

Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

Acceptance date: 30/01/2025

GIRLS' EDUCATION: AN IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCESS AND PERMANENCE STRATEGIES IN ONE OF MONTEPUEZ'S COMPREHENSIVE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Ricardo Afonso

PhD student in Educational Innovation at the Catholic University of Mozambique, Faculty of Education and Communication and lecturer on the Philosophy Teaching degree course at the Rovuma University of Mozambique, Nampula

Bonifácio da Piedade

Associate Professor in Educational Innovation at the Catholic University of Portugal

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze the access and retention strategies for girls in one of the Montepuez Comprehensive Primary Schools. The central theme of this article is girls' education, an implementation of access strategies and the permanence of girls in school. The problem addressed in the study is the high dropout rate among girls, which is the result of cultural, social and economic factors, despite the implementation of various access and retention strategies. The study seeks to identify the gaps in the strategies adopted by the school to minimize this dropout. The general objective: to analyze the implementation of strategies for girls to access and remain in school, assessing their effectiveness and the challenges faced. Specific objectives: (i) Identify the strategies adopted by Montepuez Comprehensive Primary School to ensure girls' access and retention (II) Analyze the factors that hinder the effective implementation of these strategies (III) Propose recommendations for improving access and retention strategies, taking into account the specific challenges faced by girls in the school community. Regarding methodology: The research was carried out with a mixed approach, involving qualitative and quantitative methods. The sample included teachers, 6th and 7th grade girls, school board members and parents/guardians. Data was collected through interviews, questionnaires and direct observation. Data analysis followed a triangulation approach to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results. The main conclusions of the study reveal that, although the elementary school under study has implemented various access and retention strategies, such as the distribution of school materials and lectures, there are still significant challenges that affect the retention of girls in school.

Keywords: Girls' education, Access strategies, Staying in school

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The issue of girls' education in Mozambique is of great relevance, especially considering the gender inequalities that still prevail in the education system. Despite advances in public policies and initiatives to promote the inclusion of girls in school, dropout rates among girls remain high. This scenario is driven by cultural, economic, family and institutional factors that make it difficult for girls to access and stay in school.

The general aim of the article is: to analyze how strategies are being implemented and their effectiveness in promoting girls' education (i) to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for access to education for girls in the Montepuez district (ii) to identify the main factors influencing girls' permanence in school (iii) to propose recommendations for improving the implementation of strategies for girls' access to and permanence in school.

The relevance of this article is not only that it addresses structural and socio-cultural challenges that directly influence female education. Therefore, understanding the challenges and opportunities in implementing school access and retention strategies is essential to inform more effective policies and programs that promote gender equality and girls' empowerment.

Given the relevance of the topic of the implementation of strategies for girls' access and relevance in school, it is relevant because it contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by girls in accessing and staying in school in specific contexts, such as the district of Montepuez.

As far as methodology is concerned, the research is of a mixed type and questionnaire surveys, interviews, documentary analysis and observation were used as techniques to collect the data. The data collected in the field was coded and categorized taking into account the groups of informants, then content analysis was used to critically understand the participants' mani-

fest or hidden meanings. This article is structured as follows: theoretical background; methodology; presentation, analysis and discussion of the data and final considerations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CONCEPT OF GIRL'S EDUCATION

Girls' education in Mozambique is a central issue for social and economic development. It is a topic of great importance, especially in low-income contexts like Mozambique, where socio-economic, cultural and institutional barriers often make it difficult for girls to access and stay in school. Implementing strategies to improve girls' education is fundamental to promoting gender equality, social inclusion and female empowerment.

According to Sen (1999), girls' education is not only a question of social justice, but also of economic development, as investing in girls' education results in major social benefits, such as reducing poverty and infant mortality.

Thus, girls' access to education is particularly challenging in low-income contexts, as is the case in Mozambique, where socio-economic, cultural and institutional barriers often make it difficult for girls to stay in school.

STRATEGIES FOR ACCESS AND PERMANENCE

Alberto (2019) defines the implementation of strategies for girls' access and permanence in Mozambique as ensuring that girls have access to education, including the distribution of school materials, ongoing teacher training and community involvement. And Afonso (2016) highlights the socio-economic factors that influence girls' education and the preference of families to invest in boys' education, since in Mozambique, girls are often forced to drop out of school due to their family responsibilities and the prejudice that their education will not bring economic benefits to the family.

In this way, girls' education is often devalued due to cultural norms that emphasize the role of women in the family and marriage, relegating education to a secondary plane" (Schultz, 2019). And Nhampossa (2021) discusses the need to provide quality education and a safe and inclusive school environment through education means not only ensuring access, but also improving the quality of teaching and creating a safe and inclusive school environment that encourages them to stay in school".

In this regard, Baldé (2020) points out that in order to ensure that girls stay in school, support strategies need to be adopted, such as scholarships, psychological support and training for teachers to deal with gender diversity in the classroom. "Although legislation on early marriage has advanced, cultural resistance and traditional practices are still barriers to the effective implementation of these policies, which has a direct influence on girls staying in school" (Nhampossa, 2018).

GENDER INEQUALITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Gender inequality is one of the main barriers to girls' access to education. Girls face additional difficulties due to child labor, early marriage and gender discrimination, factors that directly affect their permanence in school.

In the Mozambican context, poverty and cultural norms that favor boys' education contribute to this inequality. "Gender inequality in education remains a global challenge, particularly in developing countries, where girls face multiple social, economic and cultural barriers that hinder their access to education" (UNICEF, 2020, p. 15).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AND GIRLS' EDUCATION

Socio-economic factors such as poverty, child labor and domestic responsibilities are significant obstacles to girls' education in Mozambique. Afonso (2016) points out that families often prefer to invest in boys' education, considering that girls have a traditional role of looking after the home and family. The lack of school infrastructure in rural areas also exacerbates the difficulties of access to education for girls.

"In Mozambique, girls are often forced to drop out of school because of their family responsibilities and the prejudice that their education will not bring economic benefits to the family" (p. 32).

CULTURAL NORMS AND DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

In many Mozambican communities, cultural norms and discriminatory practices, such as early marriage, make it difficult for girls to stay in school. Schultz (2019) argues that girls' education is often devalued in relation to traditional gender roles, such as motherhood and marriage (p. 56).

PUBLIC POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR ACCESS AND PERMANENCE

The Mozambican government has been implementing policies such as free primary education since 2004, which aim to eliminate financial barriers to accessing education. However, Muita (2018) argues that there are still gaps in the effective implementation of these strategies, such as the lack of psychological support, adequate infrastructure and specific programs for girls. According to Muita (2018), "Although the Mozambican government has taken important steps to ensure girls' access to education, the strategies implemented need to be reinforced with psychological support and the creation of safer and more inclusive school environments" (p. 88).

POLICIES FOR MONITORING AND SUPPORTING PERMANENCE

Baldé (2020) highlights the importance of psychosocial support programs, scholarships and the distribution of school materials as ways of reducing school dropout among girls, especially in rural areas. He notes that "to ensure that girls stay in school (p. 19).

CULTURAL NORMS AND POLICIES TO COMBAT EARLY MARRIAGE

Early marriage is a critical challenge to girls staying in school. Nhampossa (2018) argues that public policies that combat child marriage are essential to ensuring that girls stay in school. However, cultural resistance to these policies is still an obstacle.

"Although legislation on early marriage has advanced, cultural resistance and traditional practices are still barriers to the effective implementation of these policies, which directly influences the permanence of girls in school" (Machava, 2021, p. 94).

INVESTMENTS IN GIRLS' EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Investing in girls' education has a direct impact on the economic and social development of communities. The World Bank (2019) notes that girls' education is associated with a reduction in poverty, improved health for women and families, and increased participation in the labor market.

The World Bank (2019) states that "Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and promote sustainable economic development, as educated girls have greater opportunities to improve their living conditions and contribute to society" (p. 8).

METHODOLOGY

This research is of the interpretive paradigm (Denzin, 2005) as it seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of individuals, exploring the meanings and interpretations they attribute to their experiences and social contexts. As for the research approach, it is mixed (Qualitative-Quantitative) because it analyzes the implementation of strategies for girls' access to and retention in school in one of the primary and comprehensive schools in Montepuez.

In terms of procedures, the study was based on bibliographical and documentary research, as documents were investigated and analyzed that have to do with the implementation of strategies for girls' access to and retention in education.

As far as the objectives are concerned, this research is explanatory (Gil, 2008), as during the research we sought to delve deeper into the question of the effectiveness of the implementation of strategies for girls' access and permanence in one of the schools in Montepuez, and as far as the approach to the problem is concerned, this research is mixed.

According to Gil (1999), this type of research uses both qualitative and quantitative paradigm methods, such as structured semi-interviews with a small number of participants and questionnaires with a larger number of participants. Finally, in terms of procedures, this research is a case study.

As for the participants, this research involved 34 people, including: two (2) members of the school board (the head teacher and assistant head teacher), (10) teachers, seven of whom were women and three men, (2) parents and guardians (a mother and a father) and (20) girls in sixth and seventh grade.

With regard to the instruments and techniques used to collect the data, the research was supported by interviews with the school principal, assistant principal and parents and

guardians; a questionnaire was administered to the teachers and girls at the school and, lastly, direct observation. The observation data made it possible to complement the interview and questionnaire data.

As this is a mixed study, the data collected in the field was coded and categorized taking into account the groups of informants. In addition, the research used content analysis, a procedure chosen to better understand the content expressed by the subjects surveyed through the interview and questionnaire on the implementation of strategies for girls to access and remain in school.

In this chapter, the analysis and discussion are based on a case study carried out at Montepuez Comprehensive Primary School, located in northern Mozambique. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the implementation of policies and strategies for girls' access to and permanence in school, in order to identify the advances, challenges and possible gaps in the educational process.

The study was carried out using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, collecting data from girls, teachers, parents and guardians and the school management. The main indicators analyzed involved the number of girls enrolled, the school drop-out rate, strategies to support girls to stay in school, the perception of the school community about the role of girls' education, and the school infrastructure.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

The main aim of this category was to identify the actions taken by the school to implement strategies for girls' access and retention. In order to materialize it, the guiding question was formulated in the following terms: *What actions does the school take to implement strategies for girls to access and remain in school?*

In order to identify the actions taken by the school to implement the strategies for girls' access and retention, we used interviews with the school management and a questionnaire with the teachers as sources of evidence. In the interview conducted with the members of the school management (school director and assistant pedagogical director), the two (2) people involved in the study conciliated with the direct observation made by the author that they consider the implementation of the strategies to be at a satisfactory level.

From this perspective, it was noted that the school has organized talks and awareness-raising sessions for parents and guardians, girls on the importance of girls' education. Awareness-raising is a decisive strategy for changing cultural and social perceptions that can limit girls' access to education

FAMILIES' ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Poverty is one of the main obstacles to girls' education. Many families face financial difficulties that prevent them from meeting indirect costs such as transportation, food and school uniforms. The need to contribute to the family income often forces girls to drop out of school to work.

High dropout rate and low attendance. Interview data and questionnaires reveal that 70% of girls mentioned financial difficulties as the main reason for missing school. Cultural resistance Cultural beliefs and practices that devalue female education are prevalent in some communities. The expectation that girls will take on domestic responsibilities or get married early interferes with devaluing female education, high dropout rates, around 50% of the parents interviewed expressed traditional beliefs that prioritize marriage, and

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

The lack of adequate infrastructure in schools, such as proper toilets for girls, and the scarcity of educational resources are significant barriers. In addition, the absence of specific support and ongoing awareness programs exacerbates the situation. Unwelcoming and unsafe school environment for girls. Direct observations indicate that many schools do not have separate toilets for girls, which negatively affects their attendance.

The lack of ongoing training for female teachers on inclusive pedagogy and gender sensitivity limits the effectiveness of retention strategies. Teachers without adequate training may not be equipped to deal with the specific challenges girls face. Teaching methods that are not inclusive and insensitive to gender issues.

Around 60% of the female teachers questioned reported never having received specific training on gender education. Interviews with parents and questionnaires administered to girls highlight the depth of the economic impact. Financial difficulties not only affect school attendance, but also girls' ability to fully engage in educational activities.

Data collected from questionnaires, interviews with parents and girls. Around 70% of the girls mentioned that financial difficulties affected their school attendance. The qualitative data thus reveals that, in many communities, girls' education is still seen as secondary to domestic responsibilities and marriage. This cultural resistance hinders the progress of retention strategies. The interview with parents and guardians Around 50% of parents expressed a traditional view that devalues female education.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

It should be noted that the analysis of the data collected reveals that although the implementation of public policies and strategies for girls' access to and retention in school in Montepuez has shown progress, there are still many challenges to overcome. The reduction in the dropout rate for girls is good news, but the rate is still high, especially in comparison to boys, which reflects the need for more effective strategies aimed specifically at girls.

In addition, the community's perception of the role of girls' education has changed, but there are still cultural resistances that make it difficult for girls to stay in school, such as the acceptance of early marriage as a traditional practice. Therefore, more comprehensive public policies, including the improvement of school infrastructure, ongoing awareness programs and the implementation of more concrete actions against school violence and sexual harassment, are essential to ensure that girls have the same educational opportunities as boys.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Girls' dropping out of school is often linked to economic and social difficulties, such as poverty, lack of family resources and the need for girls to take on responsibilities at home. These factors, as shown in the results, directly influence the decision to drop out of school, as girls are often forced to help with household chores or contribute financially to the family.

Sen (1999) argues that development should be understood as the expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities. In the context of education, he points out that poverty and social inequality limit girls' options, restricting their educational opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

In addition, Nussbaum (2003) points out that education is fundamental to the expansion of individual and social capacities, and the lack of access to quality education for girls can be seen as a violation of their fundamental rights.

CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL BARRIERS

Another significant barrier to girls staying in school are cultural and traditional norms, which often devalue girls' education and favor boys' education. Interviews with parents and guardians revealed that, in some communities, there is an expectation that girls will marry early and take on the traditional roles of caregivers and housewives.

Moser (1993), in her studies on gender and development, states that cultural and social expectations often shape the educational trajectory of girls, limiting their opportunities. She notes that in many societies, women are seen as responsible for caring for the home and family, which can interfere with girls' access to and permanence in school.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

The data showed that schools face institutional difficulties, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of school materials and teaching resources, which directly impacts the quality of teaching and contributes to school dropout. The lack of pedagogical strategies that meet the specific needs of girls, such as inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches, was also a concern raised by teachers.

Freire (1996), in *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, argues that education should be a transformative and emancipatory practice. However, he points out that many schools, especially in vulnerable contexts, lack adequate pedagogical training and infrastructure to promote education that respects individual and gender differences.

Apple (2001), in his work on educational policies and the reproduction of social inequalities, discusses how educational institutions often end up reproducing gender and class inequalities, which reinforces the marginalization of certain groups, such as girls in contexts of poverty.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

The active participation of parents and the school community has proved crucial for girls to stay in school. The results indicate that while many parents recognize the importance of girls' education, others still face economic difficulties that limit their ability to support access to and retention in school.

Epstein (2001), in her work on school-community partnerships, highlights that the involvement of parents in school activities has a positive impact on their children's education, increasing retention rates and school success. She argues that when parents become active partners in education, there is an improvement in academic performance and a greater understanding of the benefits of education for children.

However, Bronfenbrenner (1979), with his ecological theory of development, points out that the school does not operate in isolation, but is part of a wider system of influences that includes the family and the community. Lack of support from a wider social support network can limit girls' chances of success in education.

CHALLENGES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

The implementation of public policies to encourage girls to stay in school faces challenges related to cultural resistance and a lack of resources. Sen (1999) argues that girls' education should not be seen as a secondary benefit, but as an essential strategy for sustainable development, both on a social and economic level.

To overcome these challenges, there needs to be a joint effort by schools, communities and public policies to integrate concrete actions to support girls' education. Freire (1996) argues that education should be a process of dialog, where the voices of girls, their families and communities are heard and respected.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Girls' education in Mozambique faces a number of challenges that require urgent attention and effective solutions. This study, by exploring the five core categories related to girls' access and retention strategies in schools, provides a detailed overview of the existing barriers and opportunities.

Schools have implemented valuable actions, such as educational talks and the distribution of school materials, which have shown positive results in motivating and supporting girls. However, the continuity and expansion of these actions are essential if they are to have a significant and lasting impact. Programs that address both the academic and socio-economic needs of girls should be a priority.

The difficulties faced by schools, such as lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure and cultural resistance, are significant and require an integrated and well-coordinated approach. Investments in school infrastructure, teacher training and cultural awareness campaigns are key to creating a more inclusive and welcoming school environment.

The factors that interfere with the implementation of strategies for girls to access and stay in school are complex and interconnected. A concerted effort is needed to address poverty, cultural norms and family responsibilities that negatively impact girls' education. Robust public policies that offer financial support to families and promote gender equality in education are crucial.

Implementation difficulties have profound consequences, resulting in high dropout rates and perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality. To mitigate these implications, it is essential that education policies are inclusive

and that they offer ongoing support to girls, guaranteeing them a safe and supportive environment in which to learn.

The viable strategies identified, such as collaboration with NGOs, strengthening public policies and increasing community involvement, must be implemented in a sustained manner. Ongoing teacher training and raising awareness among families about the importance of female education are indispensable measures. In addition, creating a safe and inclusive school environment is crucial to ensuring that girls not only have access to education, but can also thrive academically.

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