

# Educational Support Systems for Teenage Mothers in Public Basic Schools: Lived Experiences of Teenage Mothers

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigated educational support systems for teenage mothers in public basic schools in the Central Region, Ghana. The study explored the educational support systems available and the in-school management strategies that are adopted by heads of schools to teenage mothers as they re-enrol into the formal public basic school. The study employed a phenomenological research design underpinned by qualitative interpretivist philosophy for the study. The population of the study consisted of teenage mothers and heads teacher. Snowballing and purposive sampling procedures were used to select 5 teenage mothers and 4 heads of schools for interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to elicit data for analysis in response to the research questions posed. The findings showed that the free senior high school policy and the government policy on teenage mothers to return to school after child birth were the factors that contributed to teenage mothers' re-enrolment into school. Again, teachers and classmates provided critical support to teenage mothers who re-entered school in terms of books and stationeries. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service and the National Council for Civic Education should sustain teenage mothers' education in communities regarding government policies and support systems as they re-enrol.

**Keywords:** Teenage Mother, Adolescent, Lived Experiences, School Dropout, Re-Enrolment

## INTRODUCTION

The right to education remains one of the basic human rights enshrined in many international conventions and declarations. This is evidenced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, the 1990 Convention on Education for All (EFA), and the 2016 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In Ghana, the right to equal access to educational opportunities for all Ghanaian children is upheld by both Article 25(1a) of the 1992 Constitution and the 1998 Children's Act. Despite these provisions, the completion of education by school-aged girls remains a challenge, particularly for those who get pregnant in the course of their basic school education.

The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) defines teenage pregnancy as girls who have not reached legal adulthood, which varies across the world, usually within the ages of 13-19, becoming pregnant (UNICEF, 2008). Although it is considered a serious public health and social problem globally (Ganchimeg et al, 2014), approximately, 95% of teenage pregnancies occur in developing countries (Loaiza & Liang, 2013). By the World Health Organisation (WHO), most of the pregnancies and childbirth are not planned and wanted. Accordingly, teenage girls aged 15–19 years are twice more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth compared to women in their twenties, whereas those under the age of 15 years are five times more likely to die [Omar, 2010].

According to the World Health Organisation (2013), about 80 million unintended adolescent pregnancies occur annually globally, and more than half of those pregnancies are aborted. Makiwane, Desmond, Ritcher & Udjo (2006) reported that 87 per cent of teenage girls get married before 18 in Nigeria and more than one in six teenage girls between the ages of 15-19 have given birth in Niger, Liberia, and Mali. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in the world, as 143 out of 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years are estimated to drop out of school because of early pregnancy (Halfaker & Taraborelli, 2015).

Halfaker and Taraborelli (2015) explain that underage sexual involvement, inadequate safe sex education in schools and households, social pressure to engage in sexual activity, inappropriate use of contraception, and sexual harassment are the causes of early pregnancy. Additionally, Maluli and Bali (2014) identify poverty, exposure to crime, violence and family conflict at home, low self-esteem, and low educational aspirations and priorities, as contributing factors to teenage pregnancy. Young school-going girls become teenage mothers between the ages of 11 and 19 because of teenage pregnancy (Cosden, 2014).

In Ghana, girls who drop out of school because of pregnancy decrease their chances of having an education. Baa-Poku (2019) argues that girls dropping out of school are vulnerable to child labor, transactional sex, early marriages, and a recurrent cycle of teen pregnancies. The national vision for girls' education in Ghana established the Girls' Education Unit (GEU) in 1997 to provide the basis for the initial commitment of the government to bridge the gap between boys and girls in education. Thus, the education of girls is seen as an essential element of inclusive education that specifically targets disadvantaged children. Although the education of girls in Ghana has seen some significant improvements, particularly at the primary level, encounters with some basic school heads and teachers have also highlighted the negative impact of the schoolgirl pregnancy phenomenon and the lack of student mothers' commitment to return to school (Maluli & Bali, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to UNESCO (2013), a nation's growth is associated with the well-being of its adolescents and young people since they represent the future of the nation. The adolescence period is a critical period of development regarding the adolescent's self-consciousness, gender, sexuality, exploration, risk taking and the desire for experimentation, especially with sex, drugs and alcohol (Forhan et al., 2009; WHO, 2009). For most adolescents, this period of their lives can be challenging as they become aware of their sexual and reproductive rights and needs (Durham, 1999). They rely on their families, peers, schools and health service providers for information, assistance, and the skills to navigate the transition into adulthood (Gagnon & Simon, 2011). This transition may expose adolescents, especially the teenage girls, to sex and related repercussions including sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, low educational attainment due to dropping out of school and early marriages (UNESCO, 2013).

According to the Africa Education Watch (2022), Ghana records 192,500 school dropout cases with over 102,000 being girls. The cases among girls is attributed largely to teenage pregnancy emanating from social and economic factors. Also, The Ministry of Health, Ghana, reported 555,575 teenage pregnancies between 2016 and 2020, with 109,865 teenage pregnancies in 2020 alone. The impact of the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic on education can never be overemphasized, and teenage girls are the most affected. Further, A COVID-19 School Re-opening report by Africa Education Watch during their monitoring of the partial re-opening of schools for finalists indicates that, 20% of schools recorded between 1-3 girls not returning to school due to teenage pregnancy and migration. This policy brief reviews the implementation of the Re-entry Policy for pregnant girls and teenage mothers by the Ghana Education Service (GES).

In the Central Region of Ghana, the prevalence of schoolgirl pregnancy remains one of the major challenges to educational attainment for the girlchild (Keitumetse, 2006). A report by Kasapa FM online on November, 15, 2021 during the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) revealed that School 'A' had seven (7) teenage pregnant candidates, School 'M' had four (4) pregnancies, School 'B' had eight (8) pregnancies, School 'O' had three (3) and School 'S' had three (3) pregnancies. Also, it was recorded that five (5) nursing mothers came to the examination centres with their breastfeeding children who were catered for by relatives when the examination was in session. Unfortunately, most of these students may end up their education after the basic education due to the pregnancies or childbirth.

The Girls Education Unit (2015b) preliminary study on girls re-enrolled in school after pregnancy in ten selected districts across Ghana showed that despite the government's directive to encourage pregnant students to continue or re-enrol in school after childbirth, majority of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy do not return. Reasons why most teenage mothers stay out of school after childbirth is largely unknown. Several factors are speculated, including stigmatization at school and the lack of appropriate support systems both at home and school for teenage mothers to re-enrol in school. This article provides a scientific exploration of the educational support systems available to teenage mothers' as they re-enroll in basic schools in the Ajumako Enyan Esiam district of the Central region of Ghana. The study further investigated the in-school management strategies adopted by heads of public basic schools within the district to encourage teenage mothers return to school and remain until completion.

## Research Questions

In line with the general purpose of this article, the following research questions were posed:

1. What educational support systems are available for the teenage mothers as they re-enrol into the formal public basic school system?
2. What in-school management strategies are adopted by heads of schools to support teenage mothers as they re-enrol into the formal basic school system?

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to explain the lived experiences of teenage mothers as they re-enroll back to school. Phenomenology is particularly suitable for this study since it is concerned with the study of human existence and how humans understand and perceive their own behaviours. Also, phenomenology seeks to explain the nature of things through the way people experience them. Creswell (2012) suggested that when little research has been done on a topic and questions are exploratory in nature, and the researcher does not know which variables merit emphasis, then qualitative research would be appropriate. Using an exploratory method to identify educational support systems available for the teenage mothers as they re-enrol into the formal public basic school is very important whenever a researcher is breaking new ground. The exploratory design adopted sought to uncover the educational and school management support systems available for teenage mothers in public basic schools in the Ajumako Enyan Esiam District. This approach was fitting because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the support systems available to teenage mothers as they return to school.

### The Study Area

Ajumako Enyan Esiam District is the study area and is bounded to the north of Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District, to the south of Mfantseman Municipality, to the east of Gomoa District and to the west of Assin South District. The study is conducted in the basic schools in Ajumako Enyan Esiam District in the Central Region of Ghana. This is the area in the Central Region noted for teenage motherhood and high dropout rate of pupils, especially girls from school due to pregnancy (Eloundou-Enyegue, 2004). The choice of the study area was also informed by anecdotal evidence from interactions with the Girl Child Coordinator at the Ajumako Enyan Esiam District Education Directorate and finally the report by the Kasapa FM online on November, 15, 2021. It was therefore important to explore how the education of girls in basic schools in the area is being affected by the phenomenon and ways in which those affected can return to school as well as their lived experiences to maintain positive progression rates.

### Participants

Research population is all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people with common observable characteristics, events, or objects to which a researcher wishes to generalize the results of a study (Majid, 2018).

The population for this study consisted of teenage mothers in public basic schools and their respective headteachers, as well as the Girl Child Coordinator in the Ajumako/Enyan/Esiam District. Table 1 indicates the population distribution of the participants.

Table 1: Sample of the Participants

Population	Number
Headteachers	4
Girl Child Coordinator	1
Pupils	5
Total	10

Source: Field Data (2023)

The circuits in the district are Abaasa, Ajumako, Besease, Amia Ba, Sunkwaa, Enyanmaim, and Denkyira. The researchers used the Besease circuit because teenage pregnancy issues and re-enrolment are very common in that circuit (Kasapa, 2021). The research sought to find out the educational support systems available to teenage mothers who returned to school after childbirth. School heads were selected because they could provide information on teenage mothers who re-enrolled.

### Sampling Procedure

The researchers employed two basic sampling techniques for the selection of participants for this study, namely, purposive and snowball. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research since it involves selecting research participants according to the needs of the study (Etikan et al, 2016). The purposive sampling procedure involves the judgment of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample (Patton, 2002). The researchers purposively chose four (4) headteachers and the Girl Child coordinator because of their knowledge and richness of information that is suitable and detailed for the phenomenon under study. Whereas, the teenage mothers were chosen using the snowball sampling technique. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers visited the Girl Child coordinator in the district for information on teenage mothers who could be contacted as far as the study was concerned.

Snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is a non-probability sampling technique applied in situations where the samples have traits that are rare to find (Johnson, 2014). This is a sampling technique in which an existing subject provides referrals to recruit samples required for a research study. Upon the information from the Girl Child Coordinator's desk, a circuit and some schools with records of teenage school mothers were chosen for the study. Due to confidentiality, the name(s) of the circuit and schools are withheld. However, the names of the schools are reported using pseudonyms.

The headteachers of the schools welcomed us whenever we showed them our permission letter and made them aware that our research was for purely academic purposes, hence, their necessary assistance was a need. With the help of one headteacher, a teenage mother who had re-enrolled was identified and upon talking to her, she directed us to other colleagues in other schools. The reason for choosing those schools was that the incidence of teenage pregnancies and re-enrolment was common there. In all, five teenage mothers who had given birth and had returned to school were identified from four schools, namely, Carrot, Lettuce, Cucumber, and Spinach with their respective headteachers. According to Patton (2002), interview participants can range from 5-30, so, the total number of teenage mothers got in the four schools visited with their respective headteachers as well as Girl Child coordinator was used.

Snowballing and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the teenage mothers and headteachers as

well as Girl Child Coordinator respectively based on inclusion criteria. The inclusion criterion for the teenage mothers is that the participants must have returned to school after giving birth.

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

A research instrument has been described by Kothari (2011), as a tool that a researcher employs to elicit information or data from a respondent. Following the design of the study, a semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data from all the participants. The semi-structured interview provides open-ended questions that offer the opportunity to receive varied responses. Moreover, it offers opportunity to probe for further information resulting in a deeper and better understanding.

The interview was conducted with five (5) teenage mothers with their respective headteachers (4) on a one-on-one basis on different dates agreed upon by both the researchers and the participants. The Girl Child coordinator assisted us to identify the various schools with the issues of teenage mothers whilst, the headteachers helped to identify the involved students. Two sets of interview schedules for teenage mothers and their respective headteachers were used. The main purpose of using the interview guide was to provide a framework in which participants could express their thoughts in their own words in the form of a conversation between two people.

## Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Research

In qualitative research, rigour and credibility are appropriate criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of research findings. One cannot be divorced from the other when the process of research is rigorous then research findings are accepted as credible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2005). In this research, a number of strategies were employed to establish trustworthiness. First, we made sure there were congruence between the adopted worldview and the methods chosen. This ensured certain degree of coherence of the epistemological perspective throughout the research process. Thus, multiple constructions and interpretations of lived experiences of students' participation and the headteachers were made consistent with the research design underpinning the work (Marias, 2005; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Secondly, member-checking as a strategy was used to establish trustworthiness (Mertens, 2005). Mertens indicates that member-checking is an ongoing consultation with participants to test the balance between the findings that were developed. This research involved all the participants in the research process and determine their intended meanings in developing overall themes. In view of this, we clarified each participant's responses on the phenomenon under study. This was done during data collection through probes. After, we asked participants to review their own transcripts to check how well the data analysis reflected their responses by giving each participant their transcripts. Another strategy of trustworthiness that was employed in this study was triangulation of data sources, unit analysis, methods and theoretical perspectives that involves the use of multiple forms of evidence to support and better describe findings (Lee, 2010). In this study, we collected data from 10 participants who were interviewed to capture their views on the phenomenon.

Finally, prolonged engagement on the field was employed. This is a strategy to build and sustain rapport with participants and settings in a way that fosters an accurate description of a phenomenon of interest (Ajjawi, 2005; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). In order to achieve these outcomes, we stayed on the field for a period of four (4) months, with six visits to each site and participants to collect data. During this period, we established rapport with participants and gained their trust and confidence. This gave participants the comfort and freedom to discuss their genuine opinion on the phenomenon under study, especially, the teenage mothers.

However, internal reliability was achieved during the study through triangulation, member checks, careful auditing of the data, reaching a consensus regarding the findings with the participants, and using audiotapes to store information on computers for the processing of data, while external reliability refers to the verification of the findings of the research, when the same research is conducted by an independent researcher under the same circumstances and using the same participants (White, 2005). Hence, in this current research, the trustworthiness of the findings was achieved when the researchers went back to show the transcribed findings to the participants to confirm whether what they said were the exact words captured.

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## Data Collection Procedures

The data collection sources consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through field studies and visits to the study area with information from the Girls Education Unit, Ghana Education Service and other relevant stakeholders. Whilst, secondary data were obtained through literature. Prior to the interviews, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Additionally, an introduction letter from the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) was used to negotiate access to the headteachers and the other research participants. Initial meetings with respondents was used to explain the purpose of the study to the respondents. The interviewers initiated contact and the interviewees' consent was established for the right to ask questions and agreed to answer those questions (Miller & Brewer 2003). The interview was capable of producing situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes. These meetings were also used to assure respondents of the confidentiality of their views expressed. Interviews with the teenage mothers who have re-enrolled in school took place at an agreed location on the school compounds. Interviews with the school heads were carried out in their offices during working hours. An audio recorder was used to capture data during the interviews. However, the use of the recorder depended on the agreement with the participants whereas, detailed notes were duly taken.

## Pilot Testing

The interview guide was pilot tested at Abura Asebu Kwamankese District in the Central Region of Ghana. Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District was chosen because it had similar incidence of teenage mothers who returned to school after delivery to the study district. Participants for the pilot testing comprised 2 teenage mothers and 2 headteachers who were purposively selected. The trustworthiness of the instrument was ascertained during the pilot testing.

## Data Processing and Analysis

The data collected from interviews with the teenage mothers and their respective headteachers were first transcribed verbatim using the Hyper Transcribe software. The transcribed data was edited and coded and grouped under themes after which numbers were used to identify similar responses. The interview data were analyzed using the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This qualitative analytical technique is used for defining, analyzing, and reporting themes within data analysis. It minimally organizes the data set in detail and explains it. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis guideline indicates that research analysis is not a linear process, but a recursive one. By implication, all the parts of research are intertwined and thus, in making an analysis the research moves back and forth in the process.

Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis Strategy, according to Lubrosky (1994), as cited in Agbevanu (2014) is used to make meaning out of textual data. It helps the researcher and the readers of the study to bring out the recurring themes cropping up in the textual data (Van Manen, 1990). Themes are contents that keep recurring in the textual data (Agbevanu, 2014). For this study, text or textual data refers to transcribed interviews with participants. In following Braun and Clarke's (2006), thematic analysis process, we first familiarised ourselves with the data by transcribing and reading the transcript over and over again to appreciate the issues being raised by the participants. Secondly, we generated initial codes by isolating interesting statements from our reading of the transcript that seemed to respond to our research objectives. Codes show a feature of the data that appears very interesting to the analyst and refers to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998 p. 63). We further coded manually by reading through the transcripts again and using numbers to map the different responses that portrayed similar ideas.

The next step after generating initial codes an assigning them to text was to search for themes. At this stage, the analysis moved from the individual transcript to a broad analysis using all the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Having identified the meaningful statements otherwise known as codes, we continued to read selectively, grouping similar ideas together. Each set of similar emergent ideas were labeled to form themes and subthemes. The next step in the analysis process involved reviewing the themes and refining those that needed to be refined.

It became apparent during this process that some themes are not themes, while others have fallen into each other. It was important to break down other themes into distinct themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) opined that; “at this stage the researcher should go through two activities, reviewing and refining themes” (p. 21). The reviewing has to do with the researcher reading through the extracts again and making sure that the themes form a ‘coherent pattern’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 22). Here, the authors developed a thematic map using the main themes and grouping the subthemes under the main themes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Research Question 1: What Educational Support Systems are available to teenage mothers as they re-enroll in school?

The research question sought to find out Educational Support Systems available to participants as they re-enroll in school. An analysis of the data gathered revealed that the Educational Support Systems available to teenage mothers as they re-enroll are as follows: Institutional support, friendly support, and home support. For easy understanding, the findings of this research question together with its discussions are presented under the themes below.

#### Theme 1: Institutional support

Under institutional support, most of the participants referred to support they received from teachers and headteachers. Unanimously, the teenage mothers said teachers and headteachers of the various schools helped them in their studies by offering (financial support, Provision of stationary, remedial lessons, and Provision of counseling services).

##### Sub Theme 1: Financial support:

The teenage mothers interviewed reported that they received some financial assistance from some of their teachers and headteachers. For instance, a teenage mother from Carrot school revealed:

*“I am most grateful to the head and the teachers for their support since I came back to school, they sometimes give me money to buy food. Because of the additional responsibility that I have brought to my family I sometimes come to school on empty stomach. Also, most of the time I am exempted from paying some levies in schools such as ICT fees, extra classes fees, and fees from the education office such as the educational week and others.” (St. 1, Car).*

##### Sub Theme 2: Provision of stationery

The second subtheme related to institutional support is the provision of stationery. Teenage mothers indicated that they are usually assisted with some stationaries such as books, pens, and pencils. This was confirmed by a head teachers who revealed that:

*“teaching goes with learning and for a pupil to come to school without writing material will hinder the progress of that pupil so we go to some extent to provide them with stationaries like exercise and notebooks, pens, and school uniforms. (Ht. Car)*

In support, a teenage mother indicated;

*Sometimes teachers support me with some of the things I need to continue my education such as exercise books, pens, and other writing materials to be able to do my classwork because the financial burden I have brought on my family is too much. (St.1)*

##### Sub Theme 3: Remedial lessons

The remedial lesson is another subtheme that emerged out of the main theme of institutional support. The data

analyzed revealed that institutions provided teenage mothers with remedial lessons because they sometimes miss some lessons. A teenage mother from lettuce school stated:

*Since I am still breastfeeding the child I am allowed to go home intermittently to take care of the child and this makes me lose a lot of contact hours so sometimes teachers give me extra time to do a task given to me. Also, they find extra time to explain things to me whenever I call on them for extra tuition. (St.1).*

#### **Sub Theme 4: Provision of counseling services**

The analyzed data revealed that participants received counseling support from their institutions. Participants (students) explained that their institutions provide them with this support to avoid future occurrences as well as to encourage them to complete their basic education. Some participants (teenage mother) from cucumber school shared:

*My teachers support me by giving me advice on the measures to follow to avoid similar situations from happening again. They told me to strive had to be able to finish my education to achieve my goal shortly because education is the key to everything and knowledge is power so I should obtain it. (St.1).*

Also, one of the headteachers revealed that;

*Teenagers of today need to be talked to or mentored, but most times not everyone gets the chance or the privilege to get someone to mentor him or her so in this case wherever the wind blows they follow. Most teenage mothers who have become victims were influenced by their peers and their curiosity. Regarding this, teachers are talked to, to counsel the pupils on sexual reproductive health and sex education in general. (Ht. Cuc)*

From the comments above all indications show that teachers gave immeasurable support to teenage mothers. The support included financial support, Provision of stationary, remedial lessons, and Provision of counseling services for teenage mothers.

#### **Theme 2: Support from friends and classmates**

Again, exploring the educational support systems available to teenage mothers as they re-enroll back to school, here, the researchers were interested in finding out if classmates and friends in the school offered any assistance to their colleague teenage mothers. It was found that the classmates also help financially, giving stationery support like notebooks, pens, and textbooks, and also spent extra time explaining whatever teachers taught in the absence of teenage mothers and advising them as well.

#### **Sub Theme 1: Financial support**

It was shown that teenage mothers received some form of financial support from their friends. Participants especially the teenage mothers explained that their friends sometimes gave them money to buy food. In Spinach school, a teenage mother said that whenever she comes to school on an empty stomach, some of her friends recognize from her face that she has not eaten. Hence, a times buy food for herself or gives her money to buy what she may need. To confirm, the headteacher revealed that;

*“Friends sometimes went beyond learning materials by offering financial support” (Ht. Spi)*

#### **Sub theme 2: Provision of Stationary**

The teenage mothers elucidated that their friends sometimes assisted them in terms of some stationaries such as books, pencils, and pens. A teenage mother who has benefited from such support at Spinach school showed:

*“My friends give me textbooks, exercise books, and other stationery to support my study. I recall one incident where we had an unannounced class test a friend came to my rescue to support me with an exercise book because I came in late and could not find my book and was very stranded” (St.2).*



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### Sub Theme 3: Extra time to explain what has been taught and advice

The teenage mothers explained that in their attempt to cope with the situation they have found themselves, they sometimes miss classes. Hence, some of their friends assist them when they are free. The teenage mother participants explained that their friends take time to explain to them what were taught in their absence. Some teenage mother from Spinach expressed their concern:

*“my friends encourage me every day to learn and how to handle the situation perfectly not to disrupt my studies the more and also carefully gather notes and teaches me what the teachers taught in my absence (St. Spi).*

*“...they give me their copied notes during break time and sometimes teach me after school, what was taught in class in my absence. They also advise me to pursue my education despite being a teenage mother” (St Spi).*

In all, it can be said that classmates and friends in their small way assisted teenage mothers in their studies. Classmates supported teenage mothers financially, giving them stationery like notebooks, pens, and textbooks, and also spent extra time explaining whatever teachers taught in their absence, coupled with these supports enjoyed by teenage mothers from classmates and friends, they also spent time advising these mothers. These supports helped teenage mothers in their continuous stay in the classroom and the school specifically.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of the study showed that teenage mothers had support from headteachers, teachers, and classmates. Teachers supported teenage mothers to buy books and other stationery to support their studies. In some instances, teachers organized extra classes for these teenage mothers to leverage their studies with their colleagues. Again, some teachers bought school uniforms and gave money to teenage mothers on many occasions. Studies have revealed that teenage mothers suffered from their classmates in that, teenage mothers were mostly teased by their classmates (Benson, 2004; Klaw, 2008). Nevertheless, in this study, classmates rather offered massive support to teenage mothers. Classmates gave their written notes to some of these teenage mothers in their absence, others went further to support teenage mothers financially. Counseling services were also offered to teenage mothers from the various schools they find themselves. Not much is known in the field of research on support systems for teenage mothers, however, the few works that have been done by Bunting and McCauley (2004), Benson (2004), and Klaw (2008), posit that support that teenage mothers received was from their family. Their study showed that “family support leads to positive outcomes for teenage mothers and also reiterated that positive impact of family on teenage mothers promoted their well-being”.

However, this current study points out that the educational support systems available for teenage mothers came from headteachers, teachers, and classmates. These supports included financial, stationary like notebooks, pens, and textbooks, and also extra time to explain whatever teachers taught in their absence. These went a long way in supporting teenage mothers in their academic work.

### Research Question 2: What in-school management strategies are adopted by heads to support teenage mothers as they re-enroll in the formal basic school system?

Research question two sought to examine the management strategies adopted by the headteachers to support teenage mothers as they re-enroll in schools. The analysis of the data disclosed the following themes: Provision of counseling service, provision of stigma-free environment, and exemption from payment of some levies.

#### Theme 1: Provision of counseling services

Teenage mothers involved in the study elucidated that they received counseling from the school when they re-enrolled. Teenage mother participants made it clear that their headteachers and other teachers took time to counsel them to ensure that they are in a good position to continue their education. Some participants revealed:

For instance, a teenage mother from Lettuce said;

*“Upon arrival at school, the headteacher sat me down and talked to me. He told me to stay safe and concentrate*

*on my studies in order not to repeat the act the got me pregnant. Also, he said, I should not lose hope and focus ahead to achieve my aim in the future. My class teacher advised me to learn extra hard to be able to catch up with my friends. (St, Let).*

On the other hand, the headteacher revealed that;

*Since the teenage mother has been away for a long time, they need extra support to be able to catch up with their friends, so I advise her in that direction, and told my teachers to attend to her whenever she calls for support and also not to be too hard on her in order to keep her in school. (Ht. Let).*

### **Theme 2: Provision of a stigma-free environment**

The atmosphere of the school has to be serene and free from anything that may pose danger to the people there. In this regard, teenage mothers and headteachers attest to the fact that a lot of measures were put in place supporting the following.

A teenage mother declared;

*“Some of my friends started to mock me because I have given birth and now consider me a grown-up, I reported them to the headteacher and she advised them not to tease or mock me because what am going through can happen to anybody”. (St Cuc).*

In support, a headteacher indicated that,

*“The classmates and other pupils in the school, sometimes become a little bit rough towards the teenage mother. They make comments like “Eiii Abaatan no” (meaning teenage mothers) whenever there is a question relating to sex education and others. When it happens like that, I talk to them that they should rather support their friends to stay in school because it can happen to anybody. (Ht. Cuc).*

### **Theme 3: Exemption from payment of some levies**

Teenage motherhood comes with a lot of problems for the nuclear family and the teenage mother herself. The participants said since teenage mothers have burdened their families already with their needs, sometimes, the provision of some basic needs becomes a problem and so they (teenage mothers) are exempted from paying some levies at school. Participants indicated this theme in their textual data. The following quotes from participants (teenage mother);

*Sometimes teachers exempt me from paying some school levies like computer fees, remedial class fees, and other similar levies.” (St. Spi).*

The headteacher of Spinach school revealed;

*“The parents are not financially sound so at times they find it very difficult to make ends meet, so considering all these things teenage mothers are sometimes exempted from paying some levies in the school to lessen their burden. (Ht. Spi).*

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings showed that teenage mothers received counseling support from their school’s teachers as in-school management strategies adopted by headteachers. This finding suggests that the school management have come to accept the re-entry policy and are prepared to support teenagers who find themselves in such situation. This finding is in congruence with the findings of Kurgat (2016) that in Kenya, the counseling department in the schools had counseling programs in place to support teenage mothers. This department provided teenage mothers with psychosocial support. Similarly, the finding of this study is consistent with the findings of Wanyama and Simatwa (2011), who found that in Kenya, “emotional and psychological support is provided for teenage mothers to deal with the demands of school and the general community at large”.

Also, the finding of this study shows that the school management ensured that the school environment is conducive for teenage mothers to continue with their education. Teenage mothers were protected against stigmatization from other students. This implies that school management is supporting and ensuring the implementation of the re-enrollment policy for teenage mothers. This finding, however, contradicts that of Ruzibiza (2020) who found that in Rwanda teenage mothers are stigmatized both in the community and in school. Hence, the re-enrolment is not patronized by the majority of teenagers who become mothers while schooling.

In addition, the findings of this study revealed that “teenage mothers were exempted from payment of some levies”. This could be because the school takes into consideration the financial burden that comes with childbirth. This finding is similar to that of Evans and Slowley (2010), who revealed that in the UK financial assistance and maintenance allowance are provided for teenage mothers who re-enroll to ensure that they complete their education.

## CONCLUSION

The World Health Organization (2013) and Save a Child Report (2000), point to the fact that teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood is on the increase in Africa. Research has again shown that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the world, as is reported that out of 1,000 girls aged 15- 19 years, 143 drop out of school because of early pregnancies. These teenage mothers mostly end their education after childbirth. However, over the years, a series of interventions have been put in place to help these teenage mothers for them to continue their studies, especially in advanced countries. But in Africa and for that matter Ghana, much was not done for these teenage mothers because of societal perception towards teenage pregnancy and teenage mothers. Despite the plethora of challenges surrounding teenage pregnancy such as lack of parental support, financial difficulties, poor academic performance, and a host of others. Some measures such as the introduction of the Free Senior High School policy and the government policy on re-enrolment of teenage mothers into schools have helped these teenage mothers in Ghana, nevertheless, support from the government, parents, and other corporate organizations should gear towards these teenage mothers to aid them to finish their education because childbirth should not be an end to one’s education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made for practice and policy:

1. Since teenage mothers are still desirous of pursuing their career ambitions, all necessary support in terms of financial and social assistance should be made available in our various schools for these mothers. Policy makers, non-governmental organization and corporate bodies should all come on board to contribute their quota to achieving these feat.
2. Even though the study revealed that teenage mothers enjoyed support from teachers and classmates. A lot more has to be done by the Ghana Education Service such as establishing nursing mothers’ centres in these schools that will take care of the babies of these teenage mothers on campus.
3. The government as a matter of urgency must bring out the policy guidelines on how the re-enrolment has to be rolled out to help the implementing body have a uniform practice.

## Areas for further study

Researchers should further examine teenage mothers’ re-enrolment in school and its impact on the growth and development of their babies.

A follow up research can also be made a few years after this study, to know the achievement of the teenage mothers who re-enrolled.

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