

A Methodological Presentation of How the Implementation of the Pregnancy Re-Entry Policy Among Stakeholders At Primary School Level in Chongwe District, Zambia was Explored for A Phd Study

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Abstract

Research methodology is considered to be the backbone in addressing a research question. The research aimed at exploring how stakeholders perceive the implementation of the Re-entry policy. Critical theory was used as the theoretical framework in applied research. The study used qualitative methodology. The paradigm was mainly interpretive making use of multiple site case studies of stakeholders in its research design. Data was collected through desk review and individual in-depth semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and Reflexive Thematic analysis (RTA). Research methodology needs to be coherent in line with the research question, researcher capabilities and the context within which the study is being conducted.

Keywords: Qualitative methodology, interpretative, critical theory, applied research, case studies.

Introduction

This article presents a research strategy focuses on a broad picture of how the study was conducted in terms of research paradigm, type of research, research approach and research. Furthermore, the population, sample size, sampling procedure will be presented. Thereafter, the research instruments, method of data, and data analysis are outlined. This is followed by trustworthiness and ethical considerations and finally the delimitations and limitations.

Research paradigm

A research paradigm refers to how the world is viewed which determines the meaning attached to research data based on the assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values of the paradigm adopted (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Creswell and Creswell point out four world views; post-positivism, constructivism, transformative and pragmatism. Constructivism paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) is commonly referred to as interpretivist paradigm by others (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014; Maree, 2012; Ritchie & Lewis, 2010). This study made use of a combination of transformative worldview and interpretivism with the latter being the main paradigm.

Transformative paradigm

This paradigm argues that the process of decision making is influenced by power relations which ends up oppressing some people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It focuses on action agenda which actively engages the disfranchised to overcome their oppression and marginalisation. The transformative paradigm is inclined to the ethnographic method of data collection. This study was inclined to philosophy of promoting social justice but not its research method. It is argued that almost every research is aimed at transformation through change in people's lives (Antunes, 2004).

Interpretivist paradigm

This was biased towards interpretivism. The interpretivist paradigm entails an inductive process (Chowdhury, 2014). This implies to giving meaning, understanding, and interpreting participants' experiences and social constructs of values over the re-entry of the teenage mothers in order to build a theory to address the problem thus effecting change.

Interpretivism paradigm is based on the premise that there is no single reality because a phenomenon is interpreted based on relativism in the socio-historic context (O'Leary, 2017) by focusing on individual (constructionism) and collective (constructivism) perceptions and actions on a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that constructivism is characterized by interpretivism. Interpretivism aims at getting a deeper meaning of what is already known (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014). It is already known that the Re-entry policy is not being effective in Zambia because some teenage mothers are not re-entering the school system compounded by increased teenage pregnancy rates. Interpretivism is based on the belief that multiple realities exist (Flick, 2009) which made it imperative that the views of multiple stakeholders were obtained on the challenges faced by teenage mothers in re-entering into primary school.

Tuli (2010) explains that interpretivism has a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. Ontology implies to one's perception of reality and how it exists (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The ontology in this paradigm is based on relativism (O'Leary, 2017) without a single truth thus characterised by multiple realities based on morals, culture, and experiences of individuals. This makes it to be subjective. This is studied from an individual perspective known as constructionism and community perspective known as constructivism (Rodwell, 2015). The constructionist also known as social constructionist ontological approach focuses on how cultural norms and values as well as the language have a bearing on the re-entry of teenage mothers in a particular community, that is, Chongwe District in this study. A constructionist approach is embedded in the 'material, social structures, social relations, and institutionalised practice' (Chen, Shek, & Bu, 2011) in relation to the phenomenon of continuation of education by teenage mothers who are considered as a deviant group in society.

The constructivists' approach to reality is that multiple value -laden realities exist which should be contextualised to the environment in which they exist. Gaining knowledge embedded in the nature of reality which is known as epistemology requires an interpretative approach to understand human behaviour by focusing on their feelings, perceptions, and experiences of their social environment (Chen, Shek, & Bu, 2011). This is aimed at gaining in-depth knowledge on challenges in primary school re-entry of teenage mothers and teenage pregnancies in Chongwe district in relation to the Re-entry policy and how to overcome them.

Type of research

This refers to the usage of information gained from a research (Msabila & Nalaila, 2013). Research

undertakings are categorised into three; theoretical, pure or basic, and applied research (Msabila & Nalaila, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2010). The Frascati manual used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) classifies research into three based on its purpose; basic, applied, and experimental (OECD, 2015). This study was Applied Qualitative Research (AQR) (McMahon & Winch, 2018) which makes use of findings to address challenges in re-entry of teenage mothers (OECD, 2015; Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013). Ritchie (2010) explains that applied research is ideal for policy research by combining theory and reality to understand the 'context' of the social problem and 'fully interpret' it in order to inform interventions.

In terms of policy research, three categories of research in policy analysis exist which are traditional, mainstream, and interpretative (Browne, Coffey, Cook, Meiklejohn, & Palermo, 2018). This study made use of the interpretative research method to gain in-depth understanding of why teenage mothers are facing challenges in re-entry and how the challenges can be overcome through a democratic process involving various stakeholders comprising of the teenage mothers, their parents, education professionals and gate keeper institutions. Interpretative policy analysis unpacks the interplay between values, norms, and facts in a social context communicated through verbal, body language and action (Behagel, Arts, & Turnhout, 2017). This study contextualises re-entry of teenage mothers in Chongwe District, which has its own unique cultural norms and values. The implementation of the Re-entry policy is a complex issue involving stakeholders including gate keeper institutions.

The language communicates the perceptions and attitudes which the stakeholders have towards re-entry of teenage mothers (Morgan & Sklar, 2012). The meaning of language at individual and collective levels forms the basis of policy interpretation through identification of emerging themes regarding challenges faced by teenage mothers in re-entry and suggested strategies to overcome them. Under this interpretative research type, policy triangle approach will be used which seeks to holistically understand how the content, context, process, and actors influence the uptake of the Re-entry policy (Browne, Coffey, Cook, Meiklejohn, & Palermo, 2018). This implies to the analysis of the Re-entry policy guidelines, the context in which they are supposed to be implemented, the process of implementation and the actors in relation to re-entry of teenage mothers.

Research approach

There are three types of research methodologies, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); (Creswell, J W, 2014). This study will make use of qualitative approach in exploring (Creswell, 2012) measures to overcome the challenges faced by teenage mothers in re-entry. Case study design is suitable for research that focuses on addressing how and why questions (Stake, 2010). This study focuses on how schools are implementing the Re-entry policy guidelines and why some teenage mothers are not re-entering the school system. Furthermore, qualitative research approach factors in time, place, history, culture, economy, social, and personal factors in studying a phenomenon (Stake, 2010) such as contextualising the implementation of the Re-entry policy in primary schools of Chongwe District at the time the study will be conducted.

Tuli (2010) points out that qualitative research focuses on 'exploring, discovering, and understanding' a phenomenon which in this case is re-entry of teenage mothers. This is achieved through qualitative research which is ideal for a bottom-up inductive process in finding solutions to challenges in effective implementation (Yin, 2011) of the Re-entry policy. Qualitative approach has the advantage of involving underrepresented populations by engaging them in problem solving concerning matters which affect their

well-being (Leavy, 2014). Qualitative research generates rational knowledge from the reasoning and judgment done when studying a societal problem (Bless et al., 2013) through critique of the assumptions and reality over re-entry of teenage mothers in government primary schools of Chongwe District.

Research design

This study adopts a case study research design which is influenced by how knowledge should be generated and the nature of reality when studying a particular phenomenon (Morgan & Sklar, 2012). A case study is defined by (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010) as a contextualised comprehensive investigation of a social problem by gathering information from multiple sources to get multiple views. This is aimed at “locating the factors that account for the behaviour-patterns of the given unit as an integrated totality” (Kothari, 2004:113). Morgan and Sklar, (2012) point out that case studies explore phenomenon focusing on three key characteristics of case studies being; idiographic (exploring individual differences), contextually analyzing the phenomenon occurrence over time, and the information is obtained from a number of sources.

This study used multiple sources in terms of primary schools, document review, teenage mothers, parents, education professions and gate keeper institutions to get information on teenage mothers’ re-entry and the implementation of the Re-entry policy. These formed the cases which were the basis of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study design has been found to be suitable for research that focuses on addressing how and why questions (Yin R. K., 2014). This study focused on how schools are implementing the Re-entry policy.

Case study design in this study was utilised under the qualitative approach thus focuses on constructivism in knowledge generation (Yazan, 2015; Ritchie & Lewis, 2010) to interpret meaning constructed by participants over the implementation of the Re-entry policy and how it influences their actions. Emphasis was on knowledge construction not discovery through an inductive process which was used to build theory based on findings.

Case studies are ideal for educational research on policies such as this study (Crewswell, 2012; Seabi, 2012). There are three main proponents of case studies in educational research, Yin, Stake, and Merriam (Yazan, 2015). This study adopted the Stakian case study approach. Stake identified three types of case studies, intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Msabila & Nalaila, 2013). This study made use of collective case study type which entails using multiple case studies from multiple sites. This was done in order to understand the phenomenon in an inclusive and participatory manner (Yazan, 2015) involving interest groups, the intended beneficiaries (teenage mothers), their primary support system (parents), and implementers (education professions, that is, administrators and teachers) as well as technocrats, and political leaders.

Just like other case studies, collective case studies have the advantage of involving participants, the researcher, and the readers. The interaction between the participants and researcher gives the former opportunities to share their experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2014a) on the implementation of the Re-entry policy. Case studies also have the advantage of being flexible to use a variety of research methods, the ability to create rapport with research subjects, and also to obtain rich description that can be transferred to similar situations, and in-depth insight into the challenges faced by teenage mothers in re-entry into the school system (Ponelis, 2015).

Population, Sample, and Sampling procedure

Population in research refers to the total number of objects in a particular geographical area (Taherdoost, 2016). Research targets populations with characteristics of interest to the researcher (Msabila & Nalaila, 2013). The target population of this study are the teenage mothers who fell pregnant at primary school level in Chongwe District during the implementation of the Re-entry from 1997 to 2020. The actual statistics are not known. According to the 2010 census data, Chongwe had a population of 182, 174 out of which more than 92,909 (51%) were females (Provincial Administration Lusaka Province, 2020). There are about 53 government primary schools in Chongwe. This study targeted government primary schools, grant aided, and community schools within which teenage mothers, parents, school administrators and teachers as well as gate keeper institutions are of interest in answering the research question. This formed the sampling frame. A sampling frame is “a list of the actual cases from which the sample is drawn which is representative of the target population” (Taherdoost, 2016).

Non- probability sampling techniques were used to select units with features which are relevant in addressing the research question (Crewswell, 2012; Morgan & Sklar, 2012). Non- probability sampling techniques inclined to qualitative research include; quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, convenience sampling (McMahon & Winch, 2018; Taherdoost, 2016) and voluntary sampling (Alvi , 2016; Murairwa , 2015). Purposive sampling also known as deliberate, judgmental, or authoritative sampling will be used to select government schools. Purposive sampling refers to the researcher handpicking participants based on some set criteria which is in line with the research question (Ritchie & Lewis , 2010). Five (5) government primary schools in Chongwe District will be selected. The statistics on teenage age pregnancy rates and re-entry for primary schools in Chongwe District compiled by the Chongwe District Education Board (DEBS) for the years 2018 (DEBS, 2018) and 2019 (DEBS, 2019). The purposive sampling of the schools was on three criteria; the first five schools were based on their data of teenage age pregnancy and re-entry levels for both years. Five schools were selected as follows; a school with a high rate of teenage age pregnancy with high rates of re-entry of teenage mothers (GPS1), a school with low teenage age pregnancy with high re-entry of teenage mothers (GPS2), a school with low rates of teenage age pregnancy and low re-entry of teenage mothers (GPS 3), and a school with high teenage age pregnancy rates with low re-entry of teenage mothers (GPS 4). Thereafter, six government schools (GPS6 -12) were selected based on their geographic position to have a representative sample of Chongwe district schools. The third criterion was to select three community primary schools CPS 1-3 geographically representing their locations. Purposive sampling has the advantage of selecting participants based on the researcher’s judgment on their suitability to answer the research question to ensure that relevant data is collected (Msabila & Nalaila, 2013). However, this might lead to a bias in sampling.

Two subgroups of teenage mothers were sampled, that is, teenage mothers in school and teenage mothers out of school. Convenience sampling which refers to selection of participants based on their availability (Ritchie & Lewis , 2010) as facilitated by the schools was used to select both subgroups of teenage mothers. The advantage with this type of sampling is that the researcher co-opts participants based on their accessibility (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013). However, convenience sampling has the disadvantage of excluding populations in isolated areas (Elder, 2009). The sample sizes were fourteen (14) teenage mothers in school, and eight (8) teenage mothers out of school.

Convenience sampling was used to sample select thirteen (13) parents of mothers in school, and nine (9) parents of teenage mothers out of school affiliated to each respective school in the sample.

Key informants referring to ‘knowledgeable’ people (Cossham & Johanson, 2019) or experts as well as gate keeper institutions who can share their experiences of the implementation of the Re-entry policy. Key informants in a study of this nature are used to gather information to help provide a broad perspective of a phenomenon (Cossham & Johanson, 2019), that is, the implementation of the Re-entry policy within the context of their schools, parents, and the teenage mothers as the primary cases in Chongwe District. Furthermore, this study takes a broader perspective of looking at the implementation through a bottom up approach that incorporates the gate keeper institutions. These are stakeholders who also influence the implementation of the policy using the multi-sectoral approach as outlined in Zambia’s eighth NDP (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2022).

The study involved eight (8) Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) representatives at school level, eleven (11) guidance and counselling teachers, twelve (12) school administrators from each of the schools, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the area of girl- child education involved in policy advocacy, educational support, Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), and Christian religious values (6), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for education(1), men’s network (1) and gender (1), gender expert one (1), two (2) officers from community development and social services, five (5) officers from Ministry of Health, Two (2) officer from Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal security, five (5) officers from the Ministry of Education, Church motherbody(1). All the key informants were purposively sampled. The total sample size was fourteen (14) primary schools, and 100 participants. The sample also encompassed desk review at ten (10) schools, one (1) report by House of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs committee, two (2) documents by National Assembly committees. The sample size in a qualitative study of this nature was determined by saturation, that is determining participation that is deemed adequate for the research purpose (Leavy, 2017).

Research instruments

This refers to tools which will be used to collect data (Bowen, 2009). Research instruments used for qualitative interpretative studies of this nature include, observation, interview guides, documents, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) guides. This study made use of Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) guides, and documents. Two data collecting tools were used to increase the credibility of findings through triangulation (Stake, 2010; Bowen, 2009).

Document review has several advantages (Bowen, 2009). It helps the researcher to understand the research context of the phenomenon under study. Secondly, it gives a history of change and development of the phenomenon. Thirdly, it can help to formulate research questions to ask participants. It is a research method which collects data to complement other methods. The disadvantage with document review is that it can be biased based on the views of the writer (Seabi, 2012). A checklist was used to guide the review of the documents.

Semi -structured interview (SSI) guides for teenage mothers in school, teenage mothers out of school, for parents of teenage mothers, and key informants have some predetermined questions in line with the research question but they are flexible to accommodate new questions during data collection aimed at deeper exploration (Creswell, 2012; Seabi, 2012) of the re-entry of teenage mothers through the Re-entry policy. Their flexibility enables the researcher to ask iterative questions by rephrasing questions to confirm earlier information supplied by the participants to confirm or dispel any confusion or untruthfulness (Shenton, 2004).

Face- to -face interviews have the advantage of enabling the interviewer to pick perceptions and attitudes towards re-entry of teenage mothers through ‘social cues’ expressed through language, that is, words, expressions, intonations of the voices as well as body language. The disadvantage with interviews is that the interviewer has to multi-task in terms of listening, paying attention to the interviewees and taking notes (Opdenakker, 2006). Time factor might be a challenge for the facilitator in probing to gain deeper understanding of the implementation of the Re-entry policy from lived experiences.

Pre- testing of the data collecting tools

This refers to checking whether the data collecting tools are phrased accordingly in terms of language by trying them out on a small representative sample of the target population prior to the actual data collection (Malmqvist, Hellberg, Mollas, Rose, & Shevlin, 2019; Majid , Othman , Mohamad, Lim , & Yusof, 2017). This enabled me to fine tune questions to be culturally appropriate, easy to understand by the participates, and illicit information is line with the research question. Due to the target population size availed by the schools. The pre-testing participates were only one interview with teenage mothers in school, one interview with teenage mothers out of school, one interview with parents of teenage mothers in school, one interview with parents of teenage mothers in school. I used to print out interview guides, even after piloting, I had to edit some questions in line with the feedback of what I was getting in terms of clarity on the part of the participants – paraphrasing to ask the correct question in relation to the research question. However, It is argued that refinement of questions as data was being collected is a given in qualitative research due to its subjective orientation (Theron & Malindi , 2012).

Methods of data collection

Primary and secondary methods of data collection were used. Primary data collection was firsthand information collected from the field by the researcher (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013). Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with teenage mothers in school, teenage mothers out of school, parents of teenage mothers as well as key informants to get a deeper understanding on participants’ individual experience regarding the implementation of the Re-entry policy (Ritchie & Lewis , 2010). Desk review of Re-entry documents was used to collect secondary data. Document review is important in understanding the historical context of the Re-entry policy. School document review was conducted. This was meant to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010).

Data Collection procedure

At each school, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with teenage mothers in school, and their parents. Then followed by interviews with teenage mothers out of school, and their parents. Thereafter, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants at school, district, and national levels. The sequence of the data collection was such that it was bottom -up thus enriching the modification of upper level questions based on the findings from a lower level. The national committee documents were the last to be reviewed. Reeves et al., (2013) explain that interviews gather perceptual data therefore the integration of document review captures documented information on the implementation of the Re-entry policy

Data analysis

This study will generate two sets of data, primary and secondary. Qualitative data analysis is aimed at

represent the participants in relation to the phenomena within a social context through a systematic scientific process (Shava et al., 2021). Both sets of data were analyzed through an interpretative process to gain deeper meaning beyond mere words (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Byrne, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nieuwenhuis, 2014b).

Secondary data analysis of school level documents

The school document review was conducted to establish the availability of policy documents and acts as well as records on teenage pregnancy, and re-entry information.

Secondary data review of committee reports at national level

Secondary data from the document review was analyzed through Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). This was critical in an educational research of this nature as it indirectly engaged with school administration, national level committees concerning issues regarding the implementation of the Re-entry policy through written text. QCA is based on reviewing written text focusing on a contextually subjective interpretation of meaning (Shava et al., 2021). This was done through content analysis which gave the researcher the liberty of creating themes (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) based on the researcher's analysis. Shava et al., (2021) explain that QCA encompasses extracting meaning and insight from text in a 'holistic and clear' manner. It is a subjective, and iterative analysis process used to understand and find meaning in the data. The QCA in this study focused on written text on the contextualisation of the implementation of the Re-entry policy in Zambia. Attention was paid to the narrative analysis (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours expressed in phrases and words used in the documents in relation to the implementation of the Re-entry policy.

The objectivity of QCA lies in analysing the meaning within 'content of communication' from purposively chosen text in line with the research question (Shava et al., 2021). It is based on inferences and interpretations through manifest (deductive) and latent (inductive) content of meaning with the latter being more prominent. It is considered to be a scientific manner of document review in qualitative research with no standard set of QCA. QCA is argued to be a more objective data source in that is not affected by direct interaction between the researcher and participants thus is said to be unobtrusive.

Though Shava et al., (2021) argue that there is no set standard in QCA however a scientific process must be followed which makes inferences and interpretation of the written words in relation to the research question. The following stages according to (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) were adopted in QCA.

Step 1: Meaning unit

For each of the committee reports, the information was extracted based first on the guidelines of the Re-entry policy. Furthermore, I looked out for any other information relating to continuation of school by teenage mothers, and teenage pregnancy amongst girls at primary school in Zambia. The documents were re-read resulting in summarization.

Step 2: Coding

Initially the codes were established manually after which the generated summaries in stage 1 were then uploaded on the Atlas. Ti23 to generate AI codes.

Step 3: Category

The documents were run through Atlas. Ti23 to generate AI summaries. The Manual and the AI summaries were read and re-read to establish semantic and latent patterns concerning the implementation of the Re-entry policy.

Step 4: Theme development

This led to the naming of the themes in a descriptive way with latent interpretation.

Primary data analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA) was used for analysing data obtained through face-to-face interviews. TA is considered to be dynamic with no standardization (Braun & Clarke, 2023) because as a researcher, I own my perspective which is unique to me. This study adopted Reflexive Thematic analysis (RTA) approach by Braun and Clarke embedded in a philosophical ontological perspective of relativist critical analysis. RTA puts the researcher at the centre in knowledge production (Byrne, 2022). Moreover, RTA is contextualised to the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of a study that is interpretivism and critical theory respectively. Therefore, this study made use of the constructivism. The critical theory focuses on in-depth reflection of findings to establish deeper meaning. The analysis used in this study is hermeneutics (Bengtsson, 2016), that is, finding meaning in spoken and written words. This is embodied in the verbal (hermeneutics) and non-verbal (body language, silence) communication of the data. I engaged with the data in an iterative process to creatively develop themes from the data through a latent process which focuses on establishing deeper meaning of the data best representing the perceptions of participants. The exercise was undertaken through a trinity of theoretical assumption, usage of Artificial Intelligence of Atlas ti. 23 CASDAQ, and the data.

Focus was on establishing the phenomena in a social setting thus does not have a single correct answer but the focus is to represent the participants' as best as possible (Byrne, 2021). This is reiterated by Braun and Clarke (2020) that RTA does not require research teams nor is it necessary for quality due to its subjective nature. However, the quality is embedded in the consistency in the philosophical and theoretical approaches used for the study.

The data collection encompassed multi-level stakeholders. The interview guides used focused on the participants' views on the implementation of the Re-entry policy and how to enhance it. This is a subjective approach based on a constructionist approach requiring me as the researcher to engage in an interpretative approach. This required the reflexivity on the part of the researcher to avoid bias. In terms of theme development, RTA requires that using a 'constructionist philosophy' calls for the researcher to focus not on frequency but the 'meaning and meaningful' as the main aspect in the 'coding processing' (Byrne, 2022: 1395). This study adopted a combination of experiential and critical phenomenological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2020) with the latter taking precedence. Experiential phenomenology in this study focused on the experiences of the primary implementers of the Re-entry policy at school level. The critical orientation of RTA involves the deeper meaning of Re-entry policy in a social context through a predominately inductive process also known as 'data driven' (Byrne, 2022) process of theme development. The initial stage of coding was done using Atlas ti.23 software as a way of increasing quality in the coding process. This was complemented by my manual coding to get more insight into the data. This study made use of latent coding focusing on gaining insight into meaning of data rather than looking at it from face value thus me as the researcher played an active role through an interpretative process which called for creativity, and flexibility (Braun & Clarke 2020; Braun & Clarke 2019). Braun and Clarke (2020:13) emphasise that usage of interpretation in postgraduate studies TA is determined by the 'skill of the analyst not the method.' Furthermore, Braun and Clarke, (2023) and Byrne (2022) argue that reflexive thematic analysis is not a rigid process but flexible and driven by the researcher's perspective in relation to the research question. This is supported by Byrne (2022) that RTA depicts a researcher's interpretative analysis of data comprising of three elements of; data set, theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and the analytical skills/ resources of the researcher. This study did this within a scientifically appropriate research school of thought, thus there is no single answer as 'meaning is not fixed in data' (Braun and Clarke

2023:2). RTA also acknowledges the uniqueness of every researcher in Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) over the same data set considering that the researcher is the main data collecting tool (Byrne, 2022). This is due to its subjective nature because of the big Q qualitative approach which is non-positivist (Braun and Clarke 2023). This was done through a knowledge generation process characterized by reflexivity, subjectivity, and creativity to code and develop themes based on commonality (Byrne, 2022). Commonality was related to meaningfulness in relation to the topic under study as opposed to frequency of occurrence.

This study adopted the six staged RTA by (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Step 1: Data familiarisation and writing notes

Transcription of audio data is the initial stage in data analysis (Bryman, 2012; Bailey, 2008). This is very crucial because it forms the foundation for analyses thus requires patience and attention to detail when transcribing. I did not do any audio recording to uphold ethics in research of consent. The responses from the participants were being written down manually. Therefore, the transcription involved the translation of hard copy of the write up to soft copy. I engaged in an iterative process of appreciating the data by analyzing it semantically, and latently. Clues of concepts coming out from the data were taken note of. This led to the establishment of manifest (surface) and latent (hidden) narrative analysis (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours expressed in phrases and words used by participants regarding the implementation of the Re-entry policy.

Step 2: Systematic data coding

I looked at possible codes emerging from my interpretation of the data in line with the research question and the specific objectives. The soft copy documents of findings per cohort of the sample, that is, teenage mothers in school, teenage mothers out of school, and parents of teenage mothers in school, parents of teenage mothers out of school, G& C teachers, school administrators, and PTA members were consolidated respectively. The documents for the key informants were individually done. The documents were uploaded on Atlas.ti 23 to generate codes using Artificial Intelligence (AI) coding. The manually, and CAQDAS generated codes were then compared with further analysis done. This led to the establishment of the codes.

Step 3: Identifying themes from coded and collated data

The data was looked at holistically in order to establish meaning from it through the identification of themes and sub-themes by consolidating some codes to develop 'over-arching narratives'. Themes were not obvious thus needed to be established through a process of reflection I undertook by linking the data to my interpretation of the interaction with the participants and the context within which it was done. Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that RTA involves creativity in the generation of themes through a narration of the data. I undertook theme development through a triangulation of theoretical assumption of constructivism in an interpretative manner using manual mining of data complemented with CASDAQ, that is, Atlas.ti.23 Artificial Intelligence (AI) code generation and summaries for the respective participant cohorts. Through the In-depth analysis, the manually and AI developed codes were the basis for theme development. Summaries of the findings were generated using Atlas.ti 23 AI summary generator. These summaries were consolidated with the manual observation of emerging themes.

Step 4: Developing and reviewing themes

This encompassed critical intensive process of identifying the main themes and sub themes.

Step 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

This stage finalized the themes and the sub-themes thereof.

Step 6: Writing the report

The final write up of the study then commenced.

Similar steps of analysis are outlined for Atlas. ti 23 steps in qualitative data analysis.

Data Presentation

The findings will be presented as themes and subthemes of narratives dominated by the voices of the participants.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the results of a research reflect the reality influenced by the linkages between different elements of the research such as the research paradigm, methodology, data analysis, interpretation and reporting (Connelly, 2016). The quality of a study in relation to the concept of trustworthiness is based on it exhibiting elements of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility

This implies to the extent to which findings reflect reality, that is, truth (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Anney, 2014) (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013). The study was designed in such a way that the theoretical framework, policy analysis framework, research paradigm, research approach and data analysis are in sync. The study made use of document review, and in -depth individual interviews from multiple sites in primary schools of Chongwe District as well as other stakeholders to enhance credibility through triangulation of findings to assess consensus in the findings (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013). Member check, that is asking participants to validate the researcher's interpretation of information gathered during fieldwork (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Stake, 2010) was done during the interviews to ensure credibility. The manual data analysis was complemented by Atlas.ti 23 CAQDAS to enhance accuracy in interpretation of data.

Dependability

This refers to consistency in the research strategy ((Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013; Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). The consistency in this research was addressed through the selection of strategies with elements of multiple participation of cases in a bottom -up approach with the focus being that of interpreting findings by the researcher within a qualitative approach.

Transferability/ Applicability

This is also known as applicability (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). Most of the results of this study were similar to those conducted in similar contexts however, the interpretation depended on the research question of this study. A detailed account of the context of the research will be presented in the thesis report which will assist readers to apply findings to similar contexts (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012).

Confirmability / Replicability

This is also known as replicability (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013) or neutrality (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). The data will be objectively presented based on the findings from the participants instead of the subjectivity of the researcher (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). The research process is fully explained in the research report to benefit other researchers conducting research in similar contexts (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013).

Ethical considerations

The legal and moral guidelines in social sciences research were upheld to ensure that the participants are not harmed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013). This study abided by the rules in conducting research with human participants to uphold the two core ethical considerations of non-maleficence and beneficence.

Non-maleficence

According to the WHO (2020b), conducting fieldwork research in health emergencies like COVID-19 should critically analyze the social value of studies of this nature based on risk benefit analysis. Wits HREC non-medical guidelines stress on avoiding physical fieldwork as much as possible by using technological platforms (Watermeyer, Knight, & Smal, 2020). This study could not employ technological data collecting platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, or Teams because of the rural setting of the study area characterized by low technology adoption. However, the COVID-19 national restrictions of operating in the new normal in Zambia were upheld. This included masking up, avoiding handshakes, hand sanitising, avoiding sharing of equipment and leaving a distance of not less than one meter between two people. The researcher also got the COVID-19 vaccine. The researcher did not conduct field work when she had sickness symptomatic of COVID-19.

The researcher ensured that the participants were protected from harm during and after the study. This guided the decision to remove the recording aspect of interviews when the first participants refused to be recorded for fear of their recordings leaking on social media. The participants were protected by upholding four ethical principles, that is, PAPA implying to *Privacy* by upholding confidentiality of participants' identities and information without audio recording, *Accuracy* by reporting findings truthfully, *Property*, that is, ownership of data by participants through confirmation during the interviews and *Accessibility* of data to only the researcher and the supervisor (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Permission from gate keeper institutions

Permission was sought from Ministry of General Education in Zambia. Written permission was granted on the 6th of June 2020. Thereafter, Permission was sought at institutional and individual levels of all participants from schools and other organisations such as government ministries, NGOs, CSOs, gender expert, House of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, the Council of Churches, and National Assembly.

Ethical review by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)

The proposed research document was submitted to three IRBs to ensure that it upholds ethical values in conducting social research and give the necessary authorization (Yin, 2011). I undertook an assessment based online research ethics training conducted by the University of Witwatersrand Human research ethics Committee (HREC non-medical) resulting in ethics competence certification in 2020. This was part of the requirements for the submission of the research proposal to the University of Witwatersrand HREC non-medical. I was asked to design a distress protocol because the HREC non-medical categorised the study as medium risk. The distress protocol (Kakanda-Sinkala, 2022) was designed after which the HREC non-medical cleared the proposal, human research ethics committee (non-medical) Protocol Number: H22/01/32. Thereafter, the proposal was submitted to a local ethics committee in Zambia that is, Eres Converge as per National Health Research Authority (NHRA) guidelines in Zambia. Clearance by Eres Converge No. 2022-Jun-007 was obtained. Furthermore, I sort national ethics clearance from NHRA considering that the research was rated as medium risk, and involved the ministry of Health, Ref No: NHRA0000004/28/09/2022. I also undertook a mental health counselling course in September 2022 for one week as preparation for fieldwork.

Informed consent

Informed consent is based on potential participants being knowledgeable about what the research is about and why they are being approached to be part of the study before deciding about whether to participate or not (Yin, 2011). I used Information sheets to explain what the research is about to the potential participants. Potential participants were given an opportunity to ask questions. Thereafter, hard copies of the information sheets were given to individual potential participants. Upon agreement to participate, potential participants were asked to sign consent forms. Permission was also sought from the parents of teenage mothers below the age of 18 years including those above 18 years in order to also uphold cultural norms of respecting the parents..... An Assent form was used for children. This ensured that the principles of autonomy and respect for persons in research ethics were upheld (Wasunna, Tegli, & Ndebele, 2014).

Voluntary participation

Even where the gate keeper institutions had given the go ahead, the right of individuals to participate voluntarily was upheld by seeking consent from each one of the individual potential participants (Wasunna, Tegli, & Ndebele, 2014). Though this was a bit of a challenge because the individual participants assumed that they had no say as long as the powers that be gave permission. I explained the ethical value of autonomy to them, thereafter respected their decision of whether or not to participate. The right of participants to withdraw at any point of the study was also upheld (Bless, Smith, & Sithole, 2013).

Privacy/ Confidentiality /Anonymity

The participants were given the opportunity to decide on the venues for the interviews to uphold privacy however safety for the participant and the researcher was considered as well. It is argued that confidentiality and anonymity cannot be granted in data collection however the research will uphold this by using pseudonyms in the form of acronym codes as identification for participants. Creswell and Creswell point out that in some cases the confidentiality is compromised by some participants not wanting to be anonymous (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Reflexivity

This refers to introspection by the researcher on the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017) to examine the appropriateness in relation to the problem being addressed, the research question and the purpose of the study. Reflexivity is aimed at minimizing bias in the research process to ensure that the reported findings are true reflections of reality (Patnaik, 2013). Reflexivity pays attention to power relations between the researcher and the participants as well as amongst participants, bias of the researcher and the role played by the researcher in the study (Leavy, 2014). As the researcher, I was the main research instrument in this qualitative research. I had to do a lot of reading and engage in critical iterative thinking on how to tackle the whole process to establish the truth from the participants and representation thereof (Stake, 2010). This rigour took a lot of time in the data analysis.

This study was qualitative in nature informed by Critical theory thus reflexivity was important considering that I am part of the social world with my own assumptions, values, knowledge (Palaganas et al., 2001) attitude, and biases (Patnaik, 2013) in the implementation of the school re-entry policy in government primary schools. Therefore, I was mindful that I was part of the research process with my role being that of facilitating knowledge sharing by the participants. Having understood the ethical considerations in human non-medical research, I ensured that there was no undue influence in the data collection such as leading participants to say what I wanted to hear.

Reflexivity is a deconstructive process of examining oneself, other, and the interpretation of the text and how it is being represented (Macbeth D. , 2001). I diarised my own assumptions and values before commencement of the field work. Self-reflection was undertaken after each session to analyse how I affected the interviews (McMahon & Winch, 2018) during field work for me to appreciate new knowledge gained and rationally analyse it. This is to say that this study made use of subjective reflexivity which is premised on the existence of multiple realities. The knowledge shared by participants was a learning process for me. The reporting of findings was dominated by the voices of the participants.

Publication of findings

This refers to sharing of the research process and findings as well as the conclusion drawn on re-entry of teenage mothers and recommendations thereof. The findings will be published in research journals. The findings of this study will also be presented as a PhD thesis to the University of Witwatersrand.

Beneficence

Beneficence implies to participates benefitting from the study (Creswell, 2014). This study was rated medium risk. I was mindful that the topic could illicit emotional distress from the teenage mothers and their parents in that some pregnancies could have been unintended. Moreover, it could remind them of the hurt suffered due to the way they were treated by their families and communities (Bwalya, 2015). Furthermore, narrating the way they are treated by the school personnel, and other learners could evoke emotions from the teenage mothers (Ntambo & Kabubi, 2017) . The parents of the teenage mothers might also be emotionally affected by this study because of the pain of their daughters' falling pregnant whilst in school, out of wedlock, and the resultant stigma. I made prior arrangements for psychosocial counsellors from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare operating under the Chongwe District office before undertaking fieldwork.

It is envisioned that the study will result in enlightenment of participates on the Re-entry policy through engagement. Participates especially the teenage mothers, their parents, and PTA representatives learnt about the policy through the interaction with me during the face-to-face interviews. It is hoped that there will be transformation in the implementation of the Re-entry policy which will contribute towards their social and economic development through recommendations based on the findings.

Delimitations of the study

The study was conducted in primary schools of Chongwe District which encompassed teenage mothers, their parents, teachers, school administrators, PTA representatives as well gate keeper institutions at district, and national level to appreciate the implementation of the teenage re-entry policy through a bottom-up approach.

Limitations of the study

- COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 slowed down progress.
- Literature from the educational statistical bulletins over the years of the implementation of the Re-entry policy state high teenage pregnancy rates amongst primary school girls with some teenage mothers re-entering in Zambia. The researcher envisioned to have the following sample; Forty-two (42) in school and (42) teenage mothers out of school sampled focusing on three participates linked to each of the fourteen (14) schools respectively. Out of the fourteen schools, only six (6) schools out of

which three (3) arranged for the teenage mothers and their parents to come to the schools, the other three (3) gave me a few contact numbers for the cases. One (1) school had not reported any pregnancy, and re-entry cases in the past four years. Overall, most schools acknowledged that they had cases of girls just stopping school after which it was learnt that they had stopped due to pregnancy with follow ups not being done for one reason or the other. Due to the target population at hand, the sample size drastically dropped.

- I was not availed with any data bases of teenage pregnancy and re-entry by the schools. The schools through the Guidance and Counselling teachers were the ones who contacted the cases, in some cases, the researcher was availed with contact numbers for the parents/ guardians of the cases.
- There were challenges in contacting other parents / guardians due to bad telecommunication networks.
- I could not locate those who were not reachable by phone due to the terrains and distances to homesteads.
- Moreover, it was brought to my attention that some parents deliberately moved the teenage pregnant girls to far flanked areas for reasons such as concealing the pregnancy, avoiding criminal cases etc.
- The study was self-funded thus financial constraints were encountered time and again.

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