

Early Marriage on Students' Academic Performance: A Phenomenology In Kalianget, Madura

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Abstract— Early marriage has been an urgent issue and needs to be solved for ages. This might be challenging since the root of this issue is close to our society. It is our social environment which still supports this. However, research shows that early marriage significantly affects various aspects of individuals' lives, especially education. Students who marry at a young age often experience academic decline, limited school attendance, and reduced motivation to pursue further education. This study explores the phenomenon of early marriage and its impact on students' academic performance in Kalianget, Madura, using a phenomenological approach. Interviews with teachers, school counselors, and students reveal how cultural norms, parental support for early marriage, and inadequate awareness contribute to the persistence of this practice. The study highlights the urgent need for collaborative efforts between schools, communities, and policy-makers to raise awareness, empower youth through education, and delay the age of marriage for the betterment of future generations. Findings also suggest that institutional pressure on schools to maintain graduation rates sometimes leads to unethical academic practices, such as inflating student scores, which further distorts the real impact of early marriage on educational outcomes.

Keywords— *early marriage, academic performance, education, cultural norms, phenomenology*

1. Introduction

Currently, people are increasingly choosing education as a means for a better future, both in developing and developed countries. However, not all residents in developing countries have the desire to continue their education after completing secondary school. This is due to the prevailing belief among people around them that education does not contribute positively to their future lives. Based on this belief, this study aims to explore more deeply their academic performance during their schooling years by conducting a phenomenological study in an area of Sumenep, Madura, where early marriage is still prevalent.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Early Marriage for Teenage Girls

Early marriage, often defined as a marital union where one or both partners are below the age of 18, for this, students of junior high school remain a significant global issue, particularly in developing

countries. It is a complex social phenomenon influenced by cultural, economic, religious, and educational factors. Numerous studies have examined the implications of early marriage, highlighting its adverse effects on individuals—particularly young girls—and society as a whole. Cultural traditions and community norms play a central role in perpetuating early marriage. According Idawati et al. (2023) found that inadequate parental involvement and education correlate with increased early marriage rates among adolescents.

Early marriage significantly disrupts educational attainment. According to UNICEF (2018), girls who marry before 18 are more likely to drop out of school and less likely to return after marriage. This lack of education contributes to a cycle of poverty and dependency, limiting women's empowerment and participation in public life.

This continues to pose serious challenges across multiple dimensions, including education, health, and gender equality. While significant progress has been made in raising awareness and implementing laws, efforts must be intensified through education reform, economic support, and community engagement to protect children's rights and ensure a brighter future, especially for girls.

2.2 Early Marriage and Education

Higher educational attainment serves as a deterrent to early marriage. A study conducted in 2024 in Indonesia's rural areas found that girls with only elementary education were 448 times more likely to marry early compared to those with college education. This correlation is attributed to education enhancing girls' autonomy, decision-making capabilities, and awareness of the consequences of early marriage.

In Ethiopia and India, research indicates that continued education delays marriage and empowers girls economically and socially. Education provides girls with skills and knowledge that increase their self-efficacy and reduce reliance on early marriage as a means of economic security. Additionally, a study by SHEQUALITY indicates that each additional year of secondary education can reduce the likelihood of marrying before 18 by at least five percentage points, underscoring the protective role of education.

Meanwhile, In Indonesia, early marriage remains prevalent, especially in rural areas. A study published in Fitria et al. (2024) concluded that education level plays a crucial role in early marriage in Indonesia's rural areas. The higher the education, the lower the probability of experiencing early marriage. Teenage girls in elementary school were found to be significantly more likely to experience early marriage compared to those in college.

2.3 Early Marriage and academic Performance

Early marriage often leads to school dropout, truncating formal education. A study in Indonesia highlighted that teenage girls in elementary school were significantly more likely to experience early marriage compared to their counterparts in higher education levels. This educational disruption limits future prospects (Ebabu et al.,2024).

In regions like Uganda, early marriage significantly affects girls' retention rates in primary schools. A study in Namayingo District concluded that early marriage leads to decreased educational performance

and higher dropout rates among girls (Yaweri, 2025). Meanwhile, in Nigeria, research revealed that early marriage negatively influences academic achievement due to factors like early pregnancy, increased domestic responsibilities, and poverty (Agi & Emelie, 2023). In Indonesia, the prevalence of early marriage among adolescent girls in rural areas was reported at 11.9%. The study found a strong correlation between lower education levels and higher rates of early marriage (Fitria et al., 2024).

3. Method

This research uses qualitative research approach using phenomena study to present the data. This design was chosen due to the result of this research obtain exploration under theories of early marriage amongst teenagers especially in education. This study is conducted using triangulated in-depth interview with counsellor teachers, homeroom teacher and the students whose family background is early marriage. This focus on one of junior high school in Kalianget, Sumenep, Madura.

This method is suitable for this study since according to Maulina & Rejeki (2024) conducting in-depth interview gives better insight to endeavour the impact, for this, it is students' academic performances. Participants' responds make the research result have ample information towards the phenomenon Budiarti & Sugito (2018). The researchers made transcripts of interviews with informants into text for each question to know each respondent's responds. Their responds will draw a conclusion towards the issue being studied.

4. Findings and Discussion

S₁ : "My grandparents have always told me that a woman shouldn't have too strong an educational background, as she might not be able to fulfil her life. Earning a bachelor's degree is more than enough."

S₂ : "People in my community have told me not to take education too seriously, because getting married and living with a financially stable man is considered more important. To this, my mother my mother allows me to get engaged when I was in ninth grade."

Their responds towards the importance of pursuing education up to higher education have the same responds to counsellor' teachers who have been observing their behaviour and academic performance.

CT₁ : "As we have been observing them since their first year of junior high school, we've noticed changes in their behaviour—particularly a decline in their willingness to improve academically. Instead, they have become more interested in buying makeup with their friends. Furthermore, one of our alumni owns a cosmetic shop and offers discounts to our female students with no minimum purchase required."

CT₂ : "Their academic performance has declined since they entered ninth grade. I interviewed the parents of three students whose academic performance is the lowest. Their parents told me that they allow their daughters to date boys. One year later, they had to get engaged to avoid gossip while preparing for their future."

Both counsellor teachers and the students share a similar response pattern—placing education as a second priority and focusing more on their future life with their life partner. However, unlike their homeroom teacher who gave a similar response but showed more disagreement with the idea that this factor is the student's own fault.

HT : *“This is not actually the students' fault; rather, it is their surrounding society that influences them. It is unsurprising that their mindset changes after entering a romantic relationship. Hence, as home room teacher, I always communicate with the counsellor teachers how to deal with this matter.”*

Students' Behaviour at school

CT 1 : *“Every morning the counsellor teachers stand in front of the basketball court to greet students and inquire about their current emotional state. We also inspect their uniforms and school-related accessories. It was observed that some female students wore nail art, which is not permitted.”*

CT 2: *“Male and female students begin to show changes in behaviour when they reach the ninth grade, as many of them enter romantic relationships with their parents' consent. As a result, it is not surprising to see them spending quality time with their partners at school.”*

CT 1: *“These students tend not to take school rules seriously, as they receive support from their parents. Consequently, when they violate the rules, they show little concern. For them, being happy with their partner takes priority over following school regulations.”*

Academic Performance

Their academic performance has declined, as they no longer put in as much effort as they did during their first year of junior high school. This decline is partly due to the fact that their parents have already made future preparations for them.

HT: *“Since the government mandates an increase in students' scores as a prerequisite for senior high school admission, I, as the homeroom teacher, have instructed all subject teachers to ensure that my class receives at least the minimum required scores in line with government policy for the entrance examination.”*

CT 1: *“We understand that this is unacceptable for a professional educator to do. However, these students have been influenced by their social environment, making it difficult to change their mindset.”*

Different and surprising responds were given by the students about academic performance. This might not be mentioned in any interview since they are aware of the consequences; however, in Kalianget, it has become something normal.

ST1: *“My boyfriend always invites me to go out with him on Fridays and Sundays. Sometimes we skip school during school hours because we believe that grades and graduation are the school's responsibility. The school would be embarrassed if they do not let us graduate.”*

Common factors of early marriage which has been widely known are poverty and women have an age limit for getting married. This also influenced by inadequate information they get especially those who live in developed country (Maniar et al., 2018). Moreover, their research showed that the number of early marriages is increasing because information is not widely spread. This is the root of the problem faced by today's generation, as the elderly people in that environment still believe that marrying a rich man is better than having a good education.

Furthermore, (Subramanee et al., 2022) add that social environment pressure gives big impact. To this, they are pushed to engage as soon as they graduate from junior high school and married after they graduate from senior high school.

The reason in each year is the same. It is their parents who allow them to have serious relationship to hinder their children from gossip. Although this lead them to their behaviour change which gives negative impact to their academic performance, they never put their attention. This burden their teachers at school because of their behaviour at school. This happen as they are surrounded by people who do not get ample education (Sagalova et al., 2021) hence they get support from their family.

Providing proper education level for society in Kalianget to give awareness to students should be applied. This is supported by (Naghizadeh et al., 2021) to change the students' mindset. However, (Islam & Zaini, 2023) suggest to have access to education, the informal one where everyone gets equal access to education to broaden their horizon of education. (Marphatia et al., 2020) strongly support that it prevents students from early marriage, which in reality leads to a future that does not align with what has been described by their parents or people around them

Dishonesty in the education sector has created a new issue, when in fact, it should serve as a means to help prevent students from being exposed to one of the contributing factors of early marriage Fitriyani (2021). However, the teachers do not help the students to do that since they have to help the students to prevent this, but the students do not pay attention to what the teachers have tried.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that early marriage significantly affects students' academic performance in Kalianget, Madura. Through a phenomenological approach, it was found that students who entered into early marriage experienced a sharp decline in academic focus, motivation, and achievement. Many of them struggled to balance the responsibilities of married life with school demands.

The findings also highlight that early marriage is not solely a personal choice but is deeply rooted in cultural norms, family expectations, and socioeconomic pressures. In many cases, parents' approval and societal acceptance of young marriages create a belief among students that marriage can be prioritized over education. This social reality, when left unchallenged, leads to the normalization of early marriage, even at the expense of education.

To address this issue, it is crucial to implement community-based awareness programs, strengthen collaboration between schools and parents, and provide support systems for married students to continue

their education. Policies must also be enforced to discourage early marriage and promote girls' and boys' right to complete their schooling without the pressure of early adult responsibilities.

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