
The Challenges of Adolescent Education in the Context of Early Marriage: Seeking Solutions to Improve Access and Participation

Ala'ul Islam^{1*} & Muyassaroh Zaini²

¹Program Studi Al-Ahwal Asy-Syakhsyiyah, Institut Agama Islam Hamzanwadi NW Lombok Timur, Indonesia

²Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam, Institut Agama Islam Hamzanwadi NW Lombok Timur, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: alaulislamyamu88@gmail.com, muyassaroh1994@gmail.com

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Abstract: Early marriage is one of the factors that hinder access and participation in adolescent education, especially in developing countries. This results in low graduation rates, increased health risks, and limitations on opportunities for adolescents to reach their full potential. This study aims to analyze the challenges of adolescent education in the context of early marriage and seek solutions to improve access and participation. The research adopts a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. Data were collected through literature reviews and case studies from several countries facing early marriage issues. Data were obtained through searches of relevant literature, interviews with education and health experts, and policy document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically, considering patterns emerging from the collected data. The research findings identified several key challenges in adolescent education related to early marriage, including limited access, social pressures, and lack of support from families and communities. Proposed solutions include improving access to education, awareness campaigns, and training for educators and communities. This study has significant implications for efforts to enhance access and participation in adolescent education amidst the challenges of early marriage. Practical implications include the development of supportive policies, integrated intervention programs, and collaborative approaches among governments, educational institutions, and civil society.

Keywords: Adolescent Education, Early Marriage, Education Access, Participation, Solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical phase in a person's life marked by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive development. It is a time when individuals form their identities, develop social relationships, and lay the foundation for their future. Education during this period plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, preparing them for adulthood and enabling them to contribute positively to society (Naik et al., 2023). However, in many parts of the world, adolescent education faces significant challenges, particularly in the context of early marriage (Van Raemdonck, 2023).

Early marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18, remains a prevalent issue worldwide, particularly in developing countries. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), an estimated 12 million girls marry before the age of 18 each year, with devastating consequences for their health, education, and

overall well-being (Khan, 2023). Early marriage often results in the premature termination of education for girls, as they are expected to assume adult responsibilities, such as household chores and child-rearing, instead of pursuing their education (Konishi et al., 2018).

The impact of early marriage on adolescent education is multifaceted and profound (Makino et al., 2021). One of the primary challenges is limited access to education for married adolescents, especially girls (Gausman et al., 2023). Cultural norms and societal expectations often prioritize marriage over education for girls, perpetuating gender disparities in education. As a result, many married adolescents, particularly girls, are forced to drop out of school, depriving them of opportunities for personal growth, empowerment, and socioeconomic advancement (Kumari & Shekhar, 2023).

Moreover, early marriage exacerbates existing barriers to education, such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate resources.

Married adolescents may face financial constraints that prevent them from attending school or accessing educational materials (Sathi, 2023). Additionally, the absence of supportive policies and programs addressing the unique needs of married adolescents further hinders their educational opportunities (Hasnain & Snopkowski, 2023). Consequently, married adolescents are disproportionately affected by educational inequality and are more likely to experience educational deprivation compared to their unmarried peers (Aggarwal et al., 2023).

Furthermore, early marriage impedes adolescents' participation in education by perpetuating harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Traditional gender roles often dictate that girls should prioritize domestic duties and child-rearing over education (Nasri & Mulyohadi, 2023), reinforcing the perception that education is less important for girls than for boys. This gendered division of labor restricts girls' autonomy and agency, limiting their ability to make informed decisions about their education and future aspirations (Corno & Voena, 2023). As a result, many married adolescent girls are denied the opportunity to pursue their educational goals and fulfill their potential (Hotte & Lambert, 2023).

Addressing the challenges of adolescent education in the context of early marriage requires comprehensive and multi-faceted solutions (Harvey et al., 2022). Firstly, efforts must be made to improve access to education for married adolescents, particularly girls, by removing financial barriers, providing scholarships, and expanding access to flexible learning options, such as distance education and non-formal education programs (Suparman et al., 2023). Additionally, comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive health services should be integrated into school curricula to empower adolescents with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, including delaying marriage and childbearing (Koski et al., 2023).

Moreover, community-based initiatives and advocacy campaigns are essential to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality in education (Nasri, 2023b). Engaging parents, community leaders, and religious authorities in conversations about the importance of girls' education and the harmful consequences of early marriage can help shift attitudes and

behaviors towards greater support for adolescent education (Nasri, 2019). Furthermore, governments and policymakers must prioritize the development and implementation of supportive policies and programs that address the unique needs of married adolescents, including access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, psychosocial support, and legal protections against early marriage and gender-based violence (Sharabi & Dorrance-Hall, 2024).

In conclusion, the challenges of adolescent education in the context of early marriage are complex and multifaceted, requiring comprehensive and multi-faceted solutions. By addressing the underlying causes of early marriage and prioritizing the educational rights and needs of married adolescents, particularly girls, we can create a more inclusive and equitable educational system that enables all adolescents to reach their full potential and contribute to sustainable development.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis to explore and understand the challenges of adolescent education in the context of early marriage and to seek solutions to improve access and participation (Nasri, 2023a). The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows researchers to delve deeply into complex phenomena, understand individuals' perspectives and experiences holistically, and capture the social and cultural contexts influencing the phenomena under study (Cissé & Rasmussen, 2022).

Data are collected through literature reviews and case studies from several countries facing early marriage issues (Hart, 2018). Literature reviews are conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of issues related to adolescent education and early marriage, including influencing factors, impacts, and proposed or implemented solutions in various contexts (Creswell & J. David Creswell, 2022). Case studies are conducted to gain deeper insights into the experiences and challenges faced by early-married adolescents in different countries, as well as to obtain examples of best practices in improving access and participation in adolescent education (Loder-Jackson et al., 2023).

Data collection techniques include searching related literature, interviewing education and health experts, and analyzing policy documents

(Falcetta et al., 2023). Literature searches are performed through academic databases and digital libraries to identify relevant empirical studies, literature reviews, and recent research reports related to the research topic (Neupane & Poudel, 2021). Interviews with education and health experts are conducted to gain their insights and experiences regarding the challenges of adolescent education in the context of early marriage, as well as solutions that can be implemented to improve access and participation. Policy document analysis is conducted to evaluate existing education policies and programs and to identify shortcomings and opportunities for improvement (Mihas, 2023).

The data obtained are analyzed thematically by observing patterns that emerge from the collected data (Schwandt, 2021). Thematic analysis is conducted by identifying main themes, patterns of relationships between these themes, and differences and similarities in perspectives and experiences expressed in the data (Eftenaru, 2023). The results of the analysis are used to identify key challenges in adolescent education related to early marriage and to propose solutions that can improve access and participation in adolescent education amidst these challenges (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). Through this approach, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges of adolescent education in the context of early marriage and to provide valuable insights for the development of more effective and sustainable policy and intervention programs (Massazza et al., 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Limited Access to Education

One of the primary challenges identified in the study is the limited access to education for married adolescents, particularly girls, due to entrenched cultural norms that prioritize marriage over schooling (Nasri, 2018). These norms contribute to early dropout rates among married adolescents, depriving them of educational opportunities critical for their personal and socioeconomic development (Nasri, 2015b). Proposed solutions to address this challenge include providing scholarships and financial support to alleviate financial barriers, implementing flexible learning options such as distance education to accommodate married adolescents' circumstances, and establishing

community-based education programs tailored to their needs (Atsani et al., 2023).

Gender Norms and Stereotypes

Harmful gender norms and stereotypes significantly impact girls' participation in education within the context of early marriage. Traditional gender roles often dictate that girls should prioritize domestic duties over schooling, perpetuating the perception that education is less essential for girls than for boys (Nasri, 2015a). To counter this, the study suggests the implementation of awareness campaigns and community-based initiatives aimed at challenging harmful gender norms and promoting gender equality in education (Nasri et al., 2016). Additionally, integrating comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula can empower girls with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and delay marriage until they are ready (Nasri, 2019).

Policy and Program Support

The study also highlights the lack of supportive policies and programs tailored to the needs of married adolescents. Existing policies often fail to adequately protect the educational rights of married adolescents, and legal protections against early marriage and gender-based violence are insufficient (Stites et al., 2022). To address this, the study emphasizes the importance of prioritizing policies that safeguard the educational rights of married adolescents and integrate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services into school curricula. Collaborative efforts between governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and communities are essential to ensure the effective implementation of these policies and programs and promote positive outcomes for married adolescents and their communities (Du, 2023).

Discussion

In discussing the findings, it becomes evident that addressing the challenges of adolescent education within the context of early marriage requires multifaceted approaches and collaborative efforts. The intersection of cultural norms and educational access underscores the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the barriers faced by married adolescents, particularly girls, in accessing education.

Initiatives such as providing scholarships and implementing flexible learning options can help alleviate financial constraints and accommodate the unique circumstances of married adolescents. Moreover, challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes is essential for promoting gender equality in education. Awareness campaigns and community-based initiatives play a crucial role in shifting societal attitudes towards prioritizing girls' education and empowering them to pursue their educational aspirations.

Additionally, enhancing policy and program support is paramount for safeguarding the educational rights of married adolescents. Governments and policymakers must prioritize the development and implementation of supportive policies that address the specific needs of married adolescents, including legal protections against early marriage and gender-based violence. Integrating comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services into school curricula is also critical for ensuring the holistic well-being of married adolescents and enabling them to make informed choices about their reproductive health.

Overall, collaborative efforts between stakeholders are essential to effectively address the challenges of adolescent education within the context of early marriage and promote equitable access to education for all adolescents. By working together, governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and communities can create an environment that empowers married adolescents to pursue their educational aspirations and reach their full potential.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the significant challenges faced by adolescents in accessing education within the context of early marriage. Cultural norms, harmful gender stereotypes, and inadequate policy support contribute to limited access and participation in education among married adolescents, particularly girls. However, through targeted interventions and collaborative efforts, there is potential to improve the educational outcomes and well-being of married adolescents. By addressing these challenges comprehensively and promoting gender equality in education, we can create a more inclusive and equitable education

system that enables all adolescents to realize their right to education and reach their full potential.

Recommendations:

1. Policy Reform: Governments should prioritize the development and implementation of supportive policies that protect the educational rights of married adolescents. This includes legal protections against early marriage and gender-based violence, as well as measures to ensure access to quality education for all adolescents.

2. Awareness Campaigns: Comprehensive awareness campaigns should be conducted to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate early marriage and limit girls' participation in education. These campaigns should target communities, schools, and policymakers to promote gender equality in education.

3. Community-Based Initiatives: Community-based initiatives play a crucial role in addressing the specific needs of married adolescents and promoting their access to education. These initiatives should include flexible learning options, financial support, and reproductive health services tailored to the needs of married adolescents.

4. Integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Schools should integrate comprehensive sexuality education into their curricula to empower adolescents with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and delay marriage until they are ready.

5. Collaboration: Collaboration between governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and communities is essential for the effective implementation of policies and programs aimed at improving access to education for married adolescents. By working together, stakeholders can create a supportive environment that enables married adolescents to pursue their educational aspirations and reach their full potential.

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