



Women's Subjective Experience in Accessing Education in Marginalized Communities: A Case Study in Urban Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The study of cultural and linguistic diversity is crucial in understanding how multicultural communities maintain their heritage while adapting to urban environments. This study seeks to answer the research question: How do individuals in multicultural urban settings preserve their cultural and linguistic identities amid external pressures and challenges? In this context, the subjective experiences of individuals in preserving their cultural and linguistic identity remain an underexplored aspect of social integration. Existing research has primarily relied on quantitative approaches, which often fail to capture the depth of personal experiences and the nuanced meanings attached to cultural preservation. This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals in multicultural urban settings, revealing how they navigate cultural and linguistic diversity. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the findings indicate that personal narratives play a significant role in shaping identity, social belonging, and intergroup interactions. Additionally, participants' experiences highlight the challenges and adaptive strategies used to sustain cultural and linguistic heritage amid external pressures. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of multiculturalism by emphasizing the subjective and emotional dimensions of cultural preservation, offering valuable implications for social policies and urban planning.



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INTRODUCTION

Access to education remains a critical issue globally, particularly for marginalized groups such as women living in urban poverty. Despite the existence of various policies aimed at promoting gender equality in education, women in marginalized urban communities often face significant barriers that impede their educational attainment (Ahmad dkk., 2021). These barriers are deeply rooted in social, economic, and cultural factors that perpetuate inequality. Socially constructed gender norms, economic limitations, and cultural expectations frequently undermine women's educational opportunities, limiting their potential for social mobility and broader participation in societal development.

The concept of gender inequality in education has been widely discussed in both global and local contexts. However the experiences of women in marginalized urban settings require particular attention, as these women face compounded challenges due to socio-economic disadvantage and geographic isolation. Previous research has highlighted the role of structural barriers such as economic hardship, lack of access to educational resources, and deeply ingrained cultural practices that prioritize male education over female education (Castañeda, 2017; Suryati & Rizki, 2019). Additionally, urban poverty in many developing countries exacerbates these challenges, creating an environment where education is often seen as a secondary concern in the face of daily survival needs.

While these factors have been studied extensively, there is still a gap in understanding the subjective experiences of women navigating these barriers (Altman dkk., 2020). The experiences of marginalized women are often reduced to general trends or statistics, with little exploration of how they personally make sense of and respond to the obstacles they face. The use of phenomenology in research allows for a deeper understanding of these subjective experiences by focusing on the meanings that individuals attribute to their lives and challenges. By exploring the lived experiences of women in marginalized urban communities, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which these women navigate their educational journeys and make sense of the obstacles they encounter.

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge by providing a rich, detailed exploration of the lived experiences of women in accessing education in urban settings. Through a phenomenological lens, it seeks to understand how these women interpret their educational experiences within the context of gender inequality and social marginalization, offering insights that may inform both policy and practice aimed at improving educational access and equity.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals within specific phenomena has become a crucial area within the field of phenomenology, particularly in understanding the complexities of marginalized groups. In the context of gender and education, numerous studies have sought to document the barriers that women in marginalized communities face in accessing education. However, much of the existing research remains limited in its ability to capture the depth and nuances of these experiences (Cupid dkk., 2024). Traditional quantitative approaches, which often rely on large sample sizes and statistical measures, are unable to adequately reflect the subjective meanings and personal interpretations that women attach to their educational experiences. These methods may provide useful data on general trends or barriers, but they fall short when it comes to understanding the lived realities and inner experiences of individuals who encounter multiple layers of disadvantage.

Phenomenological research, by contrast, offers a more effective way to uncover the meanings women assign to their educational challenges and opportunities. This approach allows for a rich, descriptive exploration of personal narratives and the ways in which individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences. However, conducting phenomenological research in the context of marginalized communities presents significant methodological challenges. One of the key challenges is the difficulty of accessing participants who may feel distrustful of researchers or hesitant to share their personal experiences due to stigma or social norms. Additionally, the subjective nature of phenomenological data requires careful attention to detail during both data collection and analysis, as the researcher must remain open to the participants' perspectives without imposing external frameworks or assumptions.

Despite these challenges, phenomenology provides an invaluable tool for exploring the deeper dimensions of educational inequality that are often overlooked by other methods. It allows researchers to engage with participants in ways that reveal not only the barriers they face but also their strategies for coping, their hopes for the future, and their interpretations of social policies. Thus, phenomenological methods are particularly suited to capturing the essence of the experiences of women in marginalized urban communities, providing insights that are both profound and directly linked to the lived reality of these women.

While existing research on women's access to education in marginalized communities provides valuable insights, most studies tend to rely on practical, often quantitative, approaches that emphasize general trends and statistical correlations. These studies, while helpful in identifying patterns and barriers, typically fail to capture the deep, subjective meanings that women ascribe to their educational experiences. For example, many studies focus on the structural barriers to education, such as economic hardship or cultural norms, but they do not fully explore how women interpret these barriers or how these experiences shape their sense of self and agency (Das Gupta, 2024). Furthermore, the use of standard survey instruments or large-scale data analysis tends to reduce the richness of individual narratives, limiting the ability to understand the personal, emotional, and psychological dimensions of these women's experiences.

The limitation of these common approaches underscores the need for a more nuanced exploration that can reveal the complexity of these women's lives. A phenomenological approach,

with its focus on lived experience and subjective meaning, offers an alternative that can capture the essence of the phenomenon in a more holistic and detailed manner. By focusing on how women make sense of their educational challenges and opportunities, phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of the intersection between gender, marginalization, and education. This approach not only uncovers the layers of personal experience but also highlights how societal and cultural factors influence individual perceptions and actions in ways that are often overlooked in conventional research. Therefore, the need for phenomenological exploration becomes apparent, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of marginalized women, thus providing insights that are richer and more meaningful than those generated by traditional methods.

Previous research has extensively examined the barriers that women in marginalized urban communities face when accessing education, often focusing on structural factors such as economic hardship and cultural norms. Studies have employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore these challenges, yet they tend to emphasize objective data rather than the subjective meanings that individuals assign to their experiences (Dejene dkk., 2024). Theoretical frameworks, such as gender theory and social inclusion, have been instrumental in analyzing how social norms and gendered expectations influence educational outcomes. However, these studies often lack a deeper exploration into how women personally interpret and respond to these obstacles, leaving a gap in understanding the lived experiences of those directly affected by these issues.

To address this gap, a phenomenological approach is proposed for this study. This methodology is uniquely suited to uncover the subjective experiences of women, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their personal interpretations and the meanings they attach to their educational journeys. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals, offering insights into how they make sense of their challenges and navigate their educational paths. By focusing on these personal narratives, the study seeks to provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the intersection between gender, marginalization, and education, answering the call for deeper exploration highlighted in the Knowledge Gap section.

The structure of this article is designed to guide the reader through a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon under study. Following the introduction, which sets the stage for the research, the article outlines the context of the educational barriers faced by marginalized women. The methodology section explains the phenomenological approach used to collect and analyze data, followed by a detailed description of the data collection process, including interviews and observations (El Sayed & Hotait, 2024). Data analysis is presented through thematic analysis, highlighting key findings, and the discussion explores the implications of these findings for policy and practice. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of the insights gained and recommendations for future research.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study adopted a phenomenological approach, which is particularly suitable for exploring the lived experiences and subjective meanings that individuals assign to specific phenomena. The choice of phenomenology as the research design is grounded in its emphasis on understanding how participants perceive and make sense of their world, specifically focusing on their educational experiences in marginalized urban communities. By prioritizing the participants' subjective experiences, phenomenology enables an in-depth exploration of the complexities surrounding gender, social exclusion, and access to education. This approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for a rich description of the meaning that women ascribe to their educational challenges and opportunities (Foresheew & Al-Jawad, 2022). The study employs an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, which seeks to understand how individuals interpret their personal and social worlds. IPA facilitates a nuanced understanding of the ways in which social, cultural, and economic factors shape the participants' experiences of educational marginalization.

Participants

The participants in this study were women living in marginalized urban communities in Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select individuals who met specific inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria required participants to be adult women (aged 18 and above) who had experienced barriers to accessing education due to social, economic, or cultural factors within their communities (Hauser, 2021). The exclusion criteria were women who had completed higher education or those who did not reside in marginalized urban areas. In total, 10 women participated in the study, which was deemed an adequate sample size for qualitative phenomenological research based on data saturation principles. The decision to select 10 participants was informed by the need to balance depth with manageability while ensuring that sufficient variation in experiences was captured. The sample size allows for a thorough examination of individual experiences while ensuring that the study remains focused and feasible within the scope of a qualitative approach. This sample size was sufficient to achieve data saturation, where no new themes emerged after the 8th to 10th interview, indicating that the data was rich and comprehensive enough to support robust findings. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 45 years, and they varied in terms of educational attainment, with most having completed only primary or secondary education. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the different factors influencing women's access to education in marginalized urban contexts.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and direct observations. The interviews were designed to capture the participants' personal narratives regarding their experiences with education, focusing on how they perceive the barriers and opportunities they encounter. The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions that prompted participants to reflect on their educational experiences, challenges, and the role of social policies in supporting their educational aspirations (Lambert dkk., 2022). Interviews were conducted individually and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. They took place in locations that were familiar and comfortable for the participants, such as their homes or community centers, to ensure an atmosphere of trust and openness. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Additionally, field observations were made to contextualize the verbal accounts, focusing on the educational environment in the community and the social dynamics affecting women's participation in education.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which emphasizes the identification of key themes that reflect the participants' lived experiences. The process of analysis involved several steps: first, the interview transcripts were read and re-read to gain a deep understanding of the individual experiences. Following this, initial codes were generated, highlighting significant statements related to the barriers and facilitators of women's education. These codes were then organized into broader themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences (Mendenhall dkk., 2019). The analysis also involved a process of interpretation, where the researcher sought to understand the meaning behind participants' accounts within the social, cultural, and economic contexts of their lives. The themes that emerged from the data were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The analysis was facilitated using NVivo software to assist with organizing and managing the data, but the primary focus remained on the thematic analysis of the interview and observation data.

Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, with participants being provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. All interviews and observations were conducted in a manner that prioritized the

participants' privacy and confidentiality (Nadkk., 2024). The participants' identities were anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in the reporting of the findings. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the institution and complied with both local and international standards of research ethics, ensuring that participants' rights and well-being were respected throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Stereotypes and Social Expectations

A predominant theme that emerged from the interviews was the influence of gender stereotypes and societal expectations on women's access to education. Many participants expressed how traditional roles ascribed to women within their families and communities limited their educational opportunities. One participant shared:

"My family expects me to take care of the household chores and the children, and when I try to study, they say it's a waste of time because a woman's place is at home."— Participant 4

Such societal expectations were not limited to family pressure but were also reflected in broader community attitudes, where education for girls was often deprioritized in favor of more immediate economic contributions, such as working in informal labor sectors. However, a deeper analysis reveals how these gendered expectations intersect with other factors, such as class and economic status. For instance, lower-income families may see educational investment as less viable for girls, particularly when their labor is seen as necessary for immediate survival. The consequences of these intersections were evident in the experiences of participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who not only faced societal gender biases but also economic pressures to contribute to the family income. These gender norms created significant barriers to women's participation in educational activities, with some even abandoning their studies to meet familial responsibilities.

Economic Barriers and Educational Accessibility

The second key theme that emerged from the interviews concerned the economic challenges women face in accessing education. Participants highlighted the financial constraints that made pursuing education difficult, despite the availability of some supportive policies like scholarships for marginalized women. Participant 8 elaborated:

"Even with scholarships available, the cost of materials, transportation, and sometimes even the pressure of needing to earn a living prevent me from fully committing to my studies. It's a constant struggle."— Participant 8

This sentiment was echoed by several other participants, who noted that while financial assistance was a helpful factor, it rarely covered all the expenses associated with education. As a result, many women were forced to prioritize immediate economic survival over long-term educational goals.

Policy Support and Government Interventions

The role of government policies in supporting women's education emerged as a significant theme. Many participants acknowledged that various government programs, such as scholarships and affirmative action policies for marginalized communities, had provided them with opportunities they might not otherwise have had. However, there was also recognition of the gaps in policy implementation at the grassroots level. One participant shared:

"The government offers scholarships for women like me, but there are too many bureaucratic hurdles, and the process is not always clear. Sometimes, I feel like I am being excluded from the opportunities that are supposed to be available to us."— Participant 2

This view suggests that while policies exist to support women's education, the actual implementation is often flawed, limiting their effectiveness. The observations in the field reinforced

this point, as it was clear that access to educational resources was uneven, particularly in areas where schools were underfunded or lacked the facilities to support female students.

The Impact of Community Support and Social Networks

Finally, a crucial theme in the study was the role of community support and social networks in shaping women's educational experiences. Several participants reported that, despite the challenges they faced, their involvement in supportive community networks helped them to persist in their educational pursuits. Participant 6 explained:

"My neighbors and friends encourage me to keep studying, even when things get tough. Without their support, I would have given up a long time ago."— Participant 6

These informal support systems were often a source of resilience for the participants, helping them navigate the challenges posed by traditional gender roles and economic constraints. The importance of solidarity within the community played a pivotal role in overcoming educational barriers.

In summary, the data reveal that the subjective experiences of women in accessing education within marginalized urban communities are shaped by a combination of gender-based discrimination, economic challenges, and the limitations of policy implementation. While some government initiatives have provided support, they are not always sufficient or effectively implemented at the local level. Additionally, gender stereotypes and economic barriers continue to play significant roles in limiting women's access to education. However, the study also highlights the positive impact of community support and social networks, which provide crucial encouragement for women to continue their educational journeys despite these challenges.

The primary findings of this study reveal that women in marginalized urban communities experience significant barriers to education, not only due to structural factors like economic constraints but also due to deeply ingrained social and cultural norms. The women's experiences, as uncovered through the phenomenological analysis, highlight how these barriers are not simply external obstacles but are interwoven with their personal sense of self, identity, and agency. The study provides an in-depth understanding of how these women navigate educational challenges, underscoring the importance of recognizing the subjective meanings they attach to their experiences. This insight directly addresses the core research question about the lived experiences of women in accessing education within marginalized communities.

The findings contribute to our understanding of the complex interplay between gender, marginalization, and education by showing that the barriers these women face are not only tangible (such as financial hardship or lack of resources) but also deeply psychological and social. The study illuminates the emotional and cognitive processes involved in navigating these barriers, demonstrating that women often develop personal coping mechanisms that allow them to persist in the face of adversity (Pollack, 2020). These mechanisms include redefining their roles within their families and communities, as well as finding strength in solidarity with other women. By exploring these subjective dimensions, the study offers a richer, more holistic view of the challenges and strategies that are often overlooked in traditional research. This underscores the necessity of focusing on lived experiences to fully comprehend the complexities of educational exclusion in marginalized communities.

When compared to previous research, these findings both support and extend existing theories of gender and education. Previous studies have highlighted economic and cultural barriers to education, but few have delved into the emotional and subjective dimensions of these obstacles. The present study aligns with feminist theoretical frameworks that emphasize the intersectionality of gender and social status, but it also challenges the notion that structural barriers alone determine educational outcomes. It adds depth to the literature by showing how personal agency, within the context of gender and social norms, plays a critical role in shaping educational experiences. This research complements work by scholars like [Author] (Year) and [Author] (Year), who have explored the role of subjective experience in educational inequality, but it expands on their findings by focusing specifically on women's experiences in urban marginalization. These insights are crucial for

developing policies and interventions that not only address external barriers but also engage with the internal, personal narratives of marginalized women.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications for understanding the educational barriers faced by women in marginalized urban communities. From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches the existing literature on gender, marginalization, and education by emphasizing the subjective experiences of women, which have often been overlooked in quantitative or structural studies. The insight that social and cultural norms profoundly shape how women perceive and respond to educational barriers calls for a more nuanced approach in policy and practice. On a practical level, the findings suggest that policies aimed at increasing educational access for marginalized women must go beyond economic support and address the social and cultural dynamics that influence educational decisions (Nagaraj & Theboral, 2024). For example, creating educational programs that also challenge gendered stereotypes and offer a supportive community for women could facilitate greater participation and retention in education. The study also underscores the importance of community-based interventions that recognize the emotional and psychological dimensions of educational exclusion.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size, consisting of only ten women from a specific urban setting in Indonesia, may not fully represent the experiences of all women in marginalized communities across different regions or countries. Moreover, the focus on a specific demographic group, namely women facing educational barriers, limits the generalizability of the findings to other marginalized groups or to men within similar contexts (Patchen dkk., 2024). Additionally, the use of phenomenology, while providing deep insights into personal experiences, may not capture the broader systemic structures that also contribute to educational inequality. These limitations suggest that further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to expand upon the findings and assess their applicability to other populations and contexts.

Future Research Directions

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research. Given the limitations in sample size and scope, future studies could include larger and more diverse groups of women from different geographic locations, such as rural areas or other urban contexts, to explore whether the findings hold across different populations. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track the experiences of women over time could provide further insights into how educational barriers evolve and how coping mechanisms change (Perez-Brumer dkk., 2021). Researchers could also investigate the role of men and boys in the educational experiences of marginalized women, particularly in communities where gender dynamics are particularly pronounced. Finally, future studies could explore the intersectionality of gender with other factors, such as age, disability, or ethnicity, to better understand the compounded effects of multiple forms of marginalization. These directions could significantly contribute to the development of more inclusive educational policies and interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on exploring the subjective experiences of women in marginalized urban communities in Indonesia as they navigate barriers to education. The findings reveal that economic constraints, gendered expectations, and social-cultural norms are the primary barriers limiting women's access to education, and these factors are deeply interconnected. Economic constraints, such as the cost of materials, transportation, and the need to contribute financially to the household, are compounded by gendered expectations that prioritize women's roles in domestic chores and caregiving. These traditional gender roles create an environment where women's education is seen as secondary to their familial responsibilities, particularly in lower-income communities. Additionally, social-cultural norms often reinforce these gendered expectations, further marginalizing women's educational aspirations. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the study provides deep insights

into the personal and emotional dimensions of educational exclusion, offering a more holistic understanding than previous quantitative research. These findings highlight the need for policies that address not only economic barriers but also the cultural and social factors that hinder women's educational participation. Future research could expand on these results by incorporating broader, more diverse samples or by examining the impact of intersectionality on educational opportunities. Ultimately, this study lays the groundwork for more inclusive educational policies and interventions tailored to the unique needs of marginalized women.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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