

## Reflection on the Policy-to-Practice Implementation of the Re-Entry Guidelines and Their Impact on Primary and Secondary drop-out Adolescent Girls' Secondary Education Re-Enrolment Rates in Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam-Tanzania

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**Abstract:** The study was on Temeke Municipality's dropout secondary school adolescent girls' re-enrolment rates and the impact of the re-entry guidelines. In Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region Tanzania, this study evaluated the implementation of re-entry guidelines for adolescent girls in Primary and secondary schools, with a view to reviewing institutional hurdles, stakeholder views, and school-based support. The re-entry policy allowed girls who had dropped out due to pregnancy to return to school after delivery and continue with studies. A mixed-methods strategy was used in the study, which involved surveying 32 school dropout adolescents' female students, interviewing 7 teachers, and reviewing 7 school records. The results indicated that adolescent girls have a high level of student policy awareness (91%) had received substantial institutional support (69%) and good counselling service (86%). Critical retention issues, as shown by a high re-dropout rate (41%), have jeopardized the policy's effectiveness. Re-entry girls cited childcare (19%), stigma (17%) and emotional stress (17%) as the biggest obstacles. The most frequently reported institutional barrier was financial hardship (26%); lack of formal records of assistance services provided (57%). The study came to the conclusion that although the circular and guidelines were good at promoting initial re-enrolment, the lack of required sponsored help for childcare and financial needs made the policy guideline ineffective as a retention strategy. The establishment of mandatory, publicly financed childcare and counselling facilities, and focused financial assistance to the re-entry students were among the suggestions made to ensure re-entry girls' continued their normal academic development.

**Keyword :** Re-entry guidelines, drop-out adolescent girls, re-enrolment rates, school-based support, stigma, Temeke, Tanzania

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## INTRODUCTION

Social justice, individual empowerment and national growth all depend on education, which is generally acknowledged as a universal human right (UNESCO, 2021). However, early pregnancies continue to be one of the main reasons for female students' school dropout, thus impairing this right for female adolescents in many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (UNFPA, 2023; BMC Public Health, 2025). Teenage pregnancy has long been common in Tanzania. According to a recent pooled analysis of demographic and health surveys, approximately 24.1% of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 had become pregnant at least once (BMC Public Health, 2025). Socio-economic and educational disadvantages have been closely linked to teenage pregnancy; girls with less education have much higher pregnancy rates than those with at least a secondary school education.

Tanzania has tended to discriminate against pregnant adolescent girls in the classroom; pregnant students were expelled and re-entry dropout students were either prohibited or subject to severe restrictions (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Mewc, 2022). Dropout adolescent students could re-enroll in public primary or secondary schools within two years of giving birth or else in alternative education centers that offer accelerated curriculum. According to the Tanzanian government's November 2021 introduction of Guidelines for the Re-entry of Students Who Dropped Out of Primary and Secondary Education for Various Reasons (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Mewc, 2022). In addition to upholding rights under international human rights standards, this strategy sought to restore

school drop-out adolescent students mothers' access school in order for Tanzania to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality school) and 5 (Gender Equality) (UNICEF, 2023; UNAIDS, 2022).

However, a policy's adoption does not guarantee that it will be implemented effectively. Despite the publication of the re-entry guidelines in 2022, data showed that many drop-out Tanzanian adolescent mothers still encounter major barriers to attending and remaining in school. Access has been hampered by administrative obstacles including the two-year re-entry ban, and the discretion of school officials (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Furthermore, societal stigma has persisted in spite of policy reforms. Peers, teachers, and community members frequently marginalize drop-out girls who returned to school after giving birth, which negatively impacted their academic performance, attendance, and self-esteem (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Additionally, material and practical barriers still existed. For example, childcare obligations and a lack of childcare facilities were often mentioned (2024). Many girls have been shown to lack the financial means to purchase uniforms, books, transportation, and other necessary supplies. Adolescent girls in rural regions were more likely to become pregnant and had fewer access points to resources that help them re-enroll them than urban counterparts which made worse by the rural/urban divide (Factors Associated with Teenage Pregnancy in Tanzania, 2025). According to Nyaisa and Njowele (2025), there was little proof that schools regularly recorded and offered the entire range of support services including financial, social, intellectual, and emotional

services that these students required, even if government declarations and directives officially provided the right to re-enroll in school.

In light of these facts, it was crucial to investigate not only whether school drop-out adolescent mothers were permitted to resume their education, but also whether they receive adequate assistance in doing so. This included analyzing how the policy was actually applied, how families, communities, and schools viewed this change, and what obstacles continued to stifle its implementation. The application of Tanzania's re-entry standards and their impact on drop-out teenage girls' re-enrollment rates in secondary and open schools are the subjects of this study conducted in Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region Tanzania. It illuminated the road from policy to practice by examining how schools offered support services, how important stakeholders saw drop-out adolescent mothers' re-entry to school, and the obstacles that prevented effective implementation of the policy and guidelines.

### **Literature Review Ecological Systems Theory as a theoretical framework**

The Ecological Systems Theory (EST), developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, offers a multifaceted framework for comprehending how the interplay of environmental systems shapes an individual's development and serve as the foundation for this investigation. Including microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are layered systems that influence a person's life in different but connected ways, according to EST, there are which holds that human growth and behavior take

place within these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Neal & Neal, 2013).

These systems working together affect drop-out adolescent mothers who tried to return to school. The girl's immediate surroundings including her home, friends, teachers, and school composed her microsystem, where interactions that either encouraged or stigmatized her had a direct impact on her commitment to her studies. The mesosystem consists of connections between these environments, for collaboration between social workers and schools or between parents and educators (Guy-Evans, 2023). The exosystem consisted of institutions that had an indirect impact on the adolescent, such as community norms surrounding mothers, childcare facilities, and local government regulations. The term "macrosystem" refers to the broad institutional and cultural settings that influence attitudes toward adolescent pregnancy and education, including national education programs, gender norms, and legal frameworks. The chronosystem also documents changes throughout time, such as Tanzania's educational policy's transition from punitive exclusion to inclusive re-entry. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

This study used EST to place re-entry implementation issues in a dynamic web of influences, showing how failures at the microsystem (school-level discrimination) and exosystem (community stigma or financial hardship) could erode progress at the macrosystem (policy reform). This integrative viewpoint is especially helpful in urban settings like Temeke Municipality, where socioeconomic disparities and intricate social networks interact to influence the

educational outcomes of re-enrolment school drop-out adolescent mothers.

### **Tanzanian Adolescent Motherhood and Educational Re-entry Policy Context**

Adolescent motherhood continues to be a major obstacle to girls' education around the world, with the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy occurring in sub-Saharan Africa (UNFPA, 2023). It is reported that in Tanzania, over 24% of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 had started having children (BMC Public Health, 2025). According to Human Rights Watch (2017), government policy up until 2021 essentially barred pregnant students from attending formal education, thus preventing them from being re-admitted after giving birth. Because it violated girls' rights to education and nondiscrimination, this punitive approach was strongly denounced (UNESCO, 2018).

This long-standing prohibition was lifted by the Tanzanian government in 2021, allowing girls who become pregnant to either continue their education through open and alternative pathways or return to formal schooling within two years after child birth. This right is now formally recognized by the Guidelines for Re-entry of Students Who Dropped Out of Primary and Secondary Education for Various Reasons (Ministry of Education, 2022). These recommendations are in keeping with global pledges made under the Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 (UNICEF, 2023; UNAIDS, 2022), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

But putting this idea into action is still difficult. Although the policy's adoption signified advancement at the

macrosystem level, scholars have observed that its execution had been uneven, characterized by a lack of knowledge, school administrators' low financial capacity, and uneven monitoring (Manyengo, 2025; Petrie-Flom Center, 2023). This necessitates an empirical evaluation of how national commitments have been applied in the local contexts, like Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania.

### **The Re-entry Process and School-Based Support Services**

A thorough rehabilitation procedure involving academic, material, and psychosocial support is necessary for effective re-entry, which goes beyond simple administrative tasks (UNESCO, 2021; Nyaisa & Njowe, 2025). For school drop-out adolescent mothers to effectively reintegrate, school-based support services including guidance and counseling, academic catch-up programmes, mentorship, financial aid, and childcare are essential (Sumbi & Mwila, 2024).

According to empirical data, counseling which addresses the stress, guilt and social stigma connected to adolescent school girls pregnancy is frequently the most easily accessible and appreciated treatment (Laurencio et al., 2024). However, few Tanzanian schools have funding or specialized counseling staff, thus the majority of schools lack institutionalized procedures for ongoing psychosocial support (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Higher persistence and Secondary education completion rates are typically the result of comprehensive interventions that incorporate childcare, flexible scheduling, and financial support, as seen at Chisalu Folk Development College (Sumbi & Mwila, 2024).

According to preliminary data, there appears to be a significant implementation gap between policy awareness and guidelines implementation practice in Temeke Municipality, although most schools have copies of the re-entry guidelines, but less than half of them record the actual provision of support services given to the re-enrolled students.

### Stakeholders Perceptions

The microsystem and exosystem variables that determine whether school drop-out adolescent mothers are accepted or rejected upon re-entry are shaped by stakeholder perceptions, especially those of teachers, peers, parents, and community leaders (Samati, 2014; Guy-Evans, 2023). One of the biggest obstacles to girls' educational reintegration is the stigma associated with school drop-out adolescent motherhood (Nyaisa & Njowele, 2025).

According to previous studies, although policy awareness is growing in Tanzania, ingrained cultural views frequently link school drop-out adolescent motherhood to moral failure (Laurencio *et al.*, 2024). Peers may isolate or make fun of returning girls, and teachers may show doubt about their commitment to their studies. These actions can undermine confidence and result in absenteeism or re-dropout. There is still disagreement among parents and the community about the policy while some regard it as a "second chance," others believe it to be a way to condone unethical behaviour (The Guardian Reporter, 2025). Therefore, addressing stigma necessitates persistent lobbying, community sensitization, and targeted teacher training in gender-responsive pedagogy elements that are essential to guaranteeing that legislative

changes result in inclusive learning environments.

### Secondary School Dropout and Re-entry Implementation Barriers

Return to school after childbirth poses a number of complex issues that affect many ecological systems. Financial difficulty, childcare obligations, emotional discomfort and societal shame are some of the frequently mentioned obstacles (Wanyama & Simatwa, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2025). Implementation is further hampered by a lack of resources at the school level, including insufficiently trained counseling teaching staff, packed classrooms and no allocated re-entry budgets (Manyengo, 2025).

The most urgent obstacles, according to quantitative data from Temeke Municipality are childcare (19%), stigma (17%), emotional stress (17%) and financial difficulties (12%), all which reflect these regional findings. These difficulties show how government funding (exosystem), a positive school climate (microsystem) and strict policy enforcement (macrosystem) all require coordinated efforts. Without these, dropout rates after re-enrollment may remain high because school drop-out girls find it difficult to juggle their parenthood and academic obligations.

There is little empirical data regarding the implementation fidelity of Tanzania's 2022 standards, especially in metropolitan towns like Temeke, despite earlier research throughout East Africa documenting the significance of re-entry frameworks. This study fills that gap by integrating school records, stakeholder perspectives, and teenage females' lived experiences. A multi-layered analysis is made feasible by applying the Ecological

Systems Theory, which moves the conversation from policymaking to true sustainability.

## METHODOLOGY

This study examined the application and impact of Tanzania's re-entry policy in Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region, utilizing a mixed-methods design and a concurrent triangulation approach. Teachers, school administrators, community people and drop-out adolescent girls who re-enrolled to school provided the data. After choosing schools using a stratified selection technique, individuals were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling. Checklists for school records, semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data. To ensure a thorough grasp of the policy's practical effects, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in awareness, support and re-enrollment. Qualitative data were examined thematically to investigate stakeholder perceptions and implementation difficulties.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographics

The stakeholders involved in this study within Temeke Municipality, included drop-out adolescent teenage girls, school personnel and community groups especially, parents. A startling 93.75% (n=30) of the 32 adolescent girls who participated in the study stated that pregnancy was the main cause of their school dropout (Figure 1). Before requesting re-entry, the majority of girls (71.87%, n=23) had been out of school for less than a year, indicating that they acted quickly to take advantage of the re-entry

opportunity. A significant persistence difficulty was confirmed by the persistence statistics, which showed that at the time of the study, 59.37% (n=19) of the drop-out adolescent girls were still enrolled in school, while 40.62% (n=13) had dropped out once again.

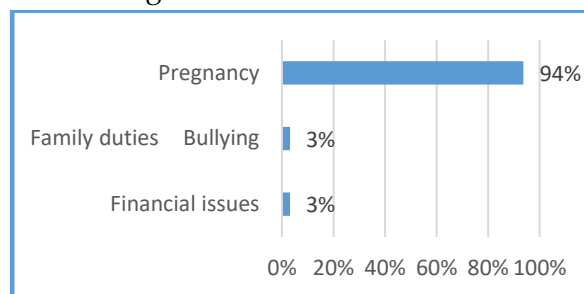


Figure 1.

### Reasons for Leaving School

### Learner Support Services in Schools Knowledge of and Access to Support Services

The findings revealed that 90.62% (n=29) of the drop-out adolescent girls polled said they were aware of the re-entry guidelines prior to their re-entry, indicating strong policy awareness findings (Figure 2). That could mean that some of the girls who had not yet returned, the reason among others could be attributed to lack of awareness about re-entry. The findings indicated that it was the school itself that the main source of information (Figure 3), since it had informed 58.82% (n=20) of the girls about the policy. Family members came in second place (17.64%, n=6). This implied that continued connection between education institutions and families was of drop-out adolescents a key factor in shaping policy implementation within Temeke Municipality.

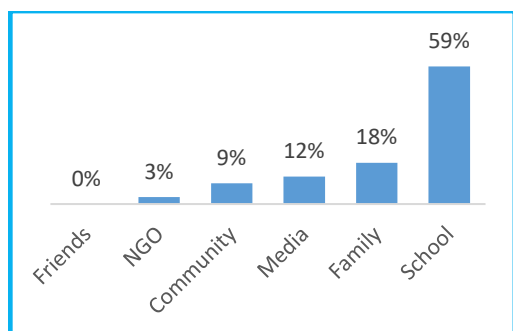


Figure 2.

Sources of Information About the School Re-Entry Policy

to this effect, the findings revealed that, of the returning females, 68.75% (n=22) acknowledged that their school offered some kind of active support. Besides, 86.36% (n=19) of the girls who received some form of assistance rated counselling as the most useful support, according to the qualitative data, which is confirmed by quantitative measurements (Figure 3). Apart from psychosocial support services, the findings revealed a serious lack of structural and material support services, as evidenced by the fact that just 4.5% (n=1) of the respondents mentioned other forms of assistance, such as financial aid, childcare, and academic support. Teachers affirmed this focus, pointing out that counselling helps drop-out girls "feel accepted as students and "regain confidence" rather than being stigmatized" (Teacher Interview 3).

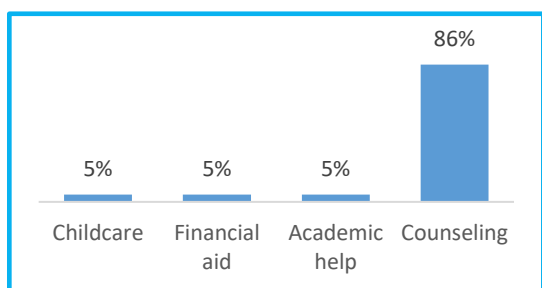


Figure 3.

Types of Support Perceived as Most Helpful by Respondents

### Support Institutionalization

It was observed that although 85.7% schools and open learning centres (open schools) engaged in this study had re-entry policy and its guidelines documents available in the school records. Just 42.8% had records that proved they had provided certain assistance services. Of the few services recorded, counseling was the most popular (50%) followed by academic catch-up (37.5%), as Figure 4 illustrates. This disparity between the low systematic documentation of resources provided and the high reported availability of counseling points to the fact that many implementation efforts were carried out on an as-needed basis rather than being consistently incorporated into school records. Teachers, who frequently make personal contributions due to a lack of official funding, observed that this institutional vacuum impeded efficient monitoring and resource allocation.

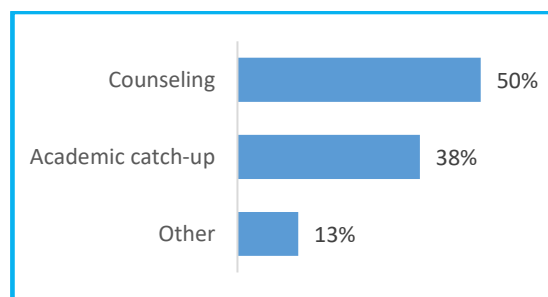


Figure 4.

Documented Support Services in School Records in Temeke Municipality

### Perceptions of Stakeholders on Re-entry Experiences of Re-entry girls with In-School Peers

The adolescent school drop-out mothers upon re-enrollment had a variety of experiences (Figure 5). Of those that returned, 46.87% (n=15) said they felt accepted, whilst 6.25% (n=2) said they

were rejected by peers. The fact is that 17.30% of the girls (Figure 7) reported stigma as their biggest challenge after returning. Besides, 50% (n=16) reported a positive level of support from their teachers and students, indicating slightly greater positive support from peers and staff. This mixed environment was qualitatively corroborated by educators and administrators, who noted that whereas awareness efforts encourage acceptance, "*certain teachers expressed doubt about the girls' commitment*" and some students saw the re-entry girls as a "*bad influence or responded with discrimination.*"

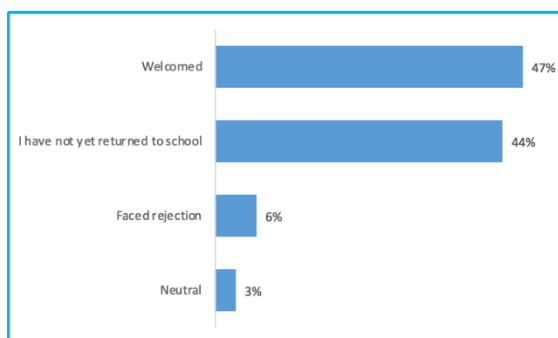


Figure 5.

How Were Re-Entry Adolescent Mothers Treated Upon Returning to School in Temeke Municipality?

### Community and Parental Perceptions

In the study's theoretical review, the community environment a crucial component of the Exosystem, also offered opposing viewpoints. The findings revealed that 50% (n=16) of the re-entry girls reported high parental support (Figure 6). Many parents saw the re-entry policy as a "*golden chance*" for their drop-out girls, according to educators and officials. According to some community members, "*promotes bad behavior, brings shame to families, or could negatively influence other students*" (Teacher Interview 5). Nevertheless, negative sentiments are still

prevalent in the larger community. Moreover, according to the checklist used in the study, approximately 43% of the schools stated that the policy had not been disseminated to the general public, which fueled these different opinions and ongoing societal stigma.

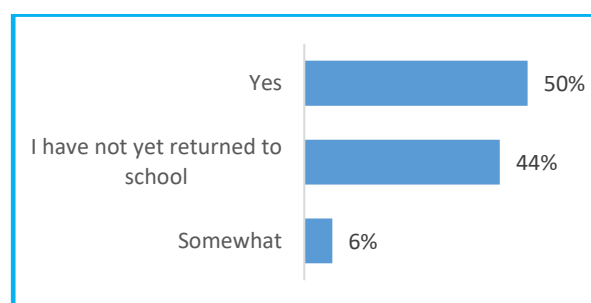


Figure 6.

Did parents support adolescent mothers' return to school in Temeke Municipality?

### Obstacles to Effective Implementation Barriers Mentioned by the Re-entry Adolescent Mothers

The barriers that the re-entry girls described were directly related to the high re-dropout rate 40.62% (n=13). The findings revealed that, childcare (19.23%, n=10), stigma (17.30%, n=9), emotional stress (17.30%, n=9), and financial limitations (11.53%, n=6) were the main challenges often encountered by girls who re-enrolled after dropping out of the formal school system (Figure 7). The stress of juggling education and early parenting was highlighted by these social and practical barriers.

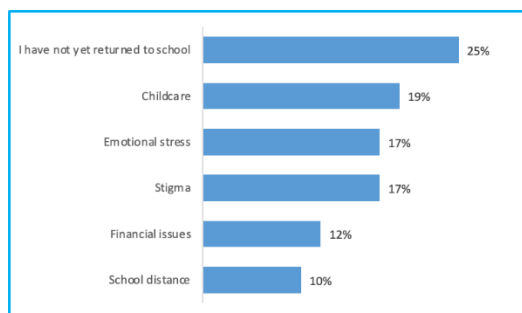


Figure 7.

### Difficulties Faced by Adolescent Mothers Upon Returning to School in Temeke Municipality

#### Resource and Institutional Barriers

As a matter of fact, teachers and school administration confirmed similar challenges, citing attitudinal and resource problems as the main obstacles affecting drop-out girls' re-entry. Financial hardship was the most frequently reported barrier to re-enrollment (26.31%, n=5), followed by stigma (21.05%, n=4) and childcare gaps (15.78%, n=3), according to institutional records (Figure 8). On top of these, negative mindset was also noted where, according to school reports, some parents, teachers and community members expressed resistance to drop-out girls' re-entry particularly these related to pregnancy cases.

Additionally, qualitative data showed that, because of a lack of teachers, classrooms and resources, it was difficult to combine regular classes with re-entry programmes. The policy's ambiguous direction on childcare and financial support, including fees, supplies and transportation, was another issue that was found to be problematic. The data validated the fact that, while some barriers were both highly practical such as money and childcare; others were highly social and psychological such as stigma and mindsets, functioning at the Microsystem

and Exosystem levels to subvert the goal of there-entry policy and its implementation guidelines.

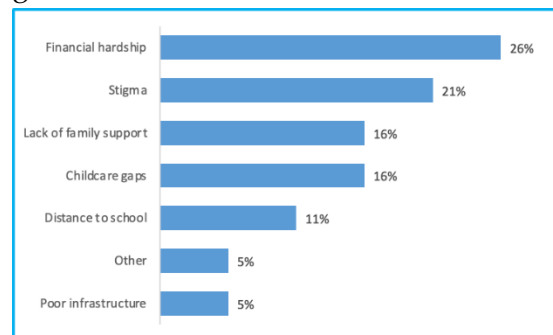


Figure 8.

### Recorded Barriers Affecting School Drop-Out Adolescent Girls' Re-Enrolment in Temeke Municipality

#### The Re-entry Policy's Most Helpful Elements

It was one of the objectives for this study to determine which Re-entry Guideline elements were thought to be most helpful to adolescent mothers who had returned to school. It was found that, 33% of respondents indicated that psychosocial support services mostly named as guidance and counseling, was the most valued support service, (Figure 9). This study emphasizes how important psychological assistance is in helping school drop-out adolescent mothers, who may return to school with social isolation, mental anguish and stigma, with a view to help them regain their confidence and sense of self. In addition to helping in these students' reintegration, counseling sessions encourage motivation and consistent attendance.

Furthermore, 17% of respondents cited financial assistance and protection against stigma as important factors in their satisfying re-entry experience. In order to guarantee that re-entry outcomes in meaningful engagement, these factors highlighted the significance of a secure,

welcoming environment and tangible assistance. Academic and logistical changes were also required for retention, as evidenced by the 11% who mentioned catch-up learning programmes, flexible school schedules and additional resources like peer mentorship (Figure 9). Together, these results imply that although counselling is still essential for a successful re-entry, the policy's effects could be greater when structural, financial and emotional supports work in concert to address the complex issues that drop-out adolescent mothers face when they return to school.

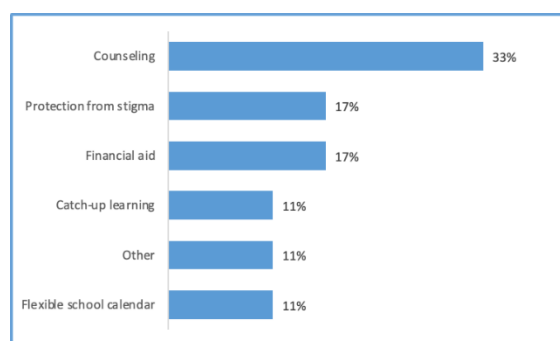


Figure 9.

#### Perceived Usefulness of Re-Entry Policy Components Among Re-Enrolled Girls in Temeke Municipality

Above all, although the Re-entry Guidelines have successfully established the right to return (a success at the macrosystem level), the results confirm that systemic and social constraints significantly limit their practical implementation. One encouraging observation was the overwhelming dependence on counselling as the most successful kind of support, which indicated that schools were giving the re-entry girls' psychological well-being and reintegration top priority. This emphasis on psychological support, however, was frequently compensatory, treating the

emotional harm brought on by the rejection and stigma that persist in the community and school settings (Microsystem).

The observed principal constraints of childcare obligations and financial limitations were closely linked to the high secondary school dropout rate (40.62%). The Ecological Systems Theory offers a framework for comprehending this failure, demonstrating that institutionally beneficial changes (policy adoption) were offset by the Exosystem's shortcomings (lack of state/community funding for childcare) and the Microsystem's enduringly negative attitudes (shame from peers and some employees). In order for the policy to be effective, structural support must be provided to match the institutional effort, particularly in the form of resources that help re-entry adolescent school mothers manage their twin responsibilities as mothers and students when they decide to return to school.

#### CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of Tanzania's Re-entry policy and re-enrolment Guidelines and their influence on school drop-out adolescent girls' re-enrolment in Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania. The findings reveal that while the policy has successfully expanded educational access and awareness, the targeted girls knew about the guidelines and received some school-based support; its impact was constrained by socio-economic and institutional barriers. Counselling, reported by respondents as the most helpful support, effectively facilitated emotional reintegration and motivation to continue schooling. However, re-dropout rate demonstrated that policy success remains limited, as

many girls struggle with childcare, stigma and emotional stress, all of which undermined persistence and completion.

Despite institutional commitment, challenges such as community stigma, inadequate financial aid, and lack of structured childcare persisted. Over half of the schools lacked formal documentation of re-entry learner support services offered to re-enrolled learners, highlighting weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms. These gaps revealed that while the policy ensured re-entry, it did not guarantee retention or academic success. To address these challenges, the Ministry of Education should fund and institutionalize school-based childcare services, integrate targeted financial aid for re-entry adolescent mothers, and provide continuous teacher training on psychosocial and gender-responsive pedagogy.

At the school and community levels, systematic counselling, improved record-keeping, and regular anti-stigma campaigns were essential to foster supportive learning environments. Partnerships between schools, parents, and local organizations should prioritize community sensitization and parental engagement to transform social attitudes and reinforce family support. Sustainable success of the re-entry policy and implementation guidelines therefore depends on coordinated, multi-level interventions that address both the institutional and socio-cultural barriers facing re-entry adolescent mothers ensuring that re-entry translates into meaningful participation, retention, and educational development of the re-enrolled students.

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**Conceptualization:** All authors ;

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