

## **Language and Early Grades Literacy Acquisition in Nepal.**

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Nepal, a country with 102 spoken languages, has made a commitment to strengthen the use of children's mother tongue language in its School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP). However, children who speak non-dominant languages continue to struggle with their literacy acquisition and learning.

Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme began an implementation in Kailali, a district in the far-western region of Nepal, in April 2009. This intervention sought to improve the availability of materials in both the Tharu and Nepali languages; provide opportunities for children to practice reading in fun and motivating ways; and train teachers in strategies for early literacy instruction. The intervention was spurred by an earlier research finding which showed Tharu children lagging behind their Nepali-speaking counterparts on key literacy outcomes. After a year of implementation, end-of-year assessments showed that all children who participated in Literacy Boost posted higher gains in their reading scores when compared to comparison schools. However, when comparing Nepali and non-Nepali speaking children, results also showed that Nepali speakers continued to outpace their non-Nepali speaking counterparts on key reading skills such as single word reading, fluency and comprehension.

This study discusses the Literacy Boost findings in relation to children's home language and literacy contexts. It also details Save the Children's initial attempts to strengthen local language literacy via Literacy Boost, and outlines additional plans to further strengthen Save the Children's efforts to bridge the gap between Nepali speakers and non-Nepali/second language learners.