

Children and Communities Benefit from Mother-Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education

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Abstract : Multilingual state, Jharkhand is home to more than 19 tribal and regional languages. These are used by more than 33 communities in the state. The state has declared 12 of these languages as official languages of the state. However, schools in the state do not recognize any of these community languages even in early grades! Children, who speak in their mother tongues at home, local market and playground, find it very difficult to understand their teacher and textbooks in school. They fail to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills in early grades. Out of frustration due to lack of comprehension, the majority of children leave school. Jharkhand sees the highest dropout in early grades in India. To address this, the state under the guidance of the author designed a mother tongue based pre-school education programme named Bhasha Puliya and bilingual picture dictionaries in 9 tribal and regional mother tongues of children. This contributed significantly to children's school readiness in the school. Followed by this, the state designed a mother-tongue based multilingual education programme (MTB-MLE) for multilingual context. The author guided textbook development in 5 tribal (Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Kurukh and Kharia) and two regional (Odia and Bangla) languages. Teachers and community members were trained for MTB-MLE in around 1,000 schools of the concerned language pockets. Community resource groups were constituted along with their academic calendars in each school to promote story-telling, singing, painting, dancing, riddles, etc. with community support. This, on the one hand, created rich learning environments for children. On the other hand, the communities have discovered a great potential in the process of developing a wide variety of learning materials for children in own mother-tongue using their local stories, songs, riddles, paintings, idioms, skits, etc. as a process of their literary, cultural and technical enrichment. The majority of children are acquiring strong early grade reading skills (basic literacy and numeracy) in grades I-II thereby getting well prepared for higher studies. In a phased manner they are learning Hindi and English after 4-5 years of MTB-MLE using the foundational language learning skills. Community members have started designing new books, audio-visual learning materials in their mother-tongues seeing a great potential for their cultural and technological rejuvenation.

Keywords : community resource groups, MTB-MLE, multilingual, socio-linguistic survey, learning

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