

Promoting Inclusive Policies to Support Pregnant Grade 6 Adolescent Learners in Zimbabwe: Implications and Solutions

Munyaradzi Saruchera¹ and Munyaradzi Chidarikire^{2*}

¹(Dr) Africa Centre for Inclusive Health Management, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch South Africa, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4345-1293>

²(Dr), Africa Centre for Inclusive health Management, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch South Africa, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3507-8329>

*Corresponding author: Chidarikire, M.

*Email: mchidas78@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3507-8329>

Citation: Saruchera M & Chidarikire M. (2024). Promoting Inclusive Policies To Support Pregnant Grade 6 Adolescent Learners: Implications and Solutions., *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11) 578 - 592
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i11.8237

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This qualitative paper aims to examine the effects of unplanned early pregnancies on the academic performance of grade 6 learners in the resettlement areas of Masvingo North District of Zimbabwe and also offer ways to mitigate early pregnancies. While there is considerable research on adolescent pregnancies in the Zimbabwe broader context, there is a notable gap in studies focusing specifically on resettlement areas in Masvingo Province. Employing a constructivist qualitative approach, the paper investigated intricate experiences of learners, parents, teachers, and other community members affected by early pregnancies of primary school-going learners within an educational context. The theoretical framework of Albert Bandura's social learning theory underscores the significance of social interactions in shaping individual experiences and academic outcomes. A case study design facilitated an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon, capturing diverse perspectives from four grade six (6) teachers, eight (8) learners, six (6) parents, and a range of other community stakeholders. Purposive sampling technique was used to achieve balanced representation of views between pregnant and non-pregnant learners. This study responded to two critical questions, how do early adolescent pregnancies among grade 6 learners affect academic performance, and what inclusive mitigation strategies exist? Data was collected through two focus group discussions, which fostered an ideal environment for open dialogue and enabled the researchers to facilitate inclusive conversations with the participants. Thematic analysis revealed key patterns and themes related to challenges posed by early pregnancies on academic performance, thus highlighting the multifaceted nature of the issue. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent among participants among others. The findings contribute to nuanced understanding of how sociocultural dynamics influence educational outcomes in the resettlement areas, suggesting implications for future educational policies and interventions aimed at supporting affected learners.

Keywords: academic performance, early pregnancies, inclusive, grade 6 learners, educational context, resettlement areas, social learning theory, Masvingo North, Zimbabwe.

Introduction and Background Rationale

The Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act of 2020 offers renewed hope and an opportunity for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in Zimbabwe to continue with their education and improve their prospects for a better

future and life. Furthermore, the Ac aligns with some key principles enshrined in the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013. As noted by UNICEF (2020), education constitutes an inherent right for every child, irrespective of gender. This right encompasses provision of quality learning experiences, inclusive educational opportunities, and enhancement of overall life quality for all children, thereby fostering a more equitable world. In low-income countries such as Zimbabwe and other parts of the world, approximately 12 million girls aged 15-19 years and at least 777,000 girls under the age of 15 years give birth annually across the globe (WHO, 2020). This alarming trend poses gendered social development challenges and a significant threat to the direct and indirect realization of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) such as SDGs 4, 3, 1, 5, 8 and 10. Early pregnancies among adolescents present significant barrier to educational attainment, ending poverty, achieving good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, decent work & economic growth and reduced inequalities particularly grade 6 primary school learners in poor and under-serviced resettlement areas of areas like Masvingo North District in Zimbabwe. Baafi (2023) states that early motherhood disrupts educational trajectories, leading to increased dropout rates and lower academic performance. Furthermore, Adhena and Fikre (2023) highlight that girls who fall pregnant while at school often become susceptible to health, social and other well-being challenges and struggle to balance parenting responsibilities with academic demands, resulting in diminished educational outcomes.

Similarly, Lucac and Lukacova (2021) found that teenage mothers in the Masvingo North resettlement areas of Zimbabwe were 40% more likely to drop out of school compared to their non-pregnant peers. Furthermore, Chinkondenji (2022) indicates that adolescent mothers are less likely to achieve the required competencies in key subjects, which is crucial at grade 6 level which is a year before the primary school leaving certificate at grade 7. This disruption is particularly acute in the resettlement area settings where resources and support systems are severely limited, making it essential to examine the compounded and specific impacts of unplanned and underage pregnancies on the academic performance of the learners (Girls Not Brides, 2023).

Teenage pregnancy exposes girls to numerous risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS infection, other sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse, and increased likelihood of school dropout (Baafi, 2020). UNICEF (2020) highlights that girls drop out of school more than boys, particularly at primary school level. This trend is exacerbated in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe where challenges of child pregnancies continue to persist alongside the longstanding and worsening socioeconomic challenges that are adversely affecting health services and family life. Moyo (2023) further emphasizes that the school dropout rates among girls in primary education in Zimbabwe are concerning. The statistics provide insights into the conditions and needs of learners in Zimbabwe, and informing interventions that align with the country's National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025), Devolution Agenda, and Vision 2030.

Partnerships between ZimStat and UNICEF are essential in highlighting and addressing these and related issues. Such collaboration has facilitated the production of provincial and district profiles, enabling stakeholders to identify areas lagging in child welfare indicators and to focus efforts on the most disadvantaged regions where interventions show significant improvement and benefits. Chidarikire (2022) revealed, in a related study conducted in Zimbabwe, that 95 % of teenage pregnancies were unintended and primarily attributed to endemic and generational poverty. The study also identified limited access to contraceptives for teenagers as contributing factor to the rise in the unplanned early pregnancies.

According to Chinkondenji (2022), many poor families in developing countries tend to prioritize the immediate economic contributions and relief from their daughters over their long-term educational and career goals, thus increasing the likelihood of teenage pregnancies and early marriages. This cultural framework not only affects girls' educational aspirations but also reinforces cycles of poverty, as young mothers may lack educational qualifications necessary for better employment opportunities (Chipfaka, 2019). The above finding aligns with Cotza (2023) who indicates that socioeconomic pressures can cause families to view early marriage and motherhood as viable paths for their daughters. Additionally, Girls Not Brides (2019) reveals that local beliefs often view girls' education as primary to domestic responsibilities, further entrenching this cycle, harmful cultural practice and gender oppression. The emphasis on economic contributions over education creates a context for girls to economically depend on men and resulting in unplanned early pregnancies to occur.

Moreover, psychological effects of early pregnancies are often overlooked in discussions about educational performance and adolescent mothers frequently experience feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety that hinder learners' academic progress and success (Lukac and Lukacova, 2024). Chidarikire and Chikwati (2024) indicate that mental health challenges faced by young mothers can lead to poor concentration and motivation which is detrimental to learning and overall well-being. The psycho-social dimension is an important aspect understanding the other impacts of early pregnancies on academic performance, and this aspect requires further investigation. Morgan et al, (2023) emphasize the importance of mental health support, especially for underage, first time and young mothers, suggesting that interventions addressing psycho-social well-being are essential for improving educational outcomes. Additionally, Mwonzora and Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2023) found that stigma associated with being an underage and young mother can further exacerbate feelings of inadequacy

and anxiety, making it difficult for such learners to engage fully in their studies. This highlights a need for comprehensive support systems that address both educational and psycho-social needs of pregnant learners.

While there is considerable research on adolescent pregnancies, there is notable gap in studies focusing specifically on resettlement areas in contexts like Masvingo North District according to Moyo (2023). Most of the existing research tends to concentrate on urban environments or provide generalized analyses that do not effectively account for local cultural and socioeconomic factors (Mukoyi, 2015). For instance, while studies in Harare City have documented the challenges faced by adolescent mothers, unique dynamics of rural and under-serviced resettlement communities remain under researched according to Mushibwe (2018). This lack of localized research creates an incomplete understanding of how early pregnancies uniquely affect academic progress and performance in schools located in rural resettlement areas, thus emphasizing the need for targeted studies to address these specific dynamics (Muzingili and Muchinako, 2016). Mweemba et al, (2019) suggest that the context of resettlement areas in Zimbabwe introduce unique challenges that differ significantly from their urban counterparts or better serviced rural areas, thereby necessitating focused investigations. The absence of detailed studies in the resettlement areas of Masvingo North District highlights a need for this research to inform effective interventions tailored to local realities.

This paper aims to fill the highlighted research gap by examining the effects of early pregnancies on the academic performance of grade 6 learners in Masvingo North District. By focusing on this demographic, the paper provides valuable insights that can inform educational policies and interventions designed to support pregnant learners and young mothers in their academic pursuits (Ncube and Mudau, 2017). Understanding the interplay of sociocultural, psychological, and educational factors is crucial in developing effective strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of early pregnancies on educational outcomes in this region (Nyariro, 2021). This study and paper are not only timely but necessary for informing relevant stakeholders on how to better support pregnant learners and young mothers and improve the overall educational landscape in the Masvingo North District resettlement areas of Zimbabwe. Ultimately, findings from this study contribute to the development of targeted educational programs that promote both academic success and wellbeing for young mothers.

Problem Statement

The issue of unplanned early pregnancies among grade 6 learners in the resettlement areas of Masvingo North District of Zimbabwe significantly undermines the academic performance, future life and career prospects, health and well-being, right to education, fulfilled lives and professions due to the myriads of multifaceted challenges that face pregnant learners and impacting their educational journey. Early pregnancies often lead to increased school absenteeism due to the physical and emotional demands of pregnancy and motherhood that result in learning gaps and decline in academic engagement. According to Chiyota and Marishane (2020), approximately 21 % of pregnancies reported between 2019 and 2022 in Zimbabwe involved girls aged 10 -19 years, resulting in a staggering 350,000 young girls falling pregnant within a period three years. The alarming statistic is closely linked to Zimbabwe's protracted socioeconomic changes, growing poverty and elevated maternal mortality rate which disproportionately affects teen mothers (Desai et al, 2020).

Educational performance among the grade 6 learners in resettlement areas suffers because of early pregnancies. ZimStat (2023) indicates that girls who experience early pregnancies score significantly lower on standardized tests compared to their peers. For example, The Herald (2024), a leading Zimbabwean national daily newspaper, revealed that grade 6 learners who had given birth had average scores of 30% lower than those of non-pregnant peers. This gap underscores the need to investigate the specific factors, aspects and causalities on how early pregnancies impact academic performance at this critical senior primary educational stage. The Human Rights Watch (2018) noted that early pregnancies often lead to increased absenteeism, emotional and mental well-being challenges, and social stigma which further detract the learners from academic success. Laiser and Muyinga (2017) also found that early pregnancies contribute to lack of interest and engagement in school activities as the young learners tend to focus on and prioritize impending childcare and related demands over their own education.

From September 2021 to August 2022, over 20,000 girls reportedly dropped out of school due to pregnancy in Zimbabwe (Chidarikire, 2022). Educational disparities are stark, female learners represent only 3.4% of the overall learner population, and at lower primary school level, the proportion of female learners stands at 11%, compared to 7.7% for males (Herald, 2024). This demographic imbalance highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to support young girls in Zimbabwe, ensuring they can pursue their life and career dreams, education and mitigate risks associated with early pregnancies (Baa-Poku, 2019). The sociocultural context of Masvingo North District exacerbates issues of early pregnancies, and the social norms tend to stigmatize adolescent mothers and discourage them from returning to school after childbirth.

Furthermore, the socioeconomic factors in resettlement areas, such as limited access to healthcare, educational resources, and support systems, exacerbate the difficulties facing such learners, thereby making them and their

babies in further vulnerability and cycles of poverty. Cultural context and social factors contribute to stigmatization and isolation, further affecting the pregnant primary school learners and young mothers' self-esteem and motivation to continue with their education. Additionally, psycho-social trauma and stress associated with navigating early motherhood impairs their cognitive function and concentration, thus ultimately leading to incomplete primary education and lower academic achievement that exacerbates cycles of unemployment and poverty.

This study sought to comprehensively explore the interconnected factors and their cumulative effects on the educational outcomes of affected learners and aims to inform targeted interventions being explored and implemented in Zimbabwe to support the learners' academic success, overall well-being and prospects for better and fuller lives for the girl child.

Literature Review

Early pregnancies among adolescents pose significant challenges to their educational and health well-being outcomes, among other challenges, and especially affecting grade 6 learners in poor, remote and under-serviced resettlement settings of Zimbabwe. In this literature review section, we examine related international research of studies done in the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), China, Nigeria, Botswana, South Africa to identify the push and pull factors of early pregnancies. We then analyse the negative impacts on the learners' academic progress and performance and explore effective mitigation strategies. Each of the outlined sections and discussion highlights research gaps pertinent for the resettlement areas context of Masvingo North District in Zimbabwe.

In the USA, unplanned and early pregnancies among young learners are often attributed to socioeconomic and political factors such as racism, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, family breakdown and dysfunctionality, and lack of access to appropriate sexual reproductive health education, especially in Black communities. Nsalamba and Simpande (2019) emphasize that adolescents from low-income families frequently lack comprehensive reproductive health resources, leading to higher pregnancy rates. Additionally, Nyamanhare et al (2022) highlight that community and cultural social stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy prevents open discussions and health-seeking behaviour about sexual health, further exacerbating the complex issues. However, research is predominantly focused on urban settings, leaving a gap in understanding the specific causes, pull and push factors and dynamics of early pregnancies in rural, under-serviced and poor settings and communities (Chidarikire, 2022 and Nyariro, 2021).

Studies undertaken in the UK settings also indicate that socioeconomic status, racism and inequity play a crucial role in early pregnancies, notably among immigrant and Black communities. Harris and Smith (2021) found that young girls from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience early pregnancies due to limited educational, lack of access to extra mural activities, health services, functional family support and employment opportunities. Furthermore, Salvi (2021) notes that inadequate family time and communication about sexual health, breakdown of family structures and bonds contribute to lack of awareness and family support among adolescents who will be going through many physical, emotional, social and mental changes. Despite the above research findings, research often overlooks the intersectionality of race and socioeconomic status, particularly in poorly serviced urban and rural settings.

Li et al. (2023) identified societal pressures and cultural expectations as key factors leading to unplanned and early pregnancies among Chinese young learners. The authors highlight that girls from rural and under-serviced communities often face strict societal norms, economic and survival challenges that prioritize early marriage as a temporary escape from poverty yet further increasing their vulnerability. Resettlement areas in China comprise places where people are relocated for reasons that include suburbanization, poverty alleviation and making room for industrial development. Unlike in Zimbabwe, resettlement areas, like Changsha, in China are not always rural and remote areas even though they may share features like poverty belts, spatial mismatch for lower class groups, poor or under service and infrastructure (Xu and Zhang, 2017). Additionally, Zhang and Liu (2022) note that limited or lack of access to sexual reproductive health education in resettlement areas exacerbates the issue. However, existing research (Li et al, 2023; Jones, 2022, Pandin and Yanto, 2023 and Rawlins, 2024) focuses more on urban populations, creating a gap in understanding the specific challenges faced of relocated communities and young female learners.

Research by Jones (2022) shows that early pregnancies have detrimental effects on the health, overall well-being and academic performance of learners in the USA. Smith and Zhang (2021) found that adolescent mothers often face school dropout rates that are significantly higher than their peers as a result of increased and childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, Pandin and Yanto (2023) highlight that young learners who assume motherhood responsibilities struggle to focus and balance their academic and parental duties. This results in lower grades, reduced engagement and dropping out of school altogether. However, most of literature focuses on high school and college dropouts, leaving a gap in understanding the impact on primary school

younger learners like the grade 6 ones who are the focus of this paper. Harris et al. (2022) indicate that early pregnancies result in significant academic challenges for young mothers, including lower educational attainment and increased dropout rates in the UK. They argue that responsibilities of motherhood often interfere with academic commitments, social life and well-being, leading to disengagement from school. Additionally, Pasternakova et al, (2023) found that young mothers often lack adequate family and professional support systems, which further exacerbates their ability to cope with different demands and academic careers.

In Nigeria, Adeyemi (2020) emphasizes that unplanned early pregnancies among learners lead to poor academic performance and school dropout. The study highlights that many young mothers cite financial constraints, social stigma and lack of family and social support as key reasons for leaving school. According to Rawlins (2024), stigma associated with teenage motherhood often results in social isolation, depression and psycho-social issues that further hinder academic performance. The focus on older adolescents indicates a research gap in understanding the plight of primary school learners in poorer, under-serviced and poor areas with little to no infrastructure.

In the USA, comprehensive sexual education is often proposed as solution to reduce early pregnancies. Salvi (2019) advocates for evidence-based programs that not only educate adolescents about reproductive health but also promote healthy relationships across family, community and school settings. Additionally, Reamer (2018) emphasizes the importance of community support systems to assist teen mothers in balancing their lives with academic and parenting responsibilities. However, such programs and strategies are mainly designed for and targeting urban environments, highlighting gaps of context, specific needs and under service in their applicability to settings such as Masvingo North District. Sperling et al (2016) suggest that enhancing targeted support networks for young mothers in the UK has improved academic outcomes and prospects for a better life. The authors advocate for mentorship programs that connect young mothers with older peers who have successfully navigated similar challenges and professional social welfare services. Moreover, Svindseth and Crawford (2019) point out a need for flexible and inclusive school policies that accommodate young mothers, such as allowing for childcare facilities on school premises. Nonetheless, there is insufficient research on sociocultural context and acceptability as well as how similar strategies are suitable and can be effectively implemented for grade 6 learners in the context of Masvingo North District.

In China, community-based support systems are recommended to mitigate effects of early pregnancies. Morgan et al. (2023) propose initiatives that involve parents, teen mothers, education, health and social welfare experts and local community and school leaders in the exploration and discussions about sexual health and education. Additionally, Thwala et al. (2022) highlight the importance of integrating sexual health education into school curricula for both rural and urban as well as poorly and well supported settings. There is a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, health and well-being as well as educational factors that contribute to unplanned early pregnancies among learners, resulting in poor academic performance, dashed prospects for better professional careers and hopes of escaping generational poverty across various contexts. While significant research exists, some gaps remain around the unique experiences of primary school learners in rural, poorer and under-serviced contexts like the resettlement areas of Masvingo North District in Zimbabwe. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing effective interventions and policies that do not leave anyone behind and outside of the SDGs, especially in supporting young mothers in their school and learning careers and better prospects for professional careers and a brighter future.

Significance of study

The study is significant at various levels and to different stakeholder interest groups in the education sector, learners in general, girls' rights and development as well as policy making and educators, among others. For learners, notably those in primary school, the study seeks to improve their understanding of the effects of early pregnancies on academic performance and empower learners to make informed choices about their health and education. It also highlights the importance of support systems and resources available for those facing challenges related to early pregnancy and fosters more supportive family, community and learning environments.

This study provides teachers with insights into the unique challenges faced by pregnant learners in rural, poor and under-serviced settings. By understanding these effects, educators can advocate for, lobby policy and better support the development of targeted interventions and strategies to ensure that learners receive the necessary assistance to stay in and return to school as well as succeed with their learning careers regardless of their circumstances.

For parents in general and specifically those of affected learners, the findings of the study can inform them about the pull and push factors as well as implications of early pregnancies. The heightened awareness can encourage parental involvement and support for community-based interventions and role towards the promotion of open discussions about sexual reproductive health and rights, and importance of girl child

education. The results of the study can also help to guide the Zimbabwean education policymakers in the development and implementation of programs aimed at reducing early pregnancies and supporting affected learners to stay in or return to school. It underscores need for comprehensive sex education and access to healthcare services, which can lead to improved educational outcomes and overall community well-being.

The Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education can utilize findings to shape educational policies and curriculum enhancements that address needs of pregnant learners. This may involve exploration of the possibilities of setting up childcare facilities in schools and community settings. This will ensure that educational system is inclusive and responsive to challenges faced by learners, thereby improving retention and completion rates. For researchers, this study contributes to existing body of literature on early pregnancies and educational outcomes. It highlights avenues for further research on interventions that can mitigate negative effects of early pregnancies on academic performance and overall development. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with young girls and women's rights, empowerment, education and health, among other issues, can use insights from this study to design and implement programs that promote reproductive health education and support services for young girls. This can enhance their advocacy and policy changes lobbying efforts to help in creating safe spaces for young women to discuss their challenges and seek assistance.

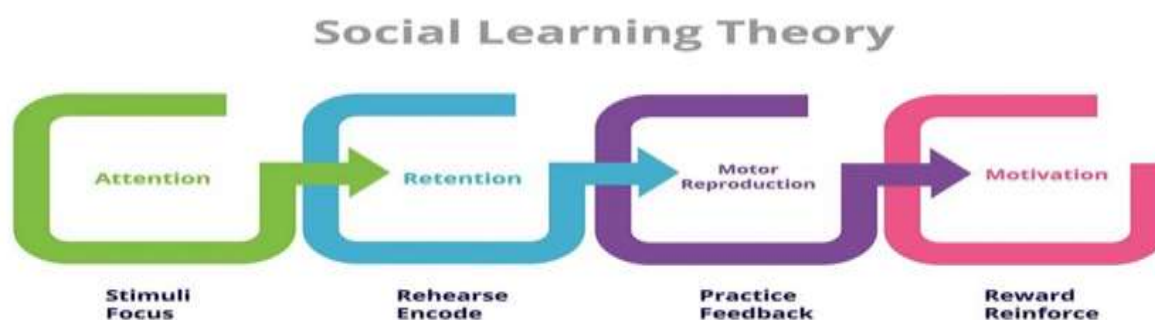
For the broader community in resettlement areas of Masvingo North District and beyond, the study raises awareness about societal implications of early pregnancies, encouraging community engagement in addressing these issues. It also fosters discussions around gender equality, education, and health, promoting collective effort to support young girls in their educational pursuits and personal development.

Theoretical framework

The study employs Albert Bandura's (1971, 1977 and 1986) social learning theory, also known as social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the significance of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in behaviour development. According to Bandura (1971, 1977 & 1986), the process of learning is facilitated through imitation, modelling and observation, with factors such as motivation, attention, emotions and attitudes playing an important role whilst the interaction of cognitive and environmental elements influencing how people learn. Human beings are actively process information and think through their behaviour and outcomes.

Bandura's social learning theory (1971 and 1977) posits that human beings learn new behaviours by imitating and observing others. As such, the theory places an important emphasis on learning through observation on how people acquire skills, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes by watching other people's actions and noting the resultant outcomes, which leads 'to the modelling and adoption of observed behaviours.' Effectively, learning takes place when people observe the outcome of the behaviour of other people according to the theory. Bandura's theory (1977) states that all behaviours are learned from and a consequence of social conditioning, and the psychological influences of memory and attention play a role in processing, retention the information and shaping such behaviours (See the linear process outlined in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Linear presentation of the social learning theory process



Source: McLeod (2024)

The direct and indirect observing of behaviour through social interactions and media is an important aspect of behavioural theory and the rewarded actions tend to be imitated, while unrewarded or punishable ones avoided. Accordingly, social learning theory can be applied in real-world contexts e.g. helping researchers to better understand how sexual and gender-based violence and culturally harmful practices are learned and transmitted through observation and social conditioning. In this way, researchers may gain better understanding of the causes and factors which push and pull learners into unplanned early pregnancies and acting out the violence and harmful practices they see at home, in community and portrayed in the media. This

perspective is particularly relevant when examining early pregnancies among grade 6 learners in Masvingo North District's resettlement areas, as behaviours and experiences of peers can significantly influence decisions and academic trajectories of younger learners.

Adolescents are highly susceptible to social influences, which can either encourage or discourage risky behaviours such as early sexual activity (Mavhu et al, 2020). Understanding these dynamics can help in designing effective interventions aimed at preventing early pregnancies (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2022). Furthermore, community environment plays crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes and behaviours towards education and pregnancy (Muzingili et al, 2024). Learning from and through social context and action can also transmit positive messaging and behaviours, therefore researchers may use Bandura's (1971) social learning theory to explore and determine how positive influence and role modelling can be deployed to facilitate social change and encourage desired behaviours.

Bandura's theory (1977) tenet of observational learning suggests that individuals can acquire new behaviours by watching and imitating the rewarded behaviour of others. In the context of early pregnancies, grade 6 learners observed older peers and members of the community who faced the challenges of teenage motherhood. The observations influence their views positively or negatively on the consequences of early pregnancy and the implications for their educational pursuits. Adhena and Fikre (2023) found that learners who witnessed struggles of teen parents were less likely to engage in early sexual behaviour which highlights importance of role models in shaping behaviour. However, this is not always the case given the unending issues and social pandemic and challenges of unplanned early pregnancy by learners in Masvingo North District and elsewhere. Baa-Poku (2019) emphasizes that learning is enhanced when individuals can relate to those being observed, making it vital for educational programs to include relatable role models. Moreover, Chinkondeji (2022) supports the idea that narrative experiences, such as storytelling about the consequences of early pregnancies can significantly influence learners' decision-making.

The tenet of attention, another critical tenet of Bandura's framework, posits that for learning to occur, individuals must focus on the behaviour being modelled (Chipfakacha, 2019). This is rarely the case in today's complex world and growing influence of social media and fake news. As a result, negative behaviour and influence by negative models is abound, resulting in the on-going unplanned early pregnancies by learners. Other influences and factors such as drug and substance abuse, negative social media etc are inevitably at play. In this study, educational interventions must effectively engage learners to capture their attention and bring about the desired social change and reduction or elimination of unplanned and early pregnancies among primary school learners. When learners are actively involved in their learning processes, they are more likely to retain information and apply it in real-life situations according to Cotza, (2023). This is particularly important in the rural poor and under-serviced resettlement areas of Masvingo North District where traditional teaching methods, unaided by modern technologies and support, may not be resonate with learners. Desai et al. (2024) emphasize that an engaging curricula can help maintain learners' interest in the material, thereby reducing the likelihood of early pregnancies.

Retention of information is essential for learners to remember the behaviours and consequences they observe in their social and learning contexts. For instance, when the grade 6 learners were exposed to compelling narratives or testimonials from peers who previously faced academic setbacks due to early pregnancies, they internalized the lessons and recounted them. Creswell and Poth (2016) indicate that storytelling can significantly enhance retention by making the information relatable. Yin (2018) notes that individuals who can visualize the consequences of their choices are often more cautious in their decision-making. This suggests that educational interventions should incorporate real-life stories that resonate with learners' experiences and context, thereby reinforcing lessons about adverse effects of early pregnancies on academic performance (Chidhakwa, 2023). Such narratives can help learners connect emotionally with material, making it more memorable.

The ability to reproduce observed behaviours is another critical aspect of Bandura's framework. In the context of early pregnancies, it is vital for learners to feel empowered to apply knowledge they have acquired about the potential consequences of their choices (Chikuvadze, 2023). Research by the Human Rights Watch (2018) indicates that when learners are provided with appropriate resources, support and tools, such as life skills training, they are better equipped to make informed decisions. Programs that focus on building self-efficacy can significantly reduce incidence of early pregnancies among learners (Laiser and Muyinga, 2017). For instance, schools that offer comprehensive sexual reproductive health education and life skills programs can empower learners to resist peer pressure and prioritize their academic goals over immediate social influences (Lukac and Lukacova, 2024).

Empowerment through education is crucial for fostering resilience among learners. Motivation is a vital component of Bandura's theory as it determines whether learners choose to emulate behaviours they have observed or not do so (Chitiyo, 2021). In contexts like Masvingo North District, grade 6 learners admired and

appreciated the successful role models in their immediacy, such as teachers or community leaders who prioritize education and achieved their professional careers and were motivated to follow similar paths. Dube (2020) shows that positive reinforcement and recognition of academic achievements can significantly enhance adolescent motivation whilst Moyo (2020) found out that mentorship programs that celebrate academic success, small and big life milestones and guide learners inspire learners to remain focused on their studies. Additionally, when learners see and can related to the tangible benefits of education, they are more likely to delay parenthood and pursue their academic goals (Morgan et al, 2024). Motivation, therefore, serves as critical buffer against pressures that lead to early pregnancies.

Finally, reciprocal determinism is yet another core tenet of Bandura's framework, and it emphasizes an interplay between personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences (Nyamanhare et al, 2022). In the context of this study, socioeconomic conditions, educational resources, and community support systems profoundly impact learners' career dreams and academic progress, performance and choices. Pandin and Yantho (2023) state that supportive learning environments mitigate the risks associated with early pregnancies, and Mweemba et al. (2019) highlight the importance of community involvement in educational initiatives that address teen pregnancy. Additionally, Ncube and Mudau (2017) suggest that addressing socioeconomic barriers is essential for creating an environment that is conducive to learning and academic success for learners. Through understanding the dynamics of reciprocal determinism, educators and policymakers can develop effective interventions that support learners in navigating the complex challenges associated with early pregnancies.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

This paper employs a qualitative study and constructivist research approach that are more appropriate for exploring complex and nuanced personal experiences of participants who are directly and indirectly impacted by early pregnancies in an educational context (Sperling et al, 2016). Constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and personal experiences, making it an ideal approach for interrogating and understanding (Creswell and Poth, 2016) how the grade 6 learners, parents, teachers, and community members perceive the effects of early pregnancies on the learners' well-being and academic performance and progress. This approach allows for exploration of diverse perspectives and contextual factors influencing learners' experiences, providing rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Mushibwe 2018). A qualitative methodology emphasizes the importance of context in shaping participants' understanding, which is important for the study's resettlement settings where sociocultural dynamics are significant in shaping educational outcomes (Ratusniak & Silva, 2024).

The research design is a case study, and this is justified by ability to provide an in-depth examination of specific phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2021). Case studies are particularly useful for exploring complex issues that require comprehensive understanding of various influencing factors, such as the interplay between socioeconomic, cultural, health, learning and personal circumstances and early pregnancies (Pasternakova et al, 2024). The case study design also allows for holistic view of experiences of grade 6 primary school learners in Masvingo North District, capturing perspectives of multiple stakeholders and allowing for rich data to be collected (Chidhakwa and Hlalele, 2020). Furthermore, a case study design facilitates the investigation of individual and collective experiences, making it possible to identify patterns and themes that inform future educational policies and interventions (World Bank, 2020).

The study population comprised a diverse group of participants, namely, 23 grade 6 teachers, 345 grade 6 learners from four primary schools in Masvingo North District's resettlement areas, 78 parents, 15 officials from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, six officers from local NGOs, 14 village heads, five registered counsellors, and five medical nurses. This heterogeneous population was vital for gaining comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted effects of early pregnancies on the well-being and academic performance of the learners in different sociocultural contexts (Twala et al, 2022). The inclusion of different stakeholders enhanced the study's diverse views, richness, wide community representation and the findings' trustworthiness by capturing a range of perspectives and experiences related to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2020). The diversity of the population also reflects the complexity of the issues, recognizing that early pregnancies occur in a context of social, cultural, and institutional influences (Lunga et al, 2020).

The selection of the study participants was determined through a purposive sampling technique that focused on participants whose experiences, role and local knowledge and context the researchers identified as relevant for the research topic based on gender, expertise, community standing, availability, interest and geographical location (Charamba et al, 2024). The selected study sample consisted of 23 participants altogether, namely; five pregnant grade 6 female learners, five grade 6 learners who were not pregnant, two female teachers, two male teachers, two male parents, two female parents, one male and one female Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education officials, one male and one female NGO officers, two village heads (one male and one female), one male and female counsellors, and one male and female nurse. The selection ensured broad

representation of perspectives in the study context, allowing for comprehensive exploration of challenges and implications associated with early pregnancies (Walgwe et al, 2016). By deliberately choosing participants who could share their unique experiences, the study aimed to generate rich qualitative data that reflects the complexities of the issues under investigation (Babbie, 2020).

The study data were collected through two focus group discussions, one with learners only and the other with adult participants (Nkoma and Kufakunesu, 2024). This methodological choice aimed to create age appropriateness, a respectful, comfortable and safe environment for both learners and adults especially given that issues of sexual reproduction are age, gender and culturally sensitive in the context of Masvingo North District, encouraging them to express their views honestly and freely (Krueger and Casey, 2020). Indirect language, concepts and expression about sexual intercourse, reproductive health etc were carefully discussed in sensitive and observance of local norms, values, practices and language.

Focus groups are particularly effective in qualitative research as they foster interaction among participants, verification of factual information like dates, places, names and events, thereby leading to more reliable data and richer discussions and insights (Morgan, 2020). The focus group discussions were guided by open-ended questions that allowed participants to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of early pregnancies on academic performance beyond the scope of the questions. The researchers facilitated discussions to ensure that all voices and different viewpoints and experiences were heard, particularly those of female learners, who may have been marginalized and dominated by adult parents and male participants given the local customs and traditions that are patriarchal, and gender biased towards men (Kanyopa, 2018).

Ethical considerations were integral to research process, particularly in protecting all participants' confidentiality through pseudonyms that were used (Charamba et al, 2024). Informed consent was obtained from both minor and adult participants after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks (Wiles et al., 2020) in the local *chiKaranga* language. For minor learner participants, consent was sought and granted by their parents or guardians. The permission to conduct the study was secured from both Great Zimbabwe University (Ethical Clearance Number GZU124/24) where one of the researchers is affiliated and the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. These ethical measures ensured that participant rights were upheld, respect was duly accorded, and the study was ethically conducted, thus fostering a trustful and professional relationship between the researchers and participants (Liamputtong, 2020). Furthermore, the researchers adhered to ethical guidelines to minimize any potential discomfort or harm to participants, ensuring a responsible and respectful research process.

Research Findings and Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), a process that involves the following steps: (1) familiarization with data through reading and re-reading transcripts, (2) generating initial codes that capture significant features of data, (3) searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data, (5) defining and naming themes for clarity, and (6) producing a final report that connects themes to the research questions (Solanke et al, 2020).

Thematic analysis is particularly advantageous in qualitative research as it allows for flexibility in interpreting complex data and it can yield detailed insights into participants' experiences (Nowell et al., 2020). This analytical method not only highlights commonalities across participant experiences, but it also emphasizes individual narratives, providing nuanced understanding of the complex issues, causes and effects of unplanned early pregnancies on the academic performance and progress, and well-being of learners. The data generated two main themes that are defined, named and critically reviewed as outlined below.

Theme 1: Negative impacts of unplanned early pregnancies on well-being and academic performance and progress

The study participants shared their views on the theme of negative impacts of unplanned early pregnancies on the academic performance of learners and highlighted significant challenges faced by young mothers and their immediate families. Early pregnancies disrupt not only individual academic pursuits but also have broader implications for health and well-being, social dynamics, and career opportunities. Understanding the multifaceted issues and impacts through the lens of Bandura's social learning theory (1971, 1977) provides deeper insights into how social contexts and observational learning influence the pregnant learners and young mothers' life and learning experiences, attitudes and education outcomes.

Participant Nomhle (a local female nurse) stated *"As a nurse, I see many young mothers who drop out of school after becoming pregnant. This not only affects their education but also their health. They often come back to us with complications related to childbirth, which can further disrupt their learning. The stress of*

motherhood combined with academic pressure can be overwhelming, leading to cycle of poverty and lack of education for their children."

Then participant Tendai (a female grade 6 learner) expounded on Nomhle's above statement as follows: *"My friend got pregnant last year (2023), and it changed everything for her. Her family is very upset with her. She had to leave school, and now she struggles to take care of herself and her baby while missing out on her education. It is quite hard for her to catch up, and she feels isolated from her classmates. I fear this might happen to me or others too; it's scary to think about a future without education or a career."*

Sister Moyo (a local female counsellor) pointed that *"Early pregnancies create a barrier to education and professional career for many in our context. Girls who become mothers at such a young age often face stigma from their peers, families and communities. This affects their self-esteem and motivation to return to school. We need to provide counselling and support to help them reintegrate, but the road is tough. The educational system isn't always accommodating, which can push the young mothers further away from academic success."*

Mr. Chikanda (a local male nurse) said *"I have seen firsthand how unplanned early pregnancies can derail dreams. Many young mothers come to us feeling hopeless about their futures. They miss school due to health issues or childcare responsibilities. This not only affects their academic performance but also limits their career opportunities later in life. We need to advocate for programs that support young mothers to balance their responsibilities while pursuing education."*

Miss Ndlovu, a local female teacher at one of the affected primary schools expressed that *"From a learning and teaching perspective, when young learners face challenges like early pregnancies, it disrupts the entire classroom and school environment. Their absence affects group dynamics, and the educational gap widens. Additionally, those who return often struggle to keep up with curriculum, leading to a cycle of underachievement. We need more support systems in place within schools to help these learners catch up and succeed."*

The study data reveals multifaceted issues where early pregnancies significantly impact academic performance. Participant Nomhle (a female nurse) emphasized prevalence of school dropouts among young mothers due to early pregnancies, and Moges et al (2023) notes that the affected learners often return with health complications that hinder their educational pursuits. This finding and observation aligns with other studies (Tarisayi, 2024; Moges et al, 2023, Zhao et al, 2023) indicating that young mothers face increased health risks, leading to prolonged absences from school. Participant Tendai (the female learner), shared her friend's experience of feeling isolated after becoming young mother, making it difficult for her to reconnect with peers and continue her education (Zhao et al, 2023). This sentiment reflects Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. When young mothers perceive their ability to succeed in education diminishes due to their circumstances, they may withdraw from academic engagement as noted by Huang et al (2020). Participant Moyo (a local female counsellor) highlighted the endless social stigma faced by young mothers and how it adversely impacts their self-esteem, dreams and motivation. Tarisayi (2024) indicates that social stigma can lead to feelings of shame and isolation, complicating reintegration into society and the educational system.

Bandura's theory (1986) suggests that observing negative reactions from peers can exacerbate the negative feelings and create cycles of disengagement, depression and shame (Ruan et al, 2020). Participant Chikanda (a local male nurse) highlighted how early pregnancies limit future career opportunities for young mothers and emphasized that disruption of education often leads to lower socioeconomic status, perpetuating a cycle of generational poverty and eventual suicide in extreme cases. Bandura's social learning theory (1971) further states that individuals learn best from observing the long-term outcomes of their behaviours.

A total of 60% of the young mothers exhibited signs of internalizing beliefs that their educational and career aspirations are unattainable and beyond their reach because of the impacts of early pregnancies. The local female teacher study participant (Ms Ndlovu) pointed out the broader learning and teaching implications for young mothers who drop out of school or struggle to keep up, and Beak et al, (2020) notes that how the affected learners' absence disrupts group dynamics and affects the learning environment and rest of the peers. Thus, collective educational experiences are crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment to which Bandura's theory (1977) emphasizes that social interactions within classrooms are vital for motivation and engagement in learning processes.

The outcome of the focus group discussion reveals that young mothers face numerous challenges straddling health and well-being complications, mental health, social welfare and stigma, socioeconomic, and educational pathways, and Kunyopa (2018) states that this can lead to long-term negative outcomes. The dropout rates highlighted by the female nurse participant (Nomhle) and the male nurse participant (Chikanda) reflect a critical need for health well-being, social and educational support systems targeted at the young mothers. In

partnership with other stakeholders like NGOs, health facilities, social welfare etc, Zimbabwe's educational institutions, notably primary and secondary schools, should implement comprehensive programs that provide academic assistance and sexual reproductive health-related resources to mitigate such challenges (Lunga et al, 2022). Recent literature (Brown et al, 2022; Moyo, 2023; Chidarikire and Chikwati, 2023) emphasizes the importance of integrated support systems and services for learners and note that such integrated support can enhance retention rates and improve educational outcomes for young mothers. The experiences of a learner participant (Tendai) and Moyo's observations (the local female counsellor) point to psycho-social impacts of early pregnancies on their self-esteem and motivation.

It is therefore important for schools to foster inclusive environments that reduce stigma and offer counselling services through collaboration with relevant partners that have the expertise, resources and the mandate to do so. The Herald (2024) states that peer support programs can effectively improve self-efficacy among young mothers and help them to reintegrate into family, social academic and broader community settings. Moreover, long-term implications of early pregnancies, as discussed by participant Chikanda, emphasize the need for advocacy lobbying for inclusive educational policy that supports young mothers (UNICEF, 2020). Programs that allow flexible learning schedules or online education, where affordable, can help mitigate the adverse impact of childcare responsibilities, ultimately supporting better academic and career outcomes according to Garcia et al. (2023).

Lastly, the insights of participant Ndlovu (a local female teacher) regarding the classroom environment highlight the inter-connectedness of learner experiences and the social context. School authorities should recognize that supporting young mothers benefits them as individuals also strengthen the educational environment and community, according to the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act (2020). Collaborative strategies that engage all learners and promote awareness can foster more supportive learning atmosphere, states Lee et al (2022). Consequently, the interplay between unplanned early pregnancies and academic performance is complex and deeply rooted in social, health, and educational contexts across families, the community and schools. By applying Bandura's theory, we can better understand the importance of social influences and support systems in shaping experiences of young mothers in the learning process. Addressing these issues holistically is crucial for breaking the cycle of disadvantage and enhancing educational trajectories of young mothers.

Theme 2: Effective ways to mitigate the effects of unplanned early pregnancies on education

This theme is crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment because early pregnancies can significantly disrupt educational experiences and outcomes, leading to dropout rates among young women and limiting their future opportunities and missed opportunities to achieve key SDGs in this regard. Various perspectives from educators, learners, and NGO representatives on effective strategies to address this issue are explored in the discussion below, drawing upon Bandura's theory (1977) which emphasizes the centrality of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in behaviour change.

A female teacher participant (Chibanda) stated that *"To address unplanned and early pregnancies, schools need to implement comprehensive sexual reproductive health education programs. We must empower learners with knowledge about their bodies, bodily changes and relationships. In addition, parents and educators should create supportive environments where learners can discuss their challenges openly with primary caregivers or guardians. We should work closely with parents to bridge the communication gap."*

On the other hand, participant Moyo (a local male teacher) elaborated that, *"I agree that education is key. Additionally, we need community workshops that involve parents and guardians in discussions about the importance of education and sexual reproductive health, especially for girls. Collaborating with local community-based organizations can help create mentorship programs where young girls can connect with women role models in various fields, showing them that education can lead to better lives and career opportunities."*

Further, Tafadzwa, a male learner participant pointed that, *"I believe we need more youth-relevant, friendly and focused activities to keep us engaged freely. If there were local social clubs or sports events, this could provide a positive outlet and reduce chances of mischief, idleness and early pregnancies. Having role models can inspire us to focus on our education and career dreams."*

Moreover, a local NGO male participant (Banda) was of the view that *"Our organization is committed to providing supportive resources to combat unplanned and early pregnancies among learners. We are implementing programs that offer counselling and sexual reproductive health services in schools across different districts. Furthermore, we advocate for girls' scholarships to encourage them to stay in school despite the current economic challenges. Partnerships with local health, social welfare and mentorship services can also ensure that young mothers receive the care they need while continuing their education."*

In addition, a female participant and official from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education official (Juma) said, *"Our Ministry recognizes the issue of early pregnancies and is working to enhance policies that support young mothers in education. We are promoting inclusive education policies that allow for flexible schooling options. Additionally, we are collaborating with NGOs to create awareness campaigns targeting both learners and parents about the importance of education and the dangers of early pregnancies."*

The views, statements and submissions by the various participants highlight the necessity of implementing comprehensive sexual reproductive health, well-being and education in schools. Such as approach can empower learners by imparting important knowledge about their bodies, bodily changes and relationships which is essential for informed decision-making, according to Booth (2022). Informed and confident learners are less likely to engage in risky sexual activity and unrewarded behaviour.

The NGO male participant (Moyo) emphasized the importance of community workshops that engage parents and guardians. By involving local and community-based organizations to develop mentorship programs, learners and in particular young girls can connect with role models to ignite their career dreams and. This strategy aligns with the principles outlined in Bandura's theory (1971) as observing positive role models can inspire similar aspirations and behaviours in learners (Laiser and Muyinga, 2017). However, this is not always the case as other complex factors and social conditioning may not facilitate such desired positive influence. Tafadzwa, the male learner participant pointed out the need for youth-friendly and targeting activities like social and debating clubs, life skills clubs, and sports events to keep learners engaged. Such extracurricular activities provide positive outlets and foster a sense of community.

Participation in extracurricular activities is linked to improved academic outcomes and decreased likelihood of risky behaviours, including early pregnancies, according to the NGO official and participant (Banda) who indicated that his organisation provides supportive resources like counselling and sexual reproductive health services. Moyo (2020) states that such initiatives help learners, and especially young mothers, to navigate their educational pathways while receiving the necessary care and reintegration back into the school environment and society. Bandura's theory (1986) states that support systems can enhance self-efficacy, a key component in overcoming challenges. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education officer participant underscores the Zimbabwean government's efforts to create inclusive education policies that support young mothers back into school. The promotion of flexible schooling options and awareness campaigns by the ministry aims to reduce stigma and encourage education (Mrewa, 2020).

A multifaceted approach to mitigate the occurrence and effects of unplanned and early pregnancies among learners is necessary. The integration of comprehensive sexual reproductive health education is supported by empirical evidence, and this illustrates the role of such education in reducing risky and unrewarded behaviours among teenagers (Mweemba et al, 2023). Furthermore, community involvement, is vital for reinforcing educational values whilst mentorship provides learners with the opportunity to engage with role models to create a supportive environment and network. Tarus (2020) demonstrates that the involvement of learners in extracurricular activities fosters resilience and reduces likelihood of early pregnancies.

Chikuvadze (2023) notes that inclusive policies and practices can significantly improve educational access and retention for vulnerable populations, reinforcing Bandura's (1977) view on the importance of environmental factors in shaping behaviour. As a result, addressing issue of early pregnancies in education requires collaborative, community-oriented approach grounded in evidence-based practices.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The study findings inform the outlined recommendations to mitigate the occurrence and effects of unplanned early pregnancies on the academic performance of grade 6 learners in Masvingo North District of Zimbabwe. Firstly, comprehensive sexual reproductive health education and life skills programs are needed in the poor and underserved schools and collaboration between different stakeholders is one way to achieve such a reality in the study context. Culturally appropriate, and tailored interventions that are respectful and sensitive to the local progressive traditions, norms, values and practices that are specific to the needs of the context are important.

Secondly, community engagement initiatives should be developed to raise awareness about the importance of gender rights, rights to education and fulfilling careers and decent lives, especially for girls and the detrimental effects of early pregnancies. Involving a range of both local and outside stakeholders such as community structures, parents, local leaders, education, social welfare, and health professionals in exploring relevant and effective interventions is central to the attainment of the desired social change and human development as well as SDGs 4, 3, 1, 5, 8 and 10.

Thirdly, empowerment through education is crucial for fostering resilience among learners. Motivation is a vital component of Bandura's theory as it determines whether learners choose to emulate the behaviours they observe. In contexts like Masvingo North District, grade 6 learners admired and appreciated the successful role models in their immediacy, such as teachers or community leaders who prioritize education and achieved their professional careers and were motivated to follow similar paths. Positive reinforcement and recognition of academic achievements can significantly enhance adolescent motivation and mentorship programs that celebrate local and other academic success stories, small and big life milestones and guide learners are needed to inspire learners to remain focused on their studies. Motivation, therefore, serves as a much needed and critical buffer against the pressures that lead to early pregnancies, and the local schools and relevant government ministry, along other stakeholders, can explore to the viability of mentorship.

Fourthly, reciprocal determinism is yet another core tenet of Bandura's framework, and it emphasizes an interplay between personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences. In the context of this study, socioeconomic conditions, educational resources, and community support systems profoundly impact learners' career dreams and academic progress, performance and choices. Therefore, supportive learning environments that mitigate the risks associated with early pregnancies are needed and these should be explore through the establishment of youth-friendly, targeted and relevant extra mural activities like social clubs, debating and life skills clubs as well as sports events.

Fifthly, for social sustainability and buy-in, it is extremely important to involve parent, learners, the local community and other stakeholders in this process. Thus, a thorough understanding of the multifaceted and complex dynamics of reciprocal determinism, parents, educators and policymakers should develop effective interventions that support learners in navigating the complex challenges associated with early pregnancies.

Finally, schools should establish support systems for pregnant learners that allow them to continue their education. This could include flexible scheduling, access to counselling services, and academic support tailored to their unique challenges. By fostering supportive educational environment, the local community can help to ensure that young girls are not forced to choose between motherhood and education, ultimately breaking cycle of early pregnancies and academic underachievement.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore urgent need to address issue of early pregnancies among grade 6 learners in the resettlement areas of Masvingo North District in Zimbabwe. The study illustrates that early pregnancies are not merely personal challenges but are deeply intertwined with complex and broader socioeconomic factors and cultural practices that require a collective response. The negative impact of unplanned early pregnancies on academic performance is significant and affects individual learners and the educational environment, other learners and outcomes of the entire community. It is evident that unplanned early pregnancies disrupt the future, career prospects and educational trajectory of young girls, locking them in cycles of generational poverty and limited opportunities. Therefore, addressing this issue is essential for fostering a more inclusive, equitable and productive educational environment.

References

1. Adhena, G., & Fikre, A. (2023). *Teenage pregnancy matters in refugee setup: early pregnancy among adolescent girls in Kule refugee camp, Gambella, Ethiopia*. BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-023-06178-0>
2. Baafi, S. (2020). *The plight of young girls: Second-chance education for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers in Techiman, Ghana*. Retrieved from: [https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/56229\(open](https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/56229(open)
3. Baa-Poku, J. (2019). Girls' Re-Entry into School after Pregnancy in the Ashiedu Keteke Sub-Metro District, Accra: Implication for substantive policy. *Ghana Social Science*, 16(71), 1–17.
4. Bandura, A. (1971). *Social learning theory*. New York: General Learning Press.
5. Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
6. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
7. Chidakwa, N. (2023). Drug abuse: A hindrance to optimal functioning of the rural learner's cognitive capabilities. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 8 (3), 155–175. <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2023.25>
8. Chidakwa, N., & Hlalele, D. J. (2021). The paradox of complex systems: Managing multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies. *Vulnerable Child and Youth Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2021.1925383>
9. Chidarikire, M., & Chikwati, T. (2024). Unravelling causes and mitigating suicidal tendencies in male educators in Zimbabwe's rural regions: A comprehensive analysis. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 50 (5), 293–303. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i51363>

10. Chidarikire, M., Chidarikire, J. N., & Ingwani, V. (2024). Unravelling ramifications of female exclusion as school heads on advancing women in leadership roles: Case of Masvingo urban schools, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research*, 11 (6), 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12524882>
11. Chideme-Munodawafa, A., Manyana, S. B., & Collins, A. E. (2020). HIV/AIDS in rural communities. *Journal of Education*, 2 (2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.53555/hsn.v1i8.780>
12. Chikuvadze, P. (2023). Gender-related policy guidelines' impact on rural female learners' participation in sciences at advanced level. *Futurity Education*, 3 (1), 150–165. <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED/2022.10.11.11>
13. Chinkondenji, P. (2022). Schoolgirl pregnancy, dropout or pushout? an Ubuntu-centric re-construction of the education for learner mothers in Malawi. *Gender and Education*, 34, 738–753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2022.2061922>
14. Chipfakacha, R. (2019). Education and the Development Agenda: An Analysis of Factors Influencing Primary School Learners' Outcomes in Hwange and Binga Districts, Zimbabwe. *Africanus: Journal of Development Studies*, 49, 26. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6522/6526>
15. Chitiyo, A. (2021). Special and inclusive education in Southern Africa. *Journal of Special Education Preparation*, 1 (1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.33043/JOSEP.1.1.55-66>
16. Chiyota, N., & Marishane, R. N. (2020). Re-entry Policy Implementation challenges and support systems for teenage mothers in Zambian primary schools. *The Education Systems of Africa*, 2, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43042-9_44-1
17. Cotza, V. (2023). *Rethinking education: A case study in the field of popular and second-chance schools*. In Conference Name: 15th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies, Palm-Spain (pp. 6391–6401). <https://doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2023.1690>
18. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
19. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing among five approaches (4th Ed.)*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
20. Desai, R., Magan, A., Ruiter, R. A., Reddy, P. S., & Mercken, L. A. (2024). Understanding why youth drop out of school in South Africa. *SAGE Open*, 14 80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231219080>
21. Dube, B. (2020). Rural online learning in the context of COVID-19 in South Africa: Evoking an inclusive education approach. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 10(3), 135–157. <https://doi.org/10.17583/remie.2020.5607>
22. Girls Not Brides. (2019). *Addressing child marriage through education: What the evidence shows*. Accessed from <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/addressing-child-marriage-education-evidence-shows/#resource-downloads> (open 6th October 2024).
23. Herald. (2024). *Silver lining to teen pregnancy risks*. <https://www.herald.co.zw/silver-lining--teen-pregnancy-risks/> Accessed on 5th October 2024
24. Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2018). *Discrimination in education against pregnant girls and adolescent mothers: Leave no girl behind in Africa*. Accessed on <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/06/14/leave-no-girl-behind-africa/discrimination-education-against-pregnant-girls-and-adolescent-mothers/> (open 6th October 2024).
25. Kanyopa, T. J. (2018). *Learners transitioning from township to ex-model C schools: An invitational educational perspective (Unpublished master's thesis)*. University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
26. Laiser, M. L., & Musinga, E. (2017). Perceptions and experiences of educational stakeholders regarding teenage mothers' readmission in primary schools of Tanzania mainland. *International Journal of Science Arts and Commerce*, 1(12), 53–64. [http://www.ijsc.net/node/155\(open](http://www.ijsc.net/node/155(open)
27. Lukáč, M., & Lukáčová, S. (2024). Second-chance in Vocational Education and Training of Adults in Slovakia: Second or Wasted Chance? *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 11, 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.13152/IJRVET.11.1.2>
28. Lunga, P., Esterhuizen, S., & Koen, M. (2022). Play-based pedagogy: An approach to advance young children's holistic development. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 12 (1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1133>
29. Mazowa, C. (2022). *An investigation into the efficiency/effects of the re-entry policy in the education sector: A case study of selected schools in Zambia* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Africa.
30. McLeod, S., (2024). Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Simply Psychology <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html>
31. Morgan, A. K., Ibrahim, R., Owusu, A. F. S., Awafo, B. A., Quartey, T., Aziire, M. A., Katsekor, J. T., Owusu, A. S., & Katey, D. (2023). Prevalence and associated factors of second-chance education among teenage mothers in Ghana's Volta Region: A cross-sectional survey. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 28, 2242476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2023.2242476>
32. Moyo, G. (2023). *Making Politics in Zimbabwe's Second Republic: The Formative Project by Emmerson Mnangagwa*. Springer Nature.
33. Moyo, J. (2020). *Unwanted pregnancies. Zimbabwe's anti-coronavirus lockdown has had an unintended consequence: A spike in unwanted pregnancies*. Accessed

- from <https://healthtimes.co.zw/2020/04/19/zim-experts-warn-of-rise-in-unintended-pregnancies-after-lockdownshould-young-people-adopt-long-term-contraceptives/> (open 6th October 2024).
34. Mushibwe, C. P. (2018). *Literature review on the research and advocacy on the implementation of the re-entry policy in Zambian schools*. CAMFED, DFID and the British Council.
 35. Muzingili, T., & Muchinako, A. G. (2016). Factors affecting school completion rate by the girl child in Binga Resettlements areas of district, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Educational Research*, 28(1), 17–36. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/zjer/article/view/132684> (open)
 36. Mweemba, G., Moono, M., Chishipula, J., & Maambo, C. (2019). An investigation into challenges faced by teen mothers who re-entered school: A case of selected schools on the Copperbelt province of Zambia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 5(3), 32–38.
 37. Ncube, D., & Mudau, T. J. (2017). Legalising the illegal: Interrogating the policy that allows pregnant schoolgirls to go for maternity leave and come back to school. A case of selected primary schools in Gwanda district. *Global Journal of Advanced Research*, 4(2), 67–78.
 38. Nsalamba, G., & Simpande, A. (2019). Effects of re-entry policy implementation on readmitted girls' academic performance in mathematics in selected primary schools of Mufulira District in Zambia. *International Journal of Data Science and Analysis*, 5(5), 73–85. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijdsa.20190505.11>
 39. Nyamanhare, E., Madzore, R., & Rembe, S. (2022). Measures to reduce primary school high dropout rate of the girl-child in marginalised Resettlements areas of communities in Zimbabwe: the case of Binga district. *Journal of Leadership, Governance and Development*, 1(2), 75.
 40. Nyariro, M. (2021). "We have heard you but we are not changing anything": Policymakers as audience to a photovoice exhibition on challenges to second-chance education for young mothers in Kenya. *Agenda*, 35, 94–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2020.1855850>
 41. Pandin, M. G. R., & Yanto, E. S. (2023). The what and how of existential phenomenological research. *The Qualitative Report*, 28(3), 816–827. [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol28/iss3/9/\(open](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol28/iss3/9/(open)
 42. Pasternáková, L., Barnová, S., Zelina, M., Krásna, S., & Gabrhelová, G. (2023). Determinants of the realization of second-chance education. *Emerging Science Journal*, 7, 189–203. <https://doi.org/10.28991/ESJ-2023-SIED2-015>
 43. Ratusniak, C., & Silva, C. C. D. (2024). School dropout or expulsion: Why do learner-mothers leave school? *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*, 27, e243705. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-35392023-243705-t>
 44. Rawlins, S. (2024). *Talking with others: Autoethnography, existential phenomenology, and dialogic being*. In *Writing philosophical autoethnography* (pp. 188–208). Routledge.
 45. Reamer, F. (2018). *Social work values and ethics*. Columbia University Press.
 46. Salvi, F. (2019). The regulation of pregnancy in Mozambican schools: From policy, to practice, to identities. *Comparative Education Review*, 63(3), 337–355. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703792>
 47. Sperling, G. B., Winthrop, R., & Kwauk, C. (2016). *What works in girls' education? Evidence for the world's best investment*. The Brookings Institution.
 48. Svindseth, M. F., & Crawford, P. (2019). *Humiliation: Mental health and public shame*. Emerald.
 49. Tarisayi, K. S. (2024). Integrating indigenous knowledge in South African geography education curricula for social justice and decolonization. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 5 (7), 1195–1206. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245711>
 50. Thwala, S. L. K., Okeke, C. I., Matse, Z., & Ugwuanyi, C. S. (2022). Teachers' perspectives on the implementation of teenage mothers' school re-entry policy in Eswatini Kingdom: Implication for educational evaluators. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(2), 684–695. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22656>
 51. UNICEF. (2020). *Girls' education is improving, but not for all girls – how can we accelerate change?* UNICEF Think Piece Series.
 52. Van Nes, F., Abma, T., Jonsson, H., & Deeg, D. (2010). Language differences in qualitative research: Is meaning lost in translation? *European Journal of Ageing*, 7(4), 313–316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-010-0168-y>
 53. Walgwe, E. L., LaChance, N. T., Birungi, H., & Undie, C. C. (2016). *Kenya: Helping adolescent mothers remain in school through strengthened implementation of second-chance education policies*. Accessed from https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/departments_sbsr-rh/243/ (open 6th October 2024).
 54. WHO. (2020). *Adolescents: Health Risks and Solutions*. World Health Organisation. Accessed <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs345/en/> (open 6th October 2024).
 55. Xu, Y. & Zhang, X., (2017). The residential resettlement in suburbs of Chinese Cities: A case study of Changsha. *Cities*, Volume 69, pages 46-55, Elsevier
 56. Zuilkowski, S. S., Henning, M., Zulu, J., & Matafwali, B. (2019). Zambia's second-chance education policy for adolescent mothers: Examining impacts beyond re-enrollment. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 64, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.11.001>