

**Promoting gender equality through the community involving culturally relevant, mother-tongue based bi/multilingual early childhood education.**

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Gender equity in educational opportunities and achievement goes beyond ensuring girls' and boys' access to schooling. In the Majority World, even when opportunities for schooling are available, there are persisting lower rates of girls' school enrolment, attendance, grade levels completed, and benefit in terms of relevance to their lives. This presentation identifies necessary components of strategies to promote educational attainment, especially for the large populations of girls globally whose primary and often only language at the point of school entry is a home language that is not the medium of formal instruction (often a minoritized or indigenous language).

Girls are less likely than boys to acquire the language used in formal schooling and parents are less likely to send their girls to school unless they see that the teaching methods and curriculum content is transparently meaningful to them. Studies have documented widespread parental support for bilingual primary school programmes. Regarding girls, parents are more receptive to formal schooling when steps are taken to involve the parents in identifying valued goals for girls' education and the kind of knowledge and skills that girls will use in their adulthood. Accumulating evidence has also demonstrated the potential for mother tongue-based bilingual early childhood programmes to enhance oral language skills overall, support emergent literacy, increase children's confidence as learners, and provide the foundation for bi/multilingual acquisition. These foundational experiences can promote school enrolment, ensure a successful transition to formal schooling, and increase parent participation and influence in favour of girls' sustained educational engagement. Research on transition-to-school programmes has also provided strong support for additive bilingual approaches that support the acquisition of academic literacy in the home language, while also gradually introducing a second, regional or national, language, first as a subject of study and later as a medium of teaching and learning. This presentation highlights the implications of these findings for early learning programming and language-in-education policies.