

East Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

Newsletter Issue No. 7: December 2010 / January 2011

In focus: The importance of gender, education and language

Special edition—most of the articles in this newsletter were based on presentations made at the International Conference on Language, Education and the MDGs, November 2010

Promoting gender equity through mother-tongue based bi/multilingual education

By: Jessica Ball, University of Victoria, Canada

Gender equity in educational opportunities and achievement goes beyond ensuring girls' and boys' access to schooling. In the East Asia and Pacific region, even when opportunities for schooling are available, there are often persisting lower rates of girls' school enrolment, attendance, grade levels completed, and benefit in terms of relevance to their lives. One of the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action is to ensure that by 2015, all children, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances, and children from ethnic minorities, have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality (UNESCO, 2000). Another goal calls for higher literacy rates, particularly among women. For large populations of girls in the East Asia and Pacific region, at the point of school entry, their primary – and often only – language is a home language that is not the medium of formal instruction (often a minoritized or Indigenous language) (Kosonen, 2005). This is one of the biggest barriers to achieving Education for All.



Two Lil'wat girls playing together. Photo provided by author.

Among the necessary strategies to promote educational attainment by all children, consideration must be given to making schooling accessible to girls – and to their families – by providing for mother-tongue based education during the transition to school and during the four or five years of formal schooling that typically culminate in being able to read to learn. 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 teaching methods and curriculum content is transparently meaningful to them.

Studies have documented widespread parent support for bilingual primary school programs (Benson, 2002; Hovens, 2002). With regards to girls, parents are more receptive to formal schooling for their daughters when steps are taken to involve parents in identifying valued goals for girls' education and the kinds of knowledge and skills that girls will use in their adulthood. Accumulating evidence also demonstrates the potential for mother-tongue based bilingual early childhood programs to enhance oral language skills overall, support emergent literacy, increase children's confidence as learners, and provide the foundation for bi/multilingual acquisition (Baker, 2001). These foundational developments support educational achievement and increase parent participation and influence in favour of girls' sustained educational engagement (Benson, 2002).

Policies that promote mother tongue-based education often stimulate conditions beyond language that are also conducive to participation by girls.

Some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Papua New Guinea (Ahai & Bopp, 1993), have shown improved outcomes for girls when the mother tongue is the medium of instruction in the first three years of school or longer. Research on transition-to-school programs have 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 an medium of teaching and learning (Cummins, 2001).

Policies that promote mother tongue-based education often stimulate conditions beyond language that are also conducive to participation by girls. For example, privileging the mother tongue typically calls for recruiting teachers who originate in the local community and share some local cultural knowledge and forms of interaction. Girls tend to learn better and demonstrate their skills more readily when they can identify with the teacher. As well, parents are more receptive to a teacher who is fluent in the mother tongue, and the teacher may be more likely to treat girls with respect and to be vigilant against exploitation of girls at school. Local teachers who teach in the mother tongue are more likely to be seen by girls as inspirational role models. Policies that authorize and encourage mother tongue-based education at all levels from early childhood to tertiary education can lead the way for more systemic changes that provide meaningful, supportive learning environments and outcomes for girls.

For more information please contact [Jessica Ball](#), University of Victoria, Canada.

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Girl power | Girls changing the society of India: Anuradha's story

By: Anuradha, Samskar-Plan Nizamabad

"I didn't know what happens in India. After I heard your talk, I think I have to learn a lot of things. I am still a child, but I want to change the world. I want to help many children and work for them like Plan. I firmly believe that we can change the world" - Miki Kajiya, Japanese student, comment after Anuradha's presentation.

I visited Japan from 17 February to 3 March 2010, along with Hemalata Rawat from Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP-Plan). We participated in a seminar on "Girl Power - Girls Changing the Society of India" in Tokyo, organized by Plan Japan. In the seminar we shared about Indian girls' situation and showed films that we made. We participated in related activities including seminars in Nagasaki and Kobe cities. We visited Japanese government schools, private schools, and universities in Tokyo, showed our films, shared the issues of Indian girls, and answered all of their queries. The above comment is from one of the schoolgirls.

Visiting Japan was a great experience for me. A girl from a remote village (Baswapur of Andhra Pradesh) traveling to Japan and participating in several seminars and meetings in major cities of Japan is not a joke. Actually, I was a school drop-out. Because I am a girl, my parents made me stay at home to take care of my siblings and do other household chores. The staff of Samskar identified me. They counseled my parents and enrolled me in a school. Now, I completed my secondary education (tenth standard) at Samskar Ashrama Vidyalayam at Varni.

At present I am studying for a Diploma in Electronics and Communications Engineering at the Government Polytechnic College, Nizamabad. I am sad that very few girls are attending secondary school and above in my village, but I am fortunate to be one of those who has the opportunity to attend. By participating in the Children's Club activities and trainings, I have developed my leadership qualities, confidence, capacities and I am



Anuradha empowering others by sharing her experiences. Photo provided by author.

very vocal. After my visit to Japan, I realized what girl power is. Some of the perceptions I had of women have changed. In Japan, women are driving heavy motor vehicles like big containers, buses, trucks, trains, etc. I learnt the value of time, time management, the value of work and to show love and affection to fellow human beings. I started practicing what I learnt from Japan – empowerment of girls/women, equality and self-recognition. My confidence level has increased.

I have gained recognition in my college and in my area. On the eve of International Women's Day on 8 March 2010, government officials of Kotagiri Mandal invited me and honored me in the presence of 500 women, Mandal Officials, and PRI members. I shared my experiences from Japan with them. In my talk, I requested that mothers treat their girl children equal to boys. I also requested them to postpone their girl children's marriage and educate them. After my visit, well reputed Telugu newspapers covered my experiences in Japan. Saakshi TV channel interviewed me. I feel that my responsibilities have increased. Whatever job I do, wherever I live, I am determined to work for women's development. With the support of Samskar and Plan I have come to this stage. Many children like me are growing as empowered people. I'd like to thank all the people who supported me, especially Samskar and Plan.

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Moving from silence to speech: The role of language in women empowerment in the Indian Desert

By: Jaya Kritika Ojha, Indian Institute of Technology-Roorkee

The Thar, Desert of Rajasthan in India makes the lives of women more complex and challenging due to its harsh terrain and extreme temperatures. Amidst this though, the journey of Urmul's producer groups of 'Thari' women (Indo-Pak war refugees from Pakistan) is a journey from silence to speech. The unique skill these 'Thari' women have is *Sindhi Kadhai*, a special kind of embroidery of Sindh, Pakistan. They embroider beautifully and they know their traditional craft very well. They laugh, they sing, they weave the threads of colours into vibrant designs, they create and produce beautiful hand embroidered apparels, and learn to understand the dynamics of the markets.

Language as a life skill involves negotiation of power. Samubai, Parobai, Ramku, Kely and Babribai are amongst the many women of Thar desert, who have learnt language-communication skills through developmental media, theme-based communication techniques, audio-visual and interactive learning material. They now speak against discrimination, and motivate themselves to have a greater participation in decision-making, to develop life skills, to inculcate leadership and strengthen self image.



Empowered Thari women continuing the traditions of Thari language, art and culture. Photo provided by author.

They understand the meaning of many technical words and use them frequently in their mother tongue 'Thari'. They also speak Marwari, Hindi and some English. The interplay of these languages has enriched their own vocabulary in Thari and has widened their world view. Their meetings and interactions with their coordinators and designers of international fame have also given them opportunities to enter in the new world of buyers. When these women artisans go in women conferences they confidently express themselves in their own dialect Thari, sing their own songs, narrate stories of their past. Deep rooted in their culture and strong footed in their own language Thari, these erstwhile refugees, are proving their worth as an important segment of their present society. They are continuing the traditions of Thari

language, art and culture, are also aware of the importance of the professional language to capture market for their unique products.

In 1992, a developmental organisation Urmul Seemant working in the western Rajasthan took notice of the skills of these Pakistan-refugee women and supported them in terms of mobilisation, skill upgradation, technical support, and national and international market linkages for their creative handicraft. The collective efforts of Urmul personals and Pakistan-refugee women artisans were supported by eminent designers from prestigious organisations in India like National Institute of Design and NIFT. From 1992 to 2010 it has been a long way for these *Thari* women, from local to global markets, a journey from silence to speech. It is fascinating to see these rural women without *Ghunghat* (veil), and wonderful to see that men of the families are supportive to them. Some now help in the kitchen, as their wives are busy in embroidery work and their daughters are studying in schools.

It is quite visible that these women artisans feel excited when their work is admired by the designers, promoters and buyers. They feel confident that they are a part of the process of income generation. They understand and are comfortable to speak about their business. It is also clearly visible that the status of these women artisans has increased in their families due to their major contribution in increasing the incomes of family, their exposure of the outer world and their capacity to deal with it with confidence.

These women have their own modes of expressions. They have learnt how to communicate effectively. When these women express, they enjoy their freedom. This develops in them capacity of leadership, negotiation, participation, decision making. The women of Thar are raising their voices to break the age old silence with their speech.

For more information please contact [Jaya Kritika Ojha](#), Indian Institute of Technology-Roorkee.

Gender-based social constraints associated with language in Punjabi society

By: Muhammad Babar Qureshi & Sayed Kazim Shah, G.C. University Faisalabad (Department of Applied Linguistics)

A recent study by the G.C. University Faisalabad explored the variations in language due to gender-based social constraints in Punjabi society in Pakistan. Through a questionnaire, the research looked at the use of language forms (assertive, apologetic, declarative, requesting and imperative) and gender roles based on economic status, professional status, family roles, class status and social settings.

The main findings of the study suggest that social constraints, particularly for women in Punjabi society, have an influence on the use of language. Women tend to use more polite language and declarative forms while only a few used imperative and assertive forms. Generally, women in Punjabi society have to be more conscientious while talking to males irrespective of their status.

One part of the study compared the use of language by males and females in the private sphere. A few decades ago, women in Punjabi society were not expected to use declarative and assertive forms of language with their husbands. Today however, education has changed this scenario by raising levels of confidence and self-esteem. It is now common for females to use more declarative forms of language with their husbands. Males were previously expected to use imperative forms of language with their sisters and wives, but this trend has also changed in that males from educated classes in Punjabi society use more declarative and sometimes requesting forms of language. An example of this is a man asking his sister or wife,



“can you please bring my shoes?” rather than using a more demanding language. Despite these changes, familial roles in Punjabi society still restrict a females’ use of language while males practice a more liberal form.

The study also compared the use of language by men and women in the workplace. Social constraints hinder the adaptation of different forms of language to males and females in Punjabi society even though they are educated and working. Females usually use declarative, requesting or apologetic forms of language when

talking to their male boss, students, colleagues and subordinates. These forms are adopted on the basis of gender irrespective of the male's social status.

Males on the other hand use more declarative language forms with their bosses, imperative forms with students, and declarative forms with their colleagues and subordinates. In their social and economic roles, males are more direct in their communication as compared to females due to social constraints. Females face more constraints when communicating with their male colleagues and tend to use declarative forms of language with other females while males use different forms of language depending upon the situation. In general, females use different forms of language depending upon the situation and the nature of their job. For instance, a male would say to his boss, "Sir, I am leaving to pick my children from school" while a female would say, "Sir, may I go to pick my children from school because they are waiting for me".

This research can potentially open up new vistas for further research in the area of language and gender in Punjabi society. Some areas of interest for further research include gender-based code-mixing, code switching and the use of certain vocabulary items by opposite genders in the same situations in Punjabi society.

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Malawi proverbs in Chichewa language

By: Juliet Kamwendo, University of Botswana

This article summarizes a research paper that analyzed Malawi proverbs in Chichewa (Chichewa is the national language of Malawi). The aim of the research was to gauge the potential of Malawian Chichewa proverbs to empower or disempower women and the impact on the realization of MDG 3 and EFA Goal 5. Although not specific to the East Asia and Pacific region, the contents of this article are highly relevant.

In recent years, serious concerns have been expressed about the role of education in the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women/girls. The literature on this issue is clear that the role played by language can be either positive or negative. There is consensus that language that lacks neutrality in its terms and expressions perpetuates gender inequality and hinders empowerment of girls and boys, women and men.

One way in which language is used is through proverbs. Proverbs are regarded as reservoirs of society's wisdom and the eloquent use of proverbs in one's speech is usually a mark of a person's wisdom. As such, proverbs are taken seriously and they have enormous power and/or potential to influence public thinking. It is for this reason that my paper analyzed proverbs with the aim of finding out how proverbs can contribute towards the creation of a gender-sensitive society in which gender equality and equity are recognized and respected.



Upon analyzing the proverbs critically, it was found that in general there is invisibility of women in what is regarded as wisdom of people since only few proverbs (fifteen out of two thousand) were explicitly referring to women in the text. Out of the few proverbs, nine out of the fifteen portrayed women in a negative manner as gossipers, talkative, people who lack confidence, weak and worthless individuals; and also reduced women to mere as flowers. In addition, the proverbs reveal the issues of unequal and unfavourable power relations between sexes within which women are subordinated, oppressed, discriminated, marginalized and dominated as a group. Such portrayal may lead women and girls to internalize the negative attitudes held against them and convince themselves that they are really incapable of taking up challenges.

Some of the negative proverbs analyzed were (1) *Akazi ndi maluwa sachedwa kulakatika* (women are like flowers the blossom and die quickly) (2) *Mkazi ndi chitenje chimathera pakhomo* (women are like wrapping cloth they are used and finish at home). (3) *Mkazi wa mfumu asamati mlomo tolotolo* (a wife of a chief should not be talkative,

otherwise she destroys the village). (4) *Mkazi wopusa apasula banja ndi manja ake* (unwise woman destroys her marriage with her own hands) (5) *Mkazi mmodzi diso limodzi, akazi awiri maso awiri* (marrying one wife is like having one eye and two wives means having two eyes.)

It is without doubt that the continued use of negative proverbs about women and girls perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces unequal power relations between the two sexes. This may lead to unequal participation and decision making in developmental issues such as education and training, health, and social-economic empowerment at family level, work places, schools and beyond. Obviously, this situation undermines the achievement of MDG 3 and Education for All Goal 5 i.e. reducing gender inequality in education. The paper, therefore, recommends that language should be reformed to eliminate instances of gender inequalities; and that school curricula should be revisited to make them more gender sensitive; and that teacher education programmes should have gender issues integrated into their curricula so as to produce teachers who can teach in a gender-sensitive manner.

The continued use of negative proverbs about women and girls perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces unequal power relations...language should be reformed to eliminate instances of gender inequalities.

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Key resources

[Proceedings from the International Conference on Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#)

Over 300 representatives of government and intergovernmental agencies, NGOs, academics and local civil society came together during a three-day forum to dialogue about the state of development of ethnolinguistic minorities, the relevance of local languages in achieving education and development goals, and the development of programs and policies that better reach these underserved groups.

The Conference featured four thematic tracks which incorporated language and education as crosscutting themes:

- Language and universal primary education
- Language and gender equality
- Language, health, nutrition and protection
- Language and sustainable development



All presentations and proceedings will be made available at: <http://www.seameo.org/LanguageMDGConference2010/>



[Advocacy video: Mother tongue-based multilingual education - a key to quality education](#)

Worldwide nearly 7000 languages are spoken today. Many languages are spoken by ethnic minorities who are educationally and economically disadvantaged because of limited language fluency. This language gap must be bridged if countries are to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All aims. More than 200 million children globally live in homes where languages spoken are different than the ones used in school. These children are vulnerable to non enrolment, repetition and non completion.

Special thanks to all

Dear friends,

As 2010 comes to an end, we would like to thank each and every one of you who has participated and supported all of EAP UNGEI's initiatives throughout the year.

Needless to say, UNGEI would not be possible without your contributions. We have many planned activities in the pipeline for the year ahead and look forward to working with you to continue to ensure gender equality and quality education for all girls and boys across the region.

Sincerely,
EAP UNGEI Secretariat

Best wishes for 2011!



Photo credit: Kosuke Ota, Bhutan

Thirteen winning entries from a photo contest under the theme: "Promoting Gender Equality in Education - five years to go until 2015: What have we accomplished?" have been selected, and will be featured in the 2011 Gender in Education Calendar. The copies of the printed 2011 Gender in Education Calendar will be distributed throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. For more information please visit this [link](#).

Editorial board

The EAP UNGEI Secretariat would like to thank everyone who has made this Newsletter possible. All content of the EAP UNGEI newsletters are based solely on the contributions from UNGEI members and partners. Submissions have been reviewed by the EAP UNGEI editorial board: Adrien Boucher, David Braun, Maki Hayashikawa, Mika Mansukhani, Goy Phumtim, Malisa Santigul, Cyrene Siriwardhana and Chemba Raghavan.