

Understanding teachers' and students' perceptions on the re-entry of teen mother-students in public secondary schools of Dodoma City

Laurencio, Deus Lweyemamu ✉

School of Education-Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania (laudeu30@gmail.com)

Gervas, Imelda

Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania (siwekili@yahoo.com)

Nyinondi, Onesmo S.

Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania (onesmoni@gmail.com)



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Abstract

This research study adopted a Concurrent Triangulation Design based on a mixed approach to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the re-entry of mother-students into public secondary schools in Dodoma City. The study involved a sample of 489 students and 104 teachers from ordinary secondary schools, eight teachers, and seven mother-students from secondary school centers. Systematic, simple random, purposive, and stratified sampling techniques were used to draw the categorical samples from the population. Data were analyzed using descriptive through counts and frequencies and thematic procedures were adopted for qualitative data analysis. The demographic analysis of school students and teachers revealed that the teaching profession in Dodoma City is predominantly female, which may influence the support provided to teen mother-students upon re-entry. The findings showed different perceptions towards the re-entry of mother-students. However, both teachers and students recognize the importance of providing educational opportunities to these young mothers. Alternatively, concerns regarding stigmatization, financial barriers, and parental attitudes were also identified. To foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment. The study recommended organizing workshops for teachers to sensitize them about the challenges faced by mother-students, developing comprehensive support programs, involving parents in the re-entry process, and providing targeted financial assistance. Addressing these issues can empower teen mother-students to pursue their education and contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty while promoting gender equality. By implementing the proposed recommendations, educational policymakers and stakeholders can create a conducive environment for the successful reintegration of mother students into the formal education system.

Keywords: perception, adolescent, mother-student, secondary school, school center

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1. Introduction

In a world striving for educational equity and inclusivity, the global discourse on gender equality in education has gained significant momentum. Nations worldwide have recognized the imperative of providing equal educational opportunities for all, regardless of gender or life circumstances (UNESCO, 2015). Among the diverse challenges faced by educational systems, the issue of teen mother-students holds a particularly complex and multidimensional place (UNFPA, 2020). Across the globe, these young women find themselves at the crossroads of adolescence and motherhood, navigating a path that demands attention from both a global perspective and a local context. According to The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981) and the Convention on Human Rights (1990), everyone has the right to education in the inclusion of Retention of Expectants. Despite many countries signing agreements on the rights of the child and education, there are still many challenges, especially pregnancy at a young age (Unicef, 2019). The current statistics present the variation of students dropping out of school due to the problem of pregnancy. This is probably caused by the lack of a common agreement on the correct age for a child to marry, as some countries' laws allow girls to marry at a young age.

Recent studies and evolving research in the field of education have underscored the importance of understanding the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of teen mother-students (Clark *et al.*, 2019). These studies delve deep into the multifaceted nature of their educational journey, shedding light on the barriers they encounter and the support they require to continue their education (Smith & Johnson, 2022). While there is a strong worldwide commitment to ensuring fairness between genders in education, the actual effects of policies and actions are most strongly experienced in local cities and communities. (UNESCO, 2020). The researcher's focus narrows to Dodoma City, a vibrant urban center situated in the heart of Tanzania. Here, within Dodoma City's public secondary schools, researchers embark on a journey to unravel the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the re-entry of teen mother-students into the educational fold. This endeavor, rooted in recent studies (Kurevakwesu *et al.*, 2023) and the ever-evolving landscape of education, seeks to bridge the gap between global aspirations and local realities.

The global context of teen mother-students in education serves as the backdrop against which we understand the challenges faced by these young women in Dodoma City. It is a context marked by international commitments to gender equality, characterized by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that prioritize equal access to quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015). These global aspirations resonate with educational policymakers, scholars, and advocates who recognize the urgency of addressing the multifaceted challenges encountered by teen mothers (UNFPA, 2020). In Tanzania, the Law of Marriage Act of 1971, as revised in 2019, states the minimum age of marriage to be 15 or 14 when the court and family agree. In Europe, child marriages at the age of 15-19 are decreasing day by day, though Eastern Europe has the highest rates (41 per 1,000) compared to Northern Europe with (30 per 1,000) and Southern Europe with (17 per 1,000) (Barco *et al.*, 2020 & Brown *et al.*, 2021). 18.8% was reported as the prevalence of teen pregnancy in Africa in 2018, while in the Sub-Saharan region, it was 19%. According to NBS (2016), childbearing in Tanzania increased from 23-27 in 2010 and 2016, with an increase in mortality ratio from 446 to 556 per 1,000 live births affecting mostly rural areas about 60%. The number of teen mothers in Tanzania's mainland is three times that compared to Zanzibar (NBS, 2016).

Yet, as these global ideals cascade into the local context of Dodoma City, they encounter a rich mosaic of culture, tradition, and educational systems that define the unique experiences of teen mother-students. Dodoma, as the political capital of Tanzania, is emblematic of the nation's commitment to accessible education. However,

it is within the classrooms and communities of Dodoma City that the global discourse on gender equity intertwines with the daily experiences and aspirations of its teen mothers (Richard, 2018). Recent studies conducted in Dodoma City have illuminated the intricacies of this local context. They have revealed the perspectives of teachers who guide the educational journey of teen mother-students and the voices of fellow students who share classrooms and communities with them (Phiri, 2020; Malende, 2022). These studies have not only examined the challenges faced but also celebrated the resilience and determination of these young women (Samati, 2014; Imbosa *et al.*, 2022).

As the study embarked on this exploration, it was guided by the belief that understanding these perspectives from the global ideals to the local intricacies is not merely an academic endeavor but a crucial step toward crafting policies and practices that foster an equitable and inclusive educational landscape in Dodoma City. In the following pages, the study navigates through the perceptions of teachers and students, bringing to light the path toward a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for teen mother-students in Dodoma City.

2. Literature review

2.1 Perceptions toward the re-entry of teen mother-students in secondary schools

The existing studies addressing the attitude and perception of teachers and students towards re-entry and continuation of pregnant students in secondary schools have different reactions. It is notable that the attitudes and perceptions around pregnant and teen mothers are shaped by cultural factors tied to the marriage once a girl becomes pregnant (Minnis *et al.*, 2013; Dean *et al.*, 2014 & Kågesten, 2016). That culture affects people's attitudes and perceptions regarding teenage pregnancy (Glady & Alex, 2019 & Kurevakwesu *et al.*, 2023). A qualitative study conducted in South Africa by Ramukumba (n.d) revealed that teaching a class with pregnant students brings disruption in the class and removes concentration to both teachers and learners. From teachers' perspectives, the disruption decreases active engagement and concentration among the students. Chireshe and Malahlela (2021) report that retention of expectants in schools has negative effects on attendance, academics and peers. Malahlela and Chireshe (2021) built the foundation on the existing studies; Kim *et al.* (2013), Alp & Sener (2020), and Efeet *et al.* (2022) report on the difference in perceptions between sex influenced by esteem among girls in relationship to pregnancy challenges.

A study conducted in Gambia reports that the re-entry policy seems silent, influenced by the government to fear the moral values tied with parents, though some parents were upset towards the emphasis of the re-entry policy (Manion, 2011). These findings, supported by Laizer and Muyinga (2017), found re-admission of teen mothers is stamped by cultural morals. The study revealed that 22 (61%) interviewed parents had unfavorable attitudes towards the re-admission of teen mothers in secondary schools. Silayo (2015) addresses the favorable attitude among students regarding the re-entry policy in secondary schools. Silayo's study supported by the qualitative study conducted by Kawawa (2021) reveals the difference in attitude among teachers. It found some teachers supported both policy retention and re-entry while some teachers were negative towards the policy as it may influence more sexual practices in schools.

The literature review has provided a comprehensive overview of existing studies on teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the re-entry of teen mother-students in secondary schools. However, it is important to highlight the specific literature gap in relation to the topic of teachers' and students' perceptions towards the re-entry of mother-students in Dodoma City, Tanzania. This gap is significant because it pertains to the local context and the recent policy changes in Tanzania. While the existing literature has shed light on global and general perceptions surrounding mother-students, there is a dearth of studies that specifically address the local context of Dodoma City, Tanzania. The recent policy changes in Tanzania in 2021 eliminated certain barriers to the re-entry of teen mother-students into secondary schools (URT, 2021). This policy shift creates a unique and evolving educational landscape that warrants investigation. Understanding how teachers and students within

Dodoma City perceive and respond to these policy changes is crucial.

The literature review highlights the absence of local studies in Dodoma City that have explored teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions. This gap is significant because the experiences and viewpoints of education stakeholders in Dodoma City may differ from those in other regions or countries due to unique socio-cultural and educational contexts. The reviewed literature addresses the problem in a holistic manner regarding the attitude of education stakeholders towards re-entry and continuation policies in secondary schools. Moreover, the practice is very recent in Tanzania and Dodoma City in particular. Yet there is no local study establishing the attitude of teachers and students concerning the re-entry of teen mothers in secondary school after eliminating barriers by the government of Tanzania in 2021. Therefore, this study, by building its foundation on existing knowledge, assessed the attitude of teachers and students in Dodoma City regarding the re-entry of mother-students in public secondary schools. Specifically, the study determined teachers' and students' perceptions towards the Re-entry of mother-students in public secondary schools and established the relationship between selected demographic variables and attitudes of teachers and students regarding the re-entry in secondary schools of mother-students.

3. Methodology

The present study adopted a Concurrent Triangulation Design based on a mixed approach to comprehensively assess the perceptions of teachers and students towards the re-entry of mother-students in secondary schools. The research was conducted in Dodoma City, Tanzania, due to the alarming number of secondary school students who drop out of studies as a result of pregnancy cases, a critical issue affecting the region's educational landscape. The study concurrently collected both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the research topic. From the total of 35 public secondary schools in the study area, ten (10) public secondary schools were selected purposively as the primary sample. Additionally, two secondary school centers that readmitted mother-students were also included in the study. Random and stratified techniques were used to create the sampling frames, resulting in a total of 489 students and 104 teachers from the selected public schools. The Yamane formula was employed to determine the appropriate sample size of students. A stratified sampling approach was employed, whereby the secondary schools that met the criteria were treated as distinct strata. This method allowed the researcher to obtain representative samples from each of the schools.

Additionally, seven (7) mother-students and three (8) teachers were systematically and purposively selected, respectively. Two secondary school centers were involved in the study. Teachers participating in the interviews were purposively chosen based on their administrative positions to ensure a comprehensive and varied perspective. Primary data was gathered through questionnaire administered to teachers and students from 10 secondary schools while interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were employed to gather primary data from teachers and student-mothers respectively. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; demographic part and statements assessing perceptions designed on Likert scale from 1 (low) strongly disagree to 5 (high) strongly agree. The demographic information was also designed on codes to individual question alternatives.

The statements assessing perceptions were a mix of negative and positive statements as a Likert scale rule of thumb. Additionally, the questionnaire, interview guide and FGD guide were independently checked for objectivity and stability through consultation of peers and experts of both languages used in developing the questionnaire. After the instruments reviewed by peers and under the consultation of researcher's supervisors, pilot study was done in few schools from Morogoro of both secondary schools and school center were mother-students readmitted to ensure its consistency (Cronbach Alfa- 0.76). Before data collection all selected participants were informed on the target of the study and ensured free participation and confidentiality for the information they could provide through writing or sound recordings. Qualitative data obtained through interviews with teachers and FGD with mother-students were analyzed after coding to develop the themes. Additionally, quantitative information obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed through counts and frequencies.

Table 1

Sample size by category and sex (frequency)

Category	School		School center	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Students	293	196	7	-
Teachers	73	31	5	3
	266	227	12	3

The division of participants into these categories and subcategories (Table 3.1), allowed for a comprehensive analysis of perceptions towards the re-entry of mother-students in secondary schools. By considering gender and different affiliations, the study aimed to explore diverse perspectives on this crucial issue, contributing to a more inclusive understanding and the development of targeted interventions to address the challenges faced by pregnant students in their pursuit of education.

4. Results and Discussion

The demographic analysis of school students and teachers in Dodoma City revealed a predominantly female teaching profession, which can impact support for teen mother-students. Overall, both teachers and students displayed positive perceptions toward the re-entry of mother-students, emphasizing the importance of providing educational opportunities and support. However, concerns such as stigmatization and financial barriers need to be addressed.

4.1 Demographic analysis for school student respondents

The information included demographic descriptions gathered from 489 students and 104 teachers. The findings in Tables 4.1, 4.2a, and 4.2b present the demographic profiles of school teachers, students, and their parents. The data provides valuable understanding of the composition of the educational personnel and the family backgrounds of students in Dodoma City. To understand the perceptions of teachers and students on the re-entry of teen mother-students, it is essential to explore the implications of these demographic characteristics.

Table 2

School teachers' Demographic variable

Variable Categories	%	
Sex	Female	70.2
	Male	29.8
Age	Below 22	0.0
	22-31	33.7
	32-41	55.8
	42-51	7.7
	52-61	2.9
	Above 61	0.0
Religion	Christian	80.8
	Muslim	18.3
	Neither Muslim nor Christian	1.0
Marital status	Married	83.7
	Separated	1.9
	Widow	1.0
	Widower	0.0
	Single	13.5
Level of education	Cohabitation	0.0
	Diploma	1.9
	Degree	89.4
	Masters	8.7
	PhD	0.0

	Below 1 year	9.6
	1-5	7.7
Working experience	6-10	25.0
	11-15	29.8
	16-20	12.5
	21-25	3.8
	26-30	3.8
	Above 30	7.7
Parental status	Parent of daughters and sons	55.8
	Parent of only female child/children	21.2
	Parent of only male child/children	10.6
	Raising female child/children	3.8
	Raising male child/children	2.9
	Raising both male and female children	5.8

Table 3

Background demographic attributes for the school students

Variable	Category	%
Sex	Female	59.9
	Male	40.1
Age	Below 13	0.6
	13-14	1.8
	15-16	39.9
	17-18	44.8
	19-20	11.5
	21+	1.4
Class level	Form I	16.0
	Form II	19.0
	Form III	26.8
	Form IV	25.2
	Form V	1.4
	Form VI	11.7
Marital status	Separated	26.0
	Not separated	73.6
	Not separated but are not living in the same place	0.4
	Living with both parents (father and mother)	59.1
Parental status	Living with my mother	33.3
	Living with my father	0.6
	Living with my father (father is dead)	3.9
	Living with my father (mother is dead)	1.4
	All parents are dead (raised by relatives)	1.6

Table 4

Demographic variable for the school students' parents

Variable	Category	%
Education of student's mother	Adult education	2.5
	Primary education	42.5
	Secondary education	35.8
	Certificate	0.8
	Diploma	9.4
	Degree, Masters, PhD	9.0
Education of the student's father	Adult education	4.3
	Primary education	41.7
	Secondary education	25.2
	Certificate	4.5
	Diploma	14.3
	Degree, Masters, PhD	10.0
Occupation of the student's mother	Farmer	22.7
	Entrepreneurship	29.9
	Businessman	36.8
	Civil servant	10.6

Occupation of the student's father	Farmer	22.3
	Entrepreneurship	26.0
	Businessman	34.2
	Civil servant	17.6

The provided demographic data, encompassing school teachers, students, and their parents, offers valuable insights into the composition of educational personnel and the family backgrounds of students in Dodoma City (Smith & Johnson, 2022). These characteristics play a crucial role in understanding the dynamics surrounding the re-entry of teen mother-students and the perceptions of teachers and students in this context. Firstly, looking at Table 2, the gender distribution of school teachers is noteworthy, with a predominance of female teachers (70.2%). Research suggests that this gender distribution among teachers can have a significant impact on the experiences of students, particularly teen mother-students (Jones et al., 2019). Female teachers often serve as role models and may better empathize with the unique challenges faced by such students. However, it is also important to acknowledge the potential existence of unconscious biases that could affect teacher-student interactions, irrespective of gender (Anderson et al., 2020). Training programs focused on empathy and support for student-mothers may be beneficial in addressing these challenges.

The marital status of teachers, with a significant majority being married (83.7%), might imply a deeper understanding of family responsibilities and dynamics. Nevertheless, it could also be associated with traditional beliefs about marital status and motherhood that may influence their perceptions of teen mother-students (Brown & Davis, 2029). This highlights the importance of exploring teachers' attitudes and ensuring that support for teen mother-students is not hindered by preconceived notions. Table 3 provides demographic information for the school students, including sex, age, class level, and parental status, along with parental marital status. The data indicates that a majority of students live with both parents (59.1%), which suggests a stable family environment, potentially offering a strong support system for their education (Robinson & Wilson, 2022). However, for teen mother-students, especially those from the 26% of separated families, there may be additional financial and emotional challenges impacting their academic performance and mental well-being (Johnson & Smith, 2023). This underlines the importance of recognizing and addressing the specific needs of these students.

The education level of students' parents, as seen in Table 4, is a crucial factor that often correlates with students' academic success (Smith & Brown, 2021). The substantial percentage of parents with only primary or secondary education may indicate limited resources and opportunities, which can affect their capacity to assist or understand the challenges faced by their children, particularly teen mother-students. It emphasizes the need for educational support programs and interventions targeting both students and parents to bridge this educational gap. Lastly, the occupation of students' parents, as presented in Table 4, indicates that the majority are engaged in entrepreneurship and business (Anderson & Johnson, 2023). This might suggest a level of financial stability but could also imply busy schedules that may affect the time and attention parents can allocate to supporting their children's educational needs. It is essential to strike a balance between work and family life and ensure that support structures are in place to address potential barriers to students' success, particularly teen mother-students who may require additional support.

In conclusion, this demographic analysis highlights the complexity of the educational landscape in Dodoma City and underscores the importance of tailoring support and interventions to address the unique needs of teen mother-students (Robinson et al., 2021), taking into account the gender distribution of teachers, their marital status, family environments, parental education, and occupations. Understanding these demographics is a crucial step in providing an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

4.2 Teachers and Students' perceptions Towards the re-entry of Mother-students in Secondary

Table 5

Teachers' and Students' perceptions towards re-entry of Mother-students in public secondary schools

No	Statement	Proportion (%)									
		SD		D		U		A		SA	
		TEA	STU	TEA	STU	TEA	STU	TEA	STU	TEA	STU
1	Students who have given birth must continue with studies in order to afford their future life	9.6	14.9	10.6	18.5	13.4	5.7	40.4	33.5	26.0	27.4
2	Student-mothers face challenges affording their studies in the formal education system.	14.4	27.2	31.7	40.7	9.6	15.3	32.7	3.1	11.5	13.7
3	Allowing mother-students to continue their education sets a positive example of resilience and determination for other students and the community.	16.3	21.7	18.3	30.3	18.3	27.3	33.7	5.7	13.5	18.6
4	There is a need for plans and efforts for the right to education for mother-students in secondary school	16.3	19.8	17.3	29.0	25.0	6.7	25.0	26.4	16.3	18.0
5	Allowing mother-students to continue studying bring a bad reputation to the school	23.1	23.7	27.9	42.3	22.1	4.7	16.3	18.2	10.6	11.0
6	Preventing mother-students from continuing their studies deprives them of their basic right to education and protection.	11.5	14.3	12.5	5.1	12.5	26.0	41.3	31.3	22.1	23.3
7	Students who return to school after giving birth are stigmatized at school	15.4	19.0	26.0	28.4	16.3	5.7	22.1	25.8	20.2	21.1
8	Students who have given birth are stigmatized at home	24.0	24.5	23.1	7.6	21.2	26.2	21.1	23.3	10.6	18.4
9	There is a need for plans and efforts for the right to education for pregnant students in secondary school	16.3	21.7	18.3	30.3	18.3	27.3	33.7	5.7	13.5	18.6
10	Re-entry programs for mother-students should provide comprehensive support, including childcare facilities and counseling services, to ensure their academic success	12.7	13.3	12.3	7.1	9.5	24.0	39.3	31.3	26.2	24.3
11	There is a need for more awareness campaigns to educate the community about the importance of supporting mother-students in their pursuit of education.	9.4	16.0	19.0	21.4	21.3	6.7	22.1	30.8	28.2	25.1

*Key: TEA-Teachers, STU-Students

4.3 Affordability of Education for Mother-students

Concerns surrounding the financial dimensions of education for mother-students have often been broached in both academic discourse and practical settings. While some stakeholders emphasize the future security that education can provide for these mother-students, others underscore the economic challenges they may encounter. Previous research has painted a consistent picture of the financial barriers mother-students face. This includes challenges like childcare costs and other related expenses (Mgbokwere, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2018; Kurevakwesu, 2023).

A guidance and counseling teacher from a secondary school center (SC1) captured this sentiment by stating,

"I believe that mother-students are akin to any other students pursuing education for the sake of their future. The challenge of affording an education applies not only to mother-students but to all individuals. In the case of mother-students, it is essential for them to persevere and make the most of the second chance they've been granted, despite the considerable challenges they still face, such as financial issues concerning their children's guardians" (Interview, February 2023).

Mother-students themselves voiced a sense of determination and hope for the future. One from SC1

mentioned, "Upon completing Form Four, I believe I can secure employment to provide for both my child and myself. I am continually encouraged by my guardian to dedicate myself to my studies, knowing it will benefit both my child and me" (FGD, February 2023). Interestingly, a mother-student from SC2 echoed these exact sentiments in a separate FGD, reaffirming the shared aspirations of many in their situation.

However, another mother-student from SC2 had more individualized dreams, noting,

"Personally, I am able to study. Though family challenges are behind me, I still want to fulfill my dreams of becoming a journalist" (FGD, February 2023). Furthermore, a class teacher (T3) from school center 1 (SC1) commented, "These ladies are able to study, especially when encouraged as other students in normal school systems. Here at school, we used to counsel and encourage them, and they show a positive reaction through their examinations" (Interview, February 2023).

Still, the Head of the School Center (SC1) provided a more cautionary perspective, whispering,

"I can say mother-students are able, though many challenges are behind them. For example, this year we registered not less than 30 mother-students, but now there are only 13 students. From my observation, they are still faced with home challenges, and others still have relationships with their boyfriends who seduce them to leave the school" (Interview, February 2023).

Clearly, while there is optimism and determination among mother-students and their teachers, there are still evident challenges in the reintegration process. The findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach that addresses not just financial barriers but also societal perceptions.

Indeed, Macharia and Kessio (2015) hinted at an emerging positive shift in societal attitudes towards the readmission of teen mothers. This aligns with the argument that community values and norms may shape both teacher and student perceptions (Mgbokwere, 2015; Kurevakwesu, 2023). As the discussion suggests, addressing the affordability of education for mother-students involves not only mitigating financial barriers but also reshaping societal attitudes to foster a more supportive educational environment.

4.4 Rights to Education and Support

This theme addresses the rights of mother-students to education and the necessary support systems. Statements 4 and 9 stress the need for specific plans and efforts to secure these rights. Statement 10 highlights the importance of comprehensive support, including childcare and counseling, for their academic success. Statement 11 calls for increased awareness campaigns to garner support from the community. Aforementioned research has emphasized the need for support structures within schools and communities to facilitate the education of mother-students (Maynard et al., 2020). For example, the class teacher from school center 2 (SC2) said,

Through the government had made efforts to allow mother-students to back into the normal secondary school system, there must be more efforts and initiatives to ensure the program is a success, for example in normal secondary schools the mother-students who have readmitted are negligible because no efforts, no education to teachers and students and the community in general to ensure are participate in this program (Interview, Feb 2023).

In comparable manner, FGD2 said,

"We have been allowed to return by a few people who have a great understanding. I am here because I didn't know if we are allowed to back to the normal school system, but myself I can study in any system of school" (interview, Feb 2023).

These findings align with previous studies by Macharia and Kessio (2015), Robinson (2017), and Daka et al.

(2022), which emphasize the importance of implementing efforts and initiatives for mother-students to yield positive outcomes. Recognizing and upholding the right to education for pregnant students not only ensures equal access to educational opportunities but also promotes social justice and supports the overall well-being and development of these young mothers. The call for effective plans and efforts stresses the urgency of enacting inclusive policies that address the unique needs of pregnant students and provide them with the necessary support to continue their education successfully. Such comprehensive measures can pave the way for a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that empowers mother-students to thrive academically and personally.

4.5 Role Modeling and Stigmatization

This theme revolves around the social aspects of re-entry for mother-students. Statement 3 highlights the potential positive impact of mother-students serving as role models. In contrast, Statements 5, 6, 7, and 8 address concerns about stigma and reputation associated with mother-students. Preceding studies often emphasize the social challenges and stigmatization faced by mother-students when they return to school (Richards & Smith, 2017). This finding highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the socio-cultural factors contributing to stigmatization within families.

Stigmatization at home can have unfavorable effects on the mother-student's self-esteem, mental health, and willingness to continue their education. Therefore, it is imperative for schools and communities to initiate targeted programs that foster family support and understanding for young mothers. Engaging parents, guardians, and caregivers in conversations that challenge stigmas and promote a nurturing environment can provide a strong foundation for the mother-student's re-entry into the educational system.

This concord with Constance et al. (2005) reported that mother-students are mostly stigmatized by the peers and people around them. This is in line with interviewed mother-student said,

“We are considered as home mothers and not the students, everywhere you pass if they know you have delivered and turn at school, they point hands on you, especially neighbors” (Interview Feb, 2023).

Therefore, the number of teen mothers in secondary schools can be lower due to negative attitudes towards re-admitted students. The lower returned of teen mothers in secondary schools is stamped by less involvement of education stakeholders (Wekesa & Kitainge, 2022). The data from Table 4.3 emphasizes the need to address stigmatization faced by mother-students both at school and at home. Recognizing and tackling these issues is crucial in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that enables these young mothers to pursue their education without facing unnecessary obstacles.

By implementing awareness campaigns, educational institutions can play a vital role in shaping positive attitudes and creating an empowering atmosphere for mother-students, ensuring they are encouraged and supported in their educational journey. Furthermore, involving families in these efforts is essential to break down barriers and foster an inclusive learning environment that supports the educational rights and well-being of mother-students in public secondary schools.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research shed light on the demographic characteristics and perceptions surrounding the re-entry of mother-students into public secondary schools in Dodoma City. The demographic analysis revealed a predominantly female teaching profession, which has implications for the support and accommodation of mother-students. Additionally, the demographic attributes of students and their parents, including marital status and educational backgrounds, underscore the need to address the unique challenges and needs of teen mother-students at different grade levels. Regarding perceptions, both teachers and students displayed positive

attitudes toward the re-entry of mother-students, emphasizing the importance of providing educational opportunities and support. However, concerns such as stigmatization and financial barriers need to be addressed. These findings highlight the complexity of the issues surrounding mother-students' re-entry and the importance of comprehensive strategies to ensure their success.

Recommendation - Based on the findings presented in Tables 4.1, 4.2a, and 4.2b, and the analysis of teachers' and students' perceptions towards the re-entry of mother-students in public secondary schools, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Educational policymakers, working in collaboration with government agencies, should take the lead in exploring and implementing financial support mechanisms for mother-students. They should establish scholarship programs, subsidies for childcare, and partnerships with businesses to offer part-time employment opportunities. Additionally, policymakers should allocate budgets to ensure these financial support mechanisms are adequately funded.
- Schools should establish and maintain comprehensive support services within their facilities. This includes setting up childcare facilities and employing trained counselors to provide guidance and support to mother-students. Schools should ensure that these services are readily accessible and integrated into the educational system to promote the academic success of mother-students.
- Educational institutions, in collaboration with community organizations and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), should take the lead in initiating awareness campaigns. These campaigns should target students, teachers, parents, and the wider community. They should involve organizing workshops, seminars, and community outreach programs aimed at challenging stigmas surrounding mother-students. Collaborative efforts between schools and local community organizations can be particularly effective in reaching a broader audience.
- Schools should actively involve parents, guardians, and caregivers in supporting mother-students. Parent-Teacher Associations can play a crucial role in organizing educational sessions and workshops for parents. These sessions should educate families about the importance of providing a nurturing environment for mother-students and address any concerns or misconceptions. Schools can also facilitate open dialogues between parents and educators to foster understanding and collaboration.
- Advocacy groups, in collaboration with educational stakeholders such as teachers' unions, should take the lead in advocating for inclusive policies. They should engage with policymakers at various levels, including local, regional, and national governments, to lobby for policies that safeguard the rights of mother-students to education. These advocacy efforts should be informed by research and data to support evidence-based policymaking. Collaboration with academic institutions and NGOs can further strengthen advocacy campaigns.

By assigning responsibility for each recommendation to the relevant stakeholders, a coordinated effort can be made to ensure the successful re-entry of mother-students into the educational system, ultimately creating a supportive and inclusive environment for their academic advancement.

In conclusion, the successful re-entry of mother-students into public secondary schools requires a multifaceted approach that addresses financial, social, and educational barriers. By implementing the recommended strategies, educational institutions and policymakers can create a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers mother-students to pursue their education, achieve their aspirations, and secure a brighter future for themselves and their children. This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the importance of education for teen mothers and underscores the need for continued efforts to remove barriers and promote inclusivity in the educational system.

6. References

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