

The Inclusion, Mobility and Multilingual Education Conference

Exploring the role of languages for education and development



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Learning Changes from Not Knowing to Knowing (Key Factors that Promote or Hinder Lifelong Learning)

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Can learning change one from ‘not knowing’ to ‘knowing’? If the answer is yes, then think of what happens to those 260 million (World Bank report, 2018) across the world and 6 million children (6-13 years) in India not enrolled in school (Census, 2011). 49.7% of grade 5 children cannot read class 2 level text even after spending 5 years in school (ASER, 2018).

Several studies on poor learning outcomes across the world have concluded that education in a child’s mother tongue holds the key to grasping knowledge easily. A child who is deprived of learning in their mother tongue could be prevented from understanding her/his culture and country. Children from non-dominant language communities are forced to learn in a language which they do not speak or understand. They fail to learn new concepts, or develop social and cognitive skills at the same rate as their peers, leading to early drop out altogether.

The 4th of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls on all governments to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”. A child’s first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school (UNESCO, 2008a). Children are more likely to enroll and succeed when they are instructed in their mother tongue (Kosonen, 2005). Mother tongue education fosters respect for linguistic and cultural diversity and acts as a force for quality learning. Former UNO Education Rights special correspondent Dr. Kishoresingh stated on International Mother Tongue Day that teaching will be more effective if taught in mother tongue.

This paper is an attempt to reflect on the author’s learning as an education specialist implementing different models, monitoring and mentoring, reviewing and supporting projects through World Vision India in Jharkhand (Santali), Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh (Hindi), West Bengal (Bengali and Nepali), Assam (Assamese), and Odisha (Odia and Bondos) in collaboration with NGOs, Governments, CSR partners among tribal and non-tribal, rural and urban, and plains and hill areas to promote lifelong learning outcomes focusing on mother tongue language.