

Girls' Education Policy Management and Retention Rate in Twelve Years Basic Education in Muhanga District, Rwanda.

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of girls' education policy management on female students' retention in Twelve Years Basic Education schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda. Specifically, it assessed the effects of policy development and planning, implementation practices and monitoring and evaluation on student retention. Guided by human capital theory, social learning theory, gender equity theory, the capability approach, and education production function models, the study employed a mixed-methods research design. A sample of 381 respondents was selected from a target population of 7,887, comprising 332 female students, 48 school staff members and 1 education leader at district level. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and five-year school retention records. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0, while qualitative data were examined through thematic content analysis. The findings revealed that all three dimensions of girls' education policy management positively influenced female students' retention. Policy development and planning ($B = 0.472$, $t = 4.0732$, $p < 0.001$), implementation practices ($B = 0.328$, $t = 4.556$, $p < 0.001$), and monitoring and evaluation ($B = 0.404$, $t = 6.098$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated positive associations with retention. Monitoring and evaluation emerged as a particularly important mechanism for tracking policy implementation, addressing absenteeism, and following up on school dropouts. The study recommends strengthening policy planning, stakeholder engagement, consistent implementation, and systematic monitoring to improve girls' retention in basic education. These findings provide insights for policy makers and education practitioners seeking to promote gender equity and educational continuity in Rwanda.

Keywords: Girls' education policy, Policy implementation, Student retention, Rwanda.

1. Introduction

Girls' continued participation in education is central to equitable learning opportunities and to the social and economic benefits associated with completing basic education. International commitments, including Sustainable Development Goal 4, call for inclusive and equitable quality education. However, access to school does not necessarily guarantee that learners remain enrolled until completion. For girls, retention can be affected by interacting economic, social, institutional and gender-related barriers, including household poverty, domestic responsibilities, early pregnancy, gender-based violence, inadequate sanitation and limited academic or psychosocial support.

Rwanda has established policy and programme frameworks intended to promote equitable education, including the Girls' Education Policy and the Twelve Years Basic Education programme. These commitments seek to expand opportunities for learners and reduce gender-related disadvantages. Nevertheless, the research project underpinning this paper identifies a continuing implementation challenge: policies designed at national level may not be applied consistently across districts and schools. Local capacity, resource availability, community awareness, school leadership and the quality of monitoring can affect whether policy intentions lead to girls' continued attendance and progression.

Muhanga district provides a relevant local context for examining this issue. The thesis reports that girls' dropout rates were 7.5% at lower secondary level and 11.8% at upper secondary level, drawing on district education reporting cited in the original study. The thesis also identifies early pregnancy, poverty, child labour, household responsibilities and limited parental support and weaknesses in school facilities as barriers that may undermine retention. These contextual factors suggest that improving retention requires more than the existence of a policy; it requires effective planning, appropriate implementation and follow-up that identifies problems before learners leave school.

The study addressed a local research gap. Previous work discussed barriers to girls' education and the broad purpose of gender-responsive policies but the thesis argued that less attention had been paid to how policy management processes operate at district and school levels in the 12YBE context. Accordingly, the study examined whether policy development and planning, implementation practices and monitoring and evaluation were associated with female students' retention in Muhanga district.

The study was guided by three objectives: i) to examine the influence of girls' education policy development and planning on female students' retention; ii) to assess the effect of policy implementation practices on retention; and iii) to examine the influence of policy monitoring and evaluation on retention. Its practical purpose was to generate evidence that could inform education policymakers, district officials, school leaders, teachers and community stakeholders seeking to improve girls' continuity in basic education.

2. Research Elaborations

2.1 Conceptual and theoretical framework

The study conceptualized girls' education policy management through three connected processes; policy development and planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Retention was the outcome of interest, understood as girls' continued participation in school rather than premature withdrawal before completing the relevant stage of education. The thesis recognized that policy management operates alongside broader contextual conditions including household income, cultural expectations, school resources and the availability of gender-responsive support.

The theoretical framing drew on Human Capital Theory, Social Learning Theory, Gender Equity Theory, the Capability Approach and education production-function and retention-rate modelling. Human Capital Theory positions education as an investment that can support individual opportunity and wider development. Gender equity perspectives focus attention on structural and institutional barriers that may affect girls differently from boys. The capability approach emphasizes whether learners have real opportunities to participate and benefit from education, not simply whether a place is formally available. Social learning highlights the role of models, expectations and interactions while education production and retention modelling provide a way to examine how school and policy inputs relate to continuation in education.

2.2 Research Design

A mixed-methods design combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both measurable patterns and participants' experience of policy management. The study was conducted in Muhanga district and focused on schools implementing the 12 YBE programme. The thesis describes the selection of seven schools for the search with attention to geographical variation and rural-urban representation. Data collection and analysis covered the period described in the thesis as 2022-2025, with school retention records considered over five years.

2.3 Population, Sample and Sampling

The methodology chapter identifies a target population of 7897; 40 head-teachers, 480 class teachers, 480 guidance and counselling staff, 6897 female students and one District Director of Education. Using Yamane's formula, the thesis reports a sample of 381

respondents. This comprised 332 female students, 23 class teachers, 23 guidance and counselling staff, 2 head teachers and 1 district director of education. Female students were selected through simple random sampling. School and district personnel were selected for their direct involvement in policy implementation and student support, using purposive and systematic approaches as described in the thesis.

2.4 Data collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were used to obtain structured responses while interviews and focus group discussions helped explore experiences and explanations related to girls' retention. Document analysis included school retention records and relevant policy or administrative material. The study states that instrument reliability was assessed using a benchmark of at least 0.70. Quantitative data were processed in SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, inferential analysis included correlation and regression. Qualitative data were examined using thematic content analysis. The combination of methods was intended to strengthen interpretation by comparing survey patterns with accounts from education stakeholders and available school records.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Policy Development and Planning

Respondents generally viewed girls' education policy development and planning as supportive of retention. The study reports that 76.6% agreed and 21.9% strongly agreed that effective policy implementation supported girls in avoiding dropout; the reported mean was 4.19 (SD= 0.49). All respondents agreed that district- level implementation facilitated retention with a mean of 4.00 (SD= 0.00). In addition, 69.3% and 28.5% strongly agreed that failures in implementation negatively affected retention. The model summary reported $R = 0.331$ and $R^2 = 0.109$, meaning that the model accounted for 10.9% of the variance in the outcome in that analysis. The regression coefficient was positive and statistically significant ($B = 0.472$, $t = 4.072$, $p < 0.001$).

These findings indicate that planning is an important foundation for retention-oriented action. Planning can help schools identify girls at risk, align activities with local barriers, clarify responsibilities and direct support toward learners who need it. At the same time, the relatively modest R^2 indicates that policy planning alone does not explain most variation in retention. Other school, household and community factors remain relevant.

3.2 Policy implementation practices

The results also revealed a positive association between implementation practices and girls' retention. The model summary reported $R = 0.365$ and $R^2 = 0.133$, indicating that implementation practices accounted for 13.3% of the variance in retention in the model. The ANOVA result was statistically significant, $F = 20.762$, $p < 0.001$. Regression analysis produced $B = 0.328$, $t = 4.556$, $p < 0.001$. The thesis highlights stakeholder involvement and support as important components of implementation and discusses gender-sensitive teaching, menstrual hygiene support, school feeding and community engagement as examples of practices through which policy can become meaningful at school level.

The findings suggest that policy effectiveness depends on how consistently interventions are delivered whether staff understand their responsibilities and whether schools and communities cooperate to support girls. A policy may establish a clear commitment but its influence on retention can be limited if implementation is uneven, resources are inadequate or girls and families do not receive timely support. For rural settings such as Muhanga, implementation therefore needs to be adapted to the barriers girls actually experience.

3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation also showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with retention. Respondents reported strong agreement that schools tracked policy implementation, used feedback to design interventions, collected data on gender-related challenges and had procedures for following up on absenteeism or dropout. The reported mean scores ranged from 4.277 to 4.394. For example, feedback used in policy evaluation had a mean of 4.394 (SD = 0.505), while regular collection of gender-related data had a mean of 4.277 (SD 0.683). The regression coefficient was $B = 0.404$, $t = 6.098$, $p < 0.001$; the model ANOVA was $F = 37.186$, $p < 0.001$.

Among the three dimensions, monitoring and evaluation produced the largest reported t-statistic while policy development and planning had the largest unstandardized B coefficient. These statistics should not be treated as a direct ranking of practical importance without considering differences in measurement and model specification. Taken together, however, the results support the value of routine attendance tracking, gender- disaggregated information, feedback from learners and staff and prompt follow-up with girls at risk leaving school. Monitoring is most useful when the information collected leads to corrective action rather than being used only for reporting.

3.4 Overall interpretation

Across all three objectives, the findings were consistent: policy planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation each had a positive, statistically significant association with girls' retention in the study's regression analyses. The results support an integrated approach in which policy commitments are translated into feasible school plans, implemented through coordinated action and reviewed using reliable data. The findings do not imply that policy management is the sole determinant of retention. The study itself identifies economic constraints, early pregnancy, household responsibilities, gender norms, infrastructure and support services as contextual factors that may also influence girls' ability to remain in school.

4. Conclusions

The study concludes that girls' education policy management is positively associated with female students' retention in twelve years basic education schools in Muhanga district. The three dimensions examined development and planning, implementation practices and monitoring and evaluation, each showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with retention in the reported regression analyses. The results reinforce the view that the existence of a policy is not sufficient by itself; its potential depends on the quality of planning, the consistency of implementation and the use of monitoring information to improve action.

Policy development and planning provide the foundation for identifying local needs, setting retention priorities, allocating responsibilities and organizing support. Implementation practices determine whether these plans are converted into accessible and responsive services for girls. Monitoring and evaluation help schools and district officials identify attendance problems, track gender-related challenges, gather feedback and follow up with learners at risk of dropping out. The findings therefore favor a coordinated policy cycle rather than isolated interventions.

Several practical implications follow. First, education authorities and school leaders should incorporate explicit retention objectives into school improvement plans and assign clear responsibilities for acting on attendance and dropout concerns, Second, schools should strengthen collaboration among teachers, counsellors, families, community leaders and district education officials. Thirdly, gender-responsive supports including appropriate sanitation and menstrual hygiene measures, counselling, mentorship and timely assistance for vulnerable learners should be implemented consistently and adapted to local needs. Fourth, monitoring should use regular attendance and retention data, disaggregated where appropriate and establish clear procedures for contacting and supporting girls who are frequently absent.

The study also points to the need for careful interpretation. Its evidence comes from a specific district and a selected group of schools, so the findings should not automatically be generalized to every district in Rwanda. The thesis notes limitations involving incomplete or inconsistent school records, restricted access to some official documents and the possibility that sensitive experiences may be underreported. Future studies could compare districts, examine longer-term retention and completion outcomes and investigate how policy management interacts with household resources, school infrastructure, social norms and targeted support programmes.

In Conclusion, improving girls' retention under the 12 YBE programme requires policy management that is planned, adequately supported, implemented in partnership with communities, and continuously informed by evidence. Stronger coordination between national policy priorities and school-level realities can help education stakeholders respond earlier to barriers and create conditions in which more girls remain in school and complete their education.

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