

Research Article

Analysis of the Academic Performance of Girls in Premature Unions

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Abstract

Girls' academic achievement in secondary school is a reality and is a major concern for schools, families and the community in general. This problematic paradigm violates the principles of the development and education process stipulated in Jan Piaget's theory of human development or education. This study aims to analyze the academic performance of girls in a situation of premature union in secondary schools in Mozambique. Therefore, this study had a qualitative and exploratory method, the population of this research was made up of 22 participants or informants. Whose, 4 members of the School Council, made up of (father and mother class) from the school, 6 teachers from different classes, including the Director and 4 responsible from the same community, also, 6 students in a premature union situation and finally 2 members of school partners (NGO involved). The treatment and analysis of the results corresponded to the following categories: pre-analysis which was based on the reflection of data collected in the field, exploration of the material which focused on the exploration of articles, monographs, dissertations and theses for the theoretical support of the study and analysis of the results. Where it was based on the treatments of data collected in the study. The research results showed that girls' low academic performance in premature union situations. This is combined with external and individual factors. External factors include: premature unions, where girls, due to lack of basic resources, are subjected to premature unions in exchange for favors in the form of money or even material goods.

Keywords

Premature Union, School Achievement, School and Girl

1. Introduction

The theme of this study is: Analysis of the Academic Performance of Girls in Premature Unions in Mozambique. This research aims to analyze the academic performance of girls in premature unions in Mozambique.

The academic performance of girls in high school is a reality and a major concern for schools, families, and the community in general. In the most remote areas of Mozambique, the idea prevails that women were created simply for household chores, and in schools, the strategies implemented

to combat this problem are rarely seen, creating a scientific vacuum. This problematic paradigm violates the principles of the development and education process stipulated in Jan Piaget's theory of human development or education. At the time of Establishment, creation, institution, or incidence? The an (if) and the quantum (how much of the contribution) are defined.

This includes determining the subjects (passive and active), the taxable event (assumed fact), the amount (including the

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tax base, rate, and tax deductions), and any tax benefits (cases where there is no tax to pay or less tax).

In Mozambique, child marriage affects almost half of all girls under 18 years of age. Once married, the girl is expected to assume her role as wife and mother, fulfilling her obligations, which include not only taking care of the home but also fulfilling all marital duties, including procreation. Therefore, child marriage can be understood as a form of legitimizing child sexual abuse [2].

Since its first Strategic Plan, the Education sector has developed instruments to guide the implementation of its plans from a gender perspective, focusing on gender equity by promoting school entry at age six, particularly for girls, through the construction of more schools closer to their communities. At the institutional level, gender balance was promoted in human resource planning and management through the recruitment of a significant number of female teachers and administrators. This also included the abolition of Order 39/GM/2003, which required pregnant girls to be transferred to night school [14].

This study analyzes the academic performance of girls in pre-term marriages at one of the schools in Gaza Province, Mozambique, considering the strategies adopted to ensure their retention. Therefore, it is important to analyze the problem of low academic performance to identify potential weaknesses and strengths, with a view to improving the quality of learning for all students. It is important to note that these acts of marriage undermine human development and education in the field of psychology.

Child marriage is one of the worst forms of violence against Mozambican girls. More than half of girls are married before the legal age, that is, before the age of 18. However, child marriage has been a concern for many schools, as this phenomenon has negative repercussions for girls in terms of their academic performance at a personal, socioeconomic, and political level [21].

Studies conducted by point to traditions and cultural practices that reinforce gender inequalities as causes of child marriage, valuing women's roles solely in terms of marriage, childbearing, and homemaking; a lack of awareness of rights; and a low level of education, which influences the academic performance of girls married prematurely, resulting from the obligation of family members, including parents, uncles, grandparents, and close relatives [22]. According to the 2009 Demographic and Health Survey in Mozambique, girls between the ages of 20 and 24 are married before the age of 18, or before the age of 15. And most marriages are formed in de facto unions formalized through cultural practices and beliefs related to lobolo, initiation rites, the subordinate role reserved for women, and, among other things, power over minors. In this sense, it becomes an involuntary union, most often for one of the parties involved in the marriage.

According to culturally, the prejudice that women are only meant for marriage can influence their education. This author goes further, stating that there is a lower return on investment

in girls' education, as parents believe that once married, girls no longer belong to them and are instead the responsibility of their husband's family. This fact contributes to parents' lack of support for girls' education and, consequently, facilitates their dropout rates [4].

Also using the study conducted by, within the scope of the "child-friendly education" study in different rural areas of Mozambique, approximately 1.2 million (23%) children of primary and secondary school age are out of school, and a large proportion of these children are girls. This is due to factors related to poverty and sociocultural norms: early marriage, teenage pregnancy, distance from home to school, lack of safe school spaces, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of an adequate number of qualified teachers [24]. From this perspective, there are few studies conducted in Mozambique to understand the performance and school dropout rates of girls in premature marriages in secondary schools. These studies reveal phenomena similar to those of the present study. Therefore, the author notes a significant failure to implement mechanisms to combat these problems, including policies governing the education system. Furthermore, it is raised that the principles of human development and education established by Jan Piaget are not respected, and the violation of the human spheres encompassed in the field of psychology is a veritable proliferation.

It is clear that the problem of poor academic performance is a reality and is more glaring among girls compared to boys. Having observed that many girls in this village drop out of school very early, it became clear to us that we needed to seek the insights of the girls who still attend school, even though they are in premature marriages. We wanted to learn from them how the school community has addressed these situations. This discussion, which was also highlighted in the school community's assessment of the prevalence of premature marriages in this area, highlighted by several families who still follow this sociocultural pattern.

The reason we decided to develop this work was our interest in analyzing girls in premature marriages, linked to the educational context, and the fact that this phenomenon is a topic of discussion and interpretation in a wide range of fields. Few studies have been conducted, and as if that weren't enough, the number of cases is increasing, as if the research weren't effective. In this expectation, this study expands the contribution to the areas of scientific interest of psychology, and because the practice of early marriage is part of everyday life because it is culturally acceptable in certain societies, this practice not only conditions through the perpetuation of poverty, but also increases cases of gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health problems, and poor school performance, reducing girls' chances of academic development at school. This leads to factors that may be associated with the psychological suffering of girls in these situations and which, in turn, constitute a community known to the author of the research and experiencing the facts in their daily lives, thus arose the need to be able to carry out the study in that school.

2. Literature Review

From this perspective, the concepts of school are presented. School is an organization in which the systematic teaching and learning process takes place. Therefore, school is the formal institution with the ultimate purpose of transmitting knowledge necessary for the formation of humankind at the individual, social, political, and economic levels [8].

school: "is par excellence the right place to fulfill the functions of education and the learning of knowledge, arts, sciences, and technology [13]."

It is clear that the authors cited above, although they define school in different terms, are unanimous in affirming that school is the institution in which the teaching and learning process takes place, without neglecting the fact that school is the place where the socialization and transmission of knowledge occur in a formal and organized manner.

Continuing in the line of thought of defining concepts, the concept of Mozambique continues, defines a girl as a female or adolescent. This author also states that a girl is in a phase between childhood and adulthood, during which physical and psychological transformations occur. The term girl refers to a woman in adolescence, generally characterized by the impulses of physical, mental, and emotional development [1].

Having introduced the concept of a girl, we continue with the concept of academic achievement. According to academic achievement is the result obtained from students' skills acquired through the learning process within the family and school context, based on a set of percentages and overall numbers around certain indicators [10].

"Academic achievement refers to the outcome of students' academic skills when assessed in different areas of learning. This can be verified with greater or lesser capacity to learn and depends on different topics, with intelligence being the most important" [12].

In other words, academic achievement is a measure of a student's abilities, expressing what they have learned throughout their educational process. However, the word "performance" can be understood as associated with the word "performance," which, in this case, refers to the student's performance throughout the school year.

After discussing the concept of academic achievement, we move on to the concept of marriage. Article 7 of Law No. 10 of 2004 (which approves the Family Law in Mozambique) defines marriage as "the voluntary and singular union between a man and a woman, for the purpose of forming a family, through a full communion of life." This definition is ambiguous and may be susceptible to different interpretations, as Mozambique is a multicultural and multiethnic country, which does not lend itself to a concise definition.

According to the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combat of Premature Marriages in Mozambique - 2016-2019 (2015), "marriage is the voluntary and singular union between a man and a woman, for the purpose of forming a family, through full communion of life." According to this principle, marriage

presupposes, above all, the free consent of the parties.

It is common knowledge that a child is not capable of giving consent to marriage because they are not mature enough to assess the full extent of the commitments they undertake upon marriage. Therefore, the child is a social being whose development depends on other, more mature human beings.

Within the context of presenting the concepts of marriage, the concept of premature marriage is finally presented. This is defined as a marital union involving minors under the age of 18, which, under Mozambican law, constitutes a violation of human rights. This act perpetuates poverty, gender-based violence, reproductive health problems, and the loss of empowerment opportunities for girls and, by extension, women [5].

Child marriage is one of the worst forms of violence against Mozambican girls. More than half of all girls are married before the legal age of 18. Although this form of marriage is illegal, perpetrators are rarely brought to justice [21].

Regarding early marriage, I can say that this union can occur between two people who are socially unprepared to live in a home, lack knowledge about homemaking, and lack sufficient physical maturity to initiate sexual activity. However, we understand that early marriage is any marriage or marital union involving a person under the age of 18.

2.1. Early Marriage in Mozambique

In Mozambique, the marriageable age is eighteen, and exceptionally, "when circumstances of recognized public and family interest occur and there is consent from the parents or legal representatives" (Family Law 10/2004), marriage may be performed between individuals of opposite sexes with a minimum age of sixteen. In this context, any and all marital unions between two young people of different sexes that do not meet the minimum ages established in the aforementioned Family Law are considered early marriages.

By establishing the same marriageable age for both sexes, this legal provision aims to guarantee, firstly, the application of the constitutional principle of equality of citizens before the law. It also seeks to safeguard the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular, "the right to education, reproductive and mental health, the right to play, and the right to grow at the right time. Finally, it seeks to prevent child marriage, especially considering "the persistence of the practice of 'premature unions'" in Mozambique [21].

How can one explain, then, that despite the existence of legal and institutional provisions, namely the imposition of fines and/or dissolution of marriages, which guarantee equal rights, Mozambique, in 2014, ranked tenth in the world ranking of countries most affected by premature unions [25].

2.2. Determinants of Premature Unions in Mozambique

The State establishes mandatory and free primary education,

in accordance with the [3]. The circumstances and factors that motivate the occurrence of premature unions in the country are numerous. highlighting, according to studies and statistical data: poverty, the weak dissemination of legislation and public policies that protect children against premature unions, and sociocultural factors, especially initiation rites and orphanhood.

2.3. Poverty

Poverty is the main determinant of early marriage in Mozambique. Some parents rely on the idea of having their daughters under 18 drop out of primary school to marry, usually to a much older adult man, hoping to earn an income for their families, have a son-in-law who will ease expenses, and become a family member. They drop out of school to assume their new social roles as wives (Francisco, 2014).

Many girls are married off early in rural areas. Their parents or relatives hand them over to older men in exchange for monetary compensation, which is a crime, even though they are unaware of international legislation on the matter. These girls become mothers between the ages of 14 and 16. From the perspective of the aforementioned actors, it is clear that the rationale for this study emphasizes that child marriage in Mozambique may be the main cause and consequence of school dropout, in addition to perpetuating poverty among women and girls, leaving a legion of people in a situation of extreme vulnerability [8].

Continuing the line of thought of the aforementioned authors, it is noted that children flee to urban areas in search of work, leaving no trace. Thus, the great expectation of escaping poverty is realized in a different reality, a worse situation, as parents do not accept their daughters back, and they often have to subject themselves to remarriage in search of support. Sometimes they are sexually exploited in exchange for food and shelter.

1) Sociocultural Factors

The persistence of child marriage in Mozambique is strongly influenced by initiation rites. Rites constitute "a set of certain behaviors, individual or collective, with a repetitive character and a strong symbolic charge for participants and witnesses." He further defines initiation rites as "various traditional practices and/or customary rules" [20].

The practice of initiation rites, in the current context, not only shapes sexual and gender identities but also constitutes a manifestation of brutal submission, especially of women. The practice generally has power based on the differentiation of feminine and masculine, recognizing men as more important than women in decision-making.

Emphasizes that initiation rites, in Mozambican society, play a preponderant role in the formation of cultural identities, teaching right and wrong regarding social behavior, as well as instituting cultures that organize the future places, roles, and social functions of children of both sexes [18].

2) Orphanhood

One of the factors that make girls vulnerable to child marriage in Mozambique is orphanhood. Orphaned girls face severe difficulties caring for their younger siblings after the death of their biological parents. The situation is worsened when parents die in rented homes, leaving the children homeless. They then choose to marry someone to help with expenses [18].

Hence the importance of the School Board creating a committee to help children identify peers at risk of child marriage. After this identification, the committee intervenes, referring the cases to Social Action, the department responsible for helping orphaned and vulnerable children. Consequently, it seeks to ensure their continued attendance at school until they complete at least the seven years of free and mandatory schooling in the country [18].

2.4. Implications of Child Marriage.

Child marriage not only compromises the future of the girl involved but also constitutes a serious public health problem. Possible implications include HIV infections, spontaneous or induced abortions, anemia, and childhood depression [2].

Child marriage in Mozambique causes many girls to leave their parents' homes. The phenomena of unwanted pregnancies and serious illnesses that can lead to death limit children's ability to continue their education. Instead of dedicating their time to school and play, they assume their new social role, that of wife, and have difficulty progressing. Every girl married before the age of 18 brings about an individual and collective tragedy [25].

In other words, it points out that girls involved in this practice become poorer and marginalized. They are unable to find jobs of their choice; they are vulnerable to psychological instability; and their lives and futures are compromised. The elimination of child marriage is not yet a priority for the Mozambican government, as it does not actively involve the School Board in combating it.

Methodology of the Study

The methodological approaches of this research are outlined through scientific procedures. This study is descriptive, exploratory, and qualitative in nature. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with teachers and students in secondary schools in the Gaza Province of Mozambique.

Regarding the Technical Procedures

at the time of Establishment, creation, institution, or levy?

The an (if) and the quantum (how much of the tax) are defined. This includes determining the subjects (passive and active), the taxable event (assumed fact), the amount (including the calculation basis, rate, and deductions from collection), and possible tax benefits (cases where there is no tax to be paid or there is less tax).

Regarding the procedures, this is a case study because, as the terms indicate, a case study refers to a singular study aimed at understanding phenomena in a given context. The

bibliographic procedure supported the researcher by consulting bibliographic references that discuss academic performance of girls in preterm unions in the Mozambican context, to understand how this phenomenon is treated in our country.

This study has a population of 22 participants or informants. The participants included four members of the Secondary School Council, consisting of the school's parents (parents), six teachers from different classes, including the Principal and four guardians from the same community, six students in preterm unions, and two members of the school's partners (NGOs involved).

Data Collection Techniques

The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data. This technique allows informants to provide spontaneous and more detailed responses, allowing researchers to access valuable information not included in the question and also allowing the researcher to explore the information revealed in depth. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants, each of whom had the opportunity to provide their own testimonies regarding the issue under study. Participants provided various insights into the analysis of the academic performance of girls in preterm unions.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation Technique

According to this line of thought, the use of content analysis involves three fundamental phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and processing of the results—inference and interpretation.

The data were organized into tables to facilitate analysis. Prior to this, participants were coded using a combination of letters and numbers to comply with ethical principles of guardianship. Thus, teachers were coded by the letter P of the Portuguese alphabet followed by a natural number from 1 to 4. E. P1 refers to teacher 1 or first teacher, including the principal and the president of the School Council, and PC, respectively; the supervisors are coded by E. EnC; mother and father class members are coded by MPT; and finally, school partners are coded by PONG.

4. Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Results

In short, what are early marriages? Early marriage in Gaza Province, Mozambique, is a notorious phenomenon that occurs in many communities. The number of children included in this practice, especially girls, tends to grow, compromising their future and, in many cases, forcing them to drop out of primary and secondary education. In this context, the following statements from participants demonstrate:

"In my opinion, premature marriage is the union of two

adolescents to form a family" (EP1, 2, and 6).

"Premature marriage is considered the union of two minors for the purpose of forming a family" (EP3, 4, and 5).

"Premature marriage is defined as marrying before the age of 18 with the purpose of living as a married couple" (E. Student-1, 2, and 3, date: February 27, 2025).

"Premature marriage is the situation in which a minor girl joins her partner to form a family" (E. Student-4, 5, and 6, date: February 27, 2025).

"Premature marriage, according to UNICEF law, is the union of two minors or adolescents to form a conjugal family" (E. PONG-1 and 2, date: February 27, 2025).

Based on the participants' statements, it is clear that secondary school teachers are knowledgeable about premature unions and are also aware of the laws enacted or implemented by the national education system to combat this type of union. They are also means of disseminating this information and investigating ways to retain girls in education without violating their privileges of access to education. The statements of participants E. PONG-1 and 2 demonstrate that they have important work to do with school organization, so that victims of these problematic effects can have competent entities to interact with regarding situations that threaten their educational lives due to premature unions. The United Nations Children's Fund's statistical report, entitled *A Profile of Child Marriage in Africa*, made public that the reduction rates of women married as children are slow – they have decreased only 10% since 1990, when the figure was 44% across the entire African continent, or 34% today. The report warned that projections indicate that, if this situation does not reverse by 2050, the African continent will have the highest number of women married at an early age, surpassing the southern region of Asia, a globally recognized region [25].

Furthermore, the documents that guide the School Council, especially the Primary School Council Support Manual, the 2010-2016 Strategic Education Plan, and Ministerial Diploma No. 46 (2008) They converge on the idea that the Primary School Council must systematically raise awareness and instill in children and their respective parents or guardians that early marriage is negative and detrimental to safe and healthy development, to avoid school dropout [21].

4.1. School Performance of Girls in Child Marriage

School performance will be characterized by dropout rates, as they are both the cause and consequence of school dropout for many girls, especially from poor families, who suffer the most from child marriage. However, the following question arises. Based on the experience gained during your work, could you tell us in detail what the challenges of working with students in child marriage have been? "For the past 10 years of my career, working with students in premature unions has been a challenge, as we are dealing with students who are subjected to life situations that take into account their age

group, and attention to their school life is difficult" (EP1, date: February 26, 2024).

"As a psychologist, I have worked systematically, according to the level of the situation, taking into account that these students are exposed to stress and anxiety (depression), which is a bit cautious for me" (EP2, date: February 26, 2025).

"Working with students in premature unions is fundamentally difficult due to their attention to themselves as students and managing family and school at the same time" (EP4 and 5, date: February 26, 2025).

"These students are a complicated group because they are subjected to two complex life situations: attention as a mother and "As a student, it ends up wearing them down psychologically" (EP6, date: February 26, 2025).

According to the testimonies presented above, the following challenges faced by teachers in the education of students in premature unions are taken into account: the lack of comprehensive care from a school psychologist due to the lack of an office for interventions in school problems, the sociocultural issues of the Mozambican population, the low educational level of the majority of the population, and poverty. Furthermore, students who resist continuing their studies have suffered from psychological distress/mental illness, such as depression, mental exhaustion, and low self-esteem. Therefore, these factors weigh heavily on and lead to failure in the teacher's work, as well as in the productivity and academic performance of these students.

When stating that premature unions directly impact education, as students drop out of school to dedicate themselves to their new social role. In turn, acknowledges that early marriage is associated with a significant risk of not completing elementary school and starting high school. Women who marry early complete elementary school less frequently than those who do not [16].

Goes further by drawing the government's attention to the practice of early marriage in Mozambique, considering it detrimental to the human development plans of the country's future productive forces. Therefore, it is necessary for everyone, both the government and the community in general, to pool resources and efforts to combat this problem, which is a reality in Mozambique [16].

4.2. Factors Leading to Early Marriage in Girls in Mozambique

What are the factors leading to early marriage among girls in secondary schools in Mozambique? To analyze the factors that lead girls to early marriage, the participants' testimonies point to the following factors: poverty, orphanhood, behavioral factors, knowledge of the law, and sociocultural factors. As the following testimonies attest:

"One of the determinants that make girls vulnerable to early marriage in Mozambique is orphanhood. The orphaned girls face severe difficulties caring for their younger siblings after the death of their biological parents (EP2, 3, and 4, date:

February 26, 2025).

"The cases we've had here at school have highlighted poverty. Other girls have been identified as being orphaned by both parents. In other cases from last year, it was due to behavioral factors, and the parents were reluctant to place premature babies into marriage" (EP2, 3, and 4, date: February 26, 2025).

"There are several factors, but what I've noticed here in Maqueze is a lack of knowledge about the consequences of premature marriage" (EP2, 3, and 4, date: February 26, 2025).

Youth Policy 16/2013 aims to ensure that Mozambican youth live long and healthy lives, based on a combination of health, education, and decent work, a fair wage, and adequate housing. Still within the government, in 2014, then-Prime Minister Alberto Vaquina led the launch of the National Campaign against Premature Births [18].

Considering the assumptions highlighted in the testimonies of participants EP1, EP2, 3, and 4, they highlight poverty as a driver of premature marriage among students, particularly at this school. However, it can be concluded that this problem that promotes these situations is due to the fact that the majority of the population has a low level of education, which undermines the work of teachers, psychologists, and non-governmental organizations in supporting girls' return to school and mitigating these students' low academic performance. This also undermines the effectiveness of psychologists, given that this school lacks a psychologist's office.

What are the reasons that led to premature marriage? According to, premature marriage is a social scourge in the country: it generates high dropout rates in primary schools and leaves most women living in extreme poverty and misery, as it compromises the survival and integral development of children [7]. As the following testimonies attest:

"What led me to marry young was because I got pregnant while still a minor and I could no longer live with my son's father" (E. Alu-3, date: 2/26/2025).

"When I got pregnant, my father told me to go to a nursing home so I could raise my son with his father, because that's our responsibility" (E. Alu-4, date: 2/26/2025).

"It was because I got pregnant and because my parents and I hadn't gotten along very well for a long time" (E. Alu-5, date: 2/26/2025).

"Actually, it was because I got pregnant and was living with my aunt and uncle, who had taken me in when I lost my parents" (E. Alu-6, date: 2/26/2025).

"Due to the various traditional practices and customary rules of a society, many families in Gaza are unable to support their children. While families struggle to provide for their children, some children engage in prostitution, and others marry adult men in the hope of economic gain" (EP5, date: 26.02.2025).

"Due to factors such as poverty and orphanhood, there are also alleged cases in which families encourage children to seek means of support, citing a lack of knowledge of legislation and public policies, as well as sociocultural experiences"

(E. PONG-1, date: 26.02.2025).

The testimonies given by students E. Alu-3 through 6 clearly demonstrate the reasons for forcing girls into premature unions, which overshadow their academic performance and consequently pose educational risks. In this case, the reasons are the pursuit of self-sustainability, whether economic, considering it is the parents' responsibility to ensure their children's well-being. Poverty and respect for cultural values, on the other hand, take precedence. These consequences lead to low academic performance, impacting their continued education, and they must care for the home they are replacing while still a minor. However, from a Piagetian perspective, subjecting minors to sociocultural issues/obligations violates the principles of learning in the human development process, meaning a child should not be considered a miniature adult.

The World Health Organization, notes the persistence of diverse challenges regarding the quality of life of the population in African countries during the reporting period (2015-2016). It notes that "The African Region continues to carry a high burden of disease compared to other regions, and most countries are health-related" [17].

The Mozambican government focuses its actions to combat premature births in urban areas and, with greater difficulty, in rural areas, which may contribute to imbalances in prevalence rates in both areas. Recent studies show that in Mozambique, more premature births were recorded in rural areas than in urban areas [23].

4.3. Analysis of the Academic Performance of Girls in Premature Marriages

This section seeks to analyze the academic performance of the girls in this study. This performance was analyzed by relating child marriage to the students' academic performance.

4.4. Relationship Between Child Marriages and the Academic Performance of Girls in Premature Marriages in Mozambique

Reactively, this topic can be considered a relationship between child marriages and girls' academic performance. However, child marriages directly impact the school process, specifically their academic performance. Girls then have dual responsibilities, involving school and marriage, and this dual responsibility can influence their academic performance.

Particular importance is attached to girls' education because, when taught by a woman, they feel more secure and confident. However, the question arises: What is the relationship between child marriages and the academic performance of girls in premature marriages at school? Girls who drop out do so for a variety of reasons, including: premature pregnancy; becoming mothers; getting married; caring for younger siblings; illness; or poor academic performance. As the following testimonials attest:

"According to my experience in teaching, I've been monitoring the situation since 2023-24, and girls' performance has been low in most of them, almost in many subjects" (EP1, date: February 26, 2025).

"The performance situation has been one of the biggest problems when the end of the quarter arrives, the worst at the end of the year, after which most girls report poor academic performance" (EP3, date: February 26, 2025).

"Honestly, girls have low performance because in some cases they get pregnant, and this creates stress in their lives" (EP4, date: February 26, 2025).

"Managing marriage and school ends up being a major source of stress, anxiety, and depression in the lives of girls in preterm unions, and this impacts their academic performance" (EP5, date: February 26, 2025).

"We are here with the mission of retaining girls in preterm unions so they can achieve better academic performance through logistical assistance, such as providing school supplies and counseling on the use of family planning methods" (E. PONG-1 and 2, date: February 27, 2025).

From this perspective, the interviewees' testimonies clarify that this relationship is challenging for a minor to achieve the desired academic performance when she finds herself in this life situation. Therefore, it is a relationship of dependency that leads to an imbalance in the social and academic lives of girls in preterm unions. Preterm unions lead to premature pregnancies; due to becoming mothers; due to marriage; caring for younger siblings; due to illness; or even poor academic performance. These consequences affect the quality of life of these minors.

Child marriage has two direct effects on education: the first is school dropout, and the second is poor academic performance. In the Gender Strategy for the Education and Human Development Sector 2016-2020, the Ministry of Human Development (MINEDH) notes that as girls grow older, dropout rates increase [15].

Additionally, Article 9.1 of Ministerial Decree No. 46 (2008) establishes at least three annual meetings, which can be reused within the collegiate body to seek better mechanisms to eliminate premature unions, which force girls still in elementary school to drop out, as per the General Regulations for Elementary Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture [18].

What is your understanding of the academic performance of girls in situations of premature unions?

"Since my daughter got married, the school situation has not been as good as before. This has led to her failing classes due to absences and very low grades" (E. EnC-3, date: February 27, 2025).

"My daughter's performance has become a concern since she got married. Getting pregnant early has caused her to fall behind in her studies" (E. EnC-1, date: February 27, 2025).

"My daughter has been complaining to me a lot about her husband's behavior. She was very sad and could barely concentrate at school. My daughter's school situation hasn't been

as good as it used to be since she got married. This led to her failing classes due to absences and very low grades." (E. EnC-2, date: February 27, 2025).

"My daughter's performance has become a concern since she got married, which has caused her to fall behind in her studies." (E. EnC-4, date: February 27, 2025).

According to the interviewees, it is clear that these students' academic performance is unsatisfactory due to the following issues: early pregnancies, many absences and low grades, and the stress of marriage. These circumstances are significant contributors to psychological distress. For a student to perform well at school, they must be provided with a good environment in terms of the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. Even while still pregnant, some girls still try to continue their education, but due to concerns, their academic performance declines, ultimately leading to them dropping out. It reinforces that among the reasons that lead some to drop out of school in these situations are the difficulty in organizing their time to care for their baby, but also possible conservative attitudes on the part of teachers toward teenage mothers, which can increase stigma and discrimination [8].

4.5. Strategies Aimed at Reducing the Rate of Premature Marriage in Secondary Schools in Mozambique

What strategies have been implemented to reduce the rate of premature marriage in secondary schools in Mozambique?

This interconnectedness can be seen in the fact that, within the School Council, meetings have been held between the various stakeholders (school principal, teacher representatives, student representatives, administrative staff representatives, parent and/or guardian representatives, and community representatives) to ensure everyone's participation in developing strategies to address the school's challenges, such as: disseminating planning methods; transferring pregnant students to after-school classes; meetings with all council members; and disseminating legislation on the consequences of premature unions. As evidenced by the following statements:

"The school members have called meetings with those responsible to discuss the consequences of premature unions" (EP5, date: February 26, 2025).

"The school council has encouraged students in this situation not to give up on their studies and to try to complete the year" (EP5, date: February 26, 2024). "One of the strategies for retaining girls in school is to transfer these students to after-school programs so they have more study time" (EP5, date: February 26, 2025).

The National Assembly is expected to discuss and approve this law with the utmost urgency so that the country can (i) prohibit unions with or between children; (ii) adopt measures to end existing child unions; and (iii) define criteria for protecting the rights acquired by children in child unions and their potential children – as stated in the objectives of the aforementioned bill. In addition to advocating for a specific

law against child unions, it would be beneficial to publicize and monitor other laws and programs related to the protection of the sexual and reproductive rights of young people and adolescents [6].

Recognize the prominent role that schools play, arguing that the School Council should be a space for community participation [9].

4.6. Measures to Reduce Low Academic Performance

Are the School Board, guardians, and partners taking measures to reduce the low academic performance rate among girls in preterm marriages? Participants' testimonies point to the following strategies: inviting guardians to school meetings and advising them to avoid these practices. As evidenced by the following statements:

"As parents and the class mother, we raise awareness among guardians to avoid subjecting their children to preterm marriages" (E. MPT1 and 2, date: February 27, 2025).

"As a partner of the school, we have implemented counseling offices for girls and implemented family planning methods" (E. PONG-1 and 2, date: February 27, 2025).

The measures provided in the participants' testimonies, such as calling guardians to school meetings and advising guardians to avoid these practices, may not be as effective without these leaders interacting with community leaders, as not all guardians participate in school meetings. Furthermore, the lack of a psychologist's office to intervene with both the student and guardian also hinders these measures implemented to mitigate premature marriage practices that trigger academic failure and educational risk.

The 2009 National Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Youth Policy 16/2013, and the Strategic Plan of the Geração Biz Program The 2014-2017 Strategic Health Sector Plan (PESS 2014-2019), and, more recently, the letter sent in July 2016 by the President of the Republic of Mozambique to the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding support for the Global Strategy for Children's, Adolescents', and Women's Health and the Investment Case for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health, reiterate that universal access to integrated, quality services and community engagement are essential to meeting the needs of these groups [11].

Recognizing this fact, the Government of Mozambique highlights empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks to increase their knowledge about themselves, the world around them, and their ability to make decisions about their lives as a necessary action to reduce child marriage [19].

4.7. Implications of Child Marriage for Girls' Educational Achievement in Mozambique

Their marriage hinders their academic performance? In

what way? Early marriage not only compromises the future of the girl involved, but also constitutes a serious public health problem. Possible implications include: spontaneous or induced abortions, childhood depression, and obstetric fistula (episiotomy). In worse cases, early marriage has significantly increased maternal and infant mortality.

"Marriage and my academic performance have been a challenge because it's very difficult to manage both under pressure" (E. Student-1, 2, and 3, date: February 26, 2025).

"Sometimes I come to school stressed due to the situation with my husband, and this ends up impacting my attention in class" (E. Student-4, date: February 26, 2025).

"There was a time when I was very critical of myself, thinking and distressed because I was having a crisis with my partner, and the teachers told me I should focus more when I was at school" (E. Student-5, date: February 26, 2025).

"Sometimes I can't manage the situations at home, and this has been hindering my schoolwork" (E. Student-6, date: February 26, 2025).

In support of the above statements, "it is true that early marriage has been a driver of girls' poor academic performance. Therefore, it has implications for a higher incidence of illiteracy/low educational attainment, school dropout/dropout, violations of rights and the human development process, psychological suffering/illness, low self-esteem, and women's dependence."

Early marriage in Mozambique causes many girls to leave their parents' homes. The phenomena of unwanted pregnancies and serious illnesses that can lead to death limit children's ability to continue their education. Instead of dedicating their time to school and play, they assume their new social role, that of wife, and find it difficult to progress [25].

5. Conclusion

The objective of this study is to analyze the academic performance of girls in child marriage in Mozambique. The study concluded that the low academic performance of girls in child marriage is linked to both external and internal factors. Among the external factors, the following stand out: premature marriage, where girls, due to a lack of basic resources, are subjected to premature unions in exchange for favors in the form of money or even material goods, and consequently drop out of school; early pregnancy, where the girl engages in relationships that often culminate in early pregnancy, causing her to drop out of school; and lack of economic conditions, where, lacking basic conditions for food, transportation, and school supplies, the girl drops out of school; and among the internal factors, the lack of interest in school on the part of the girl stands out, because, of her own free will, she decides she no longer wants to study, believing that informal activities will provide her with better conditions. The results reveal the following strategies implemented to retain girls in school: support for students in need with various school supplies; connection between the school and the community, based on

the assumption that the school is within the community and therefore requires a connection between the two; cooperation with government and non-governmental organizations; community awareness of the importance of women's education; lectures on violence, premature unions, teenage pregnancy, and drug use; and distribution of condoms and menstrual management products.

In general, the strategies implemented in Mozambique to retain girls in grades 9 and 10 reflect the reality of the school; in other words, they meet the profile of students at risk of premature unions. Despite this, it is believed that the strategies implemented in the coming years will provide better solutions to combat school dropout in the classes in question and at the school in question.

Abbreviations

PONG	Read as Partners of Non-governmental Organizations
MPT	Read as Mother and Father Class
CCD	Read as Science with Drawing
CCB	Read as Science with Biology
E. P	Interview with the Teacher
E. Alu	Interview with the Student
Lic	Bachelor's Degree

Author Contributions

Isa ás Silvestre Siteo is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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