



Perceptions of teachers, parents and female pupils towards the school re-entry policy. A case of selected secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia

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Abstract

The importance of girl's education in any given economy cannot be over emphasised therefore, it is imperative that all girls who start grade one must be kept in school through to completion. It is for this reason the Zambian government introduced the school re-entry policy in 1997 in the education system so that the pregnant teenagers can be allowed back to complete their education. This study explored the perceptions and knowledge base of some stakeholders on the school re-entry policy in selected secondary schools in Kabwe district. A descriptive survey design was employed with the study sample of 156 broken down as follows: 91 girls drawn from 5 secondary schools, 45 teachers and 20 parents. Statistical package for social sciences was used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Generally, the study revealed that the knowledge levels of the secondary school girls, teachers and parents of the re-entry policy are quite low. This is so because, despite most respondents agreeing that they were aware of the presence of the policy, further interviews showed that they could not spell out the exact guidelines of the policy and what prompted its introduction.

The re-entry policy in Zambia has been in place for almost a decade, yet some stakeholders feel that it promotes promiscuity among pupils. A good number of teachers, about 58% indicated that there has been an increase in the number of pregnancies among school girls ever since the re-entry policy was introduced. The teachers may not show the exact statistics of this alleged increase however, what came out was an assumption that many girls are taking advantage of the policy owing to its present form which is seen as promoting promiscuity among pupils. With regards to the parents' perceptions towards the policy, the study shows that out of the 20 respondents, only 2 had positive sentiments about it. The rest expressed fear that the presence of this policy has made children not to care about their morals, in fact some of them were calling for the removal of this policy. The majority of the girls do appreciate the presence of the policy however, they feel that in its present form, most school girls are abusing a good policy.

The study further reveals that all the stakeholders involved in the study feel that the majority of the school girls are engaging in sexual activities both within and outside school which is leading to an increase in pregnancy rates. Some of them attributed this kind of behaviour to the presence of the re-entry policy. we recommend that the school re-entry policy be revised where all the stakeholders will be involved to agree.

Keywords: pregnant teenagers, re-entry policy, knowledge base, perceptions, stakeholders

Introduction

Historically, in Zambia like any other country in the world, girls have been marginalised and discriminated against, in terms of access to education compared to their boy counterparts. According to Mwansa (1997), at independence the gap that existed between girls and boys with regards to access to education in Zambia was extremely wide. This was largely because of traditional factors as well as the fact that the economy of the nation was shaped by a history of colonised dominion and uneven development.

The Zambian education system has evolved over time since independence mostly due to many changes made to attempt to provide the education that would be responsive to the needs of this country. Notable among these changes, are the 1977 educational reforms. Evidently, the focus of these reforms was to make the education system that would address the needs of the country. These reforms highlighted education as an instrument for both personal and national development however; there were no specifications to deal with girls' education in particular. Later in 1992, there was

the Focus on learning policy which emphasised the need for mobilization of resources for the development of schools. However, the 1996 Educating our future had in it specific issues affecting girl children addressed as it stressed the importance of education for all children in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. (Mwansa, 2011).

Education for girls does without doubt widen opportunities for women to contribute to national development as well as enhance their freedom of choices and greater participation in decision making. Education enables girls to make their own decisions and to influence their families positively. It saves and improves the lives of girls and women. It allows great control of their lives and provides them with skills to contribute to their societies. Osakwe (2004) ^[12], indicates that girl's education brings more equitable development, stronger families, better services, better child health and effective participation in governance. However, despite the obvious benefits of girls' education to national development, some research findings show that girls'

dropout of school rate is higher than that of boys. According to Usman (1995) ^[15], Nigerian girls, for various reasons ranging from religious, cultural, social-economic and school related factors, are not given a fair chance in the educational sector. This is true because in this country, about 7.3 million children do not go to school and 62% of which are girls. Osakwe (2004) ^[12], indicates that girl's primary school completion rate is far behind that of boys, at 76% compared to 85% for boys. This gender disparity means that millions more girls than boys are dropping out of school each year. On the 13th of October, 1997, the then minister of education in Zambia, Dr. Siamujaye announced the school re-entry policy MOE, (2010) ^[8]. Forum for African Women Educationist in Zambia (FAWEZA) and UNICEF (2004), all agree that since inception of this policy, many girls have benefited from it by returning to various schools to pursue their education and making it in life. The school re-entry policy provides that when a girl falls pregnant while in school, she should be given leave to return after delivery. The policy envisages that the teen mother should return to school when her baby is six months old for day scholars while those in boarding schools should wait until the infant is twelve to eighteen months old. Although this policy has been implemented since it was announced, it has not been made law, this therefore, can be said to be one of the reasons some of the schools are not implementing it. It is on record that the faith based schools are not implementing this policy. A study on the policy done by Nyirenda (2012) indicates that there is a great deal of disparity in terms of the re-entry policy implementation between government and grant aided or faith based schools. While in the former schools girls are allowed to re-enter the same schools they were in when they got pregnant, the latter do not fully support the policy. The study reveals that a pregnant girl in such schools will be given forced transfer which amounts to constructive expulsion from school.

Statement of the problem

Pregnancy among school going children is still one of the many challenges in the education sector and if left unchecked, will be detrimental to the efforts of providing quality and equitable education in Zambia. The school re-entry policy has been in existence in Zambia for almost two decades and due to its importance to the education of a girl child, a number of papers have been written and studies done related to the policy just to see how effective it is. These have covered numerous issues ranging from the implementation of the policy and its effectiveness to how the re-entrant copes with school life when they return. In the year 2000, the government even reviewed the policy to make it more responsive to the needs of learners and stakeholders. In her study, Sitali (2009) ^[12] revealed that stakeholders in the provision of education such as the school administrators who are at the core of ensuring the implementation of this policy in schools are trying hard to implement it but this is not coming easy as some stakeholders such as teachers, parents and pupils have not welcomed the it. Little is known about the perception that girls in secondary schools hold towards the re-entry policy. Apart from that, it is not known to what extent the stakeholders such as girls, teachers and parents know the guidelines of the school re-entry policy. It is on this premise that this study was conducted to assess the perception of girls particularly in Kabwe and to evaluate the knowledge

base of the key stakeholders about the school re-entry policy.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to establish the perception of parents, teachers and secondary school girls towards the re-entry policy.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to

1. Determine the knowledge level in parents, teachers and secondary school girls about the school re-entry policy.
2. Assess the perception of parents', teachers' and secondary school girls towards the re-entry policy.
3. Determine the influence that the re-entry policy has on the behaviour of girls in secondary schools.

Literature review

The re-entry policy in African countries

The Ministries of education in some African countries have put in place a number of measures to ensure that, in accordance with their re-entry policies, adolescents are admitted and retained in the educational system in line with national, regional, and international goals under various frameworks. These include, the Education for All Goals, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and a number of international conventions. The right to education is one of the human rights entrenched in a number of international and regional human rights instruments. It is key because it gives way to the protection of other rights. Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education is a human right. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 28, as well attests to this right. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration of 1995.

The introduction of the school re-entry policy in the education system is one major stride that has spread across Many African countries. According to Hamusonde (2003), Botswana was one of the first of the countries in the sub-Saharan region to have introduced this important educational policy in their system. He adds that, since its inception, obviously up to the time he did his research, only 30% of the entrants have benefitted from the policy.

From the above reports and indeed from other African countries such as Botswana, Swaziland and Tanzania, there has been a similar fashion of not many girls benefitting from the existing policy. A number of studies have been carried out on the policy, ranging from the implementation in various countries to the challenges that the girls who are returned to school under the policy face. While a number of these countries have embraced the implementation of the school re-entry policy, Nyirenda (2012) notes that among simpacts that the policy may have on the education of girls. In this view, the impact may also mean the possible influence that the policy may have on the girls' behaviour in school has not been fully explored.

Knowledge levels in parents, teachers and secondary school girls of the re-entry policy

Since the introduction of the re-entry policy, studies have shown that many stakeholders including Government, NGOs, and some individuals have been involved in these

campaigns to advance the cause for the girl-child and women education in Zambia. The condemning label that was tagged to pregnant school girl then has been seen to have diminished. The progress that has been made in Zambian schools regarding access and retention of the girl-child following country-wide campaigns has been quite resounding. This can be attributed to increased awareness of the existence of the re-entry policy among the various stakeholders. However, according to Omwancha (2012) [11] contend that international literature on inclusive policies indicates that for government interventions in education to be sustained and to bring about positive changes, it is important to involve all the stakeholders in education. The understanding of these circumstances or causes of gender inequity would be crucial in gaining support for policies in education meant to bring about inclusive education. This could allow a diversity of stakeholders' voices to be heard and be incorporated in policy formulation and implementation.

Perceptions of parents, teachers and secondary school girls about the re-entry policy

In an evaluation report on the process and design of the re-entry policy in Zambia, Mwansa (2011) reported that out of 128 informants at national, school levels and civil society organizations, all (100%) reported that they knew of the policy and were able to clearly articulate what it entailed. It was noted that the modes of learning about the policy were largely three and these included; circulars, hearing from friends and through the radio.

Chunga (2014) [2] conducted a study in Ndola in which she explored mothering and schooling experiences of pregnant returnee girls. In her study, she targeted various stakeholders amongst them parents of the returnee girls. From the findings, the re-entry policy was generally appreciated and seen to be working in favour of girls who otherwise would have fallen out of the education system due to pregnancy. The emphasis on the goodness of the policy by the parents, who 'felt the pinch;' is highlighted here.

“Supporting the girls’ return to school does not mean endorsing their behaviour, but helping out girls that have fallen out of the safety net.”

Moreover, others who saw it as a good policy observed that it contributed to the reduction of abortions among school going girls. Although it is not easy to determine this because abortion is illegal in Zambia, and also privately done, it was nonetheless consistently upheld in the study that the policy was well intended

Methodology

Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey design because the researcher sought to collect information about the respondents' opinions on the topic at hand, the descriptive research design was ideal because it makes extensive use of primary data such that its use in this study privileges the voices of young girls and considers their views alongside those of their teachers and parents so as to analyse their perceptions of the re-entry policy in relation to the girl's behaviour. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Since no single method ever,

adequately solves the problem of various causal factors, multiple methods of observation must be employed and this is referred to as triangulation. It is a methodological rule that should be used in every investigation (Denzin, 1978) [3]. This is so because as a strategy it provides ways of capturing information by one method which could not be done by another thereby handling the matter at hand in a more holistic manner.

Study population and sample size

The population of the study comprised all secondary school girls, teachers and parents in Kabwe district.

The sample for this study consisted of 156 respondents comprising 91 secondary school girls ranging from grade eight through to twelve, 45 teachers and 20 parents. The sample was drawn from the following schools: Bwacha secondary, Chindwin secondary, Raphael Kombe girls' secondary, Kalonga and Mukobeko secondary schools while parents were drawn from the areas surrounding the sampled schools of Kabwe district.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Type of Respondent	Gender		Re-entrants	Total
	Male	Female		
Teacher	26	19	-	45
Parent	4	16	-	20
Pupil	-	86	5	91
Total	30	126		156

Sampling procedures

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling designs. In selecting schools and pupils in some schools, purposive sampling was used while snowball sampling was used to select parents who took part in the study. Simple random sampling was used to select teachers and girls at Raphael Kombe secondary because it's a girls' school. The power of Random sampling procedure provides each member of the population an equal opportunity of being included in the sample (Bless & Achola, 1988) [1].

Research instruments

In this research, structured questionnaires, interview schedules which included in depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. A questionnaire is described by Gillham (2008) [4] as a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. A questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers and pupils. This instrument was used in order to ascertain the awareness of the policy in the respondents while an interview schedule was used on teachers responsible for the re-entry policy in these schools as well as some girls. The interview schedule was used in order to get the details of their knowledge about the provisions of the policy so that the responses could substantiate the ones from the questionnaires.

Focus group discussion was used to collect information from parents. Mount (2003, p. 14) [9] defines a focus group interview as "a purposive discussion of a specific topic or a set of related topics by eight or twelve individuals with similar backgrounds and common interest." On the other hand, Kruegar & Casey (2000) [28] view focus group discussion

as a way of promoting self-disclosure in respondents and also to know what they are thinking and feeling about the topic at hand. Therefore, the researcher used focus group discussion in this study to obtain in-depth information, perceptions, and ideas of parents about the re-entry policy and its possible influence on the secondary school girls' behaviour.

Data collection procedure

The researcher sought permission from the DEBS of Kabwe district who introduced the researcher to the heads of the sampled schools. The researcher distributed a consent form and questionnaires to the respondents who were sampled and willing to complete them. Enough time was given to the respondents so that they could complete the questionnaires, after which the researcher collected the questionnaires. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher randomly selected four pupils and one teacher at each secondary school so that they could take part one on one interview. The researcher then went outside the school premises to look for the parents to take part in the focus group discussion. During these discussions, the researcher moderated all discussions and used a voice recorder so that, the flow of the discussions could not be disturbed. The recorded discussions were later transcribed and analysed.

Data Analysis

McCaig (2010, P. 45) describes data analysis as “a process that involves organising what you have seen, heard and read, so that you can make sense of what you have learnt.” The data for this study was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software to generate tables of frequencies and percentages which were used in describing distributions of the responses. Qualitative data was analysed by coding and grouping the emerging themes. Coding is an interpretative technique that both organises the data and provides a means to introduce the interpretations (Denzin, 2005) [3].

Ethical Considerations.

The researcher is aware of ethical issues in research as such paid particular attention before commencing this study. Before collecting data from the respondents, the researcher explained to all the respondents that the information that was to be collected would be used for only academic purposes and that the information that would be kept strictly confidential. Therefore, pseudo names were used in the current study to uphold the actual identities of the sites.. Additionally, consent was sought from all the respondents and their participation was voluntary. Mugema and Mugende (2003) [10] argue that awareness of ethical issues protects the integrity of the people involved in the research, some of whom may not be able to represent themselves in the event of being misrepresented and also protecting the integrity of the researcher and ensure authentic results.

Study findings

Knowledge about the Re-entry policy by the teachers

Teachers were asked to state whether they knew what the school Re-entry policy was. The figure below shows their responses.

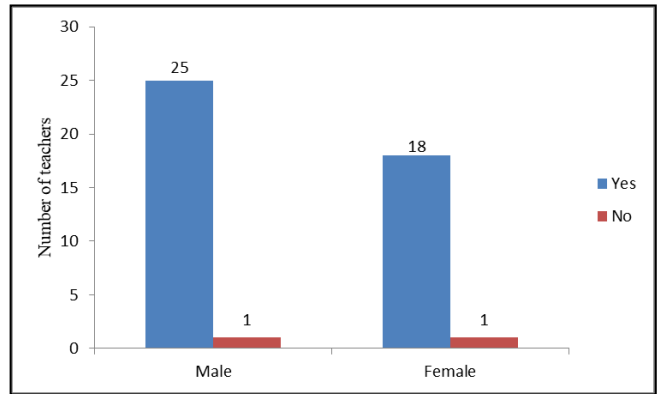


Fig 1: Teachers' knowledge of the Re-entry policy (n = 45)

As can be seen from above the majority 25 (55.6%) of male teachers and 18 (40.0%) female teachers said that they had knowledge of the Re-entry policy. Only a small percentage (2.2%) of both male and female teachers respectively portrayed ignorance of the Re-entry policy.

Further, teachers were asked to indicate the period of leave given to a pregnant school girl and the following table shows the responses

Table 2: Period after which teen mothers were allowed to return to school

Period	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
6 months after delivery	6	5	11
When the infant is weaned	6	5	11
Any time the teen mother is ready	7	6	13
I don't know	7	3	10
Total	26	19	45

The table above shows that most of the teachers thought that the teen mothers were allowed back into school at any time the teen mother was ready to do so. Of these respondents, 7 (15.6%) were males while 6 (13.3%) were female. However, 11 (24.4%) of the teachers indicated that the teen mother should be allowed back to school when the infant is weaned. Then 11(24.4%) of them said that they should return six months after delivery and 10 indicated ignorance about what was asked.

Teachers were asked to state whether they had the right to stop a pregnant girl from attending school. Their responses were as shown in the Figure below.

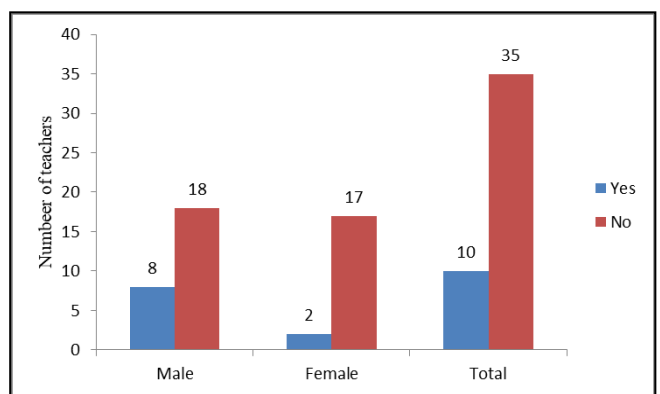


Fig 2: Right to stop a pregnant girl from attending school (n = 45)

The figure above shows that the majority of the teachers, 35 (77.8%) said that teachers had no right to stop a pregnant girl from attending schools. Of these teachers, 18 (40.0%) were males and 17 (37.8%) were females. Only 10 (22.2%) said “yes”. Regarding the reason why they don’t stop pregnant school girls from attending school, the majority of the teachers, 29 (42.2%) stated that, *the law does not permit them*” while 11 (24.2%) of them said that it was “because everyone had the right to education”. Only one male teacher stated that “teachers followed policies in relation to pregnancies”. Of the 29 teachers who said that “the law does not permit them”, 18 (40%) were males while 11 (24.2%) were females.

Pupils were asked to state whether they had knowledge of the re-entry policy. Their responses were as shown in the figure below.

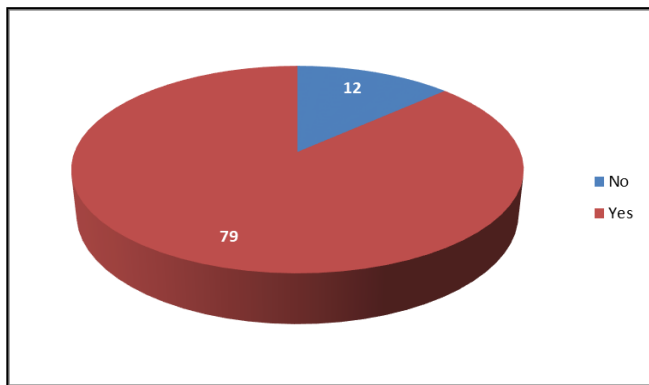


Fig 3: Whether pupils had knowledge of the re-entry policy.

The figure above shows that the majority of the pupils, 79 (86.8%) indicated that they knew what the re-entry policy was all about. However, 12 (13.2%) said that they did not have any knowledge about the re-entry policy.

Whether pupils had knowledge about the Re-entry Policy

As regards knowledge about the re-entry policy, among the interviewees’ at KLG Secondary School, three (3) out of four (4) said that they knew what the re-entry policy was all about. Only one pupil expressed ignorance about the re-entry policy. At CBA Secondary School all the pupils (4) that took part in the interviews reported that they had knowledge about the Re-entry policy.

At BW1 Secondary School, the two (2) respondents who participated in the interviews said that they had knowledge about the re-entry policy while at RAP Secondary School, two of the pupils who participated in the interviews responded that they had knowledge about the re-entry police yet another two said that they had no knowledge of the re-entry policy.

However, all the respondents that took part in the interviews, when asked to say how much knowledge they had about the policy, said that they had little knowledge or none at all.

As regards what the policy provided for the girls, pupils from KLG Secondary School said that the policy provided for the girls to be given leave and return to school after delivery. The same sentiment was echoed by pupils from the rest of the schools. However, all the pupils said that they did not know the exact duration of the maternity leave.

As regards sources of information on the Re-entry policy, of

the four pupils that were interviewed at KLG Secondary School, only one pupil indicated the source of information as the media. At CBA Secondary School two pupils out of three said that they got such information through the media and school administration.

What should happen to a girl who falls pregnant while in school?

Pupils were required to say what they felt should happen to a pupil who falls pregnant while in school. The findings of the study showed that 85 (93.4%) of the pupils said that the pupil should be expelled from school whereas one pupil was of the view that the pupil should be given leave until delivery. However, four of the pupils said that they did not know what should be done. Two of the pupils did not respond to this issue.

Period after which those who have been given leave should return to school

As regards to when pupils should return to school, 82 (of the pupils said that such pupils should be allowed back into school after one year and six months after delivery whereas six of the pupils said that a pupil should return to school whenever they felt like. Two of the pupils indicated that they did not have knowledge about when the pupil should return to school while one pupil did not respond to this issue.

Whether there were procedures to follow when granting leave to pregnant girls

Pupils were asked to indicate whether there were any procedures to follow when granting leave to pregnant girls. Their responses were as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Frequency distributions on procedures for granting maternity leave to pregnant pupils

Procedure	Frequency	Percent
Parents meeting the head teacher; talk about it and come up with resolutions	26	28.6
Pupil should continue coming to school until at least 6 months before delivery then will be granted leave	7	7.7
I don’t know	13	14.3
No response	45	49.4
Total	91	100.0

As can be seen from the table above, most of the pupils, 26 (28.6%) said that granting maternity to pregnant pupils involved parents meeting the head teacher; talk about it and come up with resolutions while 7 (7.7%) said that it involved pupils continuing going to school until 6 months before delivery. The table further shows that the majority of the pupils 45 (49.4%) did not respond to this question while 13 (14.3%) said that they had no idea.

Discussion of findings

It was expected that the teachers would express more knowledge about the policy since they are at the core of implementation however the study has shown that most teachers, parents and girls have inadequate knowledge. They are aware of the existence of the policy and they have been involved in the implementation however most of them showed low levels of knowledge of the policy. This finding is in tandem with those of Runhare & Vandeyar (2012)

which indicated that stakeholders at both community and school level had not been informed about the policy guidelines of the re-entry policy in regular schools.

The negative perceptions of the re-entry policy by the majority of the stakeholders that have come out so strongly in this study is in line with the results of a survey conducted in Uganda by UNICEF (2011) which revealed that some teachers' views on the retention of pregnant girls to school had bad influence which would spread to the rest of the girls in school thereby making them fail to concentrate on school work. In a similar manner, most of the parents thought that pregnant girls in school are a bad example to the rest and that the school system cannot accommodate them. This is an indication that the idea of pregnant girls returning to school has not been wholly accepted by some stakeholders in Uganda

Conclusion

The study established that the knowledge levels in teachers, girls and parents about the school re-entry policy are very low. They all have an idea of its existence in the education system but few of them know its exact provisions. Generally, they hold negative perception towards the policy and attribute the perceived rise in pregnancies in schools to the presence of the policy in the system.

The re-entry policy is in tandem with liberal feminist theory in trying to level the playing field for boys and girls in education sector however, the negative perception that the study has revealed including among the female respondents is not supporting the theory.

The perception and knowledge are vital to the implementation of the re-entry policy because they determine whether the policy will be accepted or rejected. It is therefore important to ensure that all the stakeholders are equipped with adequate knowledge of the guidelines and understand them completely and also they should hold positive perceptions towards the re-entry policy.

Recommendations

- The Ministry of General Education should create and intensify on the awareness on the provisions of the policy among key stakeholders such as teachers, the church, traditional leaders, parents as well as pupils.
- The Zambian government should engage the agencies of the grant aided schools on how best to modify this policy so that the grant aided schools can also implement it.

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