

What Interventions Most Effectively Keep Girls in School and Help Them Learn Once There?

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Worldwide, 130 million girls are out of school. Many of those who are in school are not learning as much as they should be. Governments and donors often turn to interventions specifically targeted to girls to remedy these challenges. But what if some of the most effective interventions to improve girls' education are general, non-targeted education programs?

A study of educational projects across more than 50 low- or middle-income countries examines the impact on girls' education of both girl-targeted and general interventions.

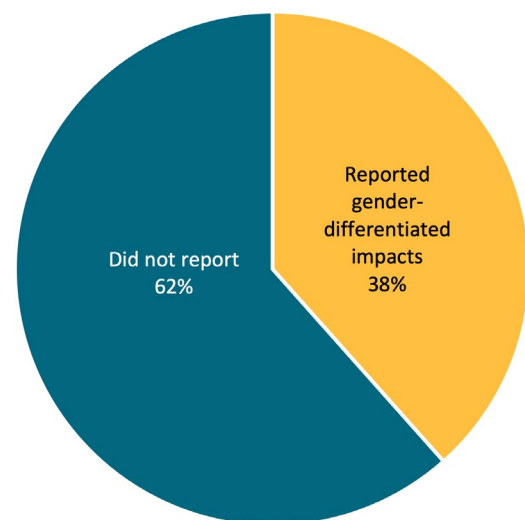
Finding 1: We can't learn what works best for girls if we don't measure it.

Out of more than 300 studies of what improves education (including 20 studies of girl-targeted programs), fewer than two out of five studies reported the impact for girls. Virtually every study of student outcomes gathers data on gender, but if researchers don't report those results, it is impossible to identify the most effective programs to benefit girls.

Finding 2: General interventions can be just as effective for girls as girl-targeted interventions.

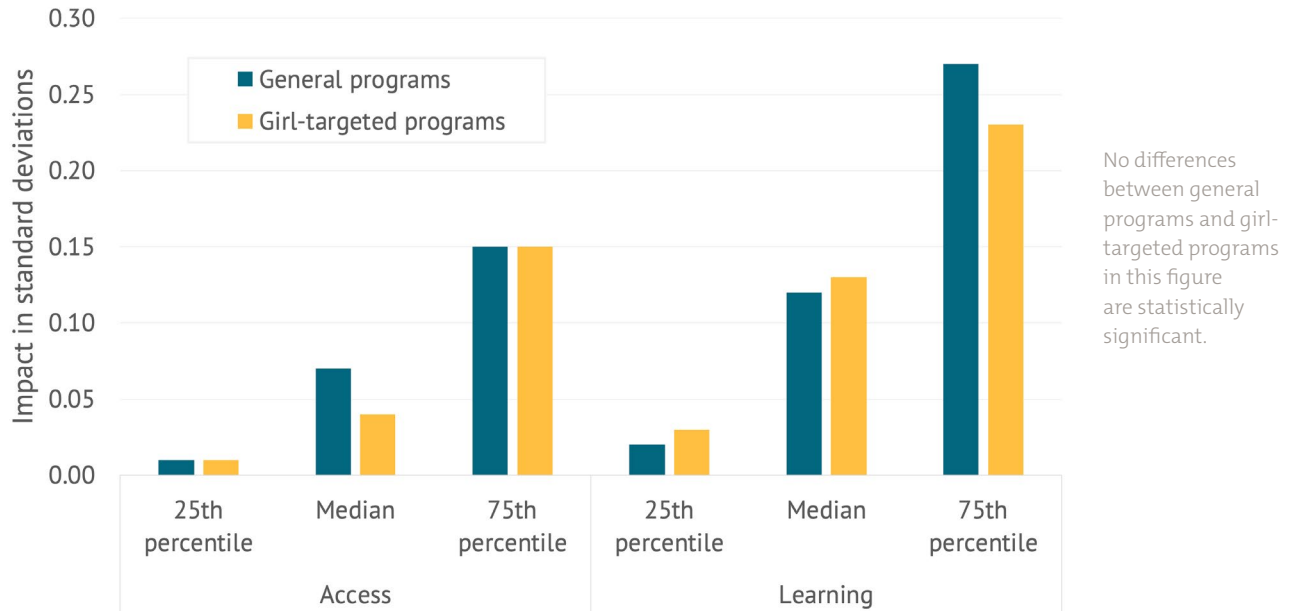
Across interventions that have been evaluated to date, general interventions deliver comparable gains to girl-targeted interventions for both keeping girls in school and helping them learn as much as they can while they are there. In addition, general programs tend to

FROM 333 STUDIES...



benefit girls at least as much as they benefit boys, so general programs usually do not worsen inequalities that disfavor girls. This doesn't mean there aren't effective girl-targeted interventions: there are. But if countries face political pressure to implement non-targeted programs yet still want to help girls, there are tested general programs that yield high gains for girls that policymakers can choose from.

IMPACT OF LESS EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS (25TH PERCENTILE), MEDIAN PROGRAMS, AND MORE EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS (75TH PERCENTILE)



Finding 3: To improve girls' access to school, cut the cost.

Among the ten most effective interventions to increase girls' access to school, seven reduce the cost of schooling for girls, either through conditional cash transfers, labelled cash transfers, or the elimination of school fees, whether for all children or specifically for girls. Only three of the most effective programs were targeted to girls. (The least effective interventions also include some cash transfer programs, albeit fewer.)

Finding 4: To improve girls' learning in school, improve pedagogy for all students.

Among the ten most effective interventions to increase girls' learning in school, the top five all improve the quality of pedagogy for all students. None are targeted to girls. The top programs include interventions that help teachers to target their teaching to the learning level of individual students, sometimes shifting pedagogy into the language that students speak at home. Most of the top programs are focused on the essential building blocks of literacy in primary school

What we still need to learn

After looking at more than 300 studies, there is much left to learn:

- Even though programs targeted only to girls don't outperform general programs on average, programs still benefit from being mindful of girls' needs.
- Innovative programs that tackle specific challenges faced by girls in particular contexts should still be piloted and tested.
- The challenges faced by the most vulnerable girls may be different from those faced by the average girl.
- Far too little research focuses on overcoming the challenges that girls face in continuing their education after primary school.

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Based on the CGD working paper
"What We Learn about Girls' Education from Interventions that Do Not Focus on Girls" by David K. Evans and Fei Yuan

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