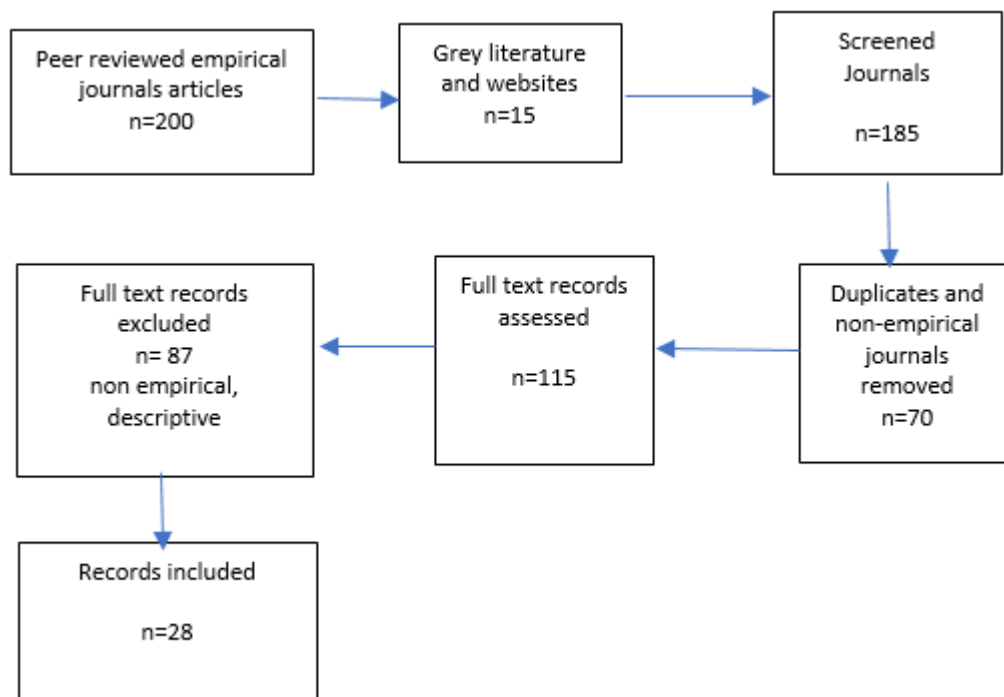


Figure 1 Flow diagram of screening and selection process of literature on teenage mothers' education

4.0 Results

Descriptive of the sampled collection of the empirical review papers

Table 1: Summary of Frequency distribution of Journals by Country (N= 28)

Country	# of studies	Number Quantitative	Number Qualitative	# of studies that had Theory
Kenya	4	2	2	1
Tanzania	3	-	3	0
Rwanda	2	-	2	2
South Africa	10	2	8	6
Malawi	2	-	2	0
Zambia	4	-	4	1
Zimbabwe	2	-	2	0
Eswatini	1	-	1	1
TOTAL	28	4	24	11

Table 1 indicates that the study reviewed of 28 studies which included 24 qualitative studies and four quantitative. All studies addressed adolescent mother education. The reviewed studies were conducted in countries within Sub-Saharan Africa region: four studies were from Kenya, three from Tanzania, two from Rwanda, ten from South Africa, two from Malawi, four from Zambia, two from Zimbabwe and one from Eswatini. Populations studied were adolescent mothers (aged below 20 years) during pregnancy and post-partum period, parents, headteachers, education officials, NGO representatives, students. The study setting varied from community to school sites with studies taking place in urban, suburban and rural areas.

3.2 Perspective from Quantitative literature on Factors influencing adolescent Mother Return to School and Continuation.

Type of School and Adolescent Adjustment

Opondo et al. (2022), studied re-adjustment in comparison to school categories with an aim of determining if there was significant difference in adjustment of re-admitted teenage mothers on the bases of school categories. The study adopted sequential explanatory design to study 242 teen mothers re-admitted in secondary schools in Ugenya sub-county of Kenya. The study compared adjustment in girls only and mixed categories. The findings indicated that teenage mothers readmitted in mixed secondary schools had difficulties in adjustment because they suffered torture and abuse

from the boys who knew their status as teenage mothers, compared to girls in girls' only secondary schools. The study reports that teenage mother re-admitted in single sex schools had higher overall adjustment and teenage mothers re-admitted in mixed school category had higher emotional adjustment. Policy implications in terms of this study is a little bit problematic because the authors were looking at traditional schools and not alternative schools (alternative paths for teen mothers who want to continue with education) empirical evidence that one would expect integration of girls in girls' school compared to the mixed schools is a little bit simplistic; especially where there is no compelling evidence that the girl's school has further support systems for adolescent mothers. What empirical evidence is there is that girl's school have less trauma, stigma that other researchers have alluded to. Since the authors introduced an argument that types of schools have significant bearing on re-integration study, comparing the different range of schools in a comprehensive way will be required. This is because Kenya, like many other countries has the following types of schools: faith-based schools, which are really driven by values of whatever religious affiliations the school is embedded. So, one could interrogate the faith-based values and whether after controlling for additional interventions for teen mothers that those kinds of schools will actually demonstrate high re-entry and continuation.

The study presupposes that empirical evidence may reveal contrary especially now that scholars perceive teen mothers to be of low morals, re-integration may compromise the high moral standards and values which they leverage to market and attract and increase enrollment. Private schools: as an extension of these authors this category might be of interest to empirically question the re-entry of teen mothers after controlling for any additional support system for teen mothers. They come in many shapes from private entrepreneurs to high end that are run by multinationals. The study opines just like faith-based schools, private schools leverage on attracting high performing students and supporting them to do well. Some scholars have pointed that teen mothers tend to have a lot of things to deal with, they also post themselves to be of high discipline caliber. There is need for empirical research on how this sort of criteria of private schools affects their attractiveness of their market for teen mothers and whether issues of stigma, trauma are less profound in that setting. Government schools: - there is need for additional research to find out whether Government schools feel pressured to comply with the return to school policy by the government and whether they have any strategies to lobby government for additional support from Government either in terms of scholarships to support economically vulnerable marginalized adolescent mothers who are interested to return to school.

Educational Participation of Adolescent Mothers and Return to School

Ayub et al. (2021) sought to investigate how family factors influence student mothers' participation in Public secondary schools in Ugenya, Kenya. This study adopted ex-post facto approach and utilized correlational research design where a sample size of 296 student mothers was involved. According to the study, education participation entails engagements such as involvement in leadership roles like class reps, prefects and immersion in extra co-curricular activities. The authors argued that student mothers were mostly involved in domestic chores such as cleaning, meal preparation that distract them from school activities. The finding of the study was that one, there is statistically significant influence of family factors on student mothers' educational participation in public secondary school. Secondly, it was found that family support reduced the burden of household chores allowing adolescent mothers who return to school opportunities to stay after school and participate in extra activities especially for day scholars. However, the study did not expound how education participation influenced perception of teenage mothers or its role in reducing stigma and isolation of teen mothers to enable them feel as part of the community. Neither did the study explore more on how education participation gives adolescent mothers a sense of responsibility or raises their self-esteem to counter the negative perception from their peer that they cannot do what the rest do. Such acceptability would encourage the adolescent mothers to remain and complete their schooling.

Individual Level, Family and Community Factors Influencing Adolescent Return to School

Many scholars have acknowledged the complexity of factors that influence the ability of teen mothers return to school. acknowledging the interlinking of Individual level, family and community factors. A cohort study of 1029 adolescent and young mothers and their children residing in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa by Jochim et al. (2022) has attempted to unpack this complexity in South African setting using structural equation model. Adolescent mothers face various challenges at an individual level. Upon delivery, adolescent mothers become primary caregivers to their infants. This state makes them struggle to return to school because of the imbalance between childcare and education. They are faced with the dilemma of ensuring good health and nutrition for their babies, including exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months which is demanding and often incompatible with school schedules. At times young mothers may face medical complications requiring frequent healthcare visits, leading to inconsistent school attendance. The study explores the complex factors influencing the return of teen mothers to school in South Africa, focusing on individual, family, and community levels. The study has highlighted self-esteem, coping skills, health and well-being as individual factors influencing adolescent mothers return to school. The authors were of the opinion

that first, High self-esteem and intrinsic motivation are crucial for adolescent mothers to overcome educational barriers. Those who believe in their abilities and are motivated to achieve their goals are more likely to persist in their studies despite challenges. Secondly, effective coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving skills and emotional regulation, help adolescent mothers manage stress and balance their responsibilities and Physical and mental health significantly affect educational resilience. Adolescent mothers who maintain good health are better equipped to handle the demands of both motherhood and education.

Family institution is the basic unit in every society. It is perceived to play various social support functions towards its members. Family status and family characteristics can influence a girl's likelihood of dropping out of school during pregnancy, and of resuming schooling after delivery. Return to school for teenage mothers may sometimes prove to be a burden as their parents are sometimes reluctant to provide support to their pregnant daughters because of the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy. They sometimes distance themselves from their pregnant girls because of the feeling of shame and the fear that the community would look down on them. Parents get angry at their daughters' pregnancy were more likely to fail in financially supporting them to return to school, which then reduces the teenage mother's chances of schooling. Parental Support: Supportive parents or guardians can provide emotional encouragement, practical help with childcare, and financial assistance, all of which are vital for adolescent mothers to stay in school. According to Jochim et al. (2022), a stable family environment, whether it includes both parents or extended family members, can offer a sense of security and stability, which is essential for educational success. Teenage mother's maternal confidence and attentiveness to their baby are shaped by the very family's quality of relations. Their care giving in teenage mothers is anchored in relationships of trust and respect that foster a sense of self-worth, acceptance, responsibility, agency, and power to act in the situation on behalf of one's self and the child. When accorded proper support by other family members and especially the grandparents, the teenage mothers are well able to balance between responsible motherhood and study. Parent's intervention in caregiving without coercing and isolation offers settled mental state to the teenage mother. Authors argue that open and positive communication within the family fosters a supportive atmosphere, helping adolescent mothers feel understood and valued.

Teen mother's environment is crucial and more so the communities in which they dwell in. These communities command the lives of the teen mothers in a big way. More often than not, the community members discourage the teen mothers from attending school since they are treated as

secondary to the rest. They are perceived to be of low morals hence not entertained to learn along their peers in the same schools and classes. In their study Jochim et al. (2022), opines that schools that offer flexible schedules, on-site childcare, and supportive staff can significantly enhance the educational resilience of adolescent mothers. Programs tailored to their needs can reduce dropout rates and improve academic outcomes. The study further highlights that community support groups, including peer networks and mentorship programs, provide emotional and practical support, helping adolescent mothers navigate their dual roles. Lastly, the study indicated availability of community resources such as healthcare, counseling services, and financial aid can alleviate some of the burdens faced by adolescent mothers, allowing them to focus more on their education.

While these factors are crucial as highlighted by Jochim et al. (2022), the interplay between these elements is complex. For instance, strong individual resilience may not be sufficient if family or community support is lacking. Conversely, robust family and community support can sometimes compensate for lower individual resilience. In addition, socio-economic disparities can exacerbate challenges, making it essential to address systemic issues alongside individual, family, and community interventions to foster educational resilience in adolescent mothers.

Factors Mediating Adolescent Return to School

One may argue that there are many factors that mediate the interaction between individual, family community factors and adolescent mothers return to school. there are very few studies that attempted to test for statistical mediation. A cohort study of 1046 adolescent mothers and their children living in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa by Jochim et al. (2023), has tried to resolve this puzzle. The authors work investigated the significance of household poverty in moderating the influence of Family/ Community on Adolescent Mothers return to school. The study was motivated by the observation that there is a paucity of evidence on the factors that are associated with mothers' postpartum return to school and the mediators of this process, particularly across sub-Saharan Africa where adolescent pregnancy rates remain high. The author's work provides evidence that lower household poverty was associated with the return to school postpartum, continued schooling during pregnancy and use of daycare.

Qualitative Scholars' Perspective on Factors Influencing Return to School

Qualitative research designs offer the best opportunity for understanding why return to school in Kenya and other SSA countries has not met the expectations and thus low return rate and high dropout rates have persisted despite many countries having those policies. Out of the sampled 28

journals, 24 journals were by scholars who have investigated adolescent mother return to school and continuation using qualitative research designs. They identified broad issues namely; challenges and barriers that adolescent encounter with return to school and continuation; adolescent return to school policy and implementation; adolescent support systems and stakeholder perception; teachers' and school principals' perspectives on adolescent mother return to school; adolescent teen mothers lived experiences and realities. There has been substantive focus on challenges and barriers (9-out-of-24), with two from Tanzania, one from Rwanda, two from South Africa, two from Malawi and one from Zambia. Seven out of the 24 focuses on policy and implementation, with two from Kenya, three from Zambia, one from Eswatini and one from South Africa. Four out-of-24 focused on support and systems, one from (Zimbabwe, one from South Africa, one from Rwanda and one from Tanzania). The rest of the categories had two studies respectively.

Stakeholder Perceptions on Interventions & Gaps

Adolescent Mother Return-to-School Policy and Implementation

Mutua et al. (2019), investigated through a cross-sectional qualitative design the Implementation of the 'return to school' policy for teenage mothers from a rights-based and feminist perspective in Kenya. The study highlights several key themes: Effectiveness of Policy Implementation where the study assesses how well the policy has been implemented in Kenyan schools, revealing significant gaps and inconsistencies; Rights Protection since it emphasizes that the policy does not fully protect the educational rights of teenage mothers. While there is provision for unconditional readmission, it lacks mechanisms to compensate for lost time, making it difficult for teenage mothers to catch up; Gender Inequality: The research points out that the policy reinforces traditional gender roles. Teenage mothers often drop out to give birth and take on care work, while teenage fathers remain in school. this enhances gender inequality; it further displayed discrimination in schools where some schools discriminate against teenage mothers by readmitting them based on academic or extracurricular abilities, rather than providing unconditional support. It highlights the need for Policy Alignment and Accountability. The study identifies a lack of alignment with other policy frameworks and an absence of accountability mechanisms, which hinders effective implementation; authors alluded that there is need for Multi-faceted Approach. They called for coordinated efforts among stakeholders to protect the right to education for teenage mothers effective. These themes underscore the complexities and challenges in implementing policies aimed at supporting teenage mothers' education in Kenya.

Nyariro (2018) used photovoice to get answers from the study participants in the question "What are your challenges as pregnant girls and young mothers in this community?". With a sample of 15

participants (girls and young mothers from Korogocho slum). Her study on re-conceptualizing school continuation and re-entry policies for young mothers in urban slums in Kenya highlights several critical themes that underscore the need for inclusive, participatory, and feminist approaches to policy formulation and implementation to support young mothers in urban slum contexts in Kenya. It identifies themes like: first, Barriers to School Continuation where the study identifies significant barriers that young mothers face in continuing their education, including socio-economic challenges, stigma, and lack of support systems. Secondly, Nyariro advocates for a girl-centered approach in policy formulation. This involves integrating the voices and experiences of young mothers to address gender inequalities in education. Thirdly, the author emphasizes the importance of participatory methodologies, where young mothers actively contribute to policy dialogue and development. This approach not only empowers them but also ensures that policies are more responsive to their needs. Fourthly, the study uses a critical feminist framework to analyze the existing policies. It argues for multi-pronged, feminist approaches to reform educational policies, aiming to promote gender equality and support for young mothers. Nyariro suggests that a broad understanding of the causes of teenage pregnancy is essential. This understanding can lead to more comprehensive and effective policy designs that address the root causes and support school re-entry and continuation. She strongly highlights the use of participatory visual methodologies as a way to give voice to young mothers, empowering them and fostering their agency in the policy-making process.

Chiyota and Marishane (2020) adopted qualitative design, with participants in the KII and FGD including head teachers, teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, teenage mothers, learners, and parents/guardians. Their study on the implementation challenges and support systems for teenage mothers' re-entry policy in Zambia highlights themes on Policy Awareness and Understanding: The study found that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the re-entry policy among stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, and the teenage mothers themselves; Stigma and Discrimination: Teenage mothers face significant stigma and discrimination from peers, teachers, and the community, which hinders their re-entry into the school system; Support Systems: The research emphasizes the need for robust support systems, including counseling, financial assistance, and childcare services, to help teenage mothers balance their educational and parental responsibilities. The study alludes that there are notable gaps between policy formulation and implementation. Schools often lack the resources and capacity to effectively support the re-entry of teenage mothers. These themes underscore the complexities involved in implementing re-entry policies for teenage mothers and highlight the need for comprehensive support systems and community involvement to ensure their success.

Through a phenomenological design, Kamanga et al. (2022) investigates managers' perspectives on managing the girl re-entry policy to prevent repeated pregnancies in Zambia. Key themes highlighted in this study addressed Policy Awareness and Clarity where many managers were not fully aware of the policy details, leading to inconsistent implementation. The study further alluded that there is need for robust support systems, including counseling and health services, to help prevent repeated pregnancies. Finally, the study recommends training and Capacity Building for teachers and administrators to better manage the re-entry policy and community involvement where they authors argue that engaging the community and parents is crucial for the successful implementation of the policy. In his study examining teacher perspectives on the school re-entry policy for adolescent mothers in Zambia, Zuilkowski et al. (2019) through a longitudinal design revealed that teachers' attitudes towards adolescent mothers significantly impact the effectiveness of the re-entry policy. The study highlighted the socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by Adolescent Mothers when returning to school. Though the study expressed that there are gaps between policy and practice, with many schools lacking the resources to support adolescent mothers adequately, it lacks the long-term outlook of the resilience among adolescent mothers despite challenges faced.

The study conducted by Thwala et al. (2022), provides valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by teenage mothers in educational settings by employing a phenomenological design, which is appropriate for capturing the lived experiences of teachers involved in guidance and counseling, thereby enriching the understanding of the policy's practical implications. The study was guided by critical theory to understand the teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the teenage mothers' school re-entry policy in the Manzini region of Eswatini. Teachers reported significant challenges in implementing the policy, including lack of resources and support while teenage mothers often face stigma and discrimination from peers and teachers, which affects their re-entry experience. This phenomenon is corroborated by the work of (Bhana et al., 2010), who discuss how stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy can lead to feelings of exclusion and shame among young mothers, ultimately affecting their educational outcomes. Thwala et al. (2022), emphasized the need for comprehensive support mechanisms, including counseling and financial aid and specialized training for teachers to handle the unique needs of teenage mothers. This aligns with findings from (Mukuna, 2021), who noted that teachers' support is crucial for teenage mothers to continue their education, yet many educators lack the necessary training and resources to provide adequate assistance. Similarly, Chiyota and Marishane (2020) emphasize that despite the existence of re-entry policies, systemic challenges persist, preventing effective implementation. The lack of resources not only affects teachers' ability to support teenage mothers but also contributes to a broader environment of neglect

regarding the educational needs of this demographic. The intersection of stigma and educational policy underscores the need for a more inclusive approach that addresses the emotional and social dimensions of teenage motherhood. Thwala et al.'s research sheds light on the critical challenges and recommendations regarding the implementation of the teenage mothers' school re-entry policy in Eswatini. The themes of implementation challenges, stigma, support mechanisms, and the necessity for teacher training are interconnected and highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to support teenage mothers in their educational pursuits. In his Cross-sectional design study Hunter-Adams et al. (2022) highlights the conflicting policies between health which promotes exclusive breastfeeding and education which promotes early return to school. It points to the need of better collaboration between the health and education sectors to support teenage mothers effectively and the importance of supporting breastfeeding while also facilitating the return to school.

Reviewed studies indicate that there are loopholes on specific timelines for maternity leave as well as clear guidelines to guide implementing stakeholders like school heads and teachers. This leaves the policy implementation at the mercy of various stakeholders who equally interpret it differently. Stakeholders hold different perspectives which range from positive to negative. Those that are negative towards teenage mothers refuse to facilitate their re-entry to schooling while those who are positive go out of their way to support their re-entry to schooling. More often than not, those that are positive lack means to implement the policy due to structural challenges while those that are negative fail to implement it citing its gaps. Policy implementation would usually depend on initial expectations, local application and its impact. From the literature it is understood that the implementation context is crucial in correctly defining the problem, matching it with available capacity, and considering the beliefs of the locality. However, major education policies are designed at higher tiers of authority, the application of policy depends on lower levels: local authorities, school boards and teachers. Studies reflected that school heads decried the absence of proper structures that can accommodate teenage mothers in school if they are to be re-admitted. It was observed that teenage mothers suffer educational difficulties, first because of their pregnancy and then because of the need to care for their child. It was evident that head teachers lack of awareness of the re-entry policy and the community culture; some parents are not ready to facilitate school re-entry for teen mothers. It is felt that more needs to be done to change this attitude among the parents towards the education of their daughters. head teachers reported that information about the policy guidelines was sketchy, which made its comprehension difficult. With most of them claiming not to have seen and read the policy which left them without a reference point in case there was need for clarification. Data was mostly absent on the number of girls who drop out due to pregnancy; teenage mothers that

have been readmitted to school under the "Radical inclusion" and "Free and Quality Education" policies; the challenges they face after readmission; and, the performance of adolescent mothers once they are back at school.

School Level Factors: Teachers' and Principals' Perspectives on Adolescent Mother Return to School Policy

Nkani and Bhana (2010) qualitative study, with male principals as target population sought to investigate male principals' perspectives on teenage pregnancy in South African schools. The study provides valuable insights into school-level factors affecting the return to school policy for adolescent mothers. The study found that male principals often view teenage pregnancy through a moralistic lens, seeing it as a sign of social decay. This perspective can lead to negative attitudes towards pregnant learners and young mothers, affecting their re-entry experience. The authors opined that principals' perspectives are influenced by traditional gender norms, which often place the blame for teenage pregnancies on the girls. This reinforces gender inequalities and can result in less support for young mothers. However, the study did not explore how the complex issues identified involving policy reform would best be resolved. Further, the study did not capture broader context of Sub-Saharan Countries educational policies and societal attitudes towards teenage pregnancy which could have given a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by adolescent mothers.

Nexus between Community level, School and Family Challenges to Adolescent Mother Return to School

Ethnographic study by Ruzibiza (2021), indicated that pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers often face significant stigma and discrimination from peers, teachers, and the community. This social stigma can lead to feelings of isolation and shame, discouraging them from continuing their education. This study concurred with the findings of Mmassy (2023) that highlighted challenges faced by teenage mothers in non-formal education systems and the unique barriers in this context. It provides valuable insights into the specific needs of these mothers and the gaps in support systems. Traditional gender roles and cultural expectations often place the burden of childcare and household responsibilities on young mothers, making it difficult for them to balance these duties with their educational pursuits. Traditional gender roles and expectations impact both teenage mothers and fathers. However, mothers are often expected to take on the primary caregiving role, which can conflict with their educational responsibilities. Fathers, on the other hand, may face pressure to provide financially, which can also interfere with their schooling. Guided by anti-oppressive and emancipatory theory, Ntini et al. (2017) revealed the existing gender-related challenges and the

negotiation of learner-parent roles. The authors provide a comprehensive view of the dual roles that teenage mothers and fathers must navigate. To counter these challenges, adolescent mothers often device coping strategies and bank on educational institutions will to create supportive environment for their academic and personal success. As noted by Malatji et al. (2023) there are coping strategies and support that can be provided by educational centers. The study offers practical insights into how educational institutions can support teenage mothers through flexible learning options, on-site childcare, counseling, and financial assistance. On the other hand, Chinkondenji (2022) opined that cultural norm, providing economic support, and reforming educational policies play a major role towards adolescent mothers return to school. Silver (2024), and Setwin et al. (2019) offer in-depth narratives of the challenges faced by learner mothers and mitigating interventions. The study adopted life history theory which is derived from scientific principles of natural selection with an aim of predicting and explaining the observed patterns in life histories of living organisms such as growth, survival and reproduction. The reviewed studies collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by adolescent mothers in different geographical contexts. They highlight the importance of community support, flexible learning options, and holistic support systems. However, there is need to diversify geographical contexts to fully capture the unique cultural, economic, and political contexts of other countries.

Adolescent Mother Education Support Systems and Perceptions

In their study, Setwin et al. (2019) highlight that schools failed to offer free education or putting learner-mothers on school bursaries which result to truancy and school drop-outs in many cases. In addition, schools were not allowing teen mothers to go to school with their babies nearby so that they could breastfeed where necessary. Besides, the study revealed that there was no support for the children of teen mothers in terms of material and financial support as well as pre-school services so that they could be provided with learning activities. On the others hand, the author indicates that school offered counselling services to learner-mothers and that the re-entered girls were offered school places so that they could continue with schooling and re-entrants agreed with guidance teachers on their submission. However, some scholars have criticized additional amenities to support adolescent mothers as turning a school to maternity schools, and some schools especially faith-based and also private are less likely to find this attractive given the reputation

In their study Ngaza and Mwila (2022), explored the support systems and perceptions of adolescent mothers in Zambia. The study emphasizes the importance of community-based support systems, including local organizations and peer support groups, in helping adolescent mothers continue their

education; Creating a supportive and non-judgmental school environment is crucial for the successful re-entry of adolescent mothers and effective implementation of re-entry policies through collaboration between schools, communities, and government agencies. This concurred with Gatsinzi (2022) research which highlighted the need for providing financial support to help adolescent mothers afford school-related expenses, counseling and psychological support to help adolescent mothers cope with the challenges of balancing education and motherhood and parental involvement and support as guided by Economic empowerment theories believe that teenage girls need economic support so as to attend to their basic needs. Amod et al. (2019) indicated that adolescent mothers often face stigma and discrimination, which can hinder their educational progress. By emulating eco systematic theory, the authors suggested that building strong support networks, including family, friends, and community organizations, is vital for the well-being and educational success of adolescent mothers. In addition, flexible learning options, such as online classes or part-time schedules, can help adolescent mothers continue their education. Kurevakwesu et al. (2023), emphasized that providing holistic support that addresses educational, emotional, and financial needs is crucial for the success of adolescent mothers, teacher training and policy advocacy is paramount. According to Setwin et al. (2019), besides access to resources and community engagement, peer support groups provide a platform for adolescent mothers to share experiences and support each other.

Studies highlighted at times teen mothers do not get enough support from their school since they are not considered as learners with special needs. The school environment involves physical infrastructure, teachers and fellow learners to the teen mothers. In these respects, teen mothers lack support from their teachers, lack counselling services from their schools to help them cope with stigma attached to teenage pregnancy and they are misunderstood and pressured by teachers and fellow learners. On coverage of school content, the learner's lack support from their subject teachers. Often the content covered while the teen mothers are away and busy with child care is never taught to them by their teachers. Upon resumption to school, teachers confer upon fellow learners the responsibility to train the teen mothers. In addition, lack of professional counselling services in schools is a major challenge. The school environment lacks counselling services that would serve to prepare teen mothers with the capability to deal with their stigma, parenthood, and schooling simultaneously. This exerts immense pressure on teen mothers and eventually they fail to cope positively resulting in school dropout. According to this study, the common scenario is whereby the class teachers are appointed to offer guidance and counselling to learners. On the other hand, the administration does not put measures in place to outsource professional counselling despite acknowledging the need for the same. Several acts portray misunderstanding and pressure from

teachers and fellow learners: teasing by fellow learners to the teen mothers from time to time during their social interaction and especially over small arguments, ridicule when teen mothers fail to meet requirements like completing the classwork homework due to the demanding childcare at home. Some teen mothers indicated that they felt misunderstood when teachers insisted that they had to perform school activities like the rest of the learners always their challenges notwithstanding. Further for girls who attended school in their pregnancy state were perceived to be irresponsible and immoral. It was feared that they would cause negative influence to the rest of the adolescent girls. In other occasions, the teen mothers were gossiped about and unkind words spoken to them as they carried out their daily activities within school compound. This action stressed them psychologically and they struggled to cope through school attendance.

Experiences of Adolescent Mother Return to School and Lived Realities

In their research, Muzingili et al. (2024) adolescent mothers face significant stigma and discrimination from peers, teachers, and the community, which negatively impacts their educational experiences. The study highlights the lack of adequate support systems, such as counseling and childcare services, which are crucial for helping adolescent mothers balance their educational and parental responsibilities. Moreso, many adolescent mothers struggle with financial difficulties, making it hard for them to afford school fees and related expenses and there are gaps between policy formulation and implementation, with many schools lacking the resources and capacity to support adolescent mothers effectively. This indicates a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by adolescent mothers and emphasizes the need for holistic support systems while neglecting exploration of successful case studies where adolescent mothers have been able to overcome these challenges. Chigona et al. (2007) as guided by conflict theory, argued that early childbearing is likely to reduce labour force participation because of the low compatibility of employment and child rearing. The study further highlighted that Adolescent mother receive insufficient support, both physically and emotionally, from schools and their families despite the struggle with dual responsibilities of motherhood and schooling which create significant stress and challenges for them. This research could be enhanced by including more quantitative data to complement the qualitative findings and provide a broader perspective on the issue. Though both studies underscore the significant challenges faced by adolescent mothers in returning to school, including stigma, insufficient support, and economic difficulties. They also highlight the need for comprehensive support systems and policy reforms to address these issues effectively. Combining the strengths of both studies could offer a more holistic understanding of the issue and inform more effective interventions.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Participants in Key Informants Interviews (KII)

KII	Frequency
Headteachers/ principals	5
Parents	2
Education officials	2
Representatives from the non-governmental organizations,	4
Teenage mothers	1
Teachers	5
Guidance and counselling teachers	2
Regional Resident Tutor	1
open school coordinator	1
managers in both sectors,	1
Nursing staff	1
Community leaders	1
Teenage fathers	1

Table 2 indicates that the most frequently interviewed groups are Headteachers/Principals and Teachers, each with 5 interviews. This suggests a strong focus on the perspectives of those directly involved in the day-to-day management and teaching within schools.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Participants Focused Groups Discussions (FGD) of 24 journals

FGD Participants	Frequency
Boys;	1
Non-pregnant girls;	1
Pregnant and mothering young women.	5
Parents of teen mothers - both females and Males	2
Ngo representatives	2
Staff participated	1
Community leaders,	1
School staff,	1
Relevant ministries officials	1
Total	15

Table 3 indicates that the largest group of participants are pregnant and mothering young women, making up 5 out of 15 participants. This indicates a significant focus on understanding the experiences and needs of this group. The data shows a diverse range of participants, including boys, non-pregnant girls, parents, NGO representatives, staff, community leaders, school staff, and ministry

officials. This diversity provided a comprehensive view of the issues being studied. The FGD data shows a well-rounded approach to gathering insights from various stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on pregnant and mothering young women which enhanced understanding the unique challenges and needs of this group while also considering the perspectives of other relevant stakeholders. However, teen fathers featured in one study. By leaving out teen fathers, it gives a feeling that research is still encouraging the already burden of responsibility to teenage mothers. discussion on who are the baby fathers and their role in childcare need to be amplified to enable the teen mothers return to school.

5.0 Conclusion

More than 30 years after the return to school policy was developed, adolescent mothers are still one of the least advocated for in education. This review has presented current knowledge on adolescent mothers return to school to gauge on their educational empowerment. Aspects found at play were categorized into six thematic areas as: factors influencing adolescent mother return to school and continuation, stakeholder perceptions on interventions & gaps, nexus, support systems and individual factors. Findings from this study highlight the multiple social and environment factors that influence return to school among adolescent mothers. Their prevalence and complexity displayed adds context to the importance of utilizing multipronged approaches to improving return-to-school policy for girls through which they are empowered for inclusive and sustainable development.

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