

Can Free Primary Education Achieve Universal Primary Education? A Study of the Intersections of Social Exclusion, Gender and Education in Kenya

Judith A. Obiero

Abstract

The adoption of Free Primary Education in 2003 has expanded access to millions of children in Kenya. However, large numbers of children are still out of school. The majority of the out-of-school children belong to ethnic minority groups and the rural and urban poor, who live in abject poverty. This situation is disturbing given that free primary education was intended to universalize access to primary education, particularly for the poor. In Kenya, where gender parity has been achieved in primary education, gender disparities become obvious when analyses include geographical region and high levels of poverty. The degree to which gender parity is met varies from region to region and across ethnic groups. However this experience is not unique to Kenya. Recent global assessments of education reveal that out-of-school girls are disproportionately represented in excluded groups. But what helps explain this disproportionate representation of poor marginalized girls among those who are out of school? Understanding and addressing discrepant rates of participation requires close examination of factors underlying poor educational participation among those at the margins of society. However, such investigation must take into account the unique ways in which culture, poverty, ethnicity, and gender interact to affect educational processes. This study adopts a feminist theory of intersectionality to argue, based on the experiences of urban poor and rural girls in Nyanza Province of Kenya, that the educational marginalization of poor girls can be understood as an outcome of intersecting, sociopolitical and economic processes that emerge from their social locations within sexism, poverty, ethnic chauvinism, classism, and the simultaneity of oppression related to multiple discrimination. Based on the perspectives of the poor girls themselves, the study argues that greater acknowledgment be given to the intersectional framework within which educational exclusion occurs, paying particular attention to the interactions of culture, economy, home, and school as domains of intervention.

Full text: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1033227221>