FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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THE EXPULSION OF PREGNANT STUDENTS IN UGANDA:
Teacher Perspectives on a Contravention of 'Education for All'

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ABSTRACT

The denial of formal education to pregnant pre-tertiary school students contravenes universal access to quality education, yet the latter is a key aspiration of the 21st century. Only recently, in 2015, did Uganda draft guidelines on preventing and managing HIV/AIDS and pregnancy in school settings, with a COVID-19 related update in 2020. These prohibit the expulsion of pregnant students before the first trimester of pregnancy elapses; and advocate unconditional re-enrolment when the child is at least 6 months. However, the guidelines are little publicised, and the practice of denying pregnant and parenting students access to formal education still continues as the case was before their promulgation. The current study was conducted to identify the factors and forces perpetuating pregnant student expulsions, and to explore ways of enabling girls to continue studying during and after pregnancy. From a theoretical perspective combining Marxist and socialist feminism, and a critical educational research approach, the study involved two group interviews with participants drawn from two nationally spread professional networks, UNELTA and ILEP Uganda, and discussions with two individual teachers. A thematic analysis was conducted, identifying, as broad themes, teachers' descriptions of processes, practices and experiences regarding pregnant student expulsions and parenting student reenrolment; the factors and actors perpetuating the denial of formal education; and possible remedies. Key conclusions are drawn by discussing the findings in light of the research theories employed and existing literature. The study recommends fostering girl child agency, improving the policy framework, establishing a pregnant and parenting students tracking mechanism to foster reenrolment, and making structural and infrastructural adjustments to enable them stay in school. I hope that the knowledge and suggested solutions contribute to the emancipation of the girl child, and to the advancement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5.

Key words: schoolgirl pregnancy, student expulsion, education for all

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PREFACE

Exploring the subject of pregnant student expulsion in this thesis has been informed by my personal and professional experiences and reflections. I have grown up, studied and taught in Uganda, where discovering that a student is pregnant is answered with expulsion and humiliation. I have seen my female classmates, students, family members, friends and neighbours drop out of school without the assurance of reenrolment.

Between 2009 and 2017, I uncritically taught in this school system. If I were a school administrator at the time, I could have been the one to expel a pregnant student from my school. I was not aware of or did not consider how much harm this practice inflicts on a girlchild as an individual and, collectively, as a class of people in our society. It did not occur to me how much of a treasure we are closing out by denying these girls an opportunity to contribute to their own development, and that of their families, communities, our country, our continent and the world.

My turning point occurred during the Spring semester of 2017 which I spent the Gerald Read Centre for International and Intercultural Education, Kent State University in Ohio, USA. There, I participated in the International Leaders in Education Programme (ILEP), a teacher professional development initiative of the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, implemented by IREX. During the fellowship, I audited a graduate course titled, *Disadvantaged Youth in Career Technical Education*, facilitated by Drs Davison Mupinga and David Browne. Aside from studying with students who had had breaks on education and were back to study this course, I learned about a school Dr Browne worked with that accommodated pregnant students. My conversation with him made me realise how important and possible it is to support pregnant students to succeed in school and brighten their career future. My work in the culture sector at the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda exposed me to the nature of culture as a dynamic driver, content and context of development. Sociocultural influences on education need to utilize this dynamism to create better conditions for students and other stakeholders in the system.

An opportunity to explore the student expulsion phenomenon as a research project occurred during my IMER coursework. In our PDA084: Qualitative Approaches to Educational Research course, Drs Adrianna Nizinska and Ernst Thoutenhoofd asked us to either choose from a provided list of topics or suggest a new one for our group work. I suggested that my group explore, *The rights and treatment of pregnant students*. I am glad my group and the tutors agreed. The deeper I delved into the topic, the more my interest and urge to act intensified. Among other efforts to discuss and advocate for a better treatment of pregnant students, I worked with colleagues Brenda Allen Kawala, Alexandra Marcelino, Davina Bih and Louice Johansson on *The Ntuo'pathy Approach: A Norms Reform Model for the Social Inclusion of Pregnant Students*, which we submitted to the Geneva Challenge 2020 as an approach to addressing the phenomenon from a critical educational research orientation and the African Ubuntu philosophical perspective. In preparation for my thesis writing, I hovered over many topics but still could not get my attention away from this which speaks to both my head and heart.

I am glad that I undertook this study, which I consider a step in my critical educational research career, with a specific inclination to inclusive education and education for sustainable development. One of my key research findings is that many teachers feel a considerable void of agency to change the rules of their routine. Some of the participants in this study expressed remorse with the expulsion of pregnant students. If they had their way, they would act differently. I hope that this research provides insights for practical steps by like-minded professionals and stakeholders to improve the educational experience of pregnant and parenting students.

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For this work and all that it has culminated from, I am greatly indebted to God from whom, I believe, all blessings flow. His providence has afforded me the requisite material and non-material resources.

For the opportunity to study at the University of Sweden, with all its prestige, I am grateful to the Swedish Institute for offering me the Swedish Institute Scholarship for Global Professionals (SISGP).

For the advice and encouragement throughout the ideation and writing up of this study, I am grateful to Sally Windsor, my thesis supervisor. IMER Programme Coordinator Ernst Thoutenhoofd and course tutors Dawn Sanders, Susanne Dodillet, Adrianna Nizinska, Aimee Haley and Kajsa Yang Hansen, helped sharpen my understanding and perspectives on research methods throughout my study time on the programme. The IMER class of 2021 gave me the peer support and helped shape my ideas during formally organised and informal interactions. Thank you.

My wife, Daphin Ganyira, who has been teaching in Ugandan schools – to whose practices and experiences the thesis topic is relevant – has (as always) been my thinking companion, informally. Daphin kindly stayed with me both in Gothenburg during my IMER coursework and in Uganda during the field research. Yvonne, Horace, Vangerina, my other family members and friends kindly pardoned my absence. Thank you.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

A' Level	- Advanced Level
AIDS	- Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BBC	- British Broadcasting Corporation
FAWE	- Forum for African Women Educationalists
HCG	- Human Chorionic Gonadotropin
HIV	- Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IIEP	- International Institute for Educational Planning
ILEP	- International Leaders in Education Programme
NGO	- Non-Governmental Organisation
O' Level	- Ordinary Level
OHCHR	- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PIASCY	- Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy to Youth
SDG	- Sustainable Development Goal
UNEB	- Uganda National Examinations Board
UNELTA	- Uganda National English Language Teachers' Association
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPE	- Universal Primary Education
UPOLET	- Universal Post Ordinary Level Education and Training
USE	- Universal Secondary Education

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Universal access to quality education is a key aspiration of the 21st century, and is a major focus of international, regional and national legislations and strategic development plans. At the international level, countries – united by commitment to implementing, among others, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 5 of the United Nations agenda 2030 – aspire for unhampered universal access to quality education. The aspiration is not a recent development. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948, Article 26) propagates grounds for all humans to inalienably access education. This is reiterated by the 1990 World Declaration of Education for All (World Conference on Education for All, 1990) and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989, Article 28). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation of African Union, 1990) domesticates these aspirations to a continental level. States Parties promulgate legal and policy provisions to achieve this agenda. Uganda has progressively promulgated policies, strategies and programmes like the free Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE) and the Universal Post-"O"-Level and Education and Training (UPOLET) towards the realisation of universal access to education.

However, a key bottleneck to achieving this universal access to education agenda in Uganda and most other sub-Saharan African countries, is the expulsion of students when they are found pregnant, usually by conducting compulsory, impromptu tests (Maly et al., 2017). Pregnancy accounts for at least 22.8% of school dropouts among girls aged 14-18 years (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; UBOS, 2018). Whereas pregnant student expulsions are more rampant in pre-tertiary schools, namely primary and secondary, some tertiary institutions, especially religiously founded ones, also expel pregnant students. Examples of such institutions include the Uganda Christian University (as in the case of Maureen, explained in Kukunda (2017)), and the Islamic University in Uganda which prohibits any premarital relationships and routinely conducts impromptu pregnancy checks on students, leading to the expulsion of those discovered pregnant (All East Africa, 2018; Etengu, 2006). Attempts to avert pregnancy occurrences by offering comprehensive sex education in the school curriculum have been made but such efforts have met either sceptical attitudes or utterly dismissive resistance (Babimpa & Bishop, 2018; Iyer & Aggleton, 2013; Kemigisha, Bruce, et al., 2019; Kemigisha, Ivanova, et al., 2019; Ninsiima et al., 2017).

Re-enrolment after pregnancy is often barred, in Uganda and other countries such as Tanzania, whose former president John Pombe Magufuli is quoted to have said, "as long as I am president … no pregnant student will be allowed to return to school. … After getting pregnant, you are done." (Ratcliffe, 2017). Only few sub-Saharan African countries like Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya and Malawi have a readmission policy for parenting mothers (Chilisa, 2002), and even fewer such as Rwanda encourage continuity of school during pregnancy (Ruzibiza, 2020).

Cultural Context

Student pregnancy and how it is viewed and handled in Uganda and possibly across sub-Saharan Africa exists in the broader cultural context where premarital sex and pregnancy are despised and punished (FAWE Tanzania, n.d.). Prematurally pregnant students, especially teenagers, are considered "a shame to the community" (Ruzibiza, 2020, pp. 1, 4). Among the Bakiga cultural community in Uganda, tradition demands that a prematurally pregnant girl is thrown down from a cliff on Kisizi Water Falls (Lyazi, 2017) or left to die by starvation or drowning on *Akampene,* the "punishment island" in the middle of Lake Bunyonyi (P. Atuhaire, 2017; Cini, 2014). Whereas this practice has waned, one Mauda Kyitaragabwire, who was left to

die but got rescued by a fisherman from this punishment island, was interviewed in a 2017 BBC documentary by P. Atuhaire (2017); which means that the practice was either recently discarded or still continues clandestinely.

Among the Baganda cultural community, the term *amawemukirano* is used to refer to premarital pregnancy. A complex, often rigorous, process of cultural rituals follows the discovery of premarital pregnancy. For example, the pregnant girl is banished from her biological family to the impregnator's family if known. If not known, she is sent to reside at a secluded corner of the family's land far from the homestead. This is irrespective of the circumstances that led to the pregnancy, even if it was through rape. Whereas it appears this traditional practice is waning too as more families are becoming more empathetic with their daughters, I observe that the expulsion of pregnant students from formal schools is akin to the banishment of the girl as it applies in the *amawemukirano* and other such traditions.

Irrespective of the cultural context prohibiting premarital sexual activity and pregnancy, the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey indicated that 20% of women begin sexual activity before age 15, and 64% by age 18. At least 25% women were reported to have had a teenage pregnancy, with a higher rate in rural areas (27%) compared to urban areas (19%). As aforesaid, at least 22.8% of the school dropouts of girls between the ages of 14 and 18 years are linked to pregnancy (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; UBOS, 2018).

1.2 Problem statement

The expulsion of pregnant pre-tertiary school students, which is practiced in Uganda and many other Sub-Saharan African countries, contravenes the quest for education for all by excluding these female students from equitable pursuit of education compared not only to their male counterparts but also females in areas where pregnant students are supported to continue school, such as the United States, Sweden and other such 'developed' countries (Aidi, 2018; Ekstrand et al., 2005). With this indiscriminate expulsion comes a high price to pay: girls are socially stigmatised, alienated from their families and often depressed, all of which endanger their own and their antenatal children's lives (C. Atuhaire & Cumber, 2018; Berg & Mamhute, 2013; Buwembo, 2018). The shattered opportunity for school deprives the expelled girls of opportunities for socioeconomic progress, keeping them in disadvantaged and marginalised ranks of society (Menzel, 2019), and hinders their contribution to development in their communities, countries and the world.

In Uganda, most government, civil society and school-based interventions regarding pregnancy are directed towards prevention; and if this fails, there is hardly any option for a girl to remain in school. In 2015, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports developed guidelines for the prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and unintended pregnancy in school settings, which were later revised in 2020 to address the heightened cases of pregnancy during the lockdown on schools orchestrated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). Although the guidelines promote, among others, a 'do no harm' principle and require that "all interventions to prevent early pregnancy, discrimination of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in schools should minimise possible longer term harm, or support the adolescent mothers and their children in ways that facilitate long-term development" (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020, p. 17), they direct that the girl be sent on mandatory leave when at least 3 months pregnant until her child is about 6 months old. I opine that this mandatory leave is only a euphemistic manifestation of the already prevalent expulsions of pregnant students, now backed by national policy. As I write this research report in the first half of 2021, schools are still closed, except to finalist and pre-finalist students in primary classes 7 and 6, senior 4 and 3 and senior 6 and 5,

respectively[1]. Whereas the Ministry of Education has directed that pregnant students in finalist classes should be allowed to sit for their final exams (The Independent, 2020), it is highly likely that expulsions will continue, as precedented by the unexplained disregard for the 2015 guidelines on prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy at least until when schools were closed in early 2020.

This disparity between policy and practice demands a sufficient understanding of the forces perpetuating the expulsion of pregnant students, and strategies for enabling them to access formal education during and after pregnancy. The current study set out to contribute to the bridging of this gap by investigating the perspectives of teachers, who are familiar with grassroots implementation of educational policies.

1.3 Research questions

The research from which this report culminates was conducted to (a) identify the forces that perpetuate the expulsion of pregnant students in Uganda; and (b) suggest ways students can be afforded an opportunity to continue with formal education during and after pregnancy. The endeavour was guided by two questions:

1. What sustains the practice of denying pregnant pre-tertiary school students an opportunity to continue formal education in Uganda?
    a. What informs the choice of decision-making actors, authority exhibited and the processes regarding pregnant students?
    b. What decisions are considered appropriate to make regarding pregnant students, and how do these affect their socioeconomic status?
    c. How is the nature of decisions and practices regarding student pregnancy propagated and perpetuated across generations?

2. What can be done to afford students an opportunity to continue formal education during and after pregnancy?

1.4 Significance of the study

The current study is important on academic and social impact counts. Academically, the study is a critical educational research endeavour, contributing to feminist scholarship and education for sustainable development. As part of feminist scholarship, the study draws on Marxist and social feminist viewpoints to identify, in the particular context of Uganda, the sociocultural structures that permeate formal institutions and hinder female students from achieving their academic and, by extension, career aspirations. In terms of education for sustainable development, the study is a timely contribution to scholarly discussions on how education influences the attainment of sustainable development goals, particularly 4: access to quality education, and 5: gender equality. The study's timeliness lies in the fact that in 2020, exactly 10 years towards the end mark year of UN development Agenda 2030, the COVID-19 pandemic ensued, and girl-child pregnancies have skyrocketed due to the disruption of the largely protective school environment (Daniel, 2020; Giannini & Albrectsen, 2020; IIEP & UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). In the Ugandan context, where pregnant students are expelled, this means more girls are permanently leaving school, thereby undermining the realisation of global development agenda 2030.

As a social impact endeavour, the study has an emancipatory agenda. By identifying and creating awareness about the factors that perpetuate pregnant student expulsions, the study will possibly evoke the consciousness and voice of the girl child to play a more active and assertive role in deciding her destiny especially regarding education and career aspirations. The discussions

[1] In Uganda's education levels, Primary 7 is the last class of primary school, senior 4 the last of secondary school (Ordinary Level), and senior 6 the last of high school (Advanced Level).

with participants in this study were structured to include ways of amplifying and strengthening the agency and voice of the girl child in the event of pregnancy during school. By suggesting ways to enable pregnant and parenting students to continue formal education, it is anticipated and desired that more practical policy promulgation and implementation will result.

Chapter 1 recap

This chapter has highlighted universal access to education as a 21st century aspiration that is threatened by the practice of pregnant student expulsion in Uganda and many other sub-Saharan African countries. At least 22.8% of girlchild school dropouts in Uganda are related to pregnancy. Although this practice occurs in formal school settings, its rooting has been traced to a traditional cultural context that detests and punishes premarital sex and pregnancy. The detrimental effect of pregnant student expulsions has been explained, namely disabling girls from achieving their personal aspirations and contributing to development in their communities, countries and the world.

The research problem has been highlighted as the insufficiency of an understanding of the factors and actors perpetuating pregnant student expulsions in spite of, for example, the 2015 and 2020 Uganda Government's partly supportive guidelines on managing pregnancy in school settings. The research aim, therefore, is to identify these factors and actors, and suggest some ways to afford pregnant and parenting students an opportunity to continue formal education. The study contributes, academically, to critical educational research and feminist thought; and, socially, to the emancipation of the girl child, towards the realisation of SDGs 4 and 5.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

To ground this study in existing scholarship on the subject of schoolgirl pregnancy, I reviewed literature pertaining to the broader context of Sub-Saharan Africa, where Uganda as a country lies both geographically and socio-culturally. The literature review inquired into the continued denial of formal education for pregnant, and often parenting, students by identifying from existing literature the perspectives on schoolgirl pregnancy; reviewing discussions of policy on student pregnancy from selected sub-Saharan African countries; and analysing discourse on the educational experience of pregnant and parenting students. Reflections on the Ugandan context and experience were woven into the discussion of the reviewed texts.

Following the literature review procedure suggested by Randolph (2019), who builds on earlier works, majorly H. Cooper (1986; 1988) and H. Cooper & Hedges (1993), I reviewed 25 publications, mostly peer-reviewed journal articles. Nine of these present perspectives on schoolgirl (and, generally premarital) sex and pregnancy, 13 discuss related policy and the contextual dynamics of its implementation, and three analyse the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting students, particularly in light of the structural arrangements and sociocultural influences.

2.1 Perspectives on schoolgirl (and, generally, premarital) sex and pregnancy

Premarital, and mostly teenage, sex and pregnancy are socially detested in Uganda and most sub-Saharan African countries. In a study engaging 12 pregnant and 14 never-pregnant adolescents in a discussion of perspectives on adolescent pregnancy, Maly et al. (2017) identified cultural and structural factors as responsible for the fear of premarital sex and pregnancy. Among the structural ones are the "expulsion of pregnant students from school, lack of access to contraceptives, limited sexual and reproductive health education, illegality of abortion, proving paternity/paternal accountability, and the legal age of marriage [which in Uganda is at least 18 years]" (p. 5). Cultural norms contributing to this abhorrence, they found out, relate to the expectation that one should only get pregnant when married (even if in some cases younger than the 18 years age of consent), stigma of premarital sex and related 'mishaps' like abortion, and myths concerning modern contraceptives which often culminate into the use of non-modern, usually, ineffective or unsafe methods of preventing pregnancy.

The social norms influence structural arrangements and the kind of support, if any, that is offered to pregnant and parenting students. Aside from the sub-Saharan African countries which obviously offer little to no support, education systems like that of the United States which are largely supportive of pregnant and parenting students provide more healthcare than education-propelling support. A 54-participant study by Brosh et al. (2007) established that support for educational and career aspirations rank least compared to other kinds of support. In fact, in the United States, Title IX's implementation of regulations for supporting the continuation of pregnant and parenting students has been criticised in studies such Fershee (2009) for being overridden by contextual and structural biases and, therefore, failing to meet its "access, choice and parity" (p. 93) objectives, which makes it full of only "hollow promises" (p. 79).

Such social norms and structural arrangements determine whether or not, and what kind of sex education, if any, is provided to children in primary and secondary school. Most of the sex education provided sends the message of "abstinence only" (Lewinger & Russell, 2019, p. 1), with less accepting protective measures like condoms, and even much less hinting on other contraceptives (Haas & Hutter, 2019). Such caps on knowledge dissemination have disparaging effects on children's sexual activity and health, and consequently compromises their ability to continue education especially due to pregnancy. Uganda's 2018 National Sexual Education Framework highlights from a 2016 Ministry of Education and Sports study that "among sexually

active girls, [only] 36% (29% in primary and 50% in secondary school) had ever used contraceptives"; and "of the 28% (n=609) girls who were sexually active while still at school, 80.1% (n=488) got pregnant", which resulted in 97% of those who got pregnant dropping out of school (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018, p. 1).

Although rural areas display more attachment to cultural norms that usually creep into the policies and practices of formal institutions like schools (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998), Haas & Hutter (2019) found similar influences on the execution of comprehensive sexuality education in a study involving 40 teachers in the urban Kampala capital city of Uganda. This suggests that the rural areas would have even much less tolerance of culture-contradicting sex and sexuality education in schools. Instead, contextually relevant aspects like biological changes, abstinence-only pregnancy messages, hygiene, sexually-transmitted disease messages and gender equality are incorporated into existing subjects like science and religious studies, with peculiarities being the largely defunct Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY) (Ninsiima et al., 2020), and pockets of other such extra-curricular programme usually run by civil society; such as Restless Development's Dance4Life programme (Evelo & Miedema, 2019).

2.2 The educational experience of expectant and parenting students

A major concern of research into pregnancy and schooling has been whether or not girls are able to study while pregnant or parenting. Some studies have identified that pregnancy while one is in pre-tertiary school or a teenager causes a lot of struggle with socioeconomic, biological, and school-related academic and non-academic factors. While young fathers face their share of the rather challenging parenting responsibility, mostly for socioeconomic reasons, (see, for example, Weber (2018)), girls bear a much heavier myriad of biological, social and psychological burdens (Ayazbekov et al., 2020; Berg & Mamhute, 2013; Brosh et al., 2007; Christensen et al., 2010). A study by Vin et al. (2014) involving 26 pregnant adolescents residing in a government shelter in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, describes that pregnancy attracts "physical (sleeping problem and self-care problem), psychological (emotional difficulties and low self-efficacy) and social (stigma and discrimination, financial difficulty, friendship problem and school dropout) problems" (p. 71). Such situations affect not only the girls themselves but also their prospective children, families and communities (Ayazbekov et al., 2020; Bain et al., 2020). The desperation, resulting majorly from lack of social support, often leads to dire actions like unsafe abortion (Mamboleo, 2012; Onyeka et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2006; Warenius et al., 2007) and neonaticide (Platt, 2014), all of which greatly reduce the girls' physical and psychosocial ability to study.

In Mozambique, where Decree number 39/GM/2003 regulates, in part, that pregnant students be transferred to night classes lasting until 10 pm, often together with their responsible male counterparts if they are in the same school, Salvi (2018) identified five problems associated with the arrangement: public transport challenges, the risks associated with being out late in the night, the usually reduced quality of night courses because both students and teachers would be tired from the day's work, the childrearing responsibility demanded particularly in the evenings as babies would be preparing to go to bed, and the design of the night courses which are seldom tailored to the curricula progress and needs of the parenting students.

To avert undesirable experiences associated with being detected pregnant, some pregnant students go silent and conceal pregnancy from the public and school administrators. In a rather unconventional argument, Salvi, (2020) demonstrates that silence and invisibility can be a tool for agency rather than subordination. Salvi claims that by, for example, wearing layers of clothes to conceal their pregnancy from school authorities, the girls are enhancing their own agency and assuming control of their situation. However, that such agency can only be exercised within and in response to the confines of regulations the girls cannot influence is indicative of the need for their full emancipation.

2.3 Policy on schoolgirl pregnancy and reenrolment

Chilisa (2002) categorises policies on school-girl pregnancy into "expulsion, re-entry and continuation policies" (p. 21). In a critique of such policies from 20 sub-Saharan African countries, Chilisa traces expulsion policies from the colonial period Christian governance of schools where pre-marital sex was strongly discouraged, and pregnancy answered with expulsion. She attributes "emerging" continuation and re-entry policies to the consideration for "the personal development and empowerment of the girl mother, her academic, physical and physiological needs as well as that of her offspring" (p. 24). Chilisa uses theories of oppression to examine patterns in the prevalence of school-girl policies in the countries surveyed; and concludes that countries with expulsion policies are normally those with poorer human rights records compared to those with continuation and re-entry policies. However, a close examination of what Chilisa calls "continuation policies" indicates that actually, they are re-entry policies. Existent in countries like "Cameroon, Madagascar, Namibia and Sierra Leone" (p. 24), she states that such policies provide for the girl to go back to school either immediately, after a negotiated maternity leave or on the recommendation of a social worker that the baby will be well taken care of. This means one would have withdrawn from school during pregnancy. Therefore, it might have been more appropriate for Chilisa to categorise school-girl pregnancy policies in sub-Saharan African countries as only expulsion and re-entry, but not continuation.

Implementation of re-entry policies has been yet another concern of a significant amount of the research materials reviewed in the current study. Factors identified as determining effective implementation have included interpretation and awareness, characteristics of implementers, societal factors, and the girls' and parents' capacity to do their part. In Zambia, Zuilkowski et al. (2019), on the premise that teachers are "the ground-level implementers of the [re-entry] policy" conducted a study that established a range of understandings of the policy and, therefore, various domestication approaches, many of which hamper the return of lactating teenagers to school. Girls' awareness of the right to re-entry has been found important in its enforcement (S.S. Zuilkowski et al., 2019). Tarus (2020) found that on top of limited awareness about the re-entry policy in Kenya, there is no tracer mechanism for girls who drop out to be attracted back to school. Kurgat (2016) found very pivotal in re-entry and retention of young mothers the role of school administrative support factors like guidance and counselling, tolerance with challenges of teenage parenting and, possibly, material support (but which was still lacking), in the case of Baringo County in Kenya. Also, a study by Opondo et al. (2017) suggests that the attitudes of young mothers to guidance and counselling programmes has also been found to have a strong bearing on how well they adjust when readmitted.

The characteristics, active involvement and role of school administrators has been highlighted as a strong contributor to success of the implementation of the readmission policy. In Kenya, Musili et al. (2020) identified statistically significant associations between the principals' age, gender, professional qualifications and experience, and the quality of implementation of the readmission policy. A dedicated effort to improve, where possible, on these qualities possibly creates an impact. For example, in 2016, a study by Kurgat (2016) reported that head teachers invited parenting students back to school, permitted them to go home and attend to their children, and established counselling services for them – all of which were gaps identified and on which recommendations were made by a study in 2011 by Omulako et al. (2011) which evaluated the role of head teachers in implementing the readmission policy. In relation to these two studies, it is important to note that the time lapse of just 5 years is quite short for the overly positive change to have happened, so it is possible that methods of inquiry might have biased the results: the 2011 study focused on only students as participants (and as the recipients of the administrative services) while the 2016 study combined students', administrators' and counsellors' perceptions. The potential bias, however, could have been checked by the fact that at least one researcher, Joyce Kurgat, was involved in both studies.

2.4 Policy and practice in Uganda

Until at least 2015, Uganda did not have clear national or district level policies on how pregnant students should be treated. Even with the establishment of the 2015 national level guidelines for the prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and unintended pregnancy in school settings, schools continued to promulgate and implement their own regulations on how to handle these situations, particularly indiscriminate expulsion of pregnant students. Other actions from such regulations include "allowing pregnant girls in candidate classes to do UNEB[2] exams, engaging the police to trace the man responsible, expulsion, suspension, regular pregnancy check-ups, regular monitoring by senior woman/man, matron and school nurses" (Ahikire & Madanda, 2011, p. iv). Although the 2015 national guidelines have been reviewed in 2020 in light of the increasing pregnancy rates during the lockdown on schools brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is quite likely that the diversity of school rules and regulations will continue influencing practice as the case was between 2015 and 2020 when the regulations existed. The national policies are not sufficiently publicised, and school rules take precedence at the moment.

Progressive policy on the education of pregnant and parenting students in sub-Saharan African countries has been largely the work of what Silver (2019) quotes Nancy Rose Hunt (1999) as having termed "middle figures"; largely non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international development institutions like sections and mechanisms of the United Nations and the African Union. Little, if any, effort has been intrinsically generated from country governments, cultural communities or the affected girls themselves. Instead, some state actors have been said to contribute "nothing but time" (Silver, 2019) to the processes. The Ugandan case is no different: the 'acknowledgements' of the publications bearing the guidelines on the handling of pregnant students list external partners like international development agencies and NGOs which possibly influenced the processes. Such publications include the 2015 'National Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of HIV/AIDS and Unintended Pregnancy', the 2020 'Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda' and the 2018 'National Sexuality Education Framework'. It is no wonder, therefore, that many educational policy makers and implementers as well as community members either have a limited understanding or have not really appreciated and consequently are not able to implement continuity and readmission policies, as studies have highlighted in Kenya, Botswana, Ghana, Malawi and Mozambique among others.

It can be concluded that sociocultural perceptions rooted in ethnic and religious traditions continue to influence educational and other public policy, and more importantly compromise the implementation of even progressive policies. Chilisa (2002) has related expulsion and re-entry policy with conservative and liberal governments, respectively. The same can pass for grassroots communities which, with the absence – or now, limited awareness – of a national policy in Uganda, possibly influence what goes into school policy continue to perpetuate expulsions.

The educational experience of pregnant and parenting students is determined by a myriad of factors, mostly economic and psychosocial ones in community, home and school spaces. In Uganda, promulgation of continuation and/or re-entry policy without addressing these factors would still render pregnant and parenting students unable to attend school, as has been demonstrated in the cases of Kenya (Kurgat, 2016; Miriti & Mutua, 2019; Musili et al., 2020), Mozambique (Salvi, 2018, 2020), Botswana (Chilisa, 2002), Malawi (Silver, 2020) and Ghana (Baa-Poku, 2016), among others.

[2] UNEB is Uganda National Examinations Board, which is the entity responsible for summative exams at Primary, Secondary and High-school levels of education.

Chapter 2 recap

This chapter has presented a review of 25 publications discussing perspectives on premarital and schoolgirl sex and pregnancy, related policies, and the educational experience of pregnant students. Overall, the literature demonstrates that premarital and schoolgirl pregnancy is unwanted and usually punished with, among others, expulsion from school. Policies related to schoolgirl pregnancy are categorised into three: expulsion, re-entry and continuity. The latter is least prevalent. I have argued that since re-entry occurs after a halt in studying, normally when one is expelled, re-entry policies subtly support expulsion, just that they provide a ray of hope after pregnancy. Educational experiences of pregnant students have been shown to be varying, with some more able than others to study while pregnant. Medical, psychosocial and economic factors are major influences on pregnant girls' ability to continue school. Uganda's budding national policy formulation regarding the management of pregnancy and parenting cases in schools has also been discussed as insufficient in addressing the need to keep pregnant girls in school.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY: SCOPE, THEORY AND APPROACH

3.1 Research scope

The current research addresses an issue that pervades the geographical width of the country and demands nationwide intervention measures like appropriate policy formulation and implementation. Therefore, I set out to gain a national overview rather than an in-depth understanding of one particular community or school. I made an effort to draw participants working in various parts of the country such that they would contribute perspectives from their respective operating communities.

Although stakeholders to the education of pregnant and parenting students are many and diverse, this research focused on perspectives of teachers. It was felt that teachers, operating in school settings and being members of the communities from which their students come, would provide to the discussion a professional worldview which weaves in community perspectives and experiences from their practice.

3.2 Theoretical framework

Two theoretical orientations informed the approach to this study. On the one hand, I applied a combination of the awareness-raising and social-structure deconstructing Marxist and socialist feminist theories (Tong, 1989; Tong & Botts, 2017). On the other hand, I applied the emancipation-focused critical educational research approach (Englund, 2010; Guilherme & Morgan, 2018; Kemmis, 1991; Young, 1989).

3.3.1. Marxist and socialist feminism

Conceived in pursuit of equal opportunities to education for all as stipulated in, among others, the 1990 World Declaration of Education for All (Ochiogu, Miettola, Ilika, & Vaskilampi, 2011), my research was theoretically grounded in an intersection of the Marxist and socialist feminism (see Tong, 1989; Tong & Botts, 2017). As noted by Tong & Botts (2017), there is only a thin layer of emphasis rather than substance between Marxist and socialist feminist theories on how societal relations manifest themselves and determine individuals' experiences. Marxists foreground the stratification of society into classes each of which has a layer of power in successive intensities, such that the higher class(es) subordinate the lower class(es). On the other hand, socialist feminists treat class as only one of the many aspects of identity that determine power relations in society, examples of the others being sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, political status and belief/religion. In contrast with the liberal and capitalist theoretical understandings of free will as what determines what and how humans think, choose and act, Marxists and socialists conceive what happens to individuals as situations beyond their individual control, and think it takes a concerted effort by the oppressed to unstrap themselves from their adversity. In agreement with Karl Marx's criticism of capitalism, Tong and Botts (2017) observe that although "under capitalism… people are largely free to do what they want within the confines of the system, … they have little say in determining the confines themselves" (p. 80).

Such is the case of the girl-child in societies that expel pregnant students. To understand this semblance, I highlight the parallels which Marxist and socialist feminists would draw: in the place of workers and their employers in the Marxist and socialist theories which stem from economic perspectives, I treat girls as a social class and group, face-to-face with both the educational policy makers and implementers, and the sociocultural forces that determine what goes into such policy and practice and, possibly, within the auspices of which they are expelled when they get pregnant. Policy tells the girls they have an 'inalienable' right to stay in school (World Conference on Education for All, 1990), but in practice, this gets sharply contradicted by the requirement to 'not get pregnant under any circumstances' or they would 'get expelled'. As Marxist and socialist

feminists theorise, the power of females' liberation lies in the consciousness of their own adversity and their determination to counter and overthrow the forces that inflict this adversity onto them. Hence, it is necessary to trigger and/or amplify the voice of the girl child in the affairs that affect her, in this case concerning the treatment of pregnant students.

My critical research, therefore, sought to extrapolate this idea by Marxist and socialist feminists by bringing to consciousness the factors that sustain the practice of expelling pregnant pre-tertiary school students, with the view of exploring spaces for compromises and lasting opportunities for the education of pregnant and parenting students.

3.3.2. Critical educational research

The current study was undertaken using a critical educational research approach which questions a status quo phenomenon and tends towards suggesting emancipatory practices in education (Englund, 2010; Guilherme & Morgan, 2018; Kemmis, 1991; Young, 1989). Female students as a broad social class, and pregnant pre-tertiary students as the particular one, are the target of emancipation from the social discrimination, manifest in expelling them when found pregnant and by implication from the opportunity to contribute to their personal, community, national and global socioeconomic development.

Practically, the research aligns to the four senses in which Kemmis (1991) argues educational critical research is oppositional a status in question: "epistemological, cognitive, cultural and political" (p. 94). Under the *epistemological opposition sense*, critical educational research questions the knowledge bases and other reference points of the phenomenon and rejects dualisms like "… positivist and interpretivist research …" Rather, it concerns itself with "productive practices" and takes the emancipatory approach of aspiring to achieve "the actual and the possible" (p. 102). The *cognitive opposition sense* questions the understanding of the world and situations as 'received', posing that social constructions are potentially distorted and distortive. In this research, this sense was helpful in understanding the motivation underlying the content of policy and practice at least at the school level. The *cultural opposition sense* acknowledges that "substantive modes of life of a culture can sustain irrationality, unsatisfying forms of life, and unjust social relationships" (p. 97). It is, therefore, concerned with identifying and exposing "the aspects of social order which frustrate the pursuit of rational goals, through analyses of the process of contestation of particular ideas and modes of language… institutionalised in taken-for-granted discourses, particular activities … institutionalised in established practices, and particular social relationships … institutionalised in the power structures of the organisations" (pp. 104, 105). In many cases, culture works on generally accepted truth claims which Postma (2015), drawing on the work of Burbules & Berk (1999) and Foucauldian theories, asserts that are a result of a particular knowledge or power base. Under the current research, the highly institutionalised but seldom questioned culture of expelling girls was brought to question, with practitioners – that is, teachers – reflecting on their daily practice and school-based experiences.

Finally, the *political opposition sense* checks power concentration by rejecting "hierarchy, bureaucracy and coercion" but also "individualism and libertarianism" (p. 105). In essence, it prefers a level ground for dialogue and unhampered expression, so that social action can take place from reasoned rather than rigidly bureaucratic conventions. This, in the current research, is where the emancipatory aspect is hinged. The power dynamics of school environments in Uganda were explored to establish the position and voice of the girl-child, and the potential for elevating her voice to the deciding table was imagined.

Although Kemmis is not clear on whether the oppositionality of critical educational research is in the nature of its identity (that is, how it is done as opposed to other approaches to research) or in what it does (such as its emancipatory role) I take, in this study, the stand that it is oppositional more by what it does than what it is, although these two attributes feed into one another. How

critical educational research is done determines what it is able to do, and what it does gives it its emancipatory identity. I, therefore, consider the four senses to work in a cyclic manner:

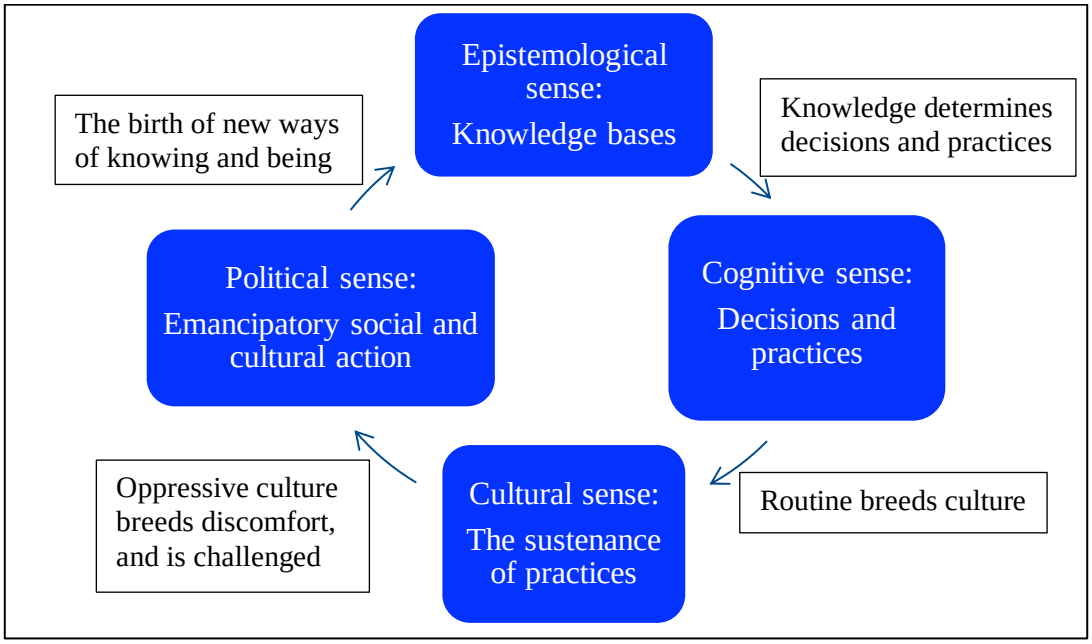

Figure 1: The Cyclic Oppositionality of Critical Educational Research (adapted from Kemmis, 1991, pp. 97, 98)

3.3 Research design

3.3.1. Participants: UNELTA and ILEP Uganda

Primary data were collected from teachers who belong to two nationally spread professional associations: the Uganda National English Language Teachers' Association (UNELTA) and the International Leaders in Education Programme alumni (ILEP Uganda). UNELTA is an association of mostly teachers of English but also has a category dubbed "content teachers" under which they admit teachers of other subjects, as inspired by the content-based instruction approach to language instruction. ILEP Uganda is an association of alumni of a United States Department of State professional development programme under which participants undertake five months of residential fellowship at a university in USA. During their residence, participants engage in cultural exchange seminars and events, audit at least two graduate courses of their choice, teach at public schools, deliver presentations at their respective universities and visit public offices responsible for educational and other aspects of American public interest, among others.

Participants from the two associations were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, their membership is geographically spread across Uganda, which lends the research some representativeness of a diversity of cultural contexts of country. Secondly, the groups represent different experience levels of teachers. UNELTA has a membership of various calibres of teachers: new graduates, university level teacher trainees as well as 'seasoned' teachers at primary, kindergarten, secondary, vocational and tertiary institution levels. On the other hand, members of ILEP Uganda have been in service for at least five years, since it is an eligibility requirement for participation in the fellowship from which they have become alumni. Some of the teachers in both associations are school administrators and others school counsellors.

To recruit the participants for this research, I sent a message calling for their expression of interest to their respective WhatsApp groups (see screenshots in Figure 2). All participants who

expressed interest and were able to meet on zoom (for the ILEP Uganda group) and to meet physically (for the UNELTA group) participated in the group interviews. The participants I interviewed individually were recommended during the group discussions.

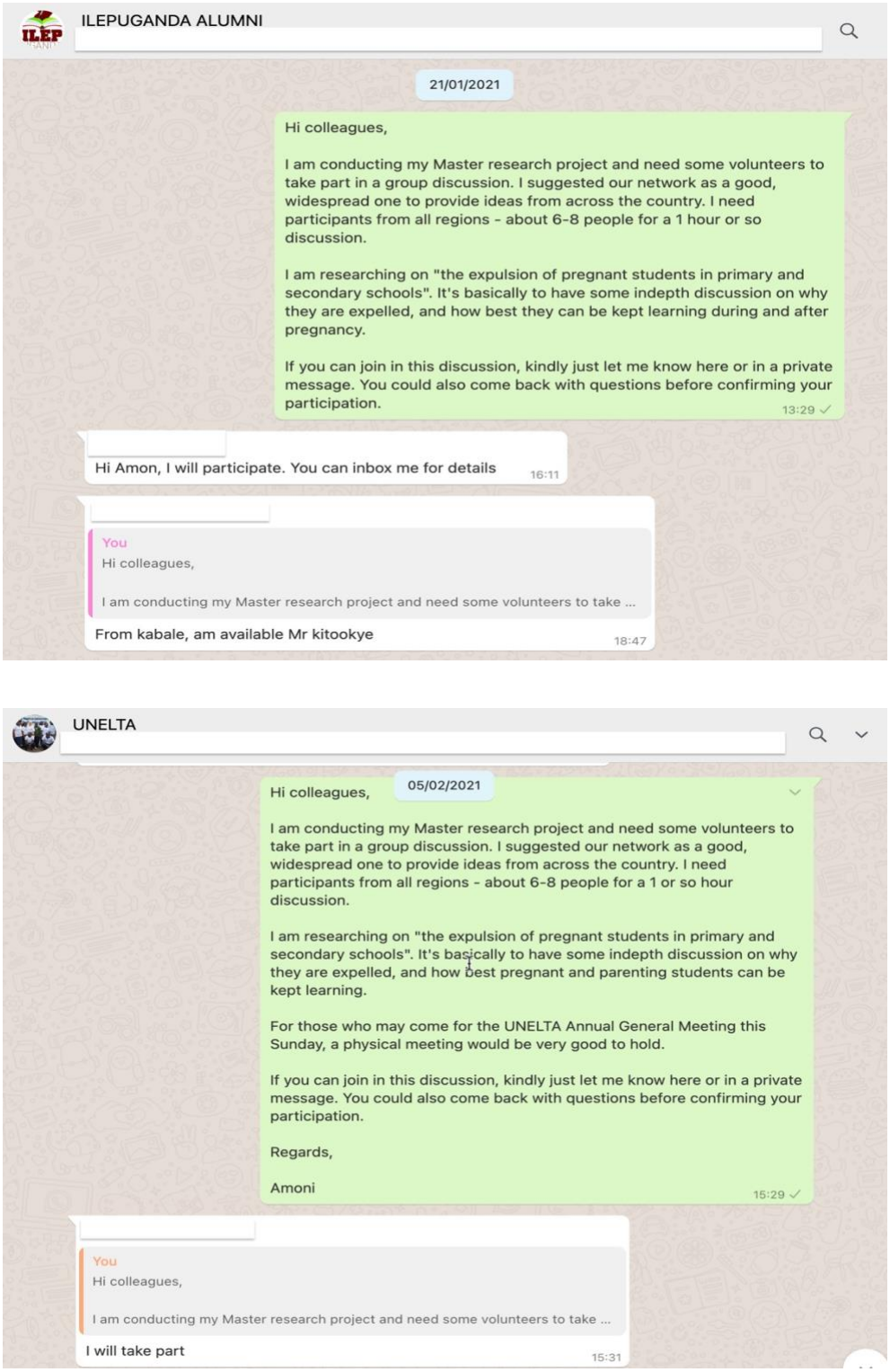

Figure 2: Screenshots of the call for expression of interest to participate in the research

Table 1: Schedule of participants

Group	No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Description
ILEP Uganda	1.	Gerald	Male	Gerald teaches at an all-girls' school in Northern Uganda. The school is mostly boarding, Anglican Protestant founded, and government aided.
	2.	Peace	Female	Peace teaches at a mixed-gender, day and boarding, Anglican Protestant founded, government aided school on the outskirts (ca. 6 km from the centre) of Fort Portal City in mid-Western Uganda.
	3.	Bridget	Female	Bridget teaches in public, mostly day school in the Arua district of the West Nile region in North-western Uganda.
	4.	Brian	Male	Brian teaches at a public school in Kabale district of Southwestern Uganda.
UNELTA	5.	Donald	Male	Donald has been teaching in various secondary schools for over 10 years, and now works as an Assistant Lecturer at one of the public Universities in Kampala, Central Uganda.
	6.	Kaleigh	Female	Kaleigh teaches in two schools: a Catholic founded and a government one. She is an administrator in the Catholic school. Both schools are in central Uganda, mixed-gender and have both day and boarding students.
	7.	Prize	Female	Prize doubles as a teacher and administrator at a private secondary school in Wakiso, Central Uganda.
	8.	Richard	Male	Richard teaches at a public school in Mityana, Central Uganda. He has been teaching for less than 2 years.
	9.	Joel	Male	Joel teaches at two private schools: one in Mityana (Central) and another in Bushenyi (Western). His school in Mityana also has a kindergarten and primary sections.
Individual interviewees	10.	Nancy	Female	Nancy taught at a pregnant students' school in Pader, Northern Uganda; but now works with public school in Gulu, in the same region.
	11.	William	Male	William teaches at two private schools in Jinja and Iganga, Eastern Uganda. He is the proprietor and an administrator of the school in Jinja.

3.3.2. Data collection

I convened two semi-formal group interviews lasting slightly more than 1 hour each. Additionally, informal discussions were held with two individual participants, separately. The interview with the 4 members of ILEP Uganda was held via a recorded teleconference using the Zoom platform, while the interview with 5 UNELTA members was held physically and recorded.

The discussions with the two individual participants were not voice recorded, but I took notes. Throughout the research, I maintained a journal using Evernote, a digital note-taking tool.

3.3.3. Data analysis

The audio-recorded data from group interviews was transcribed and coded into themes using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software. The notes from the interviews with individual participants were also used in the construction of the themes and in the discussion of the data.

Both a thematic and a framework analyses were conducted, as presented in chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

The thematic analysis was done through an iterative process of constructing, merging and collapsing themes, and subthemes, eventually arriving at three broad categories: descriptions of processes, experiences and practices; factors and actors perpetuating pregnant student expulsions; and suggested solutions. Although my research set out to identify and thematically analyse just the forces perpetuating pregnant student expulsion, and remedies to afford pregnant and parenting students an opportunity to formal education, a third category emerged, namely, the descriptive information that serves as a preamble to the two primarily targeted categories of information.

An analytical framework for deducing, corroborating and constructing meaning out of the interview data collected was developed using the tenets of the Marxist and socialist feminism, as well as critical educational research theories. The meaning construction makes reference to existing literature, theoretical, policy and practice-based perspectives on student pregnancy and universal access to education. The analytical framework fits with the overall research questions and sub-questions.

Table 2: Analytical framework

"Education for all" and SDGs 4 & 5		**Marxist and socialist feminism** *(Power distribution and socioeconomic implications)*
Critical education theory (Kemmis, 1991)	Epistemological sense *(Knowledge bases and other reference points)*	The knowledge bases and other reference points that inform the choice of decision-making actors, authority exhibited and the processes regarding schoolgirl pregnancy
	Cognitive sense *(Social constructions are potentially distorted and distortive)*	An inquiry into the decisions that are considered appropriate to make regarding pregnant students, and how these affect their socioeconomic status.
	Cultural sense *(Tradition can sustain irrationality, unsatisfying forms of life and unjust social relationships)*	An analysis of how the nature of decisions regarding student pregnancy are propagated and perpetuated across generations.
	Political sense *(Social and cultural action to challenge irrational social constructions & their sustaining mechanisms)*	Ideation on practical steps that can be taken to adjust the current constructions, structures and infrastructures to improve the educational experience of pregnant and parenting students.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In the ethical spirit of "doing no harm" I found Patton's (2002)10-point "ethical issues checklist" worth adhering to. The ten points are:

1. Explaining [to participants the research] purpose,
2. [Adhering to] promises and [ensuring] reciprocity, …
3. Risk assessment, …
4. Confidentiality, …
5. Informed consent, …
6. Data access and ownership, …
7. Interviewer mental health, …
8. Advice, …
9. Data collection boundaries, … and
10. Ethical versus legal [issues] (Patton, 2002, p. 408)

Some of these were, however, more directly relevant to this research than others; and I endeavoured to address them as follows:

Information and consent: I provide to participants relevant information on the purpose of the research. I emphasise "relevant" because excessive information (for example disclosing what I have already found in literature) would have potentially biased participants' perspectives. On an informed basis, consent was sought using an 'information and consent form' (appendix 2) signed in duplicate, of which both the researcher and participant retained a copy each.

Confidentiality: Due to the fragility of the subject, I committed to maintaining confidentiality in regard to the individual participants' identity, to limit traceability and possible victimisation.

Honest reporting: In the research report, possible biases have been checked by referencing and staying as close as possible to the subject and methodological theoretical orientations, participant perspectives and published literature. I have made an effort to record my own opinions and observations as such, wherever I could.

Promises and reciprocity: Given the across-Uganda geographical spread of the target participants, I offered to reimburse the stationery costs participants incurred in printing out, scanning and sending back the information and consent form. However, all the four participants who sent their forms electronically declined the offer. The UNELTA members whom I met physically did not need such an offer since I provided physical copies, and I used an opportunity when they held another meeting to avert the need to meet their transport costs.

Researcher identity: Having taught in several secondary and primary schools in Uganda between 2009 and 2019, it is possible that my identity as a teacher influences my researcher perspective. This partly informed the methodological theoretical orientation of the study, namely, critical educational research. During my teaching tenure, I have felt that an emancipatory approach needs to be employed in several aspects of our education system, including the question of pregnant and parenting students' opportunities to continue school. This critical orientation highly influences the discussions in Chapter 5, as well as the conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 6.

3.5 Limitations of the study

A major limitation of this study is that it focuses only on teachers' perspectives and leaves out those of other education stakeholders like the students themselves, administrators, policy makers and community leaders. This works against one of its major agenda, namely, to foster the

amplification of the girlchild's agency and voice, and this is hard to do without engaging the girls themselves. An endeavour to include female teachers was made to mitigate this limitation, and this was achieved. The mono-stakeholder participation also means the research cannot claim a comprehensive enumeration of "what sustains the expulsion of pregnant students" and does not exhaust the "possible remedies to afford them an opportunity to formal education".

Further, I approached the field with the fear that the teachers' perspectives would be influenced more by what they have been practicing than by underlying factors. As the findings suggest, however, teachers made constant reference to the community, religious and other factors influencing the education of pregnant and parenting students, which means this limitation was mitigated.

Another limitation is that the study is an overview of Uganda, rather than an in-depth analysis of a specific community. This means the synthesised information may not be applicable to all areas but is prevalent in at least one part of the country. The findings, needless to say, do not indicate any geographically motivated differences in school policies and practices regarding schoolgirl pregnancy.

Chapter 3 recap

Chapter 3 has presented the study scope as a national overview rather than an in-depth case of one community or school. I have also explained how the Marxist and socialist feminism act as the theoretical framework, and a critical educational research approach was used in the study. Two group interviews with teachers from two nationally spread teacher associations, UNELTA and ILEP Uganda, were conducted, plus interviews with two individual teachers recommended during the group interviews. The data collection and analysis procedure have been explained: digitally recorded data were transcribed, thematically analysed using NVivo 12, and discussed using an analytical framework crafted using the theories and approach of the study, but also aligned to the study's research questions. Some ethical considerations have been highlighted, especially relating to my teacher-researcher identity, information and consent, promises and reciprocity, confidentiality, and honest reporting. The study's limitations are also discussed, cognisant that teachers who are the study's participants are not the only stakeholders in the subject of pregnant student expulsions, and of the possibility that teachers draw from their own practices.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

Thematically analysed, the teachers' perspectives advanced during this study have been broadly categorised into three: descriptions of processes, practices and experiences of dealing with student pregnancy; factors and actors perpetuating pregnant student expulsions; and suggested solutions.

4.1 Descriptions of processes, practices and experiences of dealing with student pregnancy

4.1.1. Prevalence of expulsions and accommodation of pregnant students

All the participants confirmed that their schools expel pregnant students, who are usually identified through either scheduled or impromptu tests. Some participants indicated that over the 3-month period of the school term, their schools conduct beginning of term, mid-term and end of term tests, while others explained that theirs conduct them by expectation of pregnancy. Kaleigh shared her school's approach as follows:

> At my school, when students report, we wait for three weeks and then we conduct a check-up. Why? - If in case that student had sex immediately before reporting, by then HCG[3] (human chorionic gonadotropin) can show at that time. So, we usually check at that moment when they have spent three weeks and then action is taken against those who have got pregnant. And then, apart from that, there are those signs that might come in – the abnormal signs – the signs of pregnancy. When one, a teacher, identifies a student, there can be random check-ups. So, we have those mid check-ups which come in so long as one looks or behaves pregnant; and then they are checked. We usually have the strips, the HCG strips. It is the school nurse that conducts the check-ups, but in case she is not around, HCG is really easy. We have ourselves, teachers, tested before in cases where the school nurse is not around.

This descriptor indicates that all duty bearers at school, especially teachers, nurses and administrators are always on the lookout for any signs and symptoms of pregnancy, which are then confirmed by testing.

Quite unexpectedly, however, participants indicated that there are peculiar schools which accommodate pregnant students. Bridget who went to a Catholic mission school testified to have studied with pregnant students, as follows:

> I happened to go to my 'O' Level[4] school in a Mission school – a Catholic school that did not victimise these girls. Yes, they were not saying, "go and get pregnant", but you see, these things happen. So, the moment girls were discovered to be pregnant, they were actually given special care. But this still did not make them proud that, "yeah, we have become pregnant". They will still feel the shame, but they will not go ahead and, perhaps, try abortion; and if anyone tried to abort, they would then send these girls out of school. Because the first thing is, we have no right to kill. Even if you aborted in holiday, they would still trace you out. That is when they say, okay, try elsewhere.

Three of the participants (Gerald, Bridget and Prize) noted that the few peculiar schools that accommodate pregnant and parenting students are normally specially designed for that, and many are of a charitable nature. Gerald, for example, shared about one such school in Pader, Northern Uganda, where pregnant students and parenting left to study, with flexible timetables, resources and facilities.

[3] HCG (human chorionic gonadotropin) is a pregnancy testing device that is used to detect a hormone associated with pregnancy in urine or blood (see (Butler et al., 2001)).

[4] In Uganda, 'O' Level is secondary school. It is the four-year level between primary (7 years) and high school (2 years). 'O' Level students are normally in the range of 13-16 years.

> I would like to share a very rare experience. I visited a school in Pader. It is a girls' school, and it is Christian Foundation School, a private school. It was started with an aim of helping girls who have dropped out of school and those who get pregnant at school. And it is so amazing that these guys keep pregnant girls in school. They have hostels for them, and they are allowed to mix with all the other students in the school. They go to the same class, and they can have some time off to go and breastfeed, for those who have given birth.

4.1.2. The expulsion process: conferencing, clandestine and out-casting

Regarding the process of expelling a student identified as pregnant, participants expressed remorse because of the shame the girls are put to. The processes of expulsion vary with the school's established procedure. In most schools, parents are invited to a meeting with the school administrators and handed their daughter, less often with the invitation to bring her back when she has delivered. In other cases, the expulsion is radically tough and rough, as Joel explained that,

> … what happens to the girl is that in most cases – actually one teacher termed it "inciting violence" – that that person should be handled like a thief. People should not even know about the existence and the fact that this girl has been found pregnant. So, they bundle her up like; to be out of the school premises there and that time.

Some schools have realised how unbecoming this kind of treatment is, and how detrimental it can be to the life and wellbeing of the girl. Kaleigh explained the change trajectory in her school:

> Initially, they would do the shaming, but with time we fought that as teachers. We felt the student has already gone through enough stigma. So, what they do now, they invite the parent and discuss it; then they send the girl.

Even with such conferencing, however, some parents do not accept the realities of the girl. Expulsions are conducted irrespective of whether the parent is bitter and could subsequently harm the pregnant girl. Brian, explaining some of the situations the girls end up into explained that,

> … sometimes we throw them into fire: you send her at home, the father is already wielding a panga he wants to cut the girl into pieces; we have seen girls kill themselves – drink poison, suspend themselves or abort and in the process, they die because there is no one to listen to them.

Such bitterness often pushes the girls into early marriages, whether on their own accord or forced by parents and other adults. The expulsions serve as an accomplice to a widely held sociocultural vice that once a girl gets pregnant, she should be offered for marriage, regardless of the age. Kaleigh shared that even law enforcers such as the police are involved in early marriage transactions that arise from this practice:

> Sometimes when the parent gets out of school, they go to the police to report this case, especially if the man is of age. And do you know what the law does? The first person to advocate for negotiation is our own police. The police will say, ah-ah! That is easy, negotiate and let him marry her. That is the first thing that they will always say.

The culminating early marriages land the girls into further challenges like compromising their health, limiting their career potential and contribution to socioeconomic development.

4.1.3. And the boy child?

A major contention is on what happens to a male student responsible for the pregnancy of a girl. The handling of the male child was said to vary widely, mostly depending on sociocultural inclination of the school, usually determined by its location in a 'traditional' rural or 'modern'

urban area. Brian who teaches in Kabale, a mostly rural district of Southwestern Uganda, explained that boys seldom, if ever, reprimanded for impregnating girls, but are rather congratulated.

> I was asking someone whether he has ever seen a boy being penalised for impregnating a girl in school. And he was kind of telling me that in our tradition, in African tradition, any boy at whatever age; impregnating a girl is actually congratulated. When in actual sense a girl is condemned, the boy is congratulated for being a hero.

Schools in urban areas with a quite 'modern' population normally demand that the boy child be reprimanded, including imprisonment in a juvenile facility if under 18, a threat that often makes them run away sometimes with the dubious help of their parents, community members and some corrupt police officers. Joel shared that,

> The moment the man or the boy gets to know that the girl is pregnant, the boy takes off. Even the parents who do not want to go to the responsibility of this unborn child or this girl who is pregnant will try to get their son or their boy, facilitate him financial and economically to take off from the village or the location of the pregnancy and go to somewhere the boy will not be found to be responsible for the pregnancy.

From this rural-urban, or say traditional-modern divide, one can observe that the difference in treatment of the boy and the pregnant girl varies in intensity. Whether on the run or congratulated, the boy will most likely remain in school while the girl is parenting. It is usually when the boy is imprisoned that they stop studying. However, the Ministry of Education and Sports' 2020 guidelines on prevention and management of teenage pregnancy currently demands that "the boy shall also be given mandatory leave at the same time the girl goes on leave" (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020, p. 19).

4.1.4. Re-enrolment of parenting students

Participants expressed varied degrees of their school's acceptance of parenting students, especially those who had been expelled from that particular school. For some, the invitation to return is offered at expulsion. When explaining the process of effecting an expulsion, Kaleigh said that, "… they call the parent, sit with him or her and then they send away the girl to give birth and come back after the girl has delivered". In other cases, however, schools do not allow students who have been at the same school to return. Prize shared that, "if the condition of the girl is not known to this particular school, she would have a free and welcome entrance. But if it is an old scenario, there are chances that if one person in [the] administration accepts, the others will object".

The participants also said that reenrolment can only be effective if the girl can withstand the challenges the endeavour comes with. "The examples given about her, or the stigmatisation – the mess that will come with her returning to that institution will either push her out before she has to leave or make her life unbearable," said Prize.

Tracking mechanisms of pregnant students were also highlighted as a gap in facilitating their re-enrolment. Uganda's population register is not widely accessible beyond a certain institution, and so is student data. Therefore, when one student drops out, seldom does the school or any other authorities follow up their case. This is, however, helpful as the absence of such information enables a student to change to another school in a distant location without fearing to be stigmatised for their pregnancy history and parenting status.

4.2 Factors and actors perpetuating pregnant student expulsions

I have categorised the teachers' perspectives on the factors and actors perpetuating pregnant student expulsions into two: arguments for expulsion, and the reflections on structures, power and

voice. These arguments and reflections inform gaps the participants identified, and the remedies they suggested as presented in section 4.3 below.

4.2.1. Arguments for expulsion

The reasons given for sending pregnant students away from school were explored, and can be categorised as pro-school, pro-girlchild and sociocultural.

Pro-school arguments

Pro-school arguments for the expulsion of pregnant students include those that protect the school as an institution. A major argument that is advanced is to prevent other students from emulating those who get pregnant. Kaleigh said, "this girl is a bad example to the rest of the girls. They will think that getting involved in conjugal stuff is normal. So, that is among the reasons that they give to send the girl away…" Therefore, the treatment they accord those who get pregnant is to serve as a deterrent of premarital sex from which pregnancy culminates.

Another pro-school argument for the expulsions is to avert the responsibility for risks and costs associated with pregnancy. Peace observes that "every person who sends away a pregnant person fears to take the risks of this pregnancy… Probably this person would have loved to stay long with you; would have loved to give the care, but he fears the 'what if'". Relatedly, Kaleigh who is a school administrator noted, to the agreement of other colleagues, that "a pregnant person needs special care which the school did not subscribe to or which your school fees actually cannot cover". Such risks include the occurrence of miscarriages and illnesses, which normally invite medical, in addition to the usual antenatal costs. Whereas, in Uganda, some of the antenatal costs are waived in public health facilities, most of these are borne by individuals, and schools expel pregnant students to avoid them even when they might have been willing to care for the student in other circumstances. So, apart from the health and psychosocial risks associated with pregnancy, the school looks at the financial and other resources required to sustain a pregnancy.

By extension, the participants noted that the aversion of pregnancy risk is not peculiar to the Ugandan schools. The ILEP Alumni focus group shared experiences of a colleague who was deported when they were on the International Leaders in Education Programme in the United States because the programme organisers purportedly did not want to meet the costs and risks of pregnancy. Bridget, who herself was pregnant when she went for the same fellowship, shared that her colleagues scorned at her: "didn't you know that you are pregnant? And you still had to come here? See how you are risking your life and the life of the baby!"

Protecting the public image of the school is another major consideration, especially that they operate in a social context that negates with premarital sex and pregnancy. When a student gets pregnant, it is said to reflect that the school is negligent of the children's morals, which consequently compromises the school's public standing. Prize who is an administrator in a private school explained their case:

> Now if you look at some of us who are administrators in private institutions, we have a lot of competition on our head. … If right now I am battling for the academic position, my [school's] name has to shine in everything. So, if my name or my school's name has to shine, having this girl back on board is a weakening point in the eyes of my competitors… Most private schools have the aim of being highly competitive and being the best in everything. So, if my competitors hear of the presence of this girl, it is damaging.

Pro-girlchild arguments

During the interviews, participants suggested that the expulsion of pregnant students is of some benefit to the girl. Arguments are made for the health of the mother and the baby,

psychosocial wellbeing and on the account of the girls' ability to balance pregnancy and academic demands.

Regarding the health of the mother and the child, participants indicated that schools are aware of the body changes and demands during the different stages of pregnancy, think it good that a pregnant person should be relieved of the rigors of academic and other schoolwork. Some female participants shared their personal experiences, and felt the same happens to their pregnant students; as here described by Peace, here:

> I am talking from the experience of a woman –; that probably a pregnant woman is a delicate one, and sometimes the schools do not have the facilities to take good care of this delicate pregnant woman. From the experience of the schools which discontinue girls, they advise them to go home; produce (*sic*)[5]; and after producing, come back; probably with an intent that when they have gone home, the pregnancy – the baby in the womb – will be given enough care, is out of danger, and that this baby will be delivered in a conducive environment; and after delivering, this girl can continue with school.

Other participants, however, shared experiences to demonstrate that some girls are able to handle school and pregnancy without much of a difficulty. Kaleigh shared her personal experience of working until just a few hours before she goes to the labour ward to deliver. She also shared an incident where one of her students hid her pregnancy and remained in school for the entire gestation period:

> We had a case at my school where a girl gave birth from school. Previously, we used not to conduct these tests – the check-ups. We would check if we were suspicious that one might be pregnant. … So, a teacher finds a girl in class, it was examination period and then she said she had a stomach-ache. So, the teacher, it was a male teacher, forwarded the girl to the dispensary where they usually go. And then a few minutes later, they called me and the Deputy Head Teacher that 'your daughter is pregnant', and we didn't know by then who it was because we weren't there when they sent her. On reaching the dispensary, we found she was in labour. … Before we knew it, she had given birth. So, none of the teachers had ever noticed she was pregnant. And then, when we asked the matron, she said this girl would be the first to wake up at 4 am for morning preps[6]. She would do all her housework. She had never shown any signs of pregnancy. So, it revealed to me … that one can study while pregnant. Unless someone has got health complications, I think it is that bias that they put for the girls not to get pregnant in school.

Based on such experiences, most of the participants felt that pregnant students can handle the rigours of academic and other schoolwork, without refuting the fact that pregnancy comes with experiences like sleepiness, worry, stress, and some physical challenges. These, most participants said, can be addressed in the same way other health conditions are handled. The example Kaleigh gave was that of allowing pregnant students to sit for their national examinations, noting that students are able to go through this albeit short period (about 4 weeks) with little or no difficulty:

> … ever since UNEB (Uganda National Examinations Board) told teachers not to send away those girls, they are still in school now, and they are going to sit UNEB [exams]; none of them has died because they are pregnant, and none of them will fail because they are pregnant.

[5] Many Ugandan speakers of English use the word "produce" to mean "give birth".
[6] In most Ugandan boarding schools, students wake up early for what is called "morning preps", normally to study by themselves but sometimes guided by a teacher. They also have "evening preps".

Joel added that, "we have not had a report showing that majority of the people who failed were those who were pregnant", meaning that it is baseless to claim that pregnancy compromises academic ability. The participants, therefore, suggested that if academic failure occurs, it should be attributed to the challenges pregnancy comes with, and added that if these are addressed as the case is for other psychological and physical challenges, a pregnant student would excel at academics.

Sociocultural arguments for expulsion

> … we have also to accept that our culture we are living in still takes pregnancy before marriage as a shame. They laugh at the school; from home they are harassing your parents; things like that.

Brian explained this, referring to the sociocultural contexts in which schools thrive, and from which perspective pregnancy is viewed. Culture, therefore, influences practices school, reflecting the values and beliefs in the students' families and the community where the school is. Although Uganda has over 65 ethnic groups with sometimes distinct cultures, a common value to most of them is the prohibition of premarital sex and pregnancy, which is why schoolgirl pregnancy follows suit because almost all schoolgirls are unmarried.

4.2.2. Power structures, agency and voice

Participants deliberated on the actors, structures and power in regard to pregnant student expulsion. Their deliberations reflect comments on two things: (1) the educational policy and school regulations and, (2) the girl child's agency and voice in the enforcement of the rules pertaining to pregnancy.

Educational Policy and School Regulations

Almost unanimously, participants indicated that there is more reference to school policy than the consideration of any existing national policy when dealing with student pregnancy. According to Kaleigh, for example, "school rules and regulations normally guide that a pregnant schoolgirl cannot study together with these other students who are not pregnant." Founding bodies such as religious denominations (as in the cases of Christian and Islamic Mission schools), were said to be the most influential determiners of the school rules, followed by the community's culture. The participants cited hardly any consideration of national policy except in regard to allowing students to sit for examinations while pregnant. It should be noted that even the Ministry of Education and Sport's 2015 guidelines for the prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and unintended pregnancy in school settings 2015, which were revised in 2020, direct that a pregnant student should be sent home when she is "at least" [*sic*] three months pregnant, which, therefore, formalises at the national level the expulsion of pregnant students.

Girlchild Agency and Voice

The research participants indicated that a pregnant schoolgirl has no say in what happens to her, and her parents can only go by the school's pronouncement. Responding to the question on what role girls play in decision making, Peace says,

> For the few schools I have been in, the girls do not play any role in the decision making. They are the victims. The parents also don't play a role. The administration in [the] school pass[es] the verdict – kind of a verdict; and the fate of the girl is decided. They just take what has been decided for them.

Bridget felt that there is a level of agency that the girls exhibit right from enrolling in the school. By accepting to be party to the school rules and regulations, they accept to be bound by them, and being expelled when pregnant is only fulfilment of what they agreed to.

> All schools have rules and regulations; and when children join school right at the beginning, they are given these rules and regulations. So, if this happens, they still bring back the school rules and regulations and they are made to read and see where they have gone wrong; and they have to be accountable. They accept, say "okay, I have broken the school rule, you're not just sending me away because you don't want me here, I have to go." They are made responsible for whatever has happened, so that they don't take it in bad faith. So, for me, that is [how] partly they are playing a role in deciding their fate. They have accepted.

On the other hand, however, all participants, including Bridget herself agreed that irrespective of what agency the girl might have, she does not have a voice in drafting the rules and regulations, and their implementation. For example, Peace noted that "they normally do not have an option whether they want, or they don't want. So, because those who do not turn up for tests are always victimised, they will always have to be forced to take the tests." It is unlikely that the girls would have had their way if they did not agree with any of the school regulations when being admitted to the school in question. Rather, they are only receptive parties to the school rules, and passive participants in the decision-making process.

4.3 Suggested Remedies

The research participants suggested some remedies, including ideas to foster the reduction of pregnancy cases, increasing girl-child agency and voice, and towards the continuity of the education of pregnant and parenting students.

On the reduction of pregnancy cases, noted insufficiencies in the sex education that is offered to children today. They noted that most, if not all, messages are to prevent the students from engaging in sex, and seldom do the sex education providers talk about topics like contraception, body changes and the alternatives to 'abstinence only'. The participants, therefore, suggested that sex education be intensified, and that 'abstinence only' as the core message and major objective be reviewed. Gerald stressed the implications of 'abstinence only' sex education thus:

> I think 'abstinence only' is failing us to some extent, and maybe to a larger extent. It's the reason people think it is totally unacceptable to be in school when you have compromise. It's the reason for the stigma; it's the reason for the school rules that are rigid and harsh; and I think we need to adjust that to the reality that is on the ground. Because if we just pretend that it is not happening, then I think we are not looking at the solution, we are keeping a blind eye at the same problem that is poking us.

Gerald and a few other participants suggested that rather than an 'abstinence only' message, adolescents should be given a more encompassing sex education, including ideas on contraception and the avoidance of sexually transmitted diseases. Further, they should be guided to reflect on the consequences of the different choices they may make.

As a way to strengthen the messages on deterring pregnancy, some participants especially from the UNELTA group, suggested that pregnant students should be left to remain in school so that their colleagues can observe the inconvenience and judge for themselves if they want to experience the struggles the pregnant students go through. Donald suggested thus:

> Actually, if they think they want them to learn or to avoid the practice, they need to see that "okay, at 15 when you become a mother, there are certain things that happen". They should let them even be in school to the effect that you even see that waking up for morning preps

> is difficult. Okay; aha! Wearing a uniform while you are pregnant is not easy, you see? … Then they will say, "okay, much as it is tolerable, it is not the best way to go, it's an inconvenience".

A counter argument to letting students be deterred by observing the struggles of their colleagues, however, was that they may actually be attracted by the preferential treatment accorded to the pregnant ones. According to Richard, "they will be like, 'eh, they are giving them special treatment… so, I think if I get pregnant also, I will be getting that special treatment'. I think it wouldn't be feasible… other children would also be lured".

It was also noted that sometimes the students emulate the reckless sexual behaviour of adults. Therefore, the participants suggested that to reduce the cases of pregnancy, adults should be behaviour models of students and behave in a way that guides them when emulated.

In the event of a pregnancy occurrence, the participants suggested that the girls' opinions need to be sought. They felt that the voice of the girls in their own affairs is overly absent or suppressed, which makes them victims at all levels. If anything, they are exclusively the recipients of all instructions and treatments, most of which are insults, irrespective of the circumstances that led to the pregnancy. Brian noted that suppressing the girl child's voice can have devastating effects:

> I think, girls who get into that challenge of becoming pregnant should have, we should seek their opinion. Honestly, girls – they never talk to them. … I think in my opinion, that first of all before we look for how to help them, they should be given a listening ear to see what they think.

As a lasting remedy, "we need to take a moment and listen", Gerald concludes.

Some recommendations were made towards supporting pregnant students in school. Whereas the current practice is to expel them, most participants met during this research felt that the idea of keeping them in school should be embraced, and facilities availed.

The point of departure suggested is the relaxing of school rules and regulations. As Gerald says, "it is high time we came out of this kind of structured rules and regulations in the name of schools – perfect schools; and look at things squarely; look at the victim, look at so many other factors". As such, it was suggested that school rules should "deliberate design on how to deal with pregnancy" in an empathetic way and with the mindset that pregnancy will happen at school at any one point in time. Using the example of the two schools which were said to accommodate pregnant students, Donald felt that the absence of facilities is only an excuse, as he said:

> I come from a background [of] having grown up with a grandmother who tells me that "*kiremire buri bangire*"; that "if something is impossible, then someone somewhere has simply refused." Then it means that it is possible that this child can be supported. It calls for extra effort. It calls for some, probably, investment, which calls for some extra care, yes it does, and it is worth it. Because this single child also matters.

Most of the participants, therefore, suggested that schools should avail services to support pregnant students just the way they support other children who need special treatment. A starting point was seen in the already existing school clinics and sick bays, and a suggestion was made to expand their services to include attending to pregnancy cases. According to Brian, "every school should have a wing for those who may be pregnant. We have clinics, we have everything in school; that wing should be there".

Participants also noted that the two schools said to accommodate pregnant students are specially designed for that role; and suggested that other such schools be designed in case the mainstream schools are not able or willing to accommodate them. Gerald says,

> This school in Pader decided to write a project to support such girls. And I think that we need, maybe regionally, we need to have such centres where girls that have gone through such experiences can resort to study. It may not be possible now in our existing government- or church-aided or private schools running in the same old fashion. But I think if some centres somewhere could be developed, I think it helps. There should be an initiative.

Devising such centres which are friendly for pregnant students would possibly go a long way in providing alternatives to the mainstream school system and ensure that pregnant and parenting students continue with their education.

In conclusion, the participants on this research project felt that there are gaping gaps in the current education system's handling of cases of pregnant and parenting students. They also felt that efforts should be made to enable the pregnant and parenting students continue education. With varying degrees and opinions, the participants felt that pregnant students can either be accommodated in existing schools or be provided with alternatives like specialised centres.

Chapter 4 recap

Chapter 4 categorises the research findings into three: descriptions of processes, practices and experiences of dealing with student pregnancy; factors and actors perpetuating pregnant student expulsions; and suggested solutions. Affirmations of the prevalence of pregnant student expulsions as made by the participants are presented, with a description of the processes of expulsion, the disparities in handling the boys and girls in the same pregnancy case, and the intricacies of re-enrolment after pregnancy. The factors perpetuating expulsions include pro-school, pro-girlchild and sociocultural factors. Actors in the expulsions were said to be manifest in the power structures informed by educational policies and school rules, which some participants argued are designed for victimising the girlchild and suffocating her agency and voice. The participants suggested remedies such as the provision of comprehensive, rather than just the 'abstinence-only', sex education; providing structural and infrastructural enabling factors at school; promulgating appropriate policies and strengthening the agency and voice of the girl-child in matters that concern her educational and career prospects, specifically in the event of pregnancy.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the key research findings in light of the theoretical framework and existing literature on the subject; and simultaneously answer my two research questions: (1) *What sustains the practice of denying pregnant pre-tertiary school students an opportunity to continue formal education in Uganda?* (2) *What can be done to afford pregnant students an opportunity to continue formal education during and after pregnancy?* The chapter, therefore, has been arranged according to the sub-questions of these broad research questions, which are also reflected in the analytical framework.

Overall, the research findings are consistent with most of the literature reviewed in suggesting that the factors and actors in the expulsion of pregnant students stretch beyond the immediate environment of the students themselves; that is, their schools and homes. Rather, schoolgirl pregnancy-related decisions and decision makers are influenced by deep rooted knowledge systems and longstanding precedencies in practice, such as the understanding of the concepts of sex and pregnancy; communities' perceptions of what a 'good' school is or should be and what this means for the social and economic dynamics of the school; and the distribution of power, authority and voice across the social hierarchies and strata pregnant and parenting girls find themselves in. As remedies, three key recommendations are made: fostering the agency of the girl child by lending her a listening ear when situations like pregnancy occur, creating a supportive policy framework at national and school levels, and providing an environment conducive for pregnant students to stay in school, with appropriate structures and infrastructures.

5.1 Discussion and conclusions

(a) What informs decision making actors, authority exhibited and the processes regarding pregnant students?

This first question interrogates the epistemological basis of the choice of actors and actions when a student is found pregnant or a parenting one attempts to return to school. The research findings indicated that different knowledge orientations come into play, some of these being religious beliefs, sociocultural expectations and educational policy, especially the rules and regulations promulgated at the school level. The influence of religious values on school policy has been found to be rather inflexible and propagates the religious teachings of the founding body, irrespective of what other beliefs may be borne by the students, staff and other stakeholders. For example, in "*a content analysis of Catholic school discipline policies"* Philippe et al. (2017) note that school policies informed by Catholic doctrine "endorse the use of exclusionary practices (i.e., suspension and expulsion)" (p. 6). Moreover, contrary to what would be expected of Ugandan schools, even national policy is hardly, if ever, a consideration in determining response to a pregnancy case, currently except in regard to allowing pregnant students to sit for only their final exams. Noteworthily, participants in the two focus groups expressed no awareness of the existence of the national guidelines on handling pregnancy in school settings or their 2020 revision (see Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). This, therefore, affirms the aforementioned knowledge orientations as the resorts from which schools refer in their treatment of pregnant students.

In a situation where it has been determined, for example in the school rules – that one cannot study while pregnant, the alternatives are only to terminate the pregnancy or to stay away from school until they give birth. The values of most religious and indigenous cultural communities strongly discourage abortion, and Adamczyk (2009) finds a strong influence of religiosity in people's decision to abort premarital pregnancies. In Uganda, abortion on demand is also outlawed. This leaves a pregnant student with no choice but to return home, except when alternatives like abortion are pursued clandestinely.

Feminist thought has considered the participation of women and girls in making the decisions that affect them. I have highlighted above the Marxist observation, which is reappropriated to feminist discussions by Tong & Botts (2017), that although "under capitalism… people are largely free to do what they want within the confines of the system, … they have little say in determining the confines themselves" (p. 80). Pregnant students, accordingly, were said by the participants in this research to be "victims", rather than active players of a role in making the decisions on what happens when they get pregnant in school. Bridget, one of this study's participants, argued that girls express some form of agency by assenting to the school rules and regulations as a prerequisite for admission, and read for themselves the relevant articles stipulating their expulsion when they are found pregnant. However, I argue that assenting to and reading for oneself the school rules is an inflexible modality of making one passively self-convict. It, therefore, does not constitute or provide for the full and active agency of the girl child.

As a conclusion, I contend that the knowledge bases and other reference points hitherto informing the expulsion of pregnant students are not pro-girl-child and need to be reflected upon with a more progressive mindset cognisant of, among others, the aspiration for 'education for all'.

(b) What decisions are considered appropriate to make regarding pregnant students, and how do these affect their socioeconomic status?

This question relates to the cognitive sense of critical educational research's oppositionality which, according to Kemmis (1991) suggests, among other assertions, that social constructions are potentially distorted and distortive. Therefore, the invites a discussion of what, in the Ugandan context over time and currently, is considered appropriate to do in the event of schoolgirl pregnancy, and how impacts on the socioeconomic standing of the girl child and, eventually, the female adult. By reflecting on these considerations, one can understand the motivation for the continued practice of expelling pregnant students.

In the research findings above, a description of not only the processes and practices, but also the experiences surrounding schoolgirl pregnancy has been made. Although these do not merit repetition here, it is important to highlight that the most obvious action taken is expelling the pregnant student mostly without the assurance of returning to school. What would also be helpful is to reflect on whether or not this treatment is consciously considered appropriate, or the actors just go with the flow of what systems they have found running.

Most of the participants expressed remorse with the treatment of pregnant students in their respective schools, which they considered unfair to the girl child. This becomes especially evident when the situation of the impregnated girl is contrasted with that of the responsible boy if they study in the same school. As Joel says, "when the girl is expelled, in most cases, the boy is left free to study in the school". This suggests that although the expulsion practice continues, there are stakeholders, at least some teachers, that consider it inappropriate, but who may not have the ability or have not explored ways to change the trend.

The polarization of the treatment accorded to boys and men versus girls and women in the same situation is a key concern of feminist thought and activism. The concerns of Marxist feminism mostly focus on gender- and class-based economic benefits and aspirations, and socialist feminism adds the distribution of power and voice to the discussion. Although the current study is not about the economic and political implications of the gender divide, these implications pervade possibly all social situations in both processes and end results. For example, Luxton (2014) notes, in Marxist political discourse, that discussing women's challenges related to the public political arena without harmonizing their place in private spaces like the home is still insufficiently productive, as the situations in private spaces directly impact their ability to access and function in public spaces. It follows, therefore, that treating differently a girl and a boy in the same

pregnancy case influences what each of them eventually becomes and is able to do. Education has been found to be a strong determiner of socioeconomic status (Chaudhry, 2007; Javed et al., 2008; Rado, 1966), and females are disadvantaged, compared to their male counterparts, when denied an opportunity to education.

(c) How is the nature of decisions and practices regarding student pregnancy propagated and perpetuated across generations?

The 'cultural sense' in Kemmis' (1991) theorisation of the oppositionality of critical educational research focuses on how practices in question are sustained across generations. Relatedly, the maltreatment of pregnant students, which I suggest is only a reappropriation of the treatment of premarital pregnancy in the traditional communities of Uganda and other sub-Saharan countries, has been practiced over long temporal stretch. This is irrespective of the evident undesirable experiences young women go through when they are denied an opportunity to education. A question, therefore, is how the practice continues despite such realisations.

The cultural context of Uganda has been earlier explained as one that disapproves premarital pregnancy, a value that spreads to the school system. Traditionally, such values and corresponding action are transmitted across generations by elders to young ones, sometimes by designated members of the community or at particular functions. For example, a paternal aunt is responsible for instructing girls on how to behave and training them on home management skills in preparation for when they become of the appropriate age (Muyinda et al., 2003; Nanyonjo, 2008). The maternal uncle does a similar role for boys. Among the Bakonzo of Western Uganda, these two are commonly known as the *Songali* (paternal aunt) and *Nyokolhume* (maternal uncle) institutions, respectively. Other Ugandan cultural communities have their equivalent versions of the same. In fact, some of these are adapting their traditional cultural transmission mechanisms with the changing trends, a case being that of the cyber-*Ssenga* (digitised 'paternal aunt') programme for the provision of comprehensive sexuality education (see: Bull et al., 2010; Muyinda et al., 2003; Ybarra et al., 2014). Through these mechanisms, social expectations of the boys and girls are passed down generations, but these would be more ideal in a cultural setting that subscribes to these expectations. A question still remains as to why and how the formal school system follows suit, going to the extent of conducting impromptu pregnancy checks and executing expulsions.

Ridgeway (1997) explores the question of why gender hierarchy persists despite "major historical transformations" (p. 218) in socioeconomic arrangements, and argues that interactional processes are a major mechanism that perpetuate gender inequalities by facilitating their re-writing in new institutional arrangements. She observes that humans hesitate to interact with individuals whose gender they cannot specify; and considers this a basis for differentiating actions and reactions to males and female in formal and informal institutions alike. This informs even semi-permanent interaction instruments such as institutional policies. Although Ridgeway uses the employment world to argue her case, the same can be observed in the school system: whereas the world is racing towards an 'education for all' reality, educational policies such as the Uganda's recently promulgated guidelines on handling pregnancy in school settings mandate that the pregnant girls are excluded from this aspiration. As such, a gender inequality is inscribed in institutional regulations and, therefore, deeply entrenched for the foreseeable future.

I conclude, therefore, that the institutionalisation of cultural values is a strong contributor to the perpetuation of pregnant student expulsions. Without a cultural background that disapproves of premarital sex and pregnancy, there would not be a strong basis for the regulation against schoolgirl pregnancy.

5.2 Recommendations

The answer to research question 2 on 'what can be done to afford pregnant students an opportunity to continue formal education during and after pregnancy' lies in the political oppositionality of educational research which, according to Kemmis (1991), focuses on an emancipatory agenda ventured into through social and cultural action that challenges irrational social constructions and their sustaining mechanisms. Marxist and socialist feminist thought considers consciousness and voice projection as major tools for emancipation.

Pertaining to the current study, three key recommendations for practice emerged from the research interviews: fostering the agency of the girlchild in making decisions pertaining to affairs affecting her, including situations of pregnancy; harmonising the policy framework; and providing a conducive structural and infrastructural environment. To these three recommendations for practice, I add some recommendations for further research.

5.2.1 Recommendations for practice

Foster the agency of the girl child

The research participants suggested lending a listening ear to the girl child as a key practical way of strengthening her agency in matters that concern her, including the occurrence of pregnancy. Cesario & Moran, (2017) have also suggested that strengthening the girl child's agency improves her reproductive health and, by extension, global health. This approach, therefore, would score on at least two counts, both of which potentially contribute to enabling pregnant students to remain in school. Firstly, the improved health would avert the claim by school authorities that expelling pregnant students is to the benefit of their health and that of their children. Secondly, consciousness would enable the girls to make and air out such connections and arguments, thereby challenging the disempowering and oppressive authority of school administration. It is possible to invite the girl to speak up, yet within the confines of certain expectations and traditions. This would be pseudo emancipation. Rather, a truly emancipatory approach would be to level the hierarchies of power in a conversation with the girl child who has an issue to discuss. Thereby, her voice is not determined by what she thinks is expected of her, but by what she truly believes to be the state of the matter and way forward for her life.

Improve the policy framework regarding schoolgirl pregnancy

The second recommendation is to review educational policy at national and school levels. Pregnant student expulsion is deeply entrenched in and mandated by educational policy, especially school rules and regulations. Although it is often politely presented as relieving the girlchild of the academic demands to enable her take care of the pregnancy, I contend that it is still an expulsion and needs to be addressed if any emancipation in voice and educational experience is to be achieved by and for the girl child.

Addressing exclusionary policies at school level would be too decentralised and hardly manageable. Rather, it demands a nationwide agenda, supported by international legislation and aspirations such as 'education for all' campaign. Among other international legislations, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires, in Article 5, that,

> States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:
>
> a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;

b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.
(UN General Assembly, 1979)

Such a regulation provides fertile ground for the promulgation of educational policies that support the girl child in all situations, including pregnancy. Uganda's guidelines on handling teenage pregnancy in school settings are a starting point as they provide for letting the girl study during the first trimester and for her return to school after 6 months of pregnancy (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). However, these still not only propagate expulsions by demanding that a girl goes home after the first trimester, but also have gender discriminatory loopholes. Fastly, they leave a temporal space of six months between when a boy in the same pregnancy case can return and when a girl can: a boy immediately when the girl delivers and the girl when the child is six months. This means the boy will still be at least half-a-year ahead in school, other factors left constant.

Aside from the promulgation of suitable policies, awareness about the existing one and how they (should) influence school policy is a gap I observed during the research. For example, although the Ministry of Education and Sports' guidelines for the prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and unintended pregnancy in school settings have existed since 2015 and were revised in 2020 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020), the teachers interviewed were not aware of their existence, but rather stressed their schools' reference to school rules and regulations. The guidelines are not found on the website of the Ministry of Education and Sports, which should be a channel for dissemination of such information.

In this regard, I recommend that educational policy makers and implementers need to devise efficient and effective mechanisms of disseminating national policies, as well as monitoring and evaluating how they are domesticated by the schools and ultimately translate into practice.

Provide structures and infrastructures to support pregnant students in school

The third recommendation advanced by this study is to enable pregnant students to stay at school by providing a conducive environment with the necessary structures and infrastructures. Providing facilities for pregnant students is not unprecedented. Aside from the very few sub-Saharan countries such as Rwanda that encourage pregnant students to stay in school (cf. Ruzibiza, 2020), the current study's participants suggested that education planners and proprietors can and should draw examples and learn from the experiences of the very few Ugandan cases that are already heading in this direction. Bridget shared that she went to a Catholic mission school that accommodates pregnant students, and Gerald mentioned another in Pader, Northern Uganda. According to Nancy, who taught at the school in Pader, appropriate structures would include the human resource with the relevant skills of handling pregnant students, and relations levelled enough for the projection of the girl child's voice whether in decision making or to express her experience of schooling while pregnant, without the fear of being reprimanded. The relevant human resources include supportive staff such as school nurses and counsellors. Infrastructural facilities would include a mechanism of accessing antenatal services, rest spaces for example during the day, and flexible schedules.

It has been highlighted that schools are not normally willing or able to take care of the extraneous needs of pregnant students. To this, Donald suggested that the pregnant student's caretakers should be allowed to provide the needs over and beyond the normal school requirements. Although this might turn out to be harder for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds than those from more affluent ones, I consider it a step towards bridging the gender gap in access to education in the event of pregnancy.

Establish a pregnant and parenting students tracking mechanism to foster reenrolment

I also recommend that the Ministry of Education and Sports devises a nationally coordinated and accessible student tracking mechanism which will support the reenrolment of parenting students who may have dropped out of school. Today, the absence of such a mechanism makes it hard for schools to follow up on their students, which gives way to further challenges like unnoticed early marriages. Similarly, the absence of a tracking mechanism facilitates boys to transfer to other schools when they are on the run after impregnating girls in their former schools, thereby contributing to the rampancy of schoolgirl pregnancy. With a tracking mechanism, both boys and girls will become more responsible, knowing that the consequences of their behaviour will be checked by the system.

5.2.2 Recommendations for research

I have highlighted a major limitation of this research as its scope, that is, confinement to teacher perspectives, and aiming at a national overview rather than delving into the experiences of a particular case of a community, school or individual student. Focusing on teacher perspectives alone means that the ideas of other educational stakeholders have not been explored. I, therefore, would recommend a more stakeholder-inclusive study, although this would demand more time and resources than were available to me during this graduate level study. A national overview is strong in presenting perspectives from different parts of the country, but hardly focuses on the real-life experiences of individuals. I would, therefore, suggest that other studies focus on the experiences of specific individuals, schools and communities. For example, a study employing in-depth interview techniques would be for observing, recording and interpreting emotional changes of a pregnant student or a person close to her, such as a caretaking parent. A longitudinal study would be helpful in observing the body changes and the evolution of emotions and attitudes.

Brian, during the group discussions, expressed an observation and recommended that a study be conducted on why it is mostly the introverted students that get pregnant while those that seem more outgoing and possibly having sexual relations seldom get pregnant. My quick reflection on this was that it might come from information gaps between the two, but I agree with the teacher in recommending a study to ascertain this.

From my observation that many teachers have a limited awareness about national policies and how they (should) influence school policy and practice, I would recommend a study on teachers' awareness and understanding on educational policy and its relation to their practices. This will potentially provide Ministry of education officials with ways of disseminating information, as well as monitoring the implementation of educational policies.

Overview of the study

This study looked at the phenomenon of the expulsion of pregnant students in Uganda using an analytical framework aligned with the Marxist and socialist feminism and critical educational research. An inquiry into the epistemological bases of the decisions and their makers points to the cultural orientation of the school's founding and governing bodies as well as the community in which it is situated. In line with the cognitive sense of critical educational research's oppositionality as theorised by Kemmis (1991), the appropriateness of decisions made in the event of student pregnancy is discussed. Most participants indicate that expulsion is not always the appropriate decision, partly because it puts the girlchild in a more disadvantaged position than her boy counterpart. The sustenance of values and principles that perpetuate the expulsions across generations is blamed mostly on the infiltration of traditional values against premarital pregnancy

into formal education systems. Recommendations for practice arising from this study include strengthening girlchild agency, improving the policy framework regarding schoolgirl pregnancy, providing structures and infrastructures to support pregnant and parenting students in school, and devising a tracking mechanism to foster the re-enrolment of students after pregnancy. For further research, the study recommends increasing the participant scope to include other stakeholders beyond teachers, investigating why introverted students seem to be more susceptible to getting pregnant, and an inquiry into the influence of teachers' awareness and understanding of Uganda's national educational policies on their practice.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Name (of group or individual):……

Communities represented (e.g. Northern Uganda, cultural contexts, districts, etc.):

……

Categories of schools represented (e.g. public, private, international, religious, etc.):

……

Interview questions

Group A: Confirmatory questions

1. Is student pregnancy a phenomenon you have to deal with in your school(s)?
2. How are pregnant students identified in your school?
3. Are pregnant students allowed to continue attending school, where you teach?

Group B: Perspectives on factors and forces influencing the treatment of pregnant students

During pregnancy

4. What does your school do when a student gets pregnant?
5. Why is/are this/these action(s) taken?
6. On what basis are these actions taken? (reference: national or school policy, norm, instinct)
7. Who determines what action is taken?
8. What role do the pregnant students play in the decision-making process?
9. Would you say your school has support mechanisms for pregnant students to study? (reference: psychosocial, infrastructural, scholastic arrangements like flexible schedules, etc.)

After pregnancy

10. What happens to the girl after pregnancy?
11. What options do girls have, in terms of continuing school, after pregnancy?
12. Would you say your school has support mechanisms for parenting students to study? (reference: psychosocial, infrastructural, scholastic arrangements like flexible schedules, etc.)

Group C: Remedies to enable pregnant students continue school

13. What do you think needs to be done to ensure continued education for pregnant and parenting students?
14. Who would be most suitable to carry out these actions?
15. How can the girls' voice be sought after and amplified in making decisions on pregnancy and education?

Researcher notes (details in the research journal):

……..

……..

Appendix 2: Information and Consent Form

(signed in duplicate, of which the researcher and the participant retained one each)

Information

Hello!

I, Amoni Kitooke, am a student of the International Master's Programme in Educational Research at the University of Gothenburg. For my Master thesis, I am undertaking a study to identify factors and forces perpetuating the expulsion of pregnant students from schools in Uganda, and to explore ways of ensuring pregnant students continue with their education. The study includes a review of written documents and perspectives of individuals like yourself. It is envisioned that it will contribute to and trigger further discourse on policy and other interventions regarding the education and future of girls who become pregnant in school. The research report will be submitted to the University of Gothenburg and may be published for public consumption.

I invite you to participate in my research by engaging in a recorded group interview conducted either face-to-face or digitally. A follow up interview may be arranged with you, in case it is necessary.

I implore you to provide as accurate and reflective information as possible during the interviews, as this will render the research validity and relevance. I am making all measures not to attribute responses to individual participants, so please be assured of no implications against you for what you say during the interviews. I appeal to you to respect other participants' views, and not take them out of the interview setting afterward.

You may withhold any information you deem confidential or possibly harmful to yourself or your institution. You have the right to withdraw from the research process before, during or after the interview(s), until the research report has been produced and/or disseminated.

Consent

By agreeing to participate in the discussions, you express that you have read and understand the information regarding the proposed research; agree to the recording of the interviews; and that the views you express may be utilised in this research and its subsequent use.

Now, therefore, both I (the researcher) and you (the participant) append consent signatures as follows:

…….	……..
Amoni Kitooke	Name: ……
Researcher	Participant