

Examining Gender Safety in Schools: Teacher Agency and Resistance in Two Primary Schools in Kirinyaga, Kenya

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Abstract:

This article introduces Stein, Tolman, Porche, and Spencer's concept of gender safety in schools (GSS) as a useful framework for providing a gendered analysis of safety and equality at the school level within the global context of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 goal of equitable, inclusive and quality education for all. This article examines practices that support as well as undermine GSS in two primary schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. In these schools, individual teacher agency was the main factor enhancing GSS. Teachers' efforts were, however, constrained by competing discourses emphasizing hierarchical administration and a narrow understanding of the school's responsibilities. Teacher agency, therefore, was insufficient to systematically protect students and foster gender equity. The article suggests that teacher agency to enhance GSS in Kenya could be expanded through teachers' collective empowerment using community-based networks alongside the integration of monitoring and evaluation processes in existing gender equality and child protection policies. It further recommends the GSS framework as a means for monitoring SDG 4's commitments to gender equality and child protection in schools.

Keywords: child protection; gender equality; gender safety; gender violence; Kirinyaga County; Kenya; primary education; teacher agency

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