Preparedness of Public Secondary Schools to Provide a Conducive Social Environment for the Implementation of Re-Entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 In Mwanza Region

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Abstract
This study investigated preparedness of public secondary schools to provide a conducive social environment for the implementation of re-entry circular no. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza region. A convergent design under mixed research approach was employed. The target population was 216 public secondary schools, 6604 teachers,149936 regular students, 57 re-entry students and 8 District Secondary Educational Officers. The sample size for the study comprised 613 respondents. This included 7 district educational officers, 22 heads of schools, 22 guidance and counselling teachers, 57 re-entry students, 270 regular students, and 235 secondary school teachers. Purposive and stratified simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain the sample. Data were collected through an interview guide, Focus group discussions and questionnaires. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings indicated that respondents moderately agreed that the school has prepared a conducive environment for the implementation of the re-entry circular and for welcoming back the returning students. The study concludes that the social atmosphere in some public secondary schools is still unwelcoming and unsuitable for the re-entry students. The study recommends that a safe and supportive environment in schools should be promoted to ensure that stigmatisation, exclusion, and bullying of re-entry students is completely addressed in public secondary schools so as to improve implementation of re-entry circular Number two of 2021.

Key words: *Preparedness, Conducive Social environment, Re-entry Circular, Implementation*

1. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in an individual's overall development. That is why, during the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, education was recognised as a fundamental right for everyone. Worldwide, ensuring equitable access to education remains a significant challenge, especially for adolescents facing socio-economic, health, or gender-related vulnerabilities. International initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Education for All, and Fee Free education promote inclusive systems that ensure no student is left behind- particularly those who exit school due to early pregnancy, illness, or economic difficulties (UNESCO, 2021; UNFPA, 2022). Re-entry policies have also been adopted by many countries as strategic measures, allowing students who have dropped out to return and complete their education in supportive environments that foster their overall well-being (UNICEF, 2020).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the effectiveness of re-entry policies varies significantly, primarily because of insufficient focus on the school social environment. This environment is crucial in influencing learners' sense of belonging, psychological safety, and motivation to succeed academically. When returning students face stigma, discrimination, or isolation from peers and teachers, their likelihood of completing school drops considerably (UNESCO, 2021). Evidence from countries like South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, and Malawi shows that although re-entry frameworks exist on paper, their practical application is often obstructed by peer and teacher stigma, limited counselling support, and unwelcoming school cultures (Chigona & Chetty, 2008; Mweemba, 2019; Birungi et al., 2015). Fitria et al. (2023) note that the learning environment greatly

influences students' cognitive and emotional engagement. Blum (2015) emphasised that students in schools with a positive, respectful climate can concentrate better and realize their academic, social, and athletic potential. An effective re-entry policy should extend beyond administrative re-admission and focus on preparing schools socially to reintegrate returning students in a way that preserves their dignity, safety, and sense of belonging.

In the Tanzanian context, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology issued Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021, mandating all public secondary schools to readmit students, both girls and boys, who had dropped out due to pregnancy, illness, or other justifiable reasons (MoEST, 2021). The circular was a progressive step away from punitive practices such as the expulsion of pregnant girls and reflects Tanzania's commitment to inclusive education. However, the circular places significant responsibility on individual schools to create an enabling environment, not only through procedural compliance but through a social environment that supports learners emotionally, relationally, and psychologically. Thus, without such social readiness, re-entry students may face ridicule, self-stigma, and academic disengagement, ultimately undermining the goal of the re-entry policy, which can strongly influence whether re-entry students succeed or silently drop out again (Mgalla & Omari, 2023).

In the Mwanza Region, one of the most populous and culturally diverse regions of Tanzania, the number of dropouts has been characterised by a high number before and after the introduction of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021. Statistics show that the number of dropouts has been increasing from 8082 in 2019, 8364 in 2020, 9097 in 2022 and 10061 in 2023 (URT, 2020; URT, 2021; URT, 2023; URT, 2024). The implementation of the Re-entry Circular in this context is particularly complex due to prevailing socio-cultural beliefs, gender norms, and limited support services in schools. In Mwanza Region, a 2024 progress report from the Regional Education Office revealed that, despite the government's commitment, the dropout rate among re-entry students remains high, with over 58% of re-entry students who re-enrolled in 2022 dropping out again (Mwanza Regional Education Office, 2024). While some schools may comply with the circular in form, their social environments may still be unfriendly to the needs of re-entry students in that way jeopardizing the success of reintegration efforts. Based on different economic and social activities in Mwanza region, pushing factors for dropout could be economic related, exerting pressure on students to contribute to their families, distance between schools and homes and transportation, and gender disparities, may lead students to prioritise other issues over education. Although the identified causes could be contributing factors, the overall question arising from this scenario is how schools in Mwanza region are socially prepared to readmit the students wishing to return to school. Furthermore, how is the classroom environment like, for these students who take up the challenge for a comeback; are they made to make them feel appreciated, and are they comfortable in classrooms and outside the classroom, these concerns could not be answered without conducting a study. Thus, given this context, the study investigated how public secondary schools in Mwanza have prepared a conducive social environment for the implementation of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021.

2. Statement Of The Problem
Dropout of re-entry student remain a crucial problem in public secondary schools despite introduction of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021. Statistics shows that in Mwanza Region, with over 58% of re-entry students who re-enrolled 2022 drop-out again due to different hardship, inadequate school support system and negative societal attitudes (Mwanza Regional Education Office, 2024). Studies show that returnee learners often face stigma, exclusion, and a lack of social support when they rejoin school communities (Mgalla & Omari, 2023). Also, there is limited research on how schools are creating or failing to create environments that truly welcome and support re-entry students. This situation is concerning and raises several questions regarding what the school has done to ensure conducive social environment for implementation of re-entry circular within the school level. Complaints have been raised by stakeholders such as teachers, students and parents claim that many schools appear unprepared to provide the kind of supportive social environment needed to ensure the circular's success. can lead to poor circular implementation, stigmatisation and continued exclusion (Marende, 2022). If this situation is not addressed, it may lead to further increase of dropout among re-entry students and ineffective implementation of re-entry circular. Thus, the current study, sought to address the lacuna by investigating of how public secondary schools have prepared a

conducive social environment for the implementation of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza Region.

3. Research Question
The following research question guided this study:

How prepared are public secondary schools in creating the conducive social environment for the implementation of the Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza region?

4. Significance Of The Study
This study is important because it provide light on a crucial but often overlooked aspect of education circular implementation specifically the social environment within schools. For policymakers and education planners, the findings will provide evidence-based insights into the real challenges and opportunities schools face when implementing the circular. At the school level, the study offers practical value by highlighting ways to promote positive teacher attitudes, reduce stigma, and build a culture of empathy and acceptance. This knowledge can empower school communities to become more welcoming places where all students feel safe, respected, and motivated to succeed. Finally, the study strengthens the voices of re-entry students themselves, providing a platform to understand their needs and challenges. Their experiences can guide schools and stakeholders in creating environments that not only welcome re-entry students, but also support their long-term educational success.

5. Literature Review
Ratusniak and Silva (2023) explored social barrier leading to student-mothers dropout in Brazil. The study revealed that teenage mothers get strained by childcare and studentship. It was also revealed that re-entry students receive social support from the school administration, however, intimidation and stigmatization from peers, family, schools, and their communities also hindered the re-entry. This study concluded that a supportive social surrounding, build confidence of teenage mothers. However, the study leaves the gap as to how the Head of school ensures social support for the re-entry student in school when preparing for the implementation of the Re-entry Circular. Thus, the current study investigated how the Heads of secondary schools prepare social environment for the implementation of the Re-entry circular by ensuring supportive social environment for students.

Baafi (2020) examined social environment on School Re-entry for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers in Techiman in Ghana, using qualitative research approach. The study involved 15 participants with the Primary data collected using online phone interviews and chats as well as regular phone calls due to Covid-19 pandemic. secondary data sources included; academic literature, journals, organizational reports, magazines and newspapers. Qualitative data were collected, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that, unsatisfactory social environment in schools were the primary reason causing the failure of the school to re-entry teen mothers. The study further revealed that re-entered students were mostly stigmatized by Heads of schools, teachers and peers within the school. It was revealed that pregnant girls and teen mothers were stigmatised by fellow students and community members at large around the school leading to massive dropouts and limited re-entries. The findings showed the absence of conducive social environment for the implementation of re-entry policy, however, there was still a need for investigating how such a poor social environment affected the implementation of the re-entry policy. Thus, in addition to integrating other data collection methods, the current study helped in triangulating information obtained and determining the extent to which Heads of schools have prepared social environment for the implementation of the Re-entry Circular.

Nsambala and Simpande (2020) explored the role of social environment on the re-entry policy implementation on the re-entry girls' academic performance in Mathematics in Mufurila District. In order to achieve its aim, a qualitative research approach was employed to guide the study. Data related to the research were collected through interview guides and questionnaires, and analysed using narrative techniques which are appropriate for a qualitative study. Furthermore, purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain a sample of twelve teachers, twelve parents, two officers from the District Education Board Office and thirty-four re-entered girls giving a total of 60 people. The study revealed that schools had

unconducive environment for the implementation of the policy. It was shown that, the discrimination and stigmatization of the readmitted pregnant girls and teenage mother were among the social challenges faced by re-entered girls in most school causing poor performance in their studies. The study therefore left an information gap on whether or not Heads of schools were putting any efforts to harmonize the social environment to implement the re-entry circular by ensuring that re-entered students had good relations with their fellow students. The missing of such information is attributed to the exclusion of Head teachers in the study. Thus, the current study filled the gap by involving Heads of schools examining their contribution in ensuring that schools have conducive environment for the implementation of the Re-entry Circular.

Gowon and Joseph (2021) examined the social context experienced by the re-entry students in Kenya. The findings revealed that there was reluctance at the school level of allowing girls to re-enter the school due to intimidating social context experienced by returnees. Further, it was revealed that teachers contributed to stereotype by labelling the young learning mothers in their school as lazy, distracted, low performing and also at risk of tainting their fellow female learners with immoral behaviour; instead of supporting, guiding and motivating students including young mothers to stay in school. It was further revealed that most schools had not established any anti-bullying programmes to eradicate stigma in the school. However, the study left out a gap on how the Heads of schools cooperated with teachers in creating safe social environment for re-entry students to accomplish their education. Thus, the current study was conducted to explore how the Head of schools cooperated with teachers to create conducive social environment for the implementation of re-entry circular.

Niboye (2022) explored experience of teenage mothers re-joining formal schooling after a postpartum break in Zanzibar. The study in Zanzibar used qualitative research approach for in-depth insights. Public rapid appraisal method was used to collect primary data and various grey literature was used to collect secondary data. The study findings identified lack of academic support from colleagues and teachers when they return to school as social challenges faced by teenage mothers because the policy did not clearly provide for the compensation of the lost time young mothers had been away from school. The study showing different social barriers faced by re-entry student leaving out the gap as to how Heads of schools prepared social environment for the implementation of the Re-entry Circular. Thus, the current study was conducted to find out how Heads of schools prepared conducive social environment for the implementation of the Re-entry Circular.

6. Demonstrations Of Knowledge Gap
In summary, a review of existing empirical studies by Niboye (2022), Gowon and Joseph (2021), Nsambala and Simpande (2020), Baafi (2020), and Ratusniak and Silva (2023), reveals increasing scholarly interest in the conducive social environment prepared for implementation of re-entry policies in secondary schools across various contexts. These studies have contributed valuable insights, particularly highlighting challenges such as existing stigma exclusion, bullying and emotional challenges encountered by re-entry students in schools. However, several important gaps remain unaddressed: Many of the reviewed studies, such as those by Baafi (2020) and Ratusniak and Silva (2023), primarily focused on the perspectives of head teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, or teenage mothers, with limited attention to the broader school community, particularly regular students, classroom teachers, educational officers as well as boy students. This creates a partial experience and ignores the critical role of the wider school environment in policy implementation. Most of the studies were conducted outside Tanzania such as in Brazil, Ghana, Zambia, and in Kenya or in regions of Tanzania such as Zanzibar with different social, economic, and cultural contexts compared to Mwanza region. Given these contextual differences, findings from other areas may not be fully applicable to Mwanza, where factors such as socioeconomic diversity and school infrastructure may influence schools' social environment and policy application differently.

Several prior studies predominantly employed either purely quantitative or qualitative approaches (Nsambala& Simpande, 2020; Baafi, 2020), thus missing opportunities to gain a deeper, more detailed information regarding social environment for implementation of the circular through method triangulation. A convergent design, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods as used in the current study, offers a more holistic exploration. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating of how public

secondary schools have prepared a conducive social environment for the implementation of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza Region.

7. Research Methodology

In this study, a convergent design was adopted under mixed research approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, aiming to address the research question or hypothesis and obtain a comprehensive understanding of the problem being investigated. The target population for this study was 216 head teachers, 6604 teachers, 149936 Regular students, 57 re-entry students and 8 District Secondary Education Officers in Mwanza Region. From this population, Cochran's Formula for sample size determination, with a margin of error of 0.05 by (Cochran, 1977) and recommendations from (Creswell and plano, 2018) was used to obtain a sample of 613 respondents. Stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, total sampling and purposive expert sampling were used to select participant. Data collection involved the use of quantitative instruments (questionnaires) and qualitative instruments (interview guides and focus group discussion guides). The validity of the instruments was ensured through the input of research experts, particularly in the field of Education Planning and Administration. The reliability of the instruments was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha technique, which yielded a reliability output of 0.82 for the rating scale questions in the teachers' questionnaires and 0.85 in the regular students' questionnaires. trustworthiness and dependability of qualitative data was ensured by confirmability and peer examination. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data with the assistance of SPSS version 25, and the results were presented in tables displaying means, frequencies, and percentages. The hypothesis was tested using an independent t-test at a significance level of .05. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed using ATLAS.ti. software to identify common themes, which facilitated the interpretation and discussion of the findings. The qualitative data was presented in narrative form, supported by direct quotations.

8. Findings And Discussion

Conducive Social Environment Prepared for the Implementation of the Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021

This research question intended to find out how public secondary schools have prepared a conducive social environment for the implementation of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza region. The information was obtained through questionnaires from regular students and teachers. Then, interviews were conducted with Heads of Schools, District Secondary School Education Officers, guidance and counselling teachers, as well as re-entry students. Also, a focus group discussion was conducted with re-entry students to obtain in-depth information. The aim of collecting this information was to check whether the school has prepared a supportive social environment in the classroom as well as outside the classroom for re-entry students. This is with the adherence to the guidelines of the circular implementation, which demands that schools create a social and a supportive classroom environment for re-admitted students (MoEST, 2021). Responses from regular students and teachers are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Findings on how schools have created a conducive social environment for the implementation of Circular Number Two of 2021 are presented based on Likert scale, whereby Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) scales were collapsed to form one scale agree. On the other hand, Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) scales were collapsed to form disagree. The percentages from the Moderate (M) responses were presented as reported. The approach was preferred because it captured the general opinions of respondents. Additionally, in this study, mean scores were scaled as 1.0-1.80 represented "Strongly Disagree", 1.81-2.60 represented "Disagree", 2.61-3.40 represented "Moderate", 3.41-4.20 represented "Agree", and 4.21-5.00 represented "Strongly Agree".

Table 1: Students' Responses on How schools have created conducive social environment for re-entry students when they are back to school after dropping out in Mwanza Region (n= 270)

S/N	Statements	SD		D		M		A		SA		Mean
		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	The school administration has ensured we socially interact with re-entry students during school assembly	16	5.9	121	44.8	19	7	104	38.5	10	3.7	2.89
2.	Our teachers have ensured we	28	10.5	134	50.2	9	3.4	87	32.6	9	3.4	2.68

#	Statement	SD	%	D	%	M	%	A	%	SA	%	Mean
	include re-entry students in our classroom group activities											
3.	I make re-entry students comfortable through initiating conversation during breaktime in our school	11	4.1	137	50.7	8	3	92	34.1	22	8.1	2.91
4.	The school administration always encourages sense of belongingness to the re-entry students	2	0.7	12	4.5	18	6.7	199	74	38	14.1	3.96
5.	Our teachers have always given priority to re-entry students in providing academic support	15	5.6	155	57.6	17	6.3	59	21.9	23	8.6	2.70
6.	Our school administration has ensured we cooperate with re-entry students in school general cleanness	30	11.2	77	28.7	35	13.1	112	41.8	14	5.2	3.01
7.	Sport teachers have ensured we are collaborating with re-entry students in sports and games	10	3.7	132	48.9	15	5.6	104	38.5	9	3.3	2.89
8.	I always find time to study and encourage academically re-entry students	2	0.7	134	49.8	13	4.8	111	41.3	9	3.3	2.97
9.	I encourage re-entry students to join social clubs in our school	10	3.7	137	50.9	11	4.1	96	35.7	15	5.6	2.88
10.	I share with re-entry students some of learning resources like books pen and pencil	15	5.6	135	50	5	1.9	102	37.9	12	4.5	2.86
	Grand Mean											**2.975**

Source: Field data, 2024

Key: *SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, M=Moderate, A=Agree and SA=Strongly Agree*

Data in Table 1 show that 88.1% of regular students agreed that the school administration has always been encouraging a sense of belongingness to the students returning after dropping out. The mean score from regular students' responses to this item was 3.96, implying that most regular students have witnessed the effort of school administration emphasising the sense of belongingness to the re-entry students in their school. The response was further supported by the information obtained during focus group discussions when the re-entry students remarked:

> At our school, the Head of School works hard to foster a comfortable environment. In most assemblies, the head teacher highlights that every student deserves a second chance and that education is a basic right, encouraging everyone to respect one another. This philosophy is both inspiring and uplifting for all of us. (FGD2, Focus group discussion, September 17, 2024)

One of the members of another group during the focus group discussion added:

> When I came back, I felt scared, but the head teacher reassured me I was not alone. He even visited my class to introduce me respectfully, stating that the school welcomed me back and that I should not feel different from the other students. (FGD4, Focus group discussion, September 27, 2024)

The responses from re-entry students during the focus group discussion highlight the role of the Head of School in ensuring that the re-entry students experience a positive social environment in the class. Similar information was also obtained during an interview with some re-entry students who shared their experience on how the school administration encourages a sense of belongingness to them. One of the re-entry students from school X said:

When I came back, the head of the school invited me to the office and assured me that this is still my school and that I belong here just like everyone else. That encouragement boosted my confidence immensely, allowing me to join my classmates and study diligently. (RS2, Personal Communication, September 18, 2024)

The response from an interview with a re-entry student highlights a substantial emotional impact created by the Head of School, which made this student feel reassured and motivated to study hard. This implies that due to the welcoming environment created by the school administration, re-entry students would feel they are socially accepted in their school, motivating them to study hard and stay at school without dropping out. The findings align with Contextual Interaction Theory by Bressers (1990s), establishing that motivation is one of the key variables for policy implementation. Thus, re-entry students as the targeted group for the circular need to be motivated to stay in school. The circular needs to be implemented effectively by ensuring re-entry students feel a part of the school and are not different from other students. This will make them feel comfortable staying at school until completion, hence, the circular's effective implementation.

During an interview with the guidance and counselling teachers, the following was shared:

Guidance and counselling teacher from school W said: *"Our Head of School actively promotes acceptance of re-entry students. She directly addresses stigma at school assemblies and encourages re-entry students to feel comfortable in school and to report anyone or any environment that shows signs of rejection to them"* (G1, Personal communication, April 18, 2024).

Another guidance and counselling teacher added:

Our Head of School ensures that he personally meets with students who return after dropping out. During these meetings, he reassures them that they are not alone and that they have his full support to complete their secondary education. Despite his assurances of belonging, some returning students have transferred to other schools due to bullying from peers who told them that this place is not meant for them. (G6, Personal Communication, April 30, 2024)

The responses from G1 and G6 indicate that the school has instilled a sense of belongingness in the re-entry students, but some of them still move to other schools because they feel it is unacceptable to go back to schools hey dropped out. This could mean that the school has built a sense of belongingness for re-entry students, but no strategies have been put in place to make it practical, which forced some of them to move to other schools. The findings correspond to the directive, which has been given in the re-entry circular, that the re-entry students are allowed to return to the same school from which they dropped out or shift to another school where they will feel comfortable to continue with their studies (MoEST, 2021).

During an interview with the DSEOs, one of them said: *"I have noticed that most Heads of Schools in this district play an essential role in directly engaging with re-entry students and fostering an environment of acceptance and inclusion for them"* (DSEO3, Personal communication, April 30, 2024)

The response from the DSEO3 supports the findings reported by students and teachers, indicating that re-entry students receive support from the Head of School by creating a room for acceptance and inclusion in the school. The findings concur with findings in a study by Ratusniak and Silva (2023), who revealed that in some schools, re-entry students receive social support from the school administration.

Data in Table 1 also indicate that 60.7% of regular students disagreed that their teachers have ensured they include returning students in their classroom group activities. Responses from regular students generated a mean score of 2.68, implying a moderate agreement that teachers in the class ensure re-entry students are included in the classroom activities. The moderate agreement could imply that not all teachers have ensured that re-entry students are often included and collaborative in classroom activities. The responses were supported by information obtained during an interview with re-entry students, as one of them said:

In class group assignments, my classmates tend to choose each other, leaving me to join the students who are often overlooked due to their performance. There was one occasion when I sensed that the teacher wasn't concerned about my inclusion in a group. I asked her if I could join a group that had space, but she simply instructed me to find a spot on my own fit. (RS5, Personal communication, September 25, 2024)

The response from RS5 shows that some of the re-entry students are being stigmatised by fellow students in the class, and some of the teachers seem to ignore such scenarios. During focus group discussions, other re-entry students echoed similar complaints.

One of the re-entry students from school B said:

> In our class, when group assignments are given, most of us who returned after dropping out end up together in one group, as others tend to avoid us. This situation limits our interaction with different students and prevents us from receiving academic guidance from those who excel. Additionally, some teachers do not intervene to ensure we are mixed with others. (FGD2, Focus Group Discussion, September 17, 2024)

Another group also had the following to say: *"Once, a teacher asked us to find partners and form a group; it was clear she wanted us to team up with other re-entry students. This made us feel excluded from the main group class"* (FGD4, Focus Group Discussion, September 27, 2024).

The responses from FGD2 and FGD4 show that teachers rarely attempt to ensure that re-entry students are included in classroom activities. It also indicates that some teachers even discourage re-entry students from interacting with regular students during class activities. This may imply that some of these teachers are unaware of their responsibilities of creating a supportive classroom environment for re-entry students. It was highlighted in the re-entry circular that teachers have to ensure classroom environments are conducive and supportive for re-entry students (MoEST, 2021). This means that teachers must create an environment where regular students socially interact with re-entry students by collaborating in the classroom activities.

During an interview with the guidance and counselling teachers on whether they have received complaints on similar aspects from re-entry students:

One of the guidance and counselling teachers said:

> Several re-entry students approached me in tears after class, expressing feelings of exclusion during group activities. One girl shared, 'They say I should not join their group because I am too slow and behind, so I will slow them down as well. ' As a guidance and counselling teacher, I attempted to address the situation at the staff meeting. However, it seems that some teachers aren't treating it seriously, as I continue to receive complaints time. (G8, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

Another guidance and counselling teacher said: *"A re-entry student once approached me and expressed that she no longer wanted to attend a certain subject because she always ended up doing group work alone, and the teacher did not seem to care at all"* (G3, Personal communication, April 24, 2024)

The responses from G8 and G3 show persistent exclusion of re-entry students from class activities. This kind of stigmatisation could negatively affect re-entry students in their academic journey making some of them drop out of school altogether. The findings suggest that teachers who were expected to be among those who fight for the welfare of re-entry students are doing the opposite. This could be due to their negative mind set of returning students, which is why some of them ignore the welfare of re-entry students. The findings concur with the findings in a study by Nsambala and Simpande (2020) which revealed that the discrimination of readmitted pregnant girls and teenage mothers in school remains high, and stigmatisation represents a significant percentage of the social challenges faced by re-entered girls in most schools, leading to poor performance in their studies.

During an interview with the Heads of schools, comments with slight differences from other respondents were made. One Heads of school said:

> As the Head of school, I have received some concerns from re-entry students regarding a few teachers' lack of attention to their inclusion in classroom activities. I believe these feelings stem from their newness to the environment. However, most of our teachers have been urged to promote inclusivity and are making efforts to do so. (H8, Personal communication, May 3, 2024)

During an interview with one of the DSEOs, the following was commented:

> During my visits to schools where I aimed to speak with re-entry students, reports of occasional social isolation in the classroom emerged. However, overall, most schools are doing a commendable

job of supporting these students, and the school administration is working to fully address the minor complaints raised. (DSEO5, Personal communication, May 8, 2024)

The comments made by H8 and DSEO5 indicate their acknowledgement of the issue, but suggest that the complaints are not as alarming as reported. These responses highlight a common administrative perspective that focuses on circular compliance rather than the actual experiences of re-entry students. This implies that, even if the complaints are considered minor, they could significantly impact the academic journey of re-entry students and the circular implementation. This means that some re-entry students could drop out completely. The findings concur with the findings in a study by Mayunda (2021) who revealed cases where re-entry students choose to transfer to another school or return temporarily, ultimately dropping out of school completely after a while due to social challenges they encounter.

Data in Table 1 show that 52.9% of regular students disagreed that sports teachers have ensured they collaborate with re-entry students in sports and games. Responses from regular students generated a mean score of 2.89, implying a moderate level of agreement among regular students regarding collaboration with re-entry students in sports and games. This suggests that sports and games are a key area where social bonds among regular and re-entry students can be fostered, but this has not been sufficiently emphasised by sports teachers in most schools. The data are supported by the information obtained during focus group discussions with re-entry students. One of the participants commented:

> We have never been invited or included by the sports teacher in any game. Even during inter-class competitions, re-entry students are often excluded. One day, one of us attempted to volunteer, but he was informed he couldn't participate because the players had already been selected from the start. (FGD1, Focus Group Discussion, September 13, 2024)

During a focus group with another group, one of the members said:

> There was a time when I wanted to join a basketball team in the field, but my fellow students asked if mothers could play, which hurt my feelings. I reported it to the sports teacher, who promised to address the issue, but similar incidents continue to happen. I've since given up on sports and decided to focus on what originally brought me here study. (FGD2, Focus Group Discussion, September 17, 2024)

The responses from FGD1 and FGD2 show how re-entry students are socially isolated by their fellow students during extracurricular activities, and part of this isolation is perpetuated by the sports teachers themselves. This implies that some regular students could have the opportunities to establish a bond with the re-entry students in the field if sports teachers had ensured their participation in sports and games. During an interview, another re-entry student said:

> I tried to talk to the school's sports teacher about joining the football team, but he always told me to wait for some organisation to be arranged with the other team members. What made me feel worse was that I once found one of the team leaders rejecting me in front of the sports teacher, telling him that I had dropped out due to drugs and that I might influence others to use them. (RS8, Personal communication, September 30, 2024)

The response from RS8 shows that some of the sports teachers have little influence in ensuring that re-entry students collaborate in sports and games. The response clearly reflects a sense of marginalisation and inadequate support from sports teachers. This could be due to the belief among regular students and teachers participating in sports that re-entry students are not supposed to waste their time; instead, they should focus on their studies. Additionally, it could imply that some of the teachers are merely participating in implementing the circular, but they also believe re-entry students could be a bad influence once they socially interact with other students. Such negative perception could make re-entry students feel marginalised and socially rejected, which would automatically affect the implementation of the circular. The findings correspond with the Van Meter and Van Horn's Policy Implementation Theory (1975) which posits that the disposition of the implementers is among the variables to consider for successful policy implementation. Based on Horn and Meter's ideas, disposition includes attitude, beliefs, and positive rapport of the implementers with the target group. Therefore, the disposition of the key implementers can significantly influence their preparedness and effectiveness in the implementation of the circular.

An interview was also conducted with a guidance and counselling teacher regarding a similar aspect; the following comment was made by guidance and counselling teacher from school V:

> We talked with re-entry students and promoted their participation in extracurricular activities like sports and games. However, many have expressed frustration to me about their peers calling them ridiculous names. They also mentioned that when they reported these issues to the sports teacher, the follow-up was inadequate. (G3, personal communication, April 24, 2024)

Another guidance and counselling teacher added: *"I have seen several cases where re-entry girls wanted to join the game, but they were side-lined by their fellow students and the teacher in charge"* (G7, Personal communication, May 2, 2024)

The responses from G3 and G7 emphasise the social exclusion of re-entry students, especially in extra-curricular activities such as sports and games, which make them feel rejected by their fellow students. This indicates that some regular students and sports teachers were purposely discriminating against re-entry students by stigmatising them. The findings concur with the findings in a study by Baafi (2020), who revealed that pregnant girls and teen mothers encounter all kinds of ridicule, such as name-calling from their peers and community members around the school, which leads to massive dropouts and limited re-entries.

In summary, the data in Table 1 show a grand mean of 2.975, which indicates that regular students moderately agreed that the school has prepared a conducive environment for the implementation of the re-entry circular and for receiving returning students. It was found that the school administration has always been encouraging a sense of belonging among students returning to school after dropping out. Most re-entry students were satisfied with the school administration's efforts to make them feel welcomed. However, the findings also revealed that most regular students disagreed that teachers ensure that students returning to school after dropping out are included in classroom activities. Additionally, the majority of regular students disagreed that sports teachers ensure regular students are collaborating with re-entry students in sports and games. Views regarding how public secondary schools have prepared a conducive environment for implementing the re-entry circular were also collected from teachers through a questionnaire for additional information. The responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teacher's Responses on How public secondary schools have prepared a conducive social environment for implementation of re-entry circular No. 02 of 2021 in Mwanza Region (n=231)

S/N	Statements	SD		D		M		A		SA		Mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	Our school administration has ensured social cooperation among re-entry students and regular students	22	9.5	58	25.1	38	16.5	92	39.8	21	9.1	3.14
2.	The school administration is encouraging us to provide regular academic support to re-entry students	10	4.3	33	14.3	9	3.9	160	69.3	19	8.2	3.63
3.	Our administration is encouraging the re-entry students to participate in different classroom activities	14	6.1	93	40.3	6	2.6	107	46.3	11	4.8	3.03
4.	The administration in our school is encouraging re-entry students to participate in different school programs	16	6.9	109	47.2	11	4.8	86	37.2	9	3.9	2.95
5.	Our school administration is ensuring that re-entry students participate in different sports and games	28	12.1	81	35.1	8	3.5	105	45.5	9	3.9	2.84
6.	Our school has created anti-bullying rules and a campaign in school to protect the social life of re-entry students	10	4.3	137	59.3	19	8.2	62	26.8	3	1.3	2.61
7.	Our school is ensuring classroom interaction between re-entry students and	27	11.7	115	49.8	21	9.1	57	24.7	11	4.8	2.61

		SD		D		M		A		SA		Mean
	regular students											
8.	Our school is ensuring the participation of re-entry students in different students' clubs in our school	35	15.2	55	23.8	15	6.5	108	46.8	18	7.8	3.08
9.	The school has ensured a friendly interaction between teachers and re-entry students	30	13	73	31.6	30	13	74	32	24	10.4	2.95
10.	Our school is encouraging positive environment for re-entry students outside the classroom.	33	14.3	80	34.6	6	2.6	96	41.6	16	6.9	2.92
	Grand Mean											**2.986**

Source: Field data, 2024

Key: *SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, M=Moderate, A=Agree and SA=Strongly Agree*

Data in Table 2 show that 77.5% of teachers agreed that the school administration encourage teachers to provide support to the re-entry students. However, only 18.6 % of teachers disagreed with the statement. Teachers' responses on this item generated a mean score of 3.63, indicating that not all teachers agreed that the school administration had been encouraging them to provide academic support to re-entry students. This suggests that the administrative encouragement received by teachers is critical for ensuring that re-entry students receive academic support from their teachers, aligning with the circular guideline. One of the guidance and counselling teachers, during an interview, said:

> Our school administration genuinely cares about the academic success of re-entry students. The Head of School consistently reminds us in staff meetings to provide academic support to these returning students. This encouragement reassures us that we are not alone in our efforts to support them. (G4, Personal communication, April 26, 2024).

The response from G4 indicates the administration's commitment to ensuring that re-entry students excel in their academic journey.

Another guidance and counselling teacher added:

> At our school, the head of school consistently highlights the importance of providing academic support to re-entry students. She emphasises that some of these students may struggle to keep pace with their classmates, but instead of giving up, we should offer them additional time to strengthen their understanding of challenging concepts. (G10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024)

The response from G10 indicates that sometimes teachers need encouragement so that they can put extra effort into helping re-entry students academically. Thus, it is important for the Heads of Schools to provide this encouragement because they cannot do all the work on by themselves; instead, they need to delegate academic responsibilities to teachers. The role of Heads of Schools will only be to oversee the implementation. The findings concur with the findings in Policy Implementation Theory by George Edward III (1980) which proposes that Bureaucratic Structure is another important variable for policy implementation. He believed that the organization's structure has a significant influence on policy implementation.

During an interview with the Head of School on a similar aspect, the following comments were given.

The Head of School G said:

> Since the release of the re-entry circular, we have prioritised making teachers aware of their academic responsibilities toward students. In staff meetings, I consistently emphasise the importance of monitoring the academic progress of re-entry students to identify any challenges they may face and to assist them in overcoming those issues. (H8, Personal communication, May 3, 2024).

Another Head of School also said:

> As the Head of the School, I have encouraged teachers to foster a welcoming environment where re-entry students can seek academic assistance freely and without fear. However, to be candid, not all teachers fully support this initiative. Some still require reminders to build a positive rapport with re-entry students, enabling these students to approach them comfortably for help. (H2, Personal Communication, April 19, 2024)

The responses from H8 and H2 suggest that, while Heads of Schools play a crucial role in fostering a conducive environment, the success of such efforts depends significantly on the attitude of teachers. This implies that teachers are responsible for supporting re-entry students academically by monitoring them individually and providing support when needed. However, a teacher with a negative attitude would simply ignore re-entry students. This could result in these students failing their examinations because of the negative attitude shown by the teacher; thus, it would be difficult for them to seek academic help. The findings concur with fin dings in a study by Niboye (2022) who revealed that re-entry students face social challenges where they lack academic support from their teachers.

Data in Table 2 show that the majority (63.6%) of teachers who participated in the study disagreed with the statement that school had created anti-bullying rules or campaigns to protect the social life of re-entry students. The responses from the teachers regarding this item generated a mean score of 2.61, indicating a lack of institutional effort in addressing bullying towards re-entry students. The data from teachers were further supported by the focus group discussion with the re-entry students when they said:

> When we returned to school, some of us faced bullying from classmates who knew our reasons for leaving. For instance, one student was taunted by her child's name. Despite our reports to the discipline teacher, no action was taken against the bully, likely because there are no rules in place to protect our rights against bullying in the school. (FGD5, Focus Group Discussion, September 30, 2024)

During an interview with one of the re-entry students, the following observation was made:

> Returning to school was challenging for me. Other students would whisper and laugh as I walked by. I had expected school life to be easy, as promised by the head of school, but it turned out to be quite the opposite. There were no posters or rules in place to protect us from bullying by our peers. (RS4, Personal communication, September 24, 2024).

The response from re-entry students indicates the absence of anti-bullying rules or campaigns in schools, which leaves these students vulnerable to stigma and isolation. The bullying by other students could stem from a negative attitude of members of the school community towards those returning due to a limited understanding of the intent behind the re-entry circular. As revealed by Laurencio et al. (2024) most of the re-entry students face bullying and stigmatisation in school due to their peers' negative perceptions.

A similar observation was made by guidance and counselling teachers as one of them said:

> We have never had a structured anti-bullying initiative in our school that specifically addresses the challenges faced by re-entry students. However, we do have school rules and regulations that, in one way or another, explain what should be done to students who mistreat others, such as bullying. A student who engages in such behaviour must be suspended from school for some time or given another form of punishment. (G6, Personal communication, April 30, 2024)

Another guidance and counselling teacher added:

> As a guidance and counselling teacher, I have witnessed how some of our re-entry students suffer from bullying and isolation from their peers. Unfortunately, there is no formal anti-bullying rule in our school; however, such cases are handled by the discipline teacher or me through the provision of punishment or counselling for the perpetrator. (G9, Personal communication, May 6, 2024)

The responses from G6 and G9 indicate that schools lack anti-bullying initiatives; instead, they rely on discipline and counselling teachers to manage such cases. The findings also imply that the school rules and regulations are used to hold bullying cases accountable, as they are part of disciplinary actions. During an interview with the school heads, the following points were also revealed:

The Head of School K said:

> We have not implemented a dedicated anti-bullying rule or campaign focused solely on the welfare of re-entry students. However, we do encourage students to show mutual respect and urge re-entry students to report any incidents of bullying to the discipline office. (H1, Personal communication, April 18, 2024)

Another Head of School added: *"We do not have any specific anti-bullying rules in our school because the school regulations are in place to ensure that returning students can study comfortably here. However, we also have clubs like SHULE SALAMA, where they discuss such matters."* (H7, Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

The responses from H1 and H7 indicate that Heads of Schools are aware of the existence of bullying among re-entry students, but they rely solely on school rules and regulations to manage such scenarios. This implies that for schools to depend only on these rules and regulations for such sensitive issues may indicate negligence regarding the problem. Furthermore, this suggests that implementing such initiatives requires resources that some schools may lack. The findings align with the findings in a study by Gowon and Joseph (2021) which revealed that most schools have not established any anti-bullying programmes to eradicate social stigma in schools. Similar views were expressed during an interview with the DSEOs, who commented:

> Some of the schools in this district have no anti-bullying rules or campaigns, especially those found in rural areas. However, there are programs introduced in schools as clubs, such as TIMIZA MALENGO and SHULE SALAMA, which serve as platforms to advocate and campaign against bullying in schools. (DSEO2, Personal communication, April 29, 2024).

Another DSEO said:

> I have been encouraging Heads of Schools to create strategies that will help control bullying in schools, but I can honestly admit that very few schools have done so. Anti-bullying campaigns in schools have not clearly been established, and awareness campaigns are only conducted through banners in some schools. (DSEO4, personal communication, May 3, 2024)

The responses from DSEO2 and DSEO4 indicate that efforts to combat bullying and isolation among re-entry students are insufficient in most schools. The responses emphasise that attention has been given to schools, yet very little has been accomplished. This implies that since re-entry students have returned to the formal education system and are regarded like other students, their backgrounds leading to dropout have been overlooked in some schools. Re-entry students require strategies to support their social interactions in school. Treating re-entry students as regular students may negatively affect their studies due to bullying and isolation. The findings agree with the findings in a study by Marende (2022) which revealed that re-entry students face inadequate social support in schools, making them feel discriminated against and isolated. It was also revealed that schools lacked mechanisms to protect them from bullying.

In summary, the data in Table 2 show a grand mean of 2.986, indicating moderate agreement among teachers that schools have prepared a conducive social environment for implementing the re-entry circular. The findings imply that teachers highly agreed that the school administration encourages them to provide regular academic support to the re-entry students. However, it was also found that some teachers disagreed that the school has created anti-bullying campaigns and rules to protect the social lives of the re-entry students.

Therefore, the data in Tables 1 and 2 show a grand mean of 2.975 and 2.986 from regular students and teachers respectively. These indicate moderate agreement among teachers that the school has prepared a conducive social environment for implementing the re-entry circular. Additionally, the information obtained from interview with guidance and counselling teachers indicate that, most of the guidance and counselling teachers agreed that somehow the socials environment in the schools is not overly favourable for the implementation of re-entry circular and providing standard services to the re-entry students. Their responses were further supported by information given by re-entry students through interview and focus group discussion. Similarly, during interviews, Heads of Schools and DSEOs also admitted on the situation and claimed to work on improving it for better implementation of the re-entry circular.

9. Conclusion
The study also found that the social atmosphere in many public secondary schools is often unwelcoming and unsuitable for the re-entry students. Although some schools have taken deliberate steps to create a supportive environment for implementing the re-entry circular and reintegrating students who have left the system, challenges such as stigma, exclusion, and judgment from peers and sometimes from certain teachers still remain. These adverse experiences can deeply affect these students' self-esteem and academic success. While the policy allows all dropped out students to return, it is clear that numerous schools need to enhance their efforts to foster a truly inviting social environment that respects and upholds the dignity of these students, ensuring that they are treated equally.

10. Recommendation

A safe and supportive environment in schools should be promoted to ensure that stigmatisation, exclusion, and bullying of re-entry students is completely addressed in public secondary schools. Heads of Schools, discipline teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, as well as school boards, should foster an inclusive school culture by establishing peer support clubs, modifying school rules and regulations to clearly address the welfare of the re-entry students, and campaigning against bullying in the school. Additionally, the school administration and teachers should ensure that the re-entry students are allowed and supported in participating in various school activities involving students. This initiative must begin immediately and be carried out regularly in schools in Mwanza region.

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