

Re-Conceptualizing School Continuation & Re-Entry Policy for Young Mothers Living in an Urban Slum Context in Nairobi, Kenya: A Participatory Approach

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Abstract

This article discusses the barriers to school continuation for pregnant girls and young mothers living in low-income and marginalized contexts in Nairobi, Kenya. In the article, I suggest adopting a girl-centered framework in the policy formulation process (Moletsane, Mitchell, & Lewin, 2015). This perspective puts girls' voices at the center of the policy formulation process to help address the persistent gender inequality in education through problem identification and an exploration of ways to combat the challenges faced by girls. The article, which analyzes studies of government's education policies, is supported by data from my recent fieldwork investigating young mothers' challenges to school continuation and re-entry in Kenya, within the context of Kenya's re-entry and continuation policy effected in 1994. I discuss the school re-entry and continuation policies in low-income contexts using the framework of critical feminism. I argue that there is need to integrate multi-pronged, participatory and feminist frameworks to promote systematic government educational policy reforms to shore up gender equality (King & Winthrop, 2015). To support this argument, I develop three main claims: (a) broad conceptualization of the causes of teenage pregnancy will promote the use of multipronged approaches to the design of school re-entry and continuation policies; (b) formulation and implementation of any robust policies on re-entry and continuation require strong integration of the voices, perspectives and the lived experiences of pregnant teenage girls and young mothers; and (c) the use of participatory visual methodologies will give voice to pregnant girls and young mothers, and promote policy dialogue while at the same time empowering them and spurring their agency to become part of policy formulation and implementation.

Keywords: Gender; Education; Social policy; Marginalization; Participatory; Feminism; Intersectionality; Sub-Saharan Africa

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