

Language, learning and enrolment in Pakistan.

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The mother tongue, where it is classified as a vernacular language, is generally overshadowed by the official language as the medium of instruction in schools. As a result, children whose mother tongue is different from the official language face discrimination because the language of instruction becomes a barrier to effective learning. This problem is a root cause of poor learning outcomes and high dropout rates in linguistically diverse societies. Thus, the influence of the language of learning on access to schooling, especially for girls, has direct implications for achieving the MDGs.

Pakistan is a classic example of this dilemma. Pakistani society is very diverse with no less than 24 languages and dozens of native dialects. Although the Constitution of Pakistan provides for basic education in the mother tongue, Urdu as the official language and English as the lingua franca are used as languages of learning everywhere except in Sindh province. One implication of this policy is that children's average performance was the lowest in Urdu (official language). In contrast, according to the National Education Assessment System (NEAS), learning outcomes were considerably better for students who received their education in Sindhi, their mother tongue, in Sindh province,

In addition, evidence shows that this language barrier is a primary reason for high dropout rates at all levels of education. The effects of these factors on primary enrolment rates and their impact on the achievement of the MDGs by Pakistan are lessons from which policymakers in linguistically diverse societies can learn.