

Key Stakeholders' Awareness on the Implementation of Re-Entry Circular No. 2 of 2021: Evidence from Public Secondary Schools in Mwanza Region, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study sought to examine key stakeholders' awareness on the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in public secondary schools Mwanza region. A convergent design was employed under a mixed research approach. 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 there is moderate awareness of the re-entry circular among key school stakeholders. Some of regular students were not aware of the targeted group of the circular, and they did not know about the necessary procedures to be followed during re-admission. Also, teachers were not aware of the key objective of the circular and had little understanding that a re-entry student could transfer to another school. Hypothesis testing shows that there is no significant difference in the means scores among regular students and teachers on the level of awareness regarding implementation of the re-entry circular in public secondary schools. The study concludes that the low success of circular implementation is associated with a low level of awareness among public secondary key school stakeholders on the re-entry circular. The study recommends that key implementers of the circular in schools should ensure all school community members are aware of the circular so as to improve implementation of re-entry circular Number two of 2021.

Keywords: *Awareness, Re-Entry Circular, Key School Stakeholder, Sensitisation, Implementation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in the socio-economic development of any nation, providing individuals with opportunities for personal growth and national advancement. This is why education have been made a right to every individually. According to UN, education shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (United Nation, 2015). However, the state of secondary school students' dropout is still a vicious problem locally and globally. According to UNESCO (2020),

an estimate 24 million learners worldwide (from pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education) were at risk of dropping out of school in 2020. Many of them eventually dropped out of school due to various reasons such as pandemic diseases, financial constraints, child labour, and household chores (UNESCO, 2020). School Re-entry is one of the efforts which have been placed in most countries to provide second chance to students who dropped out to resume their studies and complete their education. In Tanzania, secondary education is a crucial stage in preparing students for further education and the need of the labor market.

However, challenges such as teenage pregnancy, truancy, absenteeism and other indiscipline acts have historically hindered continuation in education for many teenagers, leading to increased dropout rates (Mgala & Mhando, 2020). To address this issue, the Tanzanian government introduced Re-entry Circular No. 2/2021, which allows students who dropped out for different reasons to return to school and continue their education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2021).

Globally, several countries have adopted re-entry policies to ensure that young mothers do not permanently lose access to education. For example, Jamaica, in Latin America, countries such as Chile and Argentina have implemented policies that support the reintegration of adolescent mothers into formal education (UNESCO, 2022). Similarly, in Asia, the Philippines' Alternative Learning System provides flexible learning opportunities for teenage mothers (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2021). These initiatives align with global educational goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) which gives prominence to the need for achieving quality education in learning institutions. The goal underlines the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all as an important endeavour for the development of any nation by 2030. Also, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which emphasizes the right to education for all girls, including teenage mothers who are the most vulnerable group among those who dropped out of school (United Nations, 2022).

In Africa, re-entry policies have gained traction in countries such as Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia, where governments have established legal frameworks to facilitate the return of dropped out students including young mothers to school (African Union, 2021). In Kenya, the National Re-entry Guidelines provide mechanisms for learners who drop out of school, including those with special needs and disabilities, are supposed to go back to school in order to improve retention, transition and completion rates at all levels of basic education (MOE, 2020). Similarly, Malawi has implemented a re-admission policy that ensures pregnant students and young mothers receive educational support (Chimombo et al., 2020). Despite these efforts, implementation challenges remain, including social stigma, inadequate school support systems, and limited awareness among key stakeholders (Mlambo & Kaseke, 2022). According to Mayunda (2021), in Zambia, many students especially young girls drop out of secondary school due to early pregnancies and do not return after giving birth despite having the re-entry policy in place. Similarly, Marende (2022), reveals such issues in Kenya which include inadequate supports like financial support, social support as well as classroom support which makes them to feel discriminated and hence, low re-admission of dropped out students

The re-entry policy in Tanzania is aligned with these global and regional efforts to enhance right to education and promote gender equality. However, the success of the Re-

entry Circular No. 2/2021 depends on the level of awareness among key stakeholders, including students, teachers, school administrators, and education officers. Several studies indicate that awareness and attitudes towards re-entry policies significantly influence their success (Massawe et al., 2023; Nyirenda & Mboya, 2021). In some regions, like Mwanza which is the area of study, cultural beliefs and societal stigmatization of teenage mothers continue to present obstacles to their return to school (Komba, 2020). Recent reports from Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2023) shows that since the re-entry circular has been officially adopted, only a small fraction of affected students return to school, and even smaller percentage complete their education. In Mwanza Region, a 2024 progress report from the regional education Office revealed that despite the government's commitment, dropout rate among re-entry students remains high, 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). Additionally, a lack of adequate training for teachers, insufficient infrastructure, and limited policy dissemination further hinder the effective implementation of such policies (Waziri & Mkumbwa, 2022). These claims raised concern on the level of awareness among teachers, students, and heads of schools on the implementation of re-entry circular No. 02/2021. It is from this background that this study examined key stakeholders' awareness on the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in public secondary schools in Mwanza region

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Increase in dropout number of students remains a critical challenge in ensuring right to education. In response to this, Tanzanian government's effort to ensure all individuals of school age get the opportunity to receive education through the introduction of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 to allow dropped out students to return to school (MoEST, 2021). However, effective implementation of the circular heavily relies on how well it is understood by the key stakeholders in schools (Laurencio et al., 2024; Ngaza & Mwila, 2023). Recent

Studies revealed that few trainings regarding the circular are conducted in schools. Also, there is less sensitisation, this could be the reason for continued negative attitude regarding the circular (Massawe et al., 2023; Waziri & Mkumbwa, 2022). This could have significant consequence on the implementation of re-entry circular. This situation is concerning and raises several questions regarding what the school has done to enhance understanding of re-entry circular within the school.

Complaints have been raised by heads of schools, teachers, re-entry students and parents that lack of awareness can lead to poor circular implementation, stigmatisation and continued exclusion (UNESCO, 2021). If this situation is not addressed, it may lead to further increases in negative perception on re-entry students, which could result in a rise in an increase of dropout among re-entry students and

ineffective implementation of re-entry circular. Without adequate knowledge and commitment from stakeholders, the circular risk is being under-implemented and failing to achieve its intended objective. Thus, the current study examined key stakeholders' awareness on the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in public secondary schools in Mwanza region

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question guided this study:

What is the level of awareness among key school stakeholders regarding the implementation of the re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in public secondary schools in Mwanza region?

IV. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is significant difference in mean scores between teachers and regular students on the level of awareness regarding the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza Region.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings provide empirical evidence on the levels of awareness which the public secondary school community including regular students, re-entry students, teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, heads of schools and DSEOs has and apply the directives outlined in the circular No. 2 of 2021. The findings will inform the ministry of education science and technology about the gaps in awareness and areas requiring more sensitization. Identifying gaps in awareness and understanding will help even non-governmental organizations, education partners and local governments authorities to design targeted trainings and advocacy programs. These programs will ensure all school members are well informed about rights, responsibilities and procedures related to re-entry circular. Similarly, the findings of this study will help in emphasising the importance of awareness in promoting students' right to education especially the marginalised group of dropouts and empower them by ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The study further provides a foundation for future research on policy awareness and implementation especially in education sector in similar context. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of policy implementation on social awareness within the education sector. Specifically, it enriches theories related to Edward III Policy Implementation Theory by demonstrating how awareness among key stakeholders such as teachers, students, head of schools and educational officers influences the success of policy implementation at grassroot level.

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by Policy Implementation Theory advanced by George Edward III (1980). Edward III's theory states that four important variables determine the effectiveness of policy implementation: communication,

resources, tendencies or behaviours, and bureaucratic structures (Edward III, 1980). The current study focused on the communication variable, which assumes that policy implementation is influenced by ensuring that its intended objective and the whole process are communicated to the key implementers and the group affected by it.

In the communication variable, heads of schools should ensure people are aware of the re-admission circular in their area of jurisdiction by clearly communicating the guidelines and their objectives to teachers, students, and parents. If the objective and target of the policy are not clear or even unknown to the target group, resistance from the target group can occur (Edward III, 1980).

The relevance of policy implementation theory to this study is that it allows understanding the need for circular implementation, which is the focus of this study. It explains the important variables that is relevant in ensuring the Key school stakeholders are aware of the needs of the circular towards its implementation. The theory further establishes that circular implementation is a process. Thus, implementers, including heads of schools, must observe some variables to make the process easier. In communication variable, public schools are shown how it is important in ensuring awareness of Key school stakeholders such as students, teacher and heads of schools themselves for implementation of re-entry circular since treatment of such students is a bit different from other because they might face some discrimination, emotion instability and other treatment which are not favourable for their stay at the school. Thus, creating awareness of the circular is important for the re-entry circular implementation (Edward III, 1980).

VII. LITERATURE REVIEW

Molitor (2020) investigated administrators' perceptions of students' re-entry into school following exclusionary disciplinary measures in Pennsylvania. The study adopted a qualitative approach, collecting data through interviews and questionnaires from 36 respondents, including principals and assistant principals. The findings revealed that, although policies existed to facilitate the reintegration of dropouts into formal education, many stakeholders—including students, teachers, and administrators—lacked full awareness of the re-entry policy and its specific provisions. Molitor noted that this limited awareness extended to key issues such as students' ability to transfer schools if they felt uncomfortable returning to the one from which they had dropped out. This lack of stakeholder knowledge likely hindered effective policy implementation, despite stakeholders being strategically positioned to support the process. While the study offered valuable insights from school administrators, it overlooked the perspectives of teachers and students groups whose experiences could provide a more comprehensive understanding and aid in triangulating the findings. Furthermore, the re-admission policy context in Pennsylvania differs significantly from that of Tanzania, limiting the applicability of Molitor's findings. This contextual gap underscores the need for the current study, which explores

policy implementation within the Tanzanian educational system.

Matse et al. (2022) investigated teachers' awareness of the implementation of the school re-entry policy for teenage mothers in the Kingdom of Eswatini, a country in Southern Africa. The study used a qualitative approach with a sample of 15 teachers. Findings revealed that most educators lacked awareness and understanding of the policy and its guidelines. Additionally, school heads made minimal efforts to disseminate policy information within their institutions. However, the study's reliance solely on teachers as data sources limited the generalisability and reliability of its findings. The absence of quantitative data further constrained the potential to triangulate and strengthen the qualitative insights. Moreover, the study focused exclusively on teenage girls, overlooking the experiences of boys. To address these limitations, the current study includes both male and female participants, thereby providing a more inclusive understanding of the policy's implementation.

Omariba et al. (2024) examined learners' awareness of the school re-entry policy in Migori County, Kenya, using a predominantly quantitative approach. The study involved a sample of 328 learners, with data collected through structured questionnaires. Findings indicated varying levels of policy awareness among students, with some demonstrating only a limited understanding of the policy's provisions and procedures. While the study underscored the significance of school re-entry in promoting educational equity and inclusion, it also identified several implementation challenges. These included societal stigma and negative attitudes toward school dropouts, often driven by factors such as early pregnancy, poverty, and family instability. Despite these challenges, the study highlighted several promising practices and innovations adopted by schools and community organizations to support the re-entry and retention of learners. However, the exclusive reliance on a single data collection instrument limited the potential for triangulation and may have introduced bias into the findings. Addressing this gap, the current study utilized a variety of research instruments to assess awareness among key school stakeholders regarding the implementation of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021.

Tarus (2020) examined the level of awareness of the re-entry policy of teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study adopted a pragmatic world view, with a mixed-methods research design utilising both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study sample consisted of 59 head teachers, 59 guidance and counselling teachers, and 196 teenage mothers. Stratified sampling, as well as simple random and purposive sampling techniques, were employed. The research instruments for the study were a questionnaire, an interview schedule and document analysis. Questionnaires were administered to guidance and counselling teachers and teenage mothers, while an interview schedule was employed for head teachers. Document analysis was used to establish the number of teenage mothers back in school. The findings revealed that most of the respondents, including head teachers, claimed not to be aware of the re-entry policy. The findings revealed that the re-entry policy has not been clearly

defined, clarified and reinforced in schools. It was further revealed that stakeholders were not updated about the rights and responsibilities of the re-entry policy. The study emphasises the weaknesses occurring during the re-entry policy's implementation, as the issue of awareness has not been given a priority. However, the study provided valuable insights, it focused primarily on head teachers, guidance and counselling teachers and teenage mothers. It offered limited information on the awareness levels of other key members of school community, such as other teachers and students, who also play an important role in supporting re-entry students. Thus, the current study addresses this gap by involving a range of Key school stakeholders including both teachers and students in examining awareness level.

Kawala (2021) examined stakeholders' understanding and awareness of re-entry policy and practices in secondary schools in Malongo, Sub-County, Mayuge District in Uganda. The study employed a phenomenological design under a qualitative approach, which is an appropriate design to study the perception of a certain group of people. Data were collected through interviews and drawings for teen mothers. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 20 participants from the target population, involving head teachers, women teachers, pregnant school girls, teen mothers and ministry officials. The findings showed that some participants were aware of the re-entry policy, which is a directive to allow pregnant mothers to write their exams, especially those in candidate classes. It was also revealed that the policy was silent and information flow regarding re-entry seemed to be lacking, which made some of the stakeholders, including heads of school, unaware of its needs due to insufficient sensitisation. Although the findings show a low level of awareness on re-entry policy among stakeholders, there was still a need to explore the thoughts of other teachers and students who could have given their thoughts on how they understand re-entry policy and could have enhanced triangulation of data sources. In addition, the study could have included quantitative data since they provide useful information for generalisation, which cannot be obtained through a qualitative approach alone. The current study involved all teachers and students without considering gender since the circular covers both boys and girls.

Ngaza and Mwila (2022) explored the awareness of stakeholders on the re-entry programme of teenage mothers in Zanzibar, Tanzania. The study used a convergent mixed-methods design under a mixed-methods approach. The study used 160 respondents from four secondary schools, including teachers, academic teachers, school heads, and parents. The study employed simple random sampling and purposive sampling to select respondents. Data were collected through interviews, documentary reviews, and questionnaires, which were useful for triangulation of the information obtained. The study findings revealed that most of the educational stakeholders seemed to be confused about the policy itself and were not aware of the policy itself. It was further shown that some head teachers expressed that re-entry policy was not clear and were unsure of how to implement it. The re-entry policy in Zanzibar is similar to that exercised in

Tanzania mainland specifically Mwanza region. However, there are different social and economic activities which might lead to its implementation process and findings to differ. Thus, the findings obtained from the previous study cannot be used to generalise the situation in Mwanza region due to contextual differences. Therefore, the current study was conducted to fill that gap by examining awareness of heads of secondary schools regarding the re-admission circular.

Laurencio, Gervas and Nyinondi (2024), conducted a study on awareness level of teachers and students regarding re-entry policy for mother-student in public secondary schools in Dodoma region. The study employed descriptive research design involving sample size of 104 teachers and 489 students. The findings revealed that awareness was higher among advance classes students and female teachers. Moreover, the study revealed that majority of other students were not aware of the policy due to its limited sensitisation. While, the study by Laurencio et al., (2024) provided important insight into the level of awareness among students and teachers, its focus was somehow narrow, primarily emphasising pregnant students rather than the broader re-entry process. Additionally, although the study offered valuable quantitative findings, the absence of qualitative data limited deeper exploration into the reasons behind low awareness level. Furthermore, the study concentrated mainly on classroom level participant and did not include school leadership figures such as heads of schools and educational officers who plays acritical role in implementation of re-entry circular. Therefore, while the study's findings are informative for Dodoma region, caution should be taken when generalising them to another context.

VIII. DEMONSTRATION OF KNOWLEDGE GAP

In summary, a review of existing empirical studies by Molitor (2020), Matse et al. (2022), Omariba et al. (2024), Tarus (2020), Kawala (2021), Ngaza & Mwillla (2022), and Laurencio et al. (2024) reveals increasing scholarly interest in the level of awareness regarding re-entry policies in secondary schools across various contexts. These studies have contributed valuable insights, particularly highlighting challenges such as limited stakeholder sensitization, partial understanding of policy rights and procedures, and the inconsistent implementation of re-entry guidelines. However, several important gaps remain unaddressed: Many of the reviewed studies, such as those by Tarus (2020) and Laurencio et al. (2024), 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, and educational officers. This creates a partial view of awareness levels and ignores the critical role of the wider school environment in policy implementation. Most of the studies were conducted outside Tanzania such as in South Africa, Zambia, in Kenya and Uganda or in regions of Tanzania such as Dodoma 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 awareness and policy application differently.

Several prior studies predominantly employed either purely quantitative or qualitative approaches (Laurencio et al., 2024), thus missing opportunities to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of awareness levels 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 examining the key stakeholders' awareness, including students, teachers, heads of schools, guidance and counselling teachers, and District Secondary Educational Officers on implementation of the Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 in public secondary schools Mwanza region, Tanzania.

IX. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a mixed research approach was adopted 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 design used was a convergent design, which allowed for the integration of data collection and analysis of both types of data in a single phase. 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 0.05. 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. Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the study, including obtaining permissions, ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and appropriately acknowledging cited works to prevent plagiarism.

X. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

➤ Key Stakeholders' Awareness Regarding Implementation of Re-entry Circular No. 2 of 2021 in Public Secondary Schools

The study sought to examine key stakeholders' awareness on the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in public secondary schools in Mwanza region. Thus, Interviews were conducted with some re-entry students, but they were not enough to form a focus group discussion. However, focus group discussions took place in schools with sufficient participants. Similarly, interviews were conducted with guidance and counselling teachers, Heads of Schools, and DSEOs. Regular students and teachers also responded to the questionnaires provided to them. The questionnaires comprised ten items with a five-point Likert rating scale

concerning the level of awareness among Key school stakeholders regarding the re-entry circular. The questionnaires comprised ten items with a five-point Likert rating scale concerning the level of awareness among public secondary key school stakeholders regarding the re-entry circular. The scale ranged from "Not aware" (1) to "Very Aware" (5). Additionally, in this study, mean scores were scaled as suggested by Alkharusi (2022): 1.0-1.80 represented "Not aware," 1.81-2.60 represented "Slightly Aware," 2.61-3.40 represented "Moderately Aware," 3.41-4.20 represented "Aware," and 4.21-5.00 represented "Very Aware." The mean score for each statement was calculated to test the level of awareness. The responses of "very aware" and "aware" were treated together as aware; likewise, the responses of "Not aware" and "slightly" were treated together as not aware. The regular students' responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Regular Students' Responses on Their Level of Awareness Concerning Re-Entry Circular No.2/2021 Implementation (N=270)

No.	Statements	NA		SA		MA		A		VA		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	
1.	I am aware that the circular requires re-entry students to register at the beginning of the academic year	16	5.9	70	25.9	9	3.3	161	59.6	14	5.2	3.32
2.	I know that the circular allows re-entry students to return to the same school or transfer to another school	23	8.5	157	58.1	20	7.4	70	25.9	0	0	2.51
3.	I understand that both boys and girls who dropped out for different reasons are allowed to come back to school	32	11.9	143	53	10	3.7	85	31.5	0	0	2.55
4.	I know that the circular number Two of 2021 applies to all secondary schools	33	12.2	115	42.6	18	6.7	93	34.4	11	4.1	2.76
5.	I am aware that students who dropped out due to a criminal record are not allowed to return	18	6.7	96	35.6	24	8.5	110	40.7	23	8.5	3.09
6.	I am aware that the school has to ensure good classroom conditions for re-entry students	50	18.5	112	41.5	18	6.7	76	28.1	14	5.2	2.60
7.	I know what steps a dropped-out student should follow to return to school	65	24.1	144	53.3	29	10.7	32	11.9	0	0	2.33
8.	I am aware that re-entry students are supposed to study in the same class as we do	53	19.6	118	43.7	11	4.1	80	29.6	8	3	2.53
9.	I know which office to go to if a student wants to return to school after dropping out	46	17	123	45.6	15	5.6	72	26.7	14	5.2	2.57
10.	I am aware that students who come back to school after dropping out should be treated equally to other students	9	3.3	86	31.9	14	5.2	154	49.6	27	10	3.31
Grand Mean												2.855

Source: Field data (2024)

Key: NA=Not Aware, SA=Slightly Aware, MA=Moderately Aware, A=Aware and VA=Very Aware

The data in Table 1 show that 59.6% of regular students involved in the study understood that re-entry students who opt for returning to school after dropping out are supposed to be treated equally like them. The mean score from regular students' responses to this item was 3.31, implying that students were moderately aware of the requirement of equal

treatment for returning students after dropping out. The response was confirmed by this re-entry student during the focus group discussion.

We were not really sure of coming back, at the beginning expecting that our fellow students could mistreat us, likely since we came back, students in our school have been good to us, showing they are aware of the circular and they understand that we are equal to them, so they treat us with

respect and dignity. (FGD4, Focus group discussion, September 27, 2024)

The information from FGD4 indicates that regular students understood the circular by ensuring they treated re-entry students as their fellow students regardless of their background or reason for dropping out.

Another group had a contrasting opinion concerning whether regular students fully understand that re-entry students are supposed to be treated equally to them. From the focus group discussion, the following observation was made:

Most of our fellow students are unaware that we are equal to them because ever since we returned to school, we sometimes feel like we do not belong here. We thought our fellow students would understand that we are trying to change our lives, but it is different, as some of them treat us differently, like they are judging us because some of us have already given birth. Some even call the ones with the babies “Mama Watoto”. (FGD1, Focus group discussion, September 13, 2024).

• *Similarly, During An Interview with one of the Re-Entry Students, the Following was Said:*

I believe most students here in school are unaware that the circular has directed us to be treated like any other student. This is because I have observed them looking at me like I am less than them, as some even avoid sitting next to me. This makes me feel bad because it shows that the school administration did not communicate that to them. This makes me work hard to prove to my fellow students that I deserve to be here. (RS1, Personal communication, September 18, 2024)

The responses from the re-entry students indicates that some of the regular students were unaware that the circular demanded that the re-entry students be treated as equals. For without such treatment, they would feel out of place hence, jeopardising their chance of remaining in school. Also, this indicates that the school administration has not sensitised students on the issue of equality when communicating the circular to students in the school. The findings reflect the Edward III (1980) Policy Implementation Theory stipulating that communication is vital in policy implementation. Heads of Schools should ensure that the school community is aware of the re-entry circular by communicating the guidelines and their objectives clearly to students. If the objective and the target of the circular are unclear or even unknown to the target group, there is a possibility for resistance from the target group.

Additionally, views regarding regular students' awareness of the circular content, which directs re-entry students to be treated equally as other students, were collected from guidance and counselling teachers during an interview. One of the guidance and counselling teachers had the following to say:

The school administration here has ensured that education on the circular is provided to all students. Still, it seems that not all of them know everything in the circular,

including treating their fellow returning students as equals. I am saying this because being mistreated by their fellow students has been one of the most common complaints I have received during sessions with some of the students who have returned. (G5, Personal Communication, April 29, 2024)

Views from G5 indicate the school has sensitised students on the circular, but some are still unaware of the circular as they are unaware that re-entry students are supposed to be treated as equals, which is why they are mistreating them. This could mean that the school has provided guidance to students, but not enough effort has been put into ensuring that students are practising what they have been trained for in implementing the circular. The findings correspond to those of Omariba et al. (2024), who found a varying level of awareness among learners regarding the re-entry policy, with some demonstrating limited understanding of how learners should integrate with re-entry students.

Also, during an interview with one of the Heads of Schools, the following observation was made:

In our school, we have worked hard to ensure that students know the circular and its content and treat re-entry students equally. We hold regular sessions to educate them on respecting each other regarding their past. I am proud to say that most of our students are now aware and quite supportive of those who have returned to school after dropping out. (H3, Personal Communication, April 24, 2024).

The views of H3 indicate that the school has communicated the circular to students and ensured that they are well aware of it. They are treating returning students with respect as their equals. The findings imply that students were aware of the circular content, which requires re-entry students to be treated equally, and they were practically doing so to support re-entry students while at school.

Data in Table 1 indicate that 64.8 % of regular students were aware of the circular content, which implies that the re-entry students are required to register in formal schooling at the beginning of each academic year. Responses from regular students generated a mean score of 3.32, implying a moderate level of understanding among regular students regarding re-entry students registering themselves at the beginning of the academic year. This moderate understanding could imply that not all re-entry students return at the beginning of the academic year; some of them could be returning after registration time has passed.

• *The Response was Confirmed During a Focus Group Discussion with Re-Entry Students in one of the Groups When this Observation was Made:*

When we decided to return to school, we did not know we were supposed to register when the schools opened at the beginning of the year. We thought they would allow us to return to class since we had studied here before. However, the head of the school explained that we needed to be registered officially as a new student. (FGD1, Focus group discussion September 13, 2024).

The response by FGD 1 shows that some of the re-entry students also lacked awareness regarding the time of going back to school for registration, implying that some of these re-entry students could have dropped out long before the introduction of the circular and lacked detailed information regarding the circular.

In another group of re-entry students, this observation was made: *“In April, one girl returned. She had to plead with the Head of the school for acceptance. Although she was informed it contradicted the circular guidelines, they ultimately permitted her to join the classes”* (FGD2, Focus group discussion, September 17, 2024).

• *During an Interview, one of the Re-Entry Students Said:*

Truly, I was very confused at first as I kept waiting at home because I was not sure whether I should go back to school directly or wait for the school to send a letter. It was not until one of my friends, with whom I used to study with, who is now in form four, told me that a student who has dropped out, like me, is supposed to be registered in January. (RS9 & RS10, Personal communication, September 30, 2024)

The response from re-entry students emphasises the awareness level of regular students regarding the re-entry of students registering again for their studies at the beginning of the academic year. This implies that regular students were informed about this circular, which enabled them to share information with friends at home who wished to return to school after dropping out. The findings are supported by findings in a study by Laurencio et al. (2024), who reported that students at higher levels of education, such as the advanced level, are aware of the circular and have encouraged friends who dropped out due to pregnancy to return to school. Being aware of the circular content, such as the right time for the re-entry students to register, could facilitate sharing of information, as these students often interact with dropouts during their out-of-school hours, many of whom come from their communities. In addition to sharing information, this awareness is beneficial for regular students, as some might face the risk of dropping out and may wish to return to school someday.

Additionally, the Heads of School were asked about the level of awareness among regular students regarding reporting back to school of re-entry students at the beginning of the academic year. One such head had the following to say:

Most students in our school know the information regarding those who have dropped out and wish to return to school to register at the beginning of the year. We have informed them during meetings and emphasised that they should share this information with any student who wishes to return. (H6, Personal communication, April 30, 2024)

Another Head of School added: *“Aside from informing our students at school, we have also ensured that dropped-out students at home are aware of this by providing them information through community leaders or teachers who live among them”* (H10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024)

The responses from H6 and H10 highlight their efforts to ensure that information about re-entry reaches the intended group using different channels, especially when returning students are supposed to register. This implies that ensuring that people, especially the target group, know when to return to school to register is crucial for preparing the re-entry students at the family level.

Table 1 shows that 64.9% of regular students who participated in the study were not aware that the circular for the re-entry program allows both boys and girls. On the other hand, 31.5% of regular students who participated in the study were aware that boys and girls who dropped out of school are allowed to return. The mean score of 2.55 generated from regular student responses implied that only a few regular students knew that boys and girls could return to school after dropping out.

Being aware that the circular requires all children to go back to school after dropping out, regardless of their gender, is important to regular students as they understand that not only are girls favoured because they are categorised as a marginalised group, but even boys are allowed because they have the right to receive education. As it has been shown in different international agreements that, education is the right of every child or individual, it was necessary for the re-entry circular to allow all children who dropped out for different reasons to return to school. As the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948 explains, education is a fundamental right that helps an individual become a productive member of society (UN, 1949).

These findings were supported by qualitative information obtained from re-entry students, Head of schools, and guidance and counselling teachers. One of the re-entry students said:

When the announcement was released, I was so happy for the girls who were allowed to return to school. I thought the circular focused only on girls since most of the advertisements and announcements focused on pregnant girls. Even my parents did not know that I could return to school. I became aware of the information requiring me to go back to school when I was called to the head master's office, who is a friend of my aunt who works in town. (RS8, Personal communication, September 30, 2024).

• *During an Interview, Another Re-Entry Student Said:*

Initially, I was unaware that boys who dropped out could return to school, as I hadn't fully grasped the circular. I was even more surprised to see a boy from our class who had also come back. That's when I realised this program wasn't exclusive to girls. (RS9, Personal communication, September 30, 2024)

The responses from the interviews with RS8 and RS9 indicates insufficient understanding of the circular due to insufficient communication of the circular to the students. This implies a significant informational gap among students, where the re-entry policy is still perceived as gender specific, which may be due to poor dissemination of inclusive

information. This suggests clearer and more inclusive strategies, as explained by Edward III's Policy Implementation Theory (1980), which assumes that effective policy implementation starts by communicating the guidelines and objectives to avoid misunderstanding among the implementers or the target group.

- *Also, one of the Re-Entry Students During the Focus Group Discussion Added:*

Before we returned to school, we thought the re-entry program was only for girls like us who became pregnant. That is what everyone in our community was saying: that the government only helps girls to go back to school after giving birth. Even at school, teachers discussed helping girls more often; we didn't hear anything about boys returning. (FGD5, Focus group discussion, September 30 2024).

- *Re-Entry Students from Another Focus Group Discussion Said:*

Even though I am a girl who returned to school after the announcement, I did not know that boys also had the chance to return. In our village meetings, they only mentioned the program for girls. So, I thought boys who dropped out for other reasons were not allowed. However, I was surprised when we started a new term and I saw some boys from our neighbourhood who had dropped out back in school. (FGD4, Focus group discussion, September 27, 2024)

The responses from re-entry students in FGD4 and FGD5 indicate that the re-entry circular is still not clearly understood by people, even by the target group itself. This implies that the re-entry circular was poorly communicated, particularly regarding gender inclusivity, as most re-entry students believed it was only for girls due to how it was presented in the community forums. The focus on girls, especially those returning after giving birth, overshadowed the broad objective of the circular, which requires all students who dropped out of school for different reasons to return to school (MoEST, 2021). This could have been a reason for leaving many students especially boys uninformed about their right to return and hence low number of returning students. Guidance and counselling teachers also commented regarding regular students' awareness about the circular requirement that both boys and girls were allowed to return to school. During an interview, one of the guidance and counselling teachers from school Z said:

Most students here in our school think the re-entry circular only applies to girls who dropped out due to pregnancy. They are always shocked when I tell them that even boys who dropped out can return to complete their education if they meet the re-enrolment requirements. This is the perception among most students because girls have been regarded as a vulnerable group for a long time. (G15, Personal communication, May 16, 2024)

- *Another Guidance and Counselling Teacher Said:*

In our school here, we have some students whose brothers dropped out due to truancy and family

responsibilities and did not return because their siblings believe that only girls are considered for this program. This shows how one-sided the awareness is. (G5, Personal Communication, April 29, 2024)

The responses from the G15 and G5 signifies a critical information gap in how the re-entry circular has been communicated among regular students. The guidance and counselling teachers are the key informants and mediators in ensuring awareness of the circular, especially among students who are at school. However, they may not effectively reach all students, especially those who have already dropped out. This may be problematic because people could still receive or have false information that the circular is for girls only, which can even result in slower the implementation of the circular.

- *Similarly, one Head of School Said:*

The thing is, the majority of our students misunderstand this circular. Boys often feel they are left out, or they even assume that they have no chance of returning to school once they drop out due to different reasons, and this is because, in the mouths of many, they emphasise re-entry circular talks about girls. (H9, Personal communication, May 6, 2024)

- *Another Head of School Said:*

The majority of our students are still not aware of the circular. When we discuss the re-entry circular, students only associate it with girls who became pregnant. Very few know that boys who dropped out are allowed to return to school. (H10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024)

The response from H9 and H10 highlights the efforts of the school administration to communicate the circular to students. Also, it indicates that Heads of Schools acknowledge of the prevalent of inadequate awareness of the re-entry circular among regular students, which has affected even the perception of some students among boys, assuming they have no chance of returning to school once they drop out. This misunderstanding reveals a gap in communication of the circular, which may be due to inadequate sensitisation of the circular. The findings correspond to the findings in a study by Kawala (2021), who found that people are aware of the re-entry policy, which provides a directive to allow pregnant young mothers, especially those in candidate classes, to sit for their examinations. Thus, the schools need to enhance their communication strategies to ensure all students, even the ones affected by the word of mouth are adequately informed about their rights, particularly regarding re-entry after dropping out.

The data in Table 1 show that 77.4% of regular students reported not being aware of the necessary steps and procedures for re-entry. Conversely, 11.9% of regular students were aware of the steps and procedures to be followed for students returning to school after dropping out. Regular students' response on this item generated a mean score of 2.33, indicating that most did not know the steps and procedures for re-entering school after dropping out.

- *One of the Guidance and Counselling Teachers During an Interview, Said:*

Most of our students are unaware of the steps and procedures to follow when returning to school after dropping

out. Furthermore, this is not only for the ones who dropped out before the program's introduction. I witnessed one of our students drop out after the program's introduction and fail to register on time because she did not know the steps to follow for re-entry. (G6, Personal Communication, April 30, 2024)

The response from the G6 teacher indicates inadequate awareness of the necessary steps and procedures to follow for regular students who wish to continue with their studies. Learning the correct steps highlights reactive rather than proactive awareness among students. During an interview, another guidance and counselling teacher said:

We educate our students on the importance of following necessary procedures for readmission. Still, many students do not know about them unless someone holds their hand. I remember helping one student with her re-entry procedures. The steps are not complicated but may not be clearly communicated especially in remote areas like ours. (G2, Personal communication, April 19, 2024)

The response from G2 highlights the simplicity of the process to be followed for re-entering school, which becomes difficult for some students to navigate without proper guidance due to limited information about the circular. This implies that the re-entry process could involve some procedures which make it difficult for the target group to follow. If these procedures are not simplified, they could discourage some of the returning students from returning to school. The findings reflect the notions in the Edward III Policy Implementation Theory (1980) proposing that Heads of Schools, who are the implementers, need to ensure that bureaucracy or a long chain of command that will act as a stumbling block in the re-entry processes especially to students and parents is reduced. When Heads of Schools were interviewed on this aspect, the Head of School I X said:

Some students are not aware that there are steps which need to be followed when returning to school. I have witnessed several of them who thought, it is a matter of just showing up. They do not know that there are processes like checking if they are eligible for returning, such as within two years since they dropped out. Also determining the reasons to drop out, as we know the circular does not allow dropped out students who are ex-convicts. (H8, Personal communication, May 3, 2024)

- *Similarly, During an Interview, Another Head of School Said:*

We try to simplify the steps when students or their parents come to inquire. But honestly, many of them are still unaware of the procedures. For example, once a certain mother came with her daughter, they had no clue what to do. What she wanted was just for her daughter to go back to school. They looked confused when I asked if they had gone through any procedure. (H10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024).

The responses from Heads of Schools show that information about re-entry procedures is not sufficiently reaching students, especially dropouts and their guardians or parents in the community. Regular students at school could be getting information, but ignoring them because they are not the victims. The findings concur with findings in a study by Matse et al. (2022) who revealed that, a lack of understanding of the policy, especially procedures for student re-entry among students, could affect effective implementation of the policy. It is important for regular students to understand the procedures clearly because there are different reasons for dropping out; and any time, they could fall into a similar situation. This is why knowing the steps and procedures is necessary for all students. Little awareness of regular students on the procedures involved in the re-entry process of dropped-out students could affect the process of circular implementation, because there could be possibilities of some parents or dropped-out students inquiring about information from them. The lack of awareness in this aspect could mislead the targeted group.

In summary, the data in Table 1 show a grand mean of 2.855, which indicates that regular students were moderately aware of the content of the re-entry circular. It was found that regular students were aware of how re-entry students should be treated when returning to school. Most of re-entry students knew that they were supposed to register themselves at the beginning of the academic year. But some of the re-entry students claimed not to be aware at first, but later got clarification about it from their fellow peers or respective offices. However, it was found that most regular students were unaware of the circular's targeted group. Many thought the circular was meant for students who dropped out due to pregnancy. Also, many of them thought the circular targeted girls but not boys. Also, many re-entry students were unaware of the necessary steps and procedures to follow for the re-entry process.

Teachers also provided views on the level of awareness of public secondary key school stakeholders regarding the implementation of the re-entry circular. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Teachers' Responses on Their Level of Awareness Concerning Re-Entry Circular No.2/2021 Implementation (N=231)

S/N	Statements	NA		SA		MA		A		VA		Mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	I am aware that circular requires re-entry students to register at the beginning of the academic year	31	13.4	51	22.1	12	5.2	118	51.1	19	8.2	3.19
2.	I understand that the circular is applicable to all secondary schools	46	19.9	95	41.1	9	3.9	72	31.2	9	3.9	2.58
3.	I understand the steps that students should follow to be re-enrolled after dropping out	42	18.2	84	36.4	26	11.3	66	28.6	13	5.6	2.67
4.	I understand that the circular allows both boys and girls who dropped out of school to return to complete their education	15	6.5	29	12.6	10	4.3	143	61.9	34	14.7	3.66
5.	I am aware that re-entry students are supposed to study in the same class with other students	8	3.5	104	45	45	19.5	64	27.7	10	4.3	2.84
6.	I am aware that the circular allows students who dropped within a period of two years are allowed to return to school	22	9.5	107	46.3	10	4.3	63	27.3	29	12.6	2.87
7.	I know that the circular allows re-entry students to return to the same school or transfer to another	56	24.2	97	42	7	3	65	28.1	6	2.6	2.43
8.	I understand my role as a teacher in supporting re-admitted students	9	3.9	28	12.1	13	5.6	141	61	40	17.3	3.76
9.	I am aware that students who dropped out due to a criminal record are not allowed to return	9	3.9	29	12.6	15	6.5	131	56.7	47	20.3	3.77
10.	I am aware that students who come back to school after dropping out should be treated equally to other students	41	17.7	86	37.2	12	5.2	83	35.9	9	3.9	2.71
Grand Mean												3.048

Source: Field data (2024)

Key: NA=Not Aware, SA=Slight Aware, MA=Moderately Aware, A=Aware and VA=Very Aware

Data in Table 2 indicates that 77% of teachers are aware that the circular does not allow students who are ex-convicts to return to school after dropping out. However, only 16.5% of teachers were unaware of this provision of the circular. Teachers' response to this item generated a mean score of 3.77, indicating that not all teachers knew this provision of the circular. This suggests understanding about this is critical for ensuring the implementation of the re-entry circular at the school level aligns with the national guidelines, especially in ensuring a safe learning environment and maintenance of school discipline. One of the guidance and counselling teachers, during an interview, said:

We are trained to support students facing various life challenges, including those returning after pregnancy or experiencing economic difficulties. However, when a student has a criminal background, severe offences like theft or assault, it presents a different situation. As we all know, the circular guideline is clear: such students cannot be allowed back in our school. (G12, Personal communication, May 9, 2024)

Response from G12 teacher indicates the importance of teachers understanding of the circular and ensuring the safety

of other students within the school. During an interview, another guidance and counselling teacher said:

I am aware that the circular does not allow students with a criminal past to return to formal schooling. As teachers, we try to help students integrate after returning, but those with criminal records are viewed as a risk. There was a case of a boy who was once taken in for seriously assaulting another student; his guardian came to our school and insisted on his return, but we had to turn them down based on the circular dictates. (G10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024)

The response from G10 indicates that sometimes, teachers may find it helpful for students with criminal records to return because of a common belief that they might have changed. Nevertheless, it is important for teachers to be guided by the circular, because there must be a documented reason for the dropout. The study findings concur with the provisions of the circular provided by MoEST (2021), which indicated that all students who left school for various reasons, such as pregnancy, truancy or family issues, can return to school. The circular maintains that students who dropped out due to criminal activities are not eligible for re-entry.

During an interview with Heads of Schools regarding teachers' awareness about this provision of the circular, one head of schools said:

Every teacher in our school is aware of this guideline. We were trained during a sensitisation workshop last year that this circular excludes students with a criminal record. As heads of schools, we must enforce this consistently and not be swayed by emotions or favouritism because we are familiar with a certain situation child. (H6, Personal communication, April 30, 2024)

- *Similarly, Another Head of School Said:*

I have ensured that teachers in this school are aware that students with criminal records are not allowed re-entry. Initially, we did not clearly understand which types of crimes were being referenced, but we later received instructions from DSEO that students involved in serious misconduct, such as theft, rape, or assault, among others are not allowed to return to school. (H10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024)

The response from HS6 and HS10 indicates that Heads of School are well aware of this provision of the circular and have ensured that even teachers are aware of it. This is useful as awareness of the circular among key implementers and the target people can foster effective implementation of the circular.

During an interview with District Secondary Educational Officers, the following was commented regarding the awareness of excluding dropped-out students with criminal records from returning to school. One of the DSEOs said:

This office is responsible for overseeing the implementation of government directives, such as the re-entry circular. Therefore, when the circular was introduced, I ensured that all schools in this district were aware of its contents, including the policy that students with a criminal record are not allowed in school. This responsibility extends to ensuring that schools remain safe and secure environments for all students and staff. (DSEO4, Personal communication, May 3, 2024)

- *During an Interview with Another DSEO of District Q, Said:*

In our district, we approach these cases with caution. Before granting any re-entry, we thoroughly review students' backgrounds, particularly for transfer students, as their information may be insufficient. If we uncover a history of criminal behaviour, we promptly recommend that the school deny their application. Occasionally, parents visit our office pleading, but we typically remain firm on this matter. (DSEO6, Personal communication, May 10, 2024).

The response from DSEO4 and DSEO5 shows that a high level of circular awareness and the commitment of enforcing the rule for student safety is very important. The findings also imply that the school administrators should consistently apply the provision of the circular, even when by doing so generates pressure from parents and the community. The findings corresponded to the findings in a study by Laurencio et al. (2024), who commented that observing the circular provisions, such as not allowing unqualified students who have dropped out to return to school, may be necessary

for ensuring the safety of the re-entry and other students in general.

Data in Table 2 show that the majority of teachers (78.3%) who participated in the study are aware of their roles in supporting re-entry students. On the other hand, 16 % of teachers were unaware of their role in supporting re-entry students. Responses from teachers generated a mean score of 3.76, which shows that most teachers were aware of their role, but not all of them. The response was confirmed from the interview held with guidance and counselling teachers, one of whom said:

I know that, as teachers, we are not just here to teach subjects when it comes to returning students. When students return to school, they need different kinds of support from us, such as emotional support, encouragement, and understanding. As a guidance teacher, I always tell my fellow teachers to treat them like other students and, mostly, offer our academic support and help them rebuild their confidence. (G15, Personal communication, May 8, 2024)

- *Another Guidance and Counselling Teacher Said:*

I recognise my duty to support re-entry students. Many of these young women return filled with fear and anxiety. Our responsibility is to foster a safe environment where they feel respected. For instance, one re-entry student returned fearing judgment from her peers, which made her reluctant to engage in class. Thus, I regularly communicated with her and collaborated with other teachers to provide her with additional support. Over time, she began to acclimate to our setting, highlighting the crucial role of teachers' support. (G2, Personal communication, April 19, 2024)

Response from G15 and G2 indicates that teachers clearly understand their role in supporting re-entry students and fully engage in doing it practically, ensuring they provide their academic, social, and psychological support. The findings correspond to those in a study by Matse et al. (2022), who revealed that many teachers acknowledged their role and the importance of supporting re-entry students and suggested professional development to deepen their understanding of the policy implementation.

Similarly, Heads of Schools reflected a strong awareness of teachers' role in supporting the re-entry students as one of the Head of School X said:

Yes, teachers in our school are aware of their role in supporting re-entry students. I always emphasise to all staff that a re-entry student is, first and foremost, a student. Some may have made mistakes, but they have shown courage by returning to school. Thus, we shouldn't be a reason for them to drop out again; instead, we should be the pillars they can lean on when they need our support here in school. (H8, Personal communication, May 3, 2024)

Response from the Head of school indicates that although teachers are aware of their role in supporting the re-entry students, they are always reminded of giving them support without considering their reason for dropping out. As

highlighted in the circular, District Secondary Educational Officers also pointed out a strong awareness among teachers regarding their roles as one of the DSEOs said:

When I visit schools, I always talk to teachers and ask how they are supporting re-entry students. Many are now aware of their roles and understand that it is not about giving special treatment but about providing fair opportunities in class. One of the teachers once told me, “These girls need encouragement not punishment for what they went through. We are here to help them succeed. (DSEO1, Personal communication, April 17, 2024)

- *Similarly, Another DSEO Said:*

Most teachers in our schools are now aware of their roles in implementing the re-entry circular and supporting re-entry students. This is why we have been regularly organising workshops to train and sensitise them on this matter. Now, teachers understand it is important for them to ensure a friendly classroom environment for re-entry students and to support them academically. (DSEO3, Personal communication, April 30, 2024)

The response from DSEO1 and DSEO3 entails that teachers understand their roles in mentoring and guiding re-entry students in their academic journey. Teachers are also aware of their role, which has been highlighted in the circular, which is to ensure a classroom environment is supportive of the re-entry students (MoEST, 2021).

Data in Table 2 show that 66.2% of teachers were unaware that re-entry students could transfer to school when they opt for returning after dropping out. However, 30.7% of teachers who participated in the study understand that the re-entry students can return to the same school or transfer to another. Teachers' response on this item generated a mean score of 2.43, indicating low awareness among teachers regarding re-entry students' having an option of returning to the same school they were before dropping out or transferring to another. Guidance and counselling teachers, Heads of Schools and DSEOs were asked to give their opinions on teachers' understanding regarding this circular's provision through an interview. One of the guidance and counselling teachers said:

At first, I did not know. I only learned about that option recently. One of our students felt uncomfortable returning to this school, and her parents were pushing her to be re-admitted somewhere else. When I followed up with the head of school, he clarified that a transfer is allowed under the circular. (G12, Personal communication, May 9, 2024)

- *Another Guidance and Counselling Teacher Said:*

Some of my colleagues were not aware. I have tried to explain to them that it is not mandatory for re-entry students to return to the same school; they can transfer if they or their family feel it is better. But some teachers were surprised when I mentioned that because most believed they were supposed to return to the same school. (G10, Personal communication, May 7, 2024)

Responses from G12 and G10 showed that some teachers were unaware of the provision of the circular of allowing re-entry students to transfer. Some of them became aware when they got clarification from their colleagues or from the school administration.

- *Similarly, a Head of School X Said:*

Many teachers at my school struggle to comprehend the re-entry circular's content. Some mistakenly believe that re-entry simply means returning to the same school and class without exception. This is a misunderstanding. For instance, one re-entry student expressed a desire to transfer instead of returning here, and teachers questioned if that option was permitted. (H14, Personal communication, May 16, 2024)

DSEOs had the following to say about teachers' understanding of the circular provision regarding re-entry students to transfer to another school or return to the same school. One of the DSEOs said:

It is unfortunate that most teachers do not fully understand what the circular says. Their knowledge is mostly second-hand, based on what the heads of schools have told them. Consequently, issues like the option to transfer or return to the same school are not well known among them, except for those who make the extra effort to learn about the re-entry circular themselves. (DSEO4, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024.)

Response from the Head of School and the District Secondary Educational Officer indicate that most teachers were not aware students could transfer to another school when they wished to; only a few went an extra mile to learn about the re-entry circular knew about the provision. The study findings concur with the findings in a study by Molitor (2020), who found that many teachers were not fully aware of the re-entry circular, especially regarding details such as students' flexibility to return to the same school or transfer.

In summary, the data in Table 2 show a grand mean of 3.048, which indicate that teachers were moderately aware of the re-entry circular content. The findings imply that teachers had a moderate level of awareness of some provisions of the re-entry circular. It was found that teachers were aware of their role in supporting re-entry students in school, but students who had dropped out with a criminal record were not allowed back to school based on the circular. However, it was found that most teachers were unaware that students who return to school after dropping out have a chance to transfer to another school. Many of them believed that the circular allows re-entry students to return to the same school only.

➤ *Hypothesis Testing*

The hypothesis was tested to establish if there was a significant difference in mean scores between teachers and regular students on the level of awareness regarding the implementation of the re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021. One-way ANOVA was calculated at a 95% confidence level.

➤ Null Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in mean scores between teachers and regular students on the level of awareness regarding the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza Region.

➤ Assumptions

- The dependent variable should be measured at the interval or ratio
- The independent variable should consist of two or more categorical groups
- There should be no significant outliers
- The dependent variables should be normally distributed
- There should be homogeneity of variances

Before testing the hypothesis, the researcher conducted the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, revealing P-values of 0.070

and 0.137, were greater than the significance level of 0.05. This indicated that the data was normally distributed, and the researcher proceeded with the hypothesis testing. Moreover, Levene's test for equality of variances returned a significant p-value of 0.507, which was greater than the significance level, suggesting that homogeneity of variance assumption was met, enabled the researcher to proceed with hypothesis testing.

➤ Decisions Rules

- If the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05), reject the null hypothesis.
- ii. If the p-value is greater than the significance level (0.05) we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3 Difference in Mean Scores between Teachers and Regular Students on the Level of Awareness Regarding the Implementation of the Re-Entry Circular No. 2 Of 2021

ANOVA					
Scores					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.001	1	.001	.004	.949
Within Groups	87.212	499	.175		
Total	87.213	500			

Source: Researcher (2025)

Table 3 show that $F(1,499) = 0.004$, $P = 0.949$. The data indicated that p-value is greater than the significant level of 0.05. Since the p-value is greater than the significant level, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in mean scores between teachers and regular students on the level of awareness regarding the implementation of re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 in Mwanza region. This means that the level of awareness regarding implementation of re-entry circular among teachers and students is similar. The degree to which the circular is emphasised do not differs between the two groups (teachers and regular students. This may indicate how the circular content and its intent is communicated was not different among the teachers and regular students.

Therefore, the data in Tables 1 and 2 show a grand mean of 2.855 and 3.048 for regular students and teachers, respectively, indicating their level of awareness regarding the implementation of re-entry circular. Based on the grand mean scores, it is evident that regular students and teachers had a moderate level of awareness of some aspects of the re-entry circular. Additionally, the responses which were provided by other respondents through interview and focus group discussion show that some of the re-entry students were somehow aware of the re-entry circular. This implies that some of them, especially boys, were not aware of the circular until they got clarification about it. This could be due to inadequate communication regarding re-entry circular intent. Also, the information shared by guidance and counselling teachers and heads of schools showed their efforts in ensuring the members of the school were aware of the circular, but still some of them seemed to lack understanding of some of its

aspects. The results obtained from the hypothesis also concurs with the descriptive data where it indicates that the level of awareness among regular students and teachers do not differs, with teachers being moderate aware of the implementation of the re-entry circular same as regular students.

XI. CONCLUSION

The findings concluded that the level of awareness regarding re-entry circular No. 2 of 2021 among public secondary Key school stakeholders was Moderate. The awareness levels vary among key stakeholders in schools. While District School Education Officers (DSEOs) and school heads showed relatively high awareness of the circular and its contents, some teachers and students had a limited understanding. This suggests that the communication regarding the circular has not effectively reached all key stakeholders, especially those at the grassroots level. Without a shared understanding among all key stakeholders, achieving consistent and effective acceptance and implementation of the circular becomes a major challenge at the school level.

RECOMMENDATION

Strengthening stakeholders' awareness of the re-entry circular is essential. District educational offices and school heads, with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, should arrange sensitisation programs within schools and in the surrounding community to provide education and enhance understanding of different aspects of the circular for all stakeholders. This initiative should be

implemented across all public secondary schools in the Mwanza region. Formal initiatives should occur at least monthly in schools, as well as at the end of the academic year in the community surrounding the school, to emphasise the importance for students wishing to re-register at the beginning of the new academic year. Additionally, this should be reinforced frequently as a daily reminder using posters, brochures, and advocacy about the re-entry circular in various radio stations and television programs, as well as during school assemblies.

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