Exploring the Strategies for Promoting Academic Progression to the Post-Pregnant Students in Ilala District - Tanzania

Raya Mohamed Saleh and Onesmo Amos
Jordan University College
Tanzania East Africa College of St. Augustine University of Tanzania
P. O. Box 1878 Morogoro, Tanzania – East
rayasaleh54@gmail.com

Abstract:- This study explored the strategies that promote academic progression for post-pregnant students in Ilala District, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach, using a case study design. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 50 participants, including parents, teachers, community leaders, coordinators, and students, through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. The data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that flexible class schedules, online courses, and alternative learning methods are essential to accommodate childcare responsibilities and recovery after childbirth, and on-campus childcare services emerged as pivotal in helping students balance parenting duties with academic studies, alleviating stress and enhancing academic focus. The study concludes that by supporting the aforementioned initiatives with financial aid and healthcare services, institutions can create a supportive environment that empowers post-pregnant students to pursue their educational goals effectively, potentially leading to a brighter future for these students. Therefore, the study recommended adopting comprehensive policies incorporating these measures into the educational system to provide post-pregnant students with ongoing assistance and achievement.

Keywords:- Academic Progression, Strategies, and Post-Pregnant Students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a global issue affecting countries worldwide, irrespective of their development status. In Tanzania, it directly correlates with high rates of school dropout among girls. UNICEF (2021) reports that early marriage and pregnancy significantly hinder girls' education, with nearly 3,700 girls leaving primary and secondary schools in 2016 due to teenage pregnancy alone.

Research by Moshi and Tilisho (2023) in Dodoma identifies urban teenagers from economically disadvantaged families with low maternal education, cultural pressures for early marriage, peer influence, and experiences of sexual abuse as more vulnerable to teenage pregnancy. Mgomera

(2021) notes the consequences, including school dropout, family conflicts, physical health effects, and increased risk of sexually transmitted infections.

Women's education is pivotal for global development, yet many illiterate adults are female (Mokoena & Van Breda, 2021; Somani, 2017; UNESCO, 2023). Teenage pregnancy exacerbates school dropout rates among girls, with many not returning to school after childbirth (Ngakamba, 2021). Despite policy efforts, the issue persists (Nkosi & Pretorius, 2019).

In the United Republic of Tanzania, the former President of the regime of the 2017 banon pregnant students attending school was critiqued as punitive, hindering their educational prospects (The Guardian, 2017). However, the recent President reversed this policy in 2021 by advocating for women's rights and reinstating the right of post- pregnant students to continue their education. Tanzania's Secondary Education QualityImprovement Program, initiated in 2021 through Circular No. 2 of 2021, supports alternative education pathways for adolescent mothers.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies by Ngaza and Mwila (2022), Musili et al. (2020), and Shrestha et al. (2021) emphasise a need to support the academic progression of post-pregnant students.Despite that, little is known in Tanzania about the ways to support the academic progression of post-pregnant students. This study aims to explore effective strategies promoting academic advancement for these students, focusing on community support, financial aid, and conducive learning environments. Through this investigation, the study seeks to identify areas for improvement in the well-being and educational outcomes of post-pregnant students.

A. Research Objective

- To explore effective strategies for promoting academic progression for post-pregnant students in Tanzania.

B. Research Question

- What are effective strategies for promoting academic progression for post-pregnant students in Tanzania?

C. Theoretical Framework

This section contains reviews of the theory related to the academic progression of post-pregnant students. The basic concepts of the theory and its relationship to the study are described as follows:

D. The Stigma Theory

The Stigma Theory, as conceptualised by Erving Goffman, provides a lens to understand how social stigmas associated with pregnancy, particularly adolescent pregnancy, affect individuals' social identities and interactions (Asino, 2023; Sakakibara, 2024). In the context of education, pregnant students and those who return to school after childbirth often face stigmatisation that can lead to social exclusion, discrimination, and diminished self-esteem. These social challenges can significantly hinder their academic progression by limiting their access to educational resources, support systems, and opportunities for scholarly engagement.

At the heart of Stigma Theory is the idea that stigmatised individuals are often labelled and stereotyped, leading to their marginalisation (Asino, 2023). For post-pregnant students, this stigmatization can manifest in several ways, such as negative perceptions from peers, educators, and the community, as well as internalized feelings of shame and inadequacy. These negative experiences can create a hostile educational environment that undermines students' motivation and ability to succeed academically. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of stigma is crucial for developing strategies that can mitigate its impact and foster a more inclusive and supportive educational setting for these students. To counteract the negative effects of stigma, strategies must focus on education, policy change, and community involvement (Asino, 2023). Educators and administrators should be trained to recognise and challenge stigmatising attitudes, creating a more empathetic and supportive school culture. Policies should be implemented to ensure that post-pregnant students have access to necessary resources, such as childcare services, flexible scheduling, and counselling support. Additionally, engaging the broader community in conversations about reducing stigma and promoting the educational rights of young mothers can help change societal attitudes and provide a more nurturing environment. By leveraging Stigma Theory, educational institutions can identify and address the barriers that hinder academic progression for post-pregnant students, ultimately promoting their success and well-being.

III. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-pregnant students are those who have given birth and then continue their educational journey (Lundy, 2017). They might be attending various educational levels, such as high schools, colleges, or universities. Juggling the responsibilities of being a parent and a student can be difficult for post-pregnant students, as they encounter distinct challenges and obligations. In this research, post-pregnant students are defined as secondary school students who became parents during their studies.

According to Andrewartha (2023), a nationwide survey in Australia collected data from 578 student parents about their motivations, challenges, and strengths. The study identified several difficulties faced by post-pregnant students, such as the struggle to balance parental and academic responsibilities, which can be demanding in terms of time and energy. Financial concerns and work commitments further complicate their path to success. Despite these hurdles, student parents often receive minimal institutional support. Additionally, limited access to adequate on-campus childcare facilities and parent spaces, as well as the challenge of coordinating studies with childcare needs, are common issues.

As per the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2013), schools must make reasonable adjustments to their educational programs to ensure pregnant students can participate fully. This might include providing larger desks, allowing more frequent restroom breaks, or granting temporary elevator access. Similarly, in Tanzania, schools must make appropriate modifications to their curricula to support pregnant students. Examples of these adjustments include providing larger desks, offering more restroom breaks, or allowing temporary elevator access.

Millington (2022) from the UK highlighted several equitable modifications to help pregnant and post-pregnant students complete their education comfortably before giving birth. These adjustments might include accommodating their schedule for pregnancy or postnatal classes, allowing them to leave five minutes early from each lesson to avoid crowded hallways, and providing materials for missed lessons. It could also be beneficial to allow the student to start the day later or join her peers at the beginning of the first lesson if she experiences morning sickness.

Thabethe et al. (2020) examined the psychological experiences of pregnant students at the University of Venda in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological design, with convenience sampling used to select 12 pregnant students from the target population. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, and an interpretative phenomenological approach was applied for analysis. The findings suggested that the institution should provide adequate services to pregnant students, such as antenatal care at the university clinic, to reduce stress, anxiety, and dropout rates among pregnant students.

In Tanzania, the government is implementing re-entry policies aimed at positively influencing the educational and life outcomes of teenage mothers. However, despite these promising measures, challenges persist, including balancing academic duties with childcare, facing social stigma, financial pressures, limited study time affecting academic

performance, and stress from parenting duties affecting concentration. Addressing these challenges requires effective strategies to promote academic progression for post-pregnant students, which can be achieved through empirical research.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study was grounded in the philosophy of constructivism, which focuses on the subjective understanding of social phenomena and acknowledges that individuals and communities form meanings and concepts based on their distinct experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The decision to use qualitative research within an interpretive framework was influenced by the need to incorporate human interests (Yin, 2018), allowing an investigation into the viewpoints of various education stakeholders regarding strategies to support the academic progress of post-pregnant students. This qualitative approach aimed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issue.

A case study design was utilised, enabling an in-depth investigation of a specific context to understand community attitudes affecting the acceptance and support of post-pregnant students in their educational pursuits. This design allows for examining real- world issues within a defined setting using multiple data sources (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By focusing on the Ilala District in Tanzania, the study sought to capture stakeholders' perspectives on strategies to enhance academic progress for post-pregnant students.

The study focused on parents of post-pregnant students, teachers, students, and coordinators from the Ilala District, Dar es Salaam. The sample comprised 50 respondents, including 8 parents of post-pregnant students, 4 coordinators, 6 teachers, 8 post-pregnant students, and 24 students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals such as post-pregnant students, teachers, school heads, and parents who have experience with post-pregnant students.

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. The semi-structured interviews offered a balance between structure and flexibility, enabling a deeper exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and emotions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, 4 focus group discussions provided a platform to gather a range of perspectives and insights on societal dynamics and perceptions regarding the educational experiences of post-pregnant students. The structured observational method effectively examined supportive strategies and challenges related to the academic progression of post-pregnant students within school environments.

A systematic and rigorous data analysis process ensured the study's validity. Data were analysed thematically, following procedures such as familiarisation with the data, organisation and preparation, reading and re-reading, coding and categorisation, data reduction and organisation, analysis and interpretation, triangulation, member checking, and reporting and documentation of the data collection methods related to the theme.

NVIVO software was used to assist in analysing and interpreting qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This iterative process continued until the data was clear, relevant, and high quality.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed various strategies to promote academic progression for post- pregnant students in Tanzania. Their presentation and discussion are as follows;

A. Childcare Services

Affordable and accessible childcare services are vital for supporting post-pregnant students. One student noted, *"Affordable childcare services would allow me to focus more on my studies without worrying about my child's care"* (PPS 5, Personal Communication, April 29, 2024). Reliable childcare options reduce stress and help students prioritise their academic responsibilities. A parent echoed this sentiment, saying, *"Having reliable childcare options would really lift a burden off my daughter's shoulders. It would allow her to focus more on her studies without constantly worrying about who will take care of the baby"* (PPPS 5, Personal Communication, May, 2024).

These findings highlight the critical impact of affordable childcare on the academic pursuits of post-pregnant students. Testimonials indicate that such services alleviate stress for both students and their families, allowing students to concentrate more on their studies and potentially improving academic performance and well-being. This underscores the need for institutional support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs of post-pregnant students to create an environment conducive to their educational success.

Jochim et al. (2023) support these findings, reporting that mothers returning to school after childbirth experience lower poverty, fewer grade repetitions, increased daycare use, more family support, and reduced exclusive breastfeeding within six months postpartum. Policymakers and practitioners should consider combined interventions that support school retention during pregnancy and provide access to and financial support for daycare.

B. Flexible Learning Options

Flexible learning modalities, such as online classes, cater to the unique needs of post- pregnant students. One participant shared, *"Flexible schedules and online classes would make it easier for me to balance school and parenting responsibilities"* (PPS 6, Personal Communication, May 6, 2024). Diverse learning formats ensure continuity in education despite logistical challenges.

The findings indicate that flexible learning options, like online classes, are perceived asbeneficial for accommodating students' diverse needs. Participants noted that flexible schedules and online classes could help balance academic and parenting responsibilities. This highlights the importance of offering various learning formats to ensure continuous education, especially in overcoming logistical challenges that may prevent regular attendance in traditional classroom settings. The U.S. Department of Education, Officefor Civil Rights (2013) supports this finding, stating that schools must modify curricula to accommodate pregnant students. This includes providing flexible hours, larger desks,and frequent restroom breaks.

C. Emotional Support

Psychological and emotional support systems are crucial for the well-being of post- pregnant students. One respondent noted, *"Counseling services can help me cope with the emotional stress and stigma I face"* (PPS 4, Personal Communication, April 29, 2024). Emotional support fosters resilience and strengthens their determination to overcome educational obstacles. A community leader emphasised, *"The well-being of post-pregnant students greatly depends on having strong psychological and emotional support systems in place"* (CLPPS 2, Personal Communication, April 30, 2024).

These findings highlight the essential role of psychological and emotional support in promoting the well-being and resilience of post-pregnant students. Participants emphasised the importance of counseling services for managing emotional stress and overcoming stigma, significantly aiding their ability to navigate educational challenges. Community leaders stressed the importance of support systems, affirming their role in fostering a supportive environment that empowers students to succeed.

Naidoo (2005) found that educators believe pregnant teenagers often struggle to disclosetheir pregnancy to parents, sometimes relying on educators to communicate on their behalf. This causes psychological stress from negotiations with parents, disclosure to the child's father, peer rejection, isolation, school departure, stigmatization, and fear. The anticipated insensitivity of health professionals towards teenage pregnancy also contributes to learners' stress. Masuku (1998) argues that pregnant teenagers experiencesignificant stress, potentially impacting their physical state if unmanaged. Educators expressed concerns about pregnant teenagers' emotional experiences and felt ill- equipped to provide counselling.

D. Anti-Discrimination Policies

Implementing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies fosters an inclusive educational environment. One student stated, *"Implementing strict anti-discrimination policies would help ensure that I am treated fairly"* (PPS 3, Personal Communication, April 30, 2024). Awareness and adherence to these policies mitigate bias and promote equity within the school community.

The findings suggest that enforcing anti-discrimination policies in educational settings significantly fosters an inclusive environment. Participants highlighted the need for fair treatment through strict policy implementation, emphasising the effectiveness of such measures in ensuring equity. Awareness and adherence to these policies are crucial in mitigating biases and promoting a more equitable school community, potentially improving educational outcomes and fostering a supportive environment for all studentsand staff.

E. Awareness Programs

Educational initiatives that focus on the challenges and opportunities faced by post- pregnant students play a key role in combating stigma. As one respondent reported, *"Educational programs about the challenges and potential of post-pregnant students can help reduce stigma"* (PPS 4, Personal Communication, April 29, 2024). Such programs promote understanding and inclusivity, fostering a supportive environment for these students. This view is reinforced by a parent of a post-pregnant student, who stated, *"The more we promote understanding and inclusivity, the better we can create a supportive environment for students who are pregnant or have recently given birth"* (PPPS 4, Personal Communication, May 8, 2024).

The findings indicate that educational initiatives aimed at increasing awareness about post-pregnant students' challenges are crucial in reducing stigma. They suggest that fostering a culture of understanding and inclusivity within educational settings helps create a more supportive atmosphere. Both a respondent and a parent of a post-pregnant student support this conclusion, highlighting the positive impact of such initiatives on reducing stigma and enhancing support.

F. Mentorship and Guidance

Mentorship programs offer essential guidance and encouragement to post-pregnant students to navigate academic and parenting challenges. One participant expressed, *"Mentorship programs can provide me with the guidance and support I need tosucceed"* (PPS 1, Personal Communication, April 30, 2024). Mentors who empathize with their experiences provide valuable insights and motivational support.

The findings suggest that mentorship programs are vital in providing guidance and encouragement. Participants view mentors as critical sources of support, noting that mentorship helps them navigate challenges and stay motivated. Empathetic mentors who understand their experiences are especially valued for offering insightful and motivational support. This perspective is corroborated by Malatji et al. (2023), who argue that post-pregnant students re-engaging with education after childbirth benefit from coping strategies such as consulting with educators and participating in after-school programs. The study calls for enhanced learner support programs, including mentorship and counseling, to assist teenage mothers in completing their education.

G. Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Education empowers post-pregnant students to disrupt the cycle of poverty. Onerespondent reported that, *"Educated mothers are better equipped to provide for their children, which can help break the cycle of poverty"* (PPS 5, Personal Communication,April 29, 2024). Investing in their education provides long-term socioeconomic benefitsfor their families and communities. This view is supported by a community leader, who stated, *"Supporting the education of post-pregnant students leads to lastingsocioeconomic advantages for their families and communities"* (CLPPS 1, Personal Communication, April 29, 2024).

The findings underscore the critical role of education in enabling post-pregnant studentsto break the cycle of poverty. Educated mothers are better positioned to support their children financially, which significantly contributes to breaking the poverty cycle. Investment in the education of these students offers long-term socioeconomic benefits for both their families and communities (Sundaram, 2014). Community leaders emphasise that supporting the educational pursuits of post-pregnant students is essentialfor achieving lasting socioeconomic improvements at both the family and community levels.

H. Gender Equality

Advancing educational opportunities for post-pregnant students promotes gender equality. As one participant stated, "Promoting educational opportunities for post- pregnant students ensures that young mothers have the same opportunities as their peers" (PPS 7, Personal Communication, May 7, 2024). Gender-inclusive policies enable women to pursue their educational and career goals without facing discrimination. A community leader echoed this sentiment, noting, "Gender-inclusive policies provide women with the support they need to pursue their educational and career goals freely and without facing discrimination" (CLPPS 2, PersonalCommunication, April 30, 2024).

The findings suggest that promoting educational opportunities for post-pregnant students is crucial for advancing gender equality. Participants emphasised that such initiatives ensure young mothers have equal access to education and career opportunities, reducing stigma and fostering inclusivity. Community leaders highlighted that gender-inclusive policies empower women to pursue their goals without discrimination, supporting their socio-economic advancement. Kuteesa et al. (2024) support these findings, emphasizing that gender equity in education is vital for social empowerment and creating a more inclusive society. They argue that a multi-faceted approach is necessary to address barriers such as early pregnancies, cultural norms, andeconomic constraints, advocating for policy interventions that enhance equitable accessto education.

VI. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The study highlights several strategies to promote academic progression for post- pregnant students. Flexible class schedules, online courses, and alternative learning methods are essential for accommodating childcare responsibilities and recovery after childbirth. On-campus childcare services also play a critical role in helping students balance parenting duties with their studies, reducing stress and enhancing academic focus. These strategies, coupled with awareness programs and anti-discrimination policies, contribute to a more inclusive academic environment. Financial aid andhealthcare services further support these initiatives, creating an environment that empowers post-pregnant students to achieve their educational goals. The findingsunderscore the transformative potential of targeted support mechanisms in breaking cycles of poverty and advancing gender equality, ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve academic outcomes for post-pregnant students, education stakeholders should provide affordable childcare services, flexible learning options, and emotional support to help them manage their studies alongside parenting responsibilities. Additionally, schools should enforce anti-discrimination policies, develop mentorship programs, raise awareness to combat stigma, offer financial and health-related support,engage parental involvement, and regularly evaluate interventions to ensure they address the students' needs effectively.

REFERENCES

[1]. Andrewartha, L., Knight, E., Simpson, A., & Beattie, H. (2023). Balancing the books: How we can better support students who are parents. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 45(2), 160-173.

[2]. Asino, F., Mukadi, E., & Nyanga'ra, N. (2023). COUNSELLING ON STIGMA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC PROGRESSION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF ADOLESCENT STUDENT MOTHERS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAKURU

[3]. COUNTY, KENYA. Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences ISSN (2708-504X), 3(1), 74-86.

[4]. Asumini, S. I., & Mwila, P. M. (2024). Prospects and challenges of teenage mothers' re-entry into secondary schooling at Chisalu folk development college, Tanzania. Journal of Educational and Management Studies, 14(1), 16-26.

[5]. Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). Research Methods in Education. (8th Edition). Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539

[6]. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage Publications.

[7]. Jochim, J., Meinck, F., Toska, E., Roberts, K., Wittesaele, C., Langwenya, N., & Cluver, L. (2023). Who goes back to school after birth? Factors associated with postpartum school return among adolescent mothers in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Global public health, 18(1), 2049846.

[8]. Kuteesa, K. N., Akpuokwe, C. U., & Udeh, C. A. (2024). Gender equity in education: addressing challenges and promoting opportunities for social empowerment. International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences, 6(4), 631-641.

[9]. Lundy, L. (2017). Postpartum Adolescents' Educational Experiences: The Role of High Schools in Fostering Resilience. Journal of Adolescent Research, 32(6), 707–732.

[10]. Malatji, H., Dube, N., Nkala-Dlamini, B., & Shumba, K. (2023). Coping Strategies and Support Provided by Educational Centres to Teenage Mothers Re-Engaging with Education Post-Pregnancy: A Case Study of A Township School in South Africa. e-BANGI Journal, 20(3).

[11]. Mgomera, W. (2021).The Impact of Teenage Pregnancies on Secondary School's Students: A Case of Magu District of Tanzania (Doctoral dissertation, The Open University of Tanzania).

[12]. Millington, S. (2022). How teachers can support pregnant students to continue education. https://www.ocr.org.uk/blog/how-teachers-can-support- pregnant-students/

[13]. Moshi, F. V., &Tilisho, O. (2023). The magnitude of teenage pregnancy and its associated factors among teenagers in Dodoma Tanzania: a community- based analytical cross-sectional study. Reproductive Health, 20(1), 28.

[14]. Musili, E. K., Mwania, J. M., &Mulwa, D. M. (2020). Influence of school based determinants on the implementation of the re-admission policy of girls after teenage pregnancy in public secondary schools in Kituicounty, Kenya. IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education, 10(2), 62-66.

[15]. Sakakibara, K., Murray, S. M., Arima, E. G., Ojuka, C., & Familiar-Lopez, I. (2024). Exploring pregnancy-related stigma experiences among adolescents in rural Uganda. Journal of Adolescence.

[16]. Thabethe, L. R., Mulondo, S. A., &Tugli, A. K. (2020). Psychological experiences of pregnant students at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa. African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de La Santé Reproductive, 24(3), 18–23.

[17]. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2013). Supporting the academic success of pregnant and parenting students under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Washington, D.C. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/pregnancy.pdf

[18]. UNESCO. (2023). Comprehensive sexuality education: For healthy, informed and empowered learners. Retrieved from https://www.unesco.org/en/health- education/cse

[19]. UNICEF. (2021). Early childbearing can have severe consequences for teenage girls.

[20]. Retrieved from https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/teenage-health/