



# The Role of Multilingual Education and Cultural Competence in Enhancing Equity and Academic Achievement

<sup>1</sup>Okolo Chinwe Jane, <sup>2</sup>Chinyere Grace Ezeonwumelu\*, <sup>3</sup>Chioma Ihuoma Barah and <sup>4</sup>Ugwu Nnenna Jovita

<sup>1</sup>Department of Foreign Languages Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu -Alike.

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Education Kampala International University Uganda

<sup>3</sup>Department of Public Administration and Management, Kampala International University Uganda

<sup>4</sup>Department of Publication and Extension Kampala International University Uganda

Corresponding Authors Email: grchinyere@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

Multilingual education and cultural competence are increasingly recognized as essential components in creating equitable and effective educational environments. This paper explores the challenges and benefits of embedding local and home languages into new L1 educational settings, particularly in urban areas where colonial languages often dominate. It discusses the importance of cultural competence in fostering inclusive, engaging, and academically successful classrooms. The integration of multilingual education is highlighted as a means to respect linguistic diversity, improve educational outcomes, and promote social equity. The paper also examines implementation strategies and models for multilingual education programs, drawing on global examples and best practices.

Keywords: Multilingual education, cultural competence, equity, academic achievement, educational policy, linguistic diversity and implementation strategies

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## INTRODUCTION

Embedding the use of languages spoken by vibrant local communities and diverse macro ethnic groupings into new L1 educational settings presents significant challenges. In many countries, the home languages of urban dwellers are often unrecognized in the school system, replaced by a dominant, colonially imposed language such as English [1, 2]. Despite the end of colonial rule, these languages persist as tools of educational control. In a globalizing world characterized by increasing multilingualism, the relationship between sociolinguistic dynamics and educational practices has become a critical area of focus [3, 4]. Addressing the underachievement of mono- or multilingual individuals necessitates the incorporation of multilingual education practices in schools to foster better academic performance [5, 6]. Cultural competence involves recognizing, respecting, and integrating the diverse knowledge, skills, and experiences of students into the educational process. This includes not just race or ethnicity, but also gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, spirituality, and disabilities. Culturally competent education promotes equity by creating inclusive learning environments that honor the cultural backgrounds of all students [7]. It enhances student engagement, motivation, and academic success by making learning relevant and meaningful. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering cultural competence through interdisciplinary teaching strategies and activities that connect ethnic pride with academic pride. Multilingual education aims to provide equal, quality, language, and culture-sensitive education by using multiple languages of instruction [8]. It respects and promotes the linguistic, cultural, social, and human rights of learners. Benefits of multilingual education include improved cognitive skills, better academic outcomes, and enhanced social cohesion. It also aligns with principles of linguistic decency and benevolence, as well as international guidelines advocating for the respect and promotion of language

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diversity [9]. Multilingual education can empower students and communities by acknowledging and valuing their linguistic heritage. Implementing multilingual education requires a comprehensive approach that includes reviewing community needs, involving stakeholders, and fostering democratic debate. Effective implementation strategies involve assessing existing language resources, attitudes, and uses within the community. It is crucial to engage all stakeholders, including language speakers, in discussions about the potential impact of multilingual policies on children's educational outcomes [10, 11]. This paper presents various methods and models for implementing multilingual education programs, encouraging adaptation and experimentation to suit specific educational contexts.

### **The Importance of Cultural Competence in Education**

This involves students, staff, family, and community collaborations connected to the curriculum. Students work more collaboratively in integrated learning units when their peers' knowledge and values are shared and recognized [12]. Learners are more motivated to learn when familiar content is engaging and the instructional language is reinforced rather than replaced. Furthermore, academic and social skills are more easily developed when culturally competent practices and tasks are reinvented as desirable and meaningful in the learning context [13]. When developing culturally competent programs, teachers may utilize interdisciplinary teaching strategies and activities connecting ethnic pride with academic pride. These programs may be transformed into curricular units. Studies show that infused connections resulting in meaningful learning activities instigate critical thinking and higher order thinking [14]. At the very least, they can inspire students' excitement and engagement. When issues of equity in educational policy are absent, data reveal disparate treatment and barriers to educational opportunities. Achieving equity demands dedicated attention to the gender, languages, and culture learners bring to the classroom. This cultural diversity becomes the wealth of awareness and resources that both enhances learning and affirms the respect and trust of the learning community [15]. Being culturally competent is recognizing, honoring, respecting, and regarding the knowledge, skills, and lived experiences of diverse students. This does not simply refer to race or ethnicity, but includes gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, as well as religion, spirituality, and any form of disability [8]. Cultural competence operates under the assumption that there are significant psychological and academic manifestations of one's experience and understanding of the world both as a whole and in classrooms [10]. The strength of our country is as an inclusive democracy that places individuals in a responsible relationship to their communities. It requires individuals to understand both the brilliance and challenges we face. Framing an equity agenda cultural competence in educational policy enhances opportunities for social, economic, educational and psychological advancements. Cultural proficiency eliminates inaccuracies and increases cultural knowledge and understanding about students' lives by the teachers [12]. This will make the learning environments more engaging and motivating, increase knowledge retention, promote the overall social well-being of students and improve their academic outcomes. Consequently, the issues of equity should be addressed in educational opportunities.

### **Multilingual Education**

Multilingual education, as an integral part of society and language management, provides equal, quality, language and culture-sensitive education to all learners by using at least two languages: the national/state/regional/ethnic/international or *linguae francae* of wider communication, as languages of instruction and use, and community and heritage languages as school subjects, with full respect toward their people's linguistic, cultural, social, natural, and human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the law and the principles of good governance and subsidiarity [9]. Highlighting the benefits of multilingual education, the principles of linguistic decency and benevolence put forward by the American linguist Joshua Fishman will be explored, as well as the pedagogical implications. Language requirements of the EC Mission Statement on Multilingualism provide the parameters for this article. To enhance their opportunities for success and empowerment, the language diversity of all European Union citizens must be acknowledged, respected, and actively furthered, advocated by the Fundamental Rights Agency [12]. The foundations of multilingual international law theory, as interpreted by András Sajó, and the concept of 'Multilingual' security, as introduced by Jane Friedman, will be referred to. Supervening antidemocratic tendencies of language policies will be accentuated.

### **Implementing Multilingual Education Programs**

For a community that is either interested in or advocating for a multilingual education program, the first step in implementation is to review the aims, objectives, and targets, and to critically assess what is already happening in the community with the aid of local language resources, and in regard to language attitudes and use [13]. It is necessary to involve a wide cross-section of the community, including speakers of each of the languages, and to do so on an informed basis. Subject the community to a series of discussions, presentations, and consultations about the current state of the languages and about what

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would be the likely effects of a multilingual policy on the life-chances of the children if it were implemented in education. It is necessary to ensure that all groups and points of view are fairly represented in the discussion, so as to avoid misunderstanding and foster a feeling of common purpose [14]. Everyone who is a stakeholder in the process must be able to air their views in order that agreements and compromises can be made and that strong feelings can be assuaged. Depending on the rights of the different groups and the issues raised, this must take place by the standards established for democratic debate. In considering whether a multilingual program would be worthwhile for a particular educational context, the question arises of 'how to do it'. Many researchers, educators, and policymakers have already grappled with that question. Many intriguing ideas, informed by deep conceptual work and decades of practical experience, are presented in the literature [9]. For better or for worse, advocates of those methods tend to disagree on substantive points, and there are no quick, easy answers. In this section, a range of generic methods for implementing a multilingual education program is first offered [10]. Then a series of models, proceeding from the most modest to the most ambitious, are presented and examined. In the discussion that follows, researchers, developers, educators, and policymakers are invited to adapt, combine, and experiment further with these ideas in ways befitting their particular educational settings.

### CONCLUSION

Multilingual education and cultural competence are vital for creating equitable and effective educational environments. By integrating local and home languages into educational settings and fostering cultural competence, schools can enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic success. Implementing multilingual education programs requires a collaborative approach that respects and values linguistic diversity. As educational policies and practices evolve, the inclusion of multilingual education and cultural competence will play a crucial role in promoting social equity and improving educational outcomes.

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