

Indigenous Children Doing Better through Mother Tongue Based Early Childhood Care and Development Center in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

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Abstract : Background: The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is one of the most diverse regions in Bangladesh in terms of geography, ethnicity, culture and traditions of the people and home of thirteen indigenous ethnic people. In Bangladesh indigenous children aged 6-10 years remain out of school, and the majority of those who do enroll drop out before completing primary school. According to different study that the dropout rate of indigenous children is much higher than the estimated national rate, children dropping out especially in the early years of primary school. One of the most critical barriers for these children is that they do not understand the national language in the government pre-primary school. And also their school readiness and development become slower. In this situation, indigenous children excluded from the mainstream quality education. To address this issue Save the children in Bangladesh and other organizations are implementing community-based Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education program (MTBMLE) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) for improving the enrolment rate in Government Primary Schools (GPS) reducing dropout rate as well as quality education. In connection with that Save the children conducted comparative research in Chittagong hill tracts on children readiness through Mother tongue-based and Non-mother tongue ECCD center. Objectives of the Study To assess Mother Language based ECCD centers and Non-Mother language based ECCD centers children's school readiness and development. To assess the community perception over Mother Language based and Non-Mother Language based ECCD center. Methodology: The methodology of the study was FGD, KII, In-depth Interview and observation. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were followed. The quantitative part has three components, School Readiness, Classroom observation and Headteacher interview and qualitative part followed FGD technique. Findings: The interviews with children under school readiness component showed that in general, Mother Language (ML) based ECCD children doing noticeably better in all four areas (Knowledge, numeracy, fine motor skill and communication) than their peers from Non-mother language based children. ML students seem to be far better skilled in concepts about print as most of them could identify cover and title of the book that was shown to them. They could also know from where to begin to read the book or could correctly point the letter that was read. A big difference was found in the area of identifying letters as 89.3% ML students of could identify letters correctly whereas for Non mother language 30% could do the same. The class room observation data shows that ML children are more active and remained engaged in the classroom than NML students. Also, teachers of ML appeared to have more engaged in explaining issues relating to general knowledge or leading children in rhyming/singing other than telling something from text books. The participants of FGDs were very enthusiastic on using mother language as medium of teaching in pre-schools. They opined that this initiative elates children to attend school and enables them to continue primary schooling without facing any language barrier.

Keywords : Chittagong hill tracts, early childhood care and development (ECCD), indigenous, mother language

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