

Getting Ready for School in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: A comparative analysis of mother-tongue and national-language based preschools in Adivasi communities November 10, 2010, Bangkok Thailand



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The Shishur Khamatayan Project (SKP)

- Save the Children and Zabarang Kalyan Samity
- 2 year preschool education (K1 and K2) 100 centres, 1664 children
- 3 upazilas in Khagrachari district, CHT
- Chakma, Marma, Tripura languages



The SKP Curriculum



- Children begin learning in mother tongue, with mother-tongue script
- Activity-based learning, locally created materials, learning corners
- Teachers from the community
- 6-month bridge to oral Bangla at the end of year 2

Research questions

Aim: To assess how the use of mother tongue in preschool classrooms affects Adivasi children's school readiness and participatory learning environments

Research questions

1. How developmentally ready are children attending MLE preschools for the transition to primary school, in comparison with children attending Bangla preschools with similar levels of resources?
2. How does the extent of the use of mother-tongue in preschool classrooms impact learning processes and teacher-student interaction?
3. Do children have the broader support from parents to transition to primary school?

Models for Comparison



- Mainstream Bangla-medium preschools (445)
 - Similar activities -- learning corners, songs
 - Mother-tongue used only to facilitate Bangla learning; only Bangla script used



- NGO preschools (25)
 - More rote-based learning
 - Mother tongue used only to facilitate Bangla and English learning

Components of the Study

- One-on-one assessment
 - School readiness assessment
 - 30 questions in 4 competency areas
 - Based on assessments used in other settings in Bangladesh
 - Pre-literacy assessment
 - 10 questions on concepts about print
 - Letter recognition in language of instruction with letters in random order
- Classroom observation
 - Snapshot tool and activity list
 - Notes on interaction, learning environment, materials, and languages used.
- Parental focus group discussions: attitudes towards language, preschool and primary education

Sample of K2 Children

Mother-tongue preschools
(92 children)

Sadar
20 centres



4 centres
33 children

Panchari
12 centres



3 centres
21 children

Dighinala
12 centres



3 centres
38 children

Bangla-medium preschools
(75 children)

8 centres
42 children

3 centres
17 children

3 centres
16 children

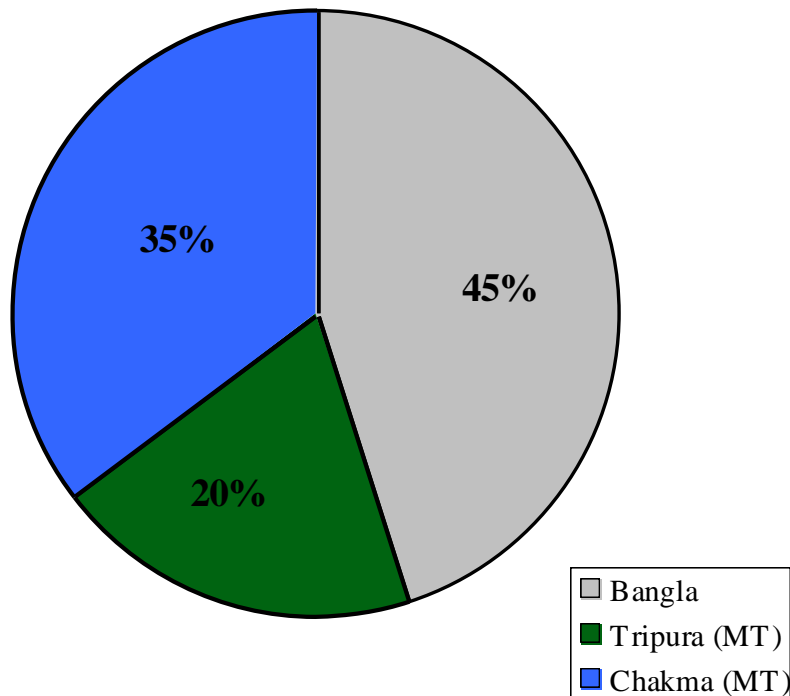
192
mainstream
centres

25 NGO
centres

93
mainstream
centres

160
mainstream
centres

Study Participants

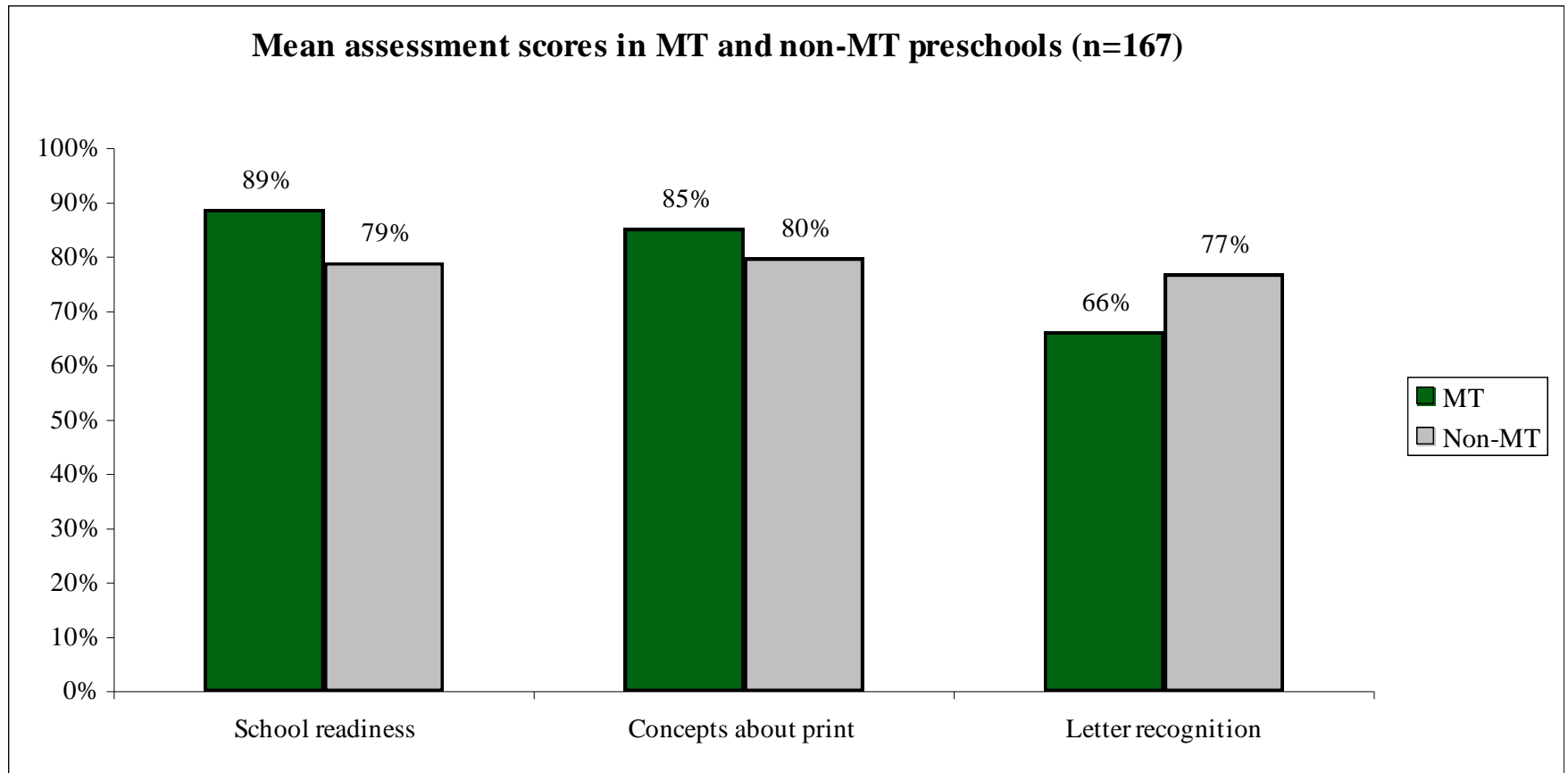


- 167 children
- Age: Between 4.5 and 9
- About to enter primary school
- 53% girls

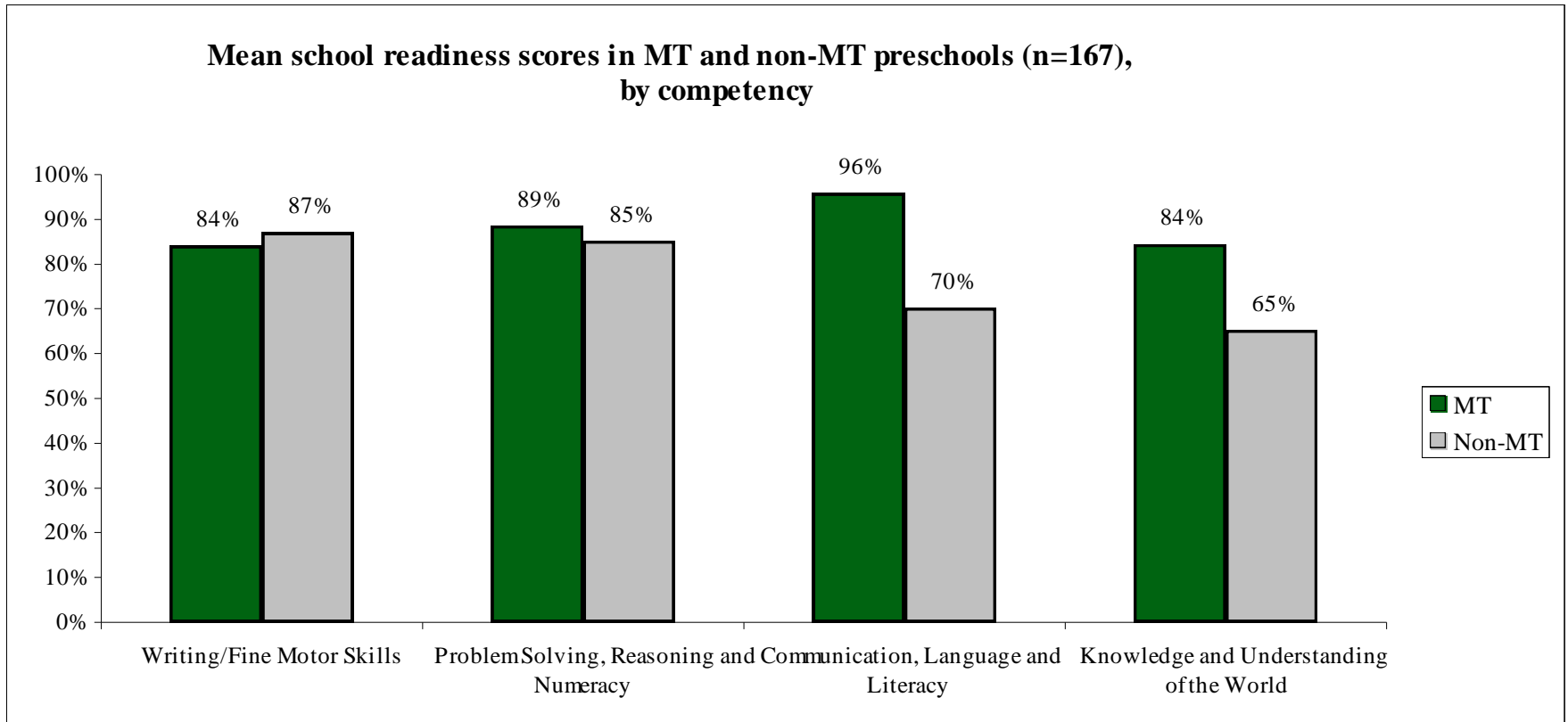
Differences Between Groups

Percent boys and girls, mean age, mean SES** and teacher experience in MT and non-MT preschools in Khagrachari (n=167)					
	MT (n=92)	Non-MT (n=75)	Total (n=167)	Difference	t
Boys	52%	41%	47%	0.11	1.44
Girls	48%	59%	53%		
N	92	71	163		
Age					
	5.2	5.8	5.5	0.6	6.57*
sd	0.4	0.7	0.6		
N	88	70	158		
Range	4.5-7	5-9	4.5-9		
SES**					
	4.2	6.4	5.2	2.1	5.18*
sd	2.6	2.7	2.8		
N	92	72	164		
Range	0-12	0-11	0-12		
Teacher experience					
	2.9	5.5	3.8	2.7	6.41*
sd	1.2	3.7	2.7		
N	92	53	145		
Range	0.2-4	1-14	0.2-14		
*p<0.001 **SES is on a scale of 0-12, based on a list of self-reported home assets.					

One-on-One Assessment Results

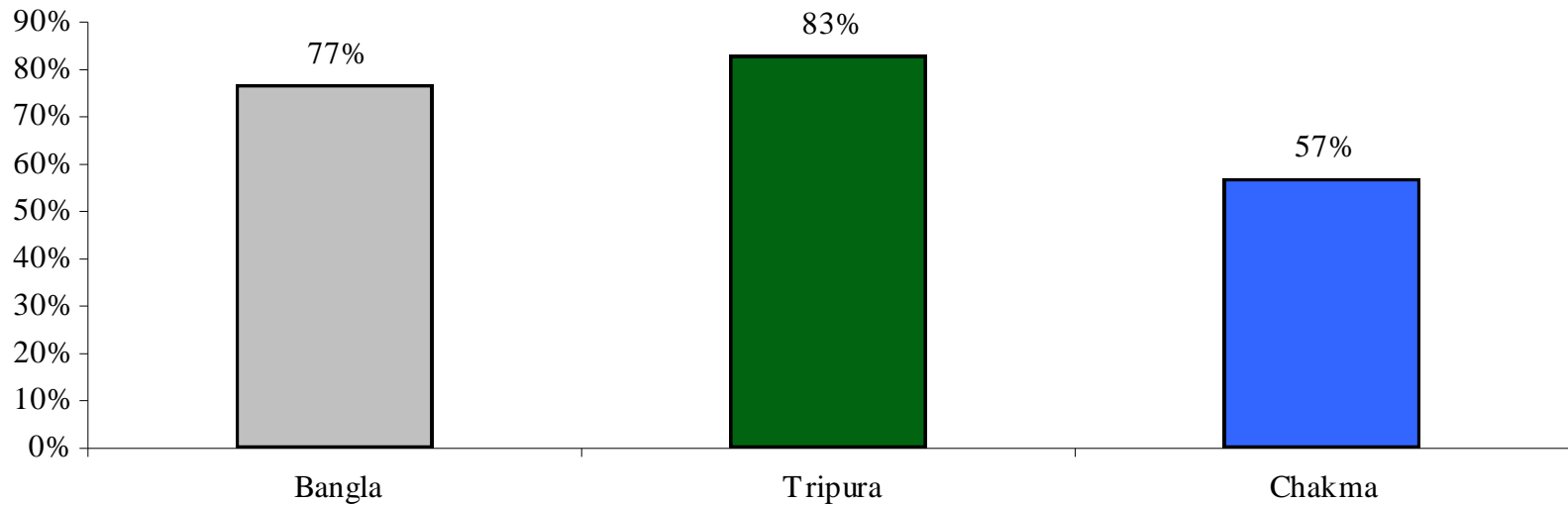


School Readiness Results by Competency Area

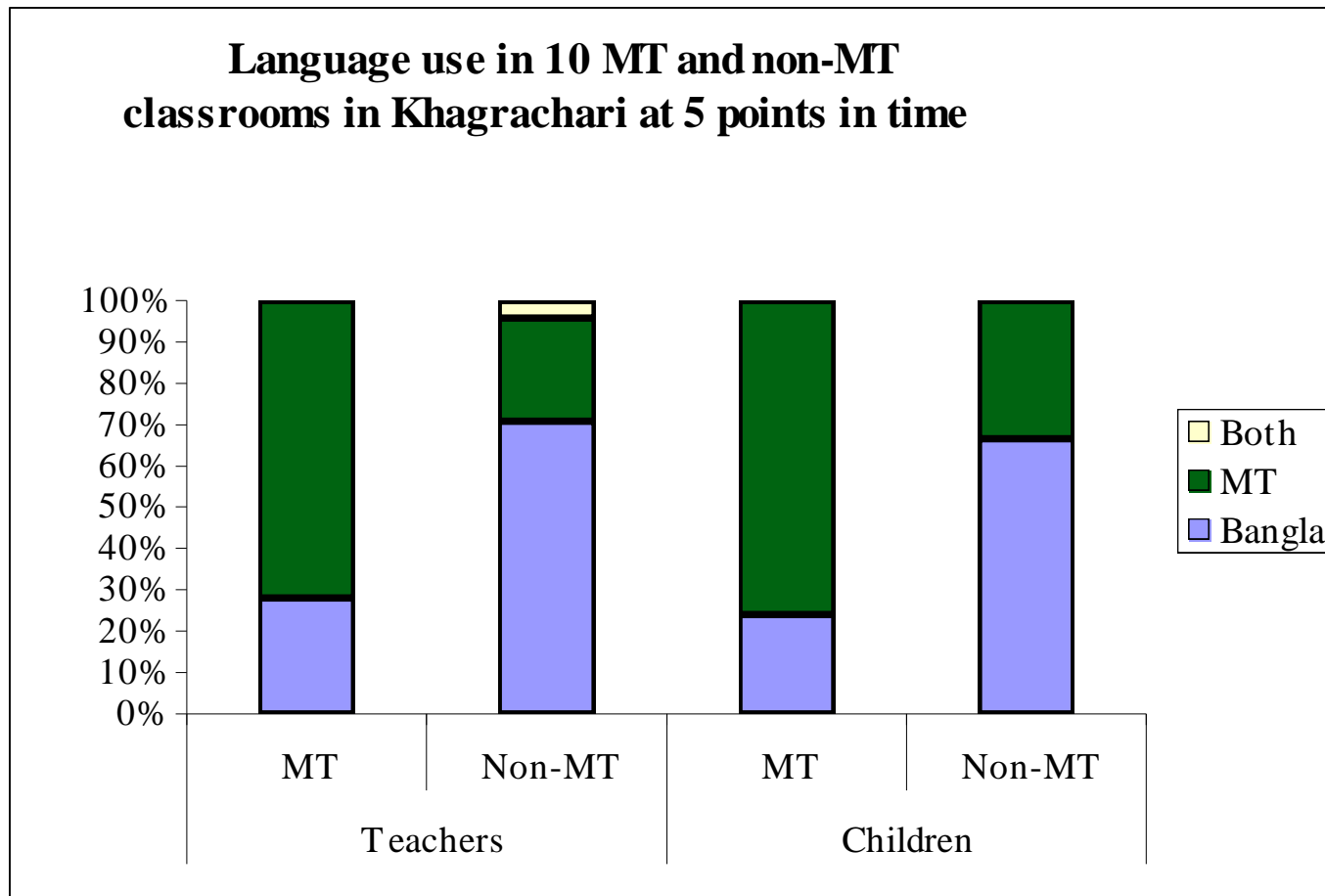


Letter Recognition and Language

Mean percent of letters recognized, by language of instruction (n=167)

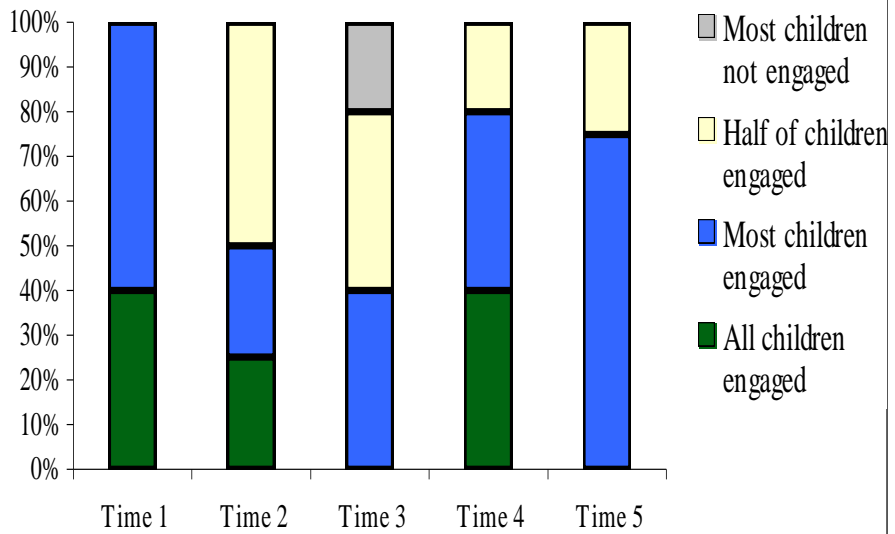


Language Use in the Classroom

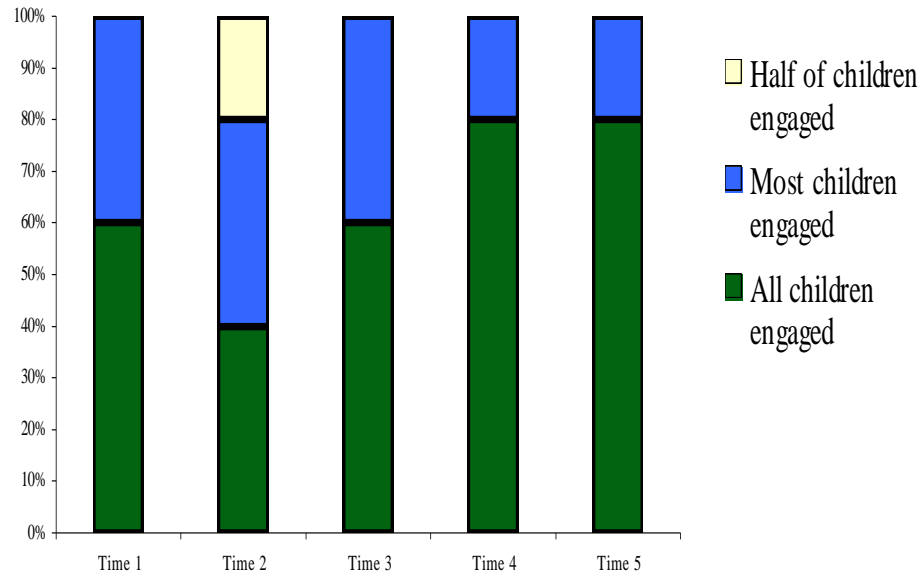


Children's Engagement

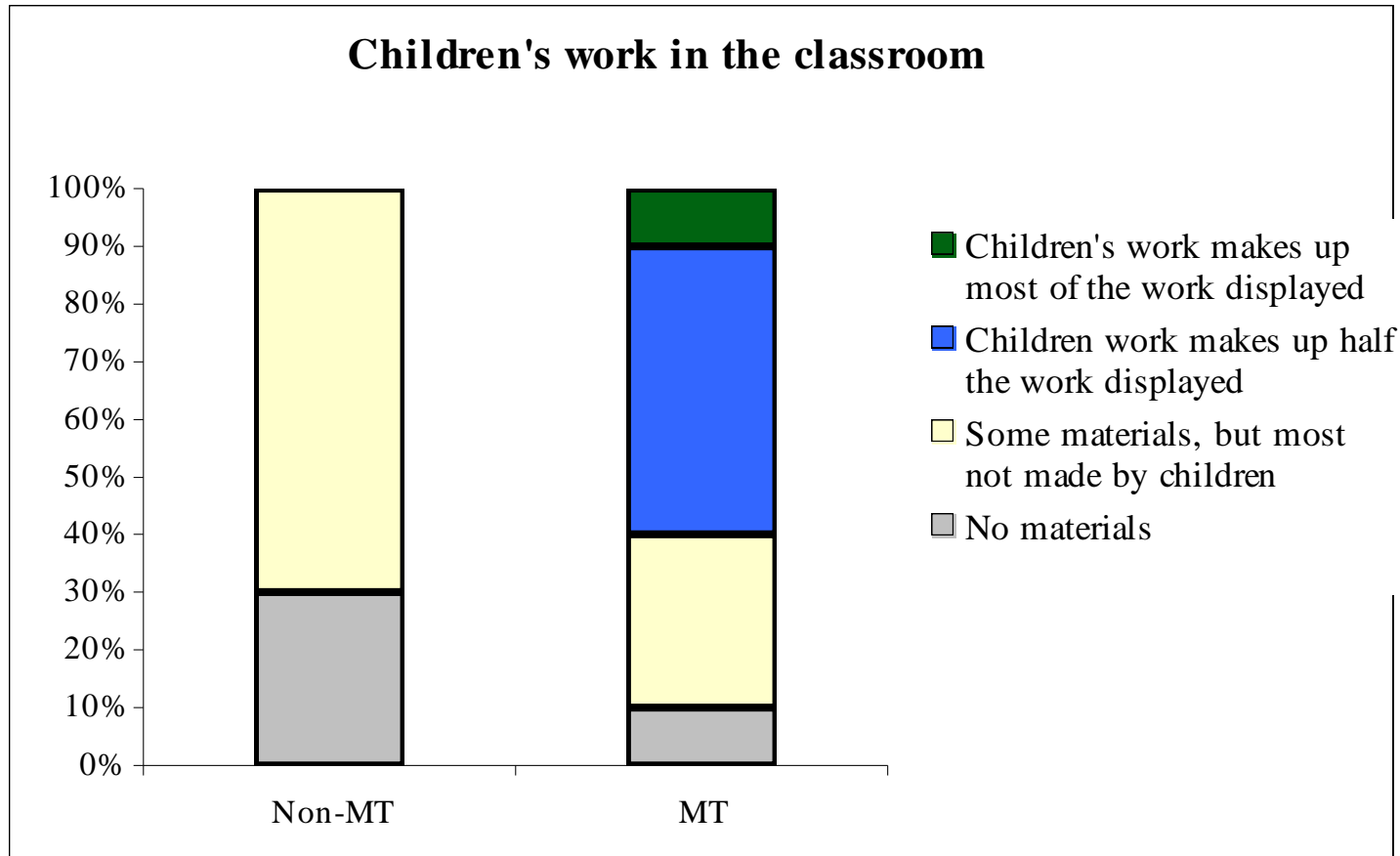
Children's engagement in non-MT classrooms at 5 points in time



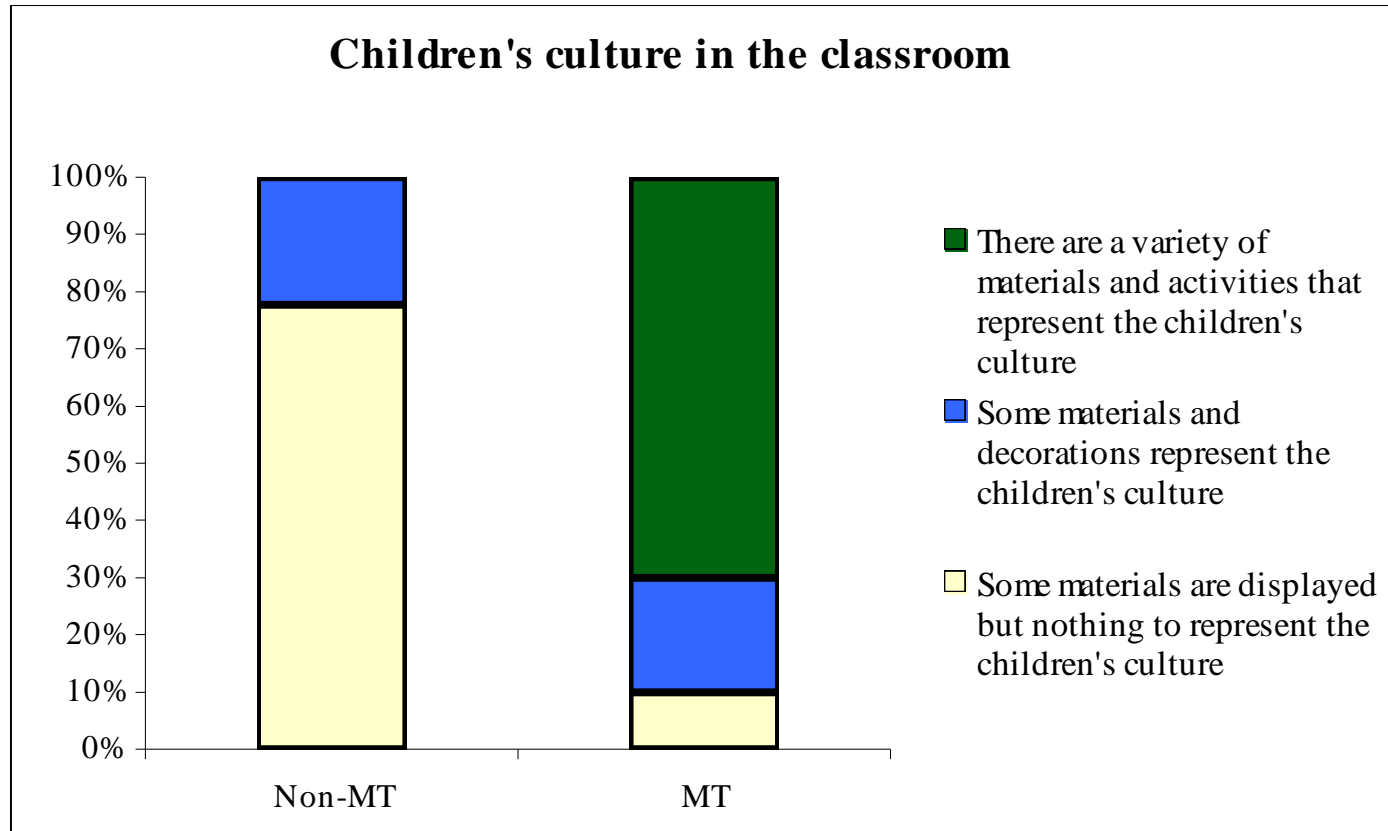
Children's engagement in MT classrooms at 5 points in time



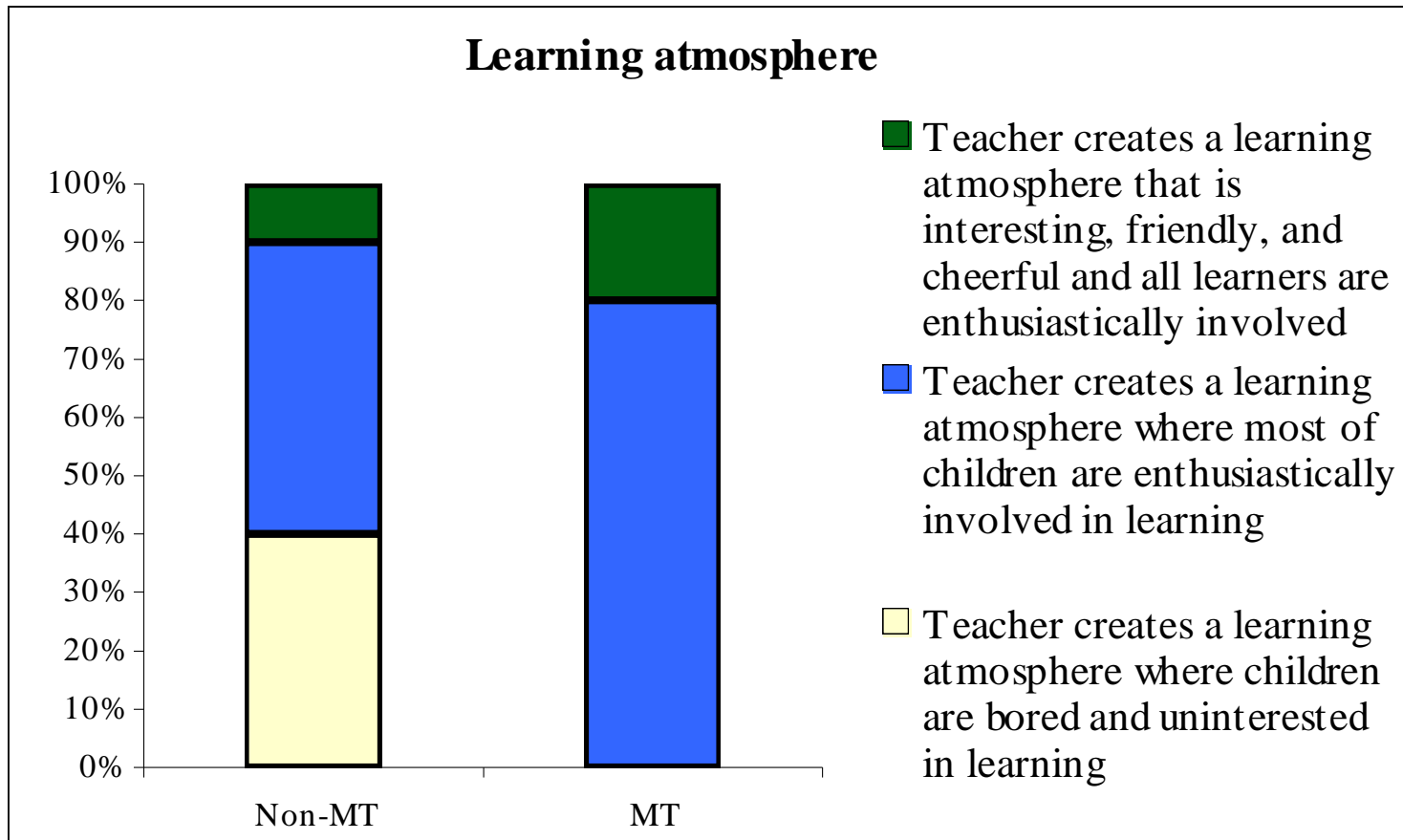
MT and Child-Friendly Environments



MT and Child-Friendly Environments



MT and Child-Friendly Environments



Data Collectors' Observations

- Children often unable to answer questions when asked in Bangla first, even in Bangla-medium schools
- Children in MT schools were more confident attempting questions even if they didn't know the answer, while non-MT children remained silent
- MT classrooms offered more opportunities for language use through discussion of experiences and review of the day's activities

Parents in Non-MT and MT Communities: Commonalities

Parents in both MT and Non-MT communities:

- Proud of their children's learning, particularly the songs and dances they share at home
- Recognized the importance of learning Bangla to build the confidence to function effectively in the world and get jobs, but also the importance of their mother tongue, which they felt was being lost
- Had a wide range of strong opinions about language and education

Parents in Non-MT and MT Communities: Differences

MT Preschools	Non-MT preschools
Confident supporting children's learning (stories, songs, games, rhymes)	Not as confident supporting children's learning (siblings, tutors)
Concerned about children's Bangla in primary school	Proud of children's Bangla for primary school
Children playing together	No longer playing, only studying
MT for learning and many uses	MT for next generation



Study Limitations

Design:

- Small sample
- Not a longitudinal study -- no pre-test
- No comparison to children who are not in preschool
- Lacking child data on attendance, number of years in preschool, and accurate age
- Limited information on children's home background
- Limited information on differences between preschool models (materials, training, implementation)

Data collection:

- Bias?
- Distractions -- assessment and observation
- Police presence
- Rainy season



Recommendations

- Mother Tongue is essential to making preschool environments effective and child-friendly: **Advocate for activity-oriented, MT based curriculum** in all preschools in the CHT
- Improve **support at the primary level** for language transition and activity-based learning, so that MT doesn't disappear from children's curriculum after preschool
- **Letter recognition.** Children in MT preschools performed less well in letter recognition than their peers.
 - Improve support for Chakma learners outside of the classroom, perhaps by introducing parents to Chakma script
- **Writing skills.** There may be a need for more explicit writing instruction, especially in Bangla.
- Revitalizing mother tongue scripts can't just happen in the school. **Community-level learning and support** is key to making mother-tongue preschools work for children

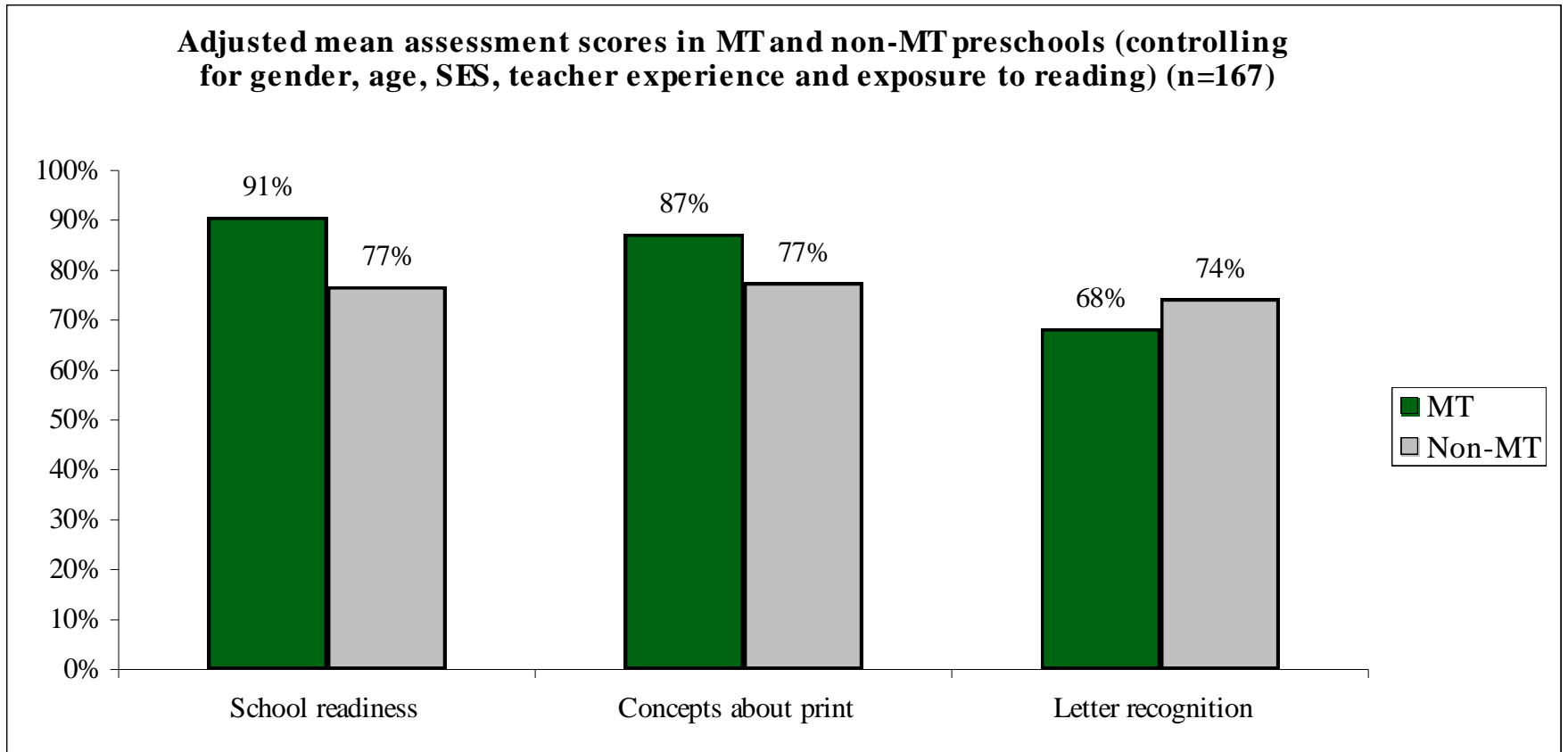
Questions for future consideration

- How can advantages of MT-based preschools be translated into long-term academic success in primary school?
 - Children are ready for school, but are the schools ready for children?
- What are the best strategies for preschool when the primary school system is not immediately likely to change to a mother-tongue-based model?
 - How much “bridging” is enough?
 - How can programs support mother-tongue learning at the primary level outside of school?
- How can we influence policy makers to include MTBMLE in the primary school?

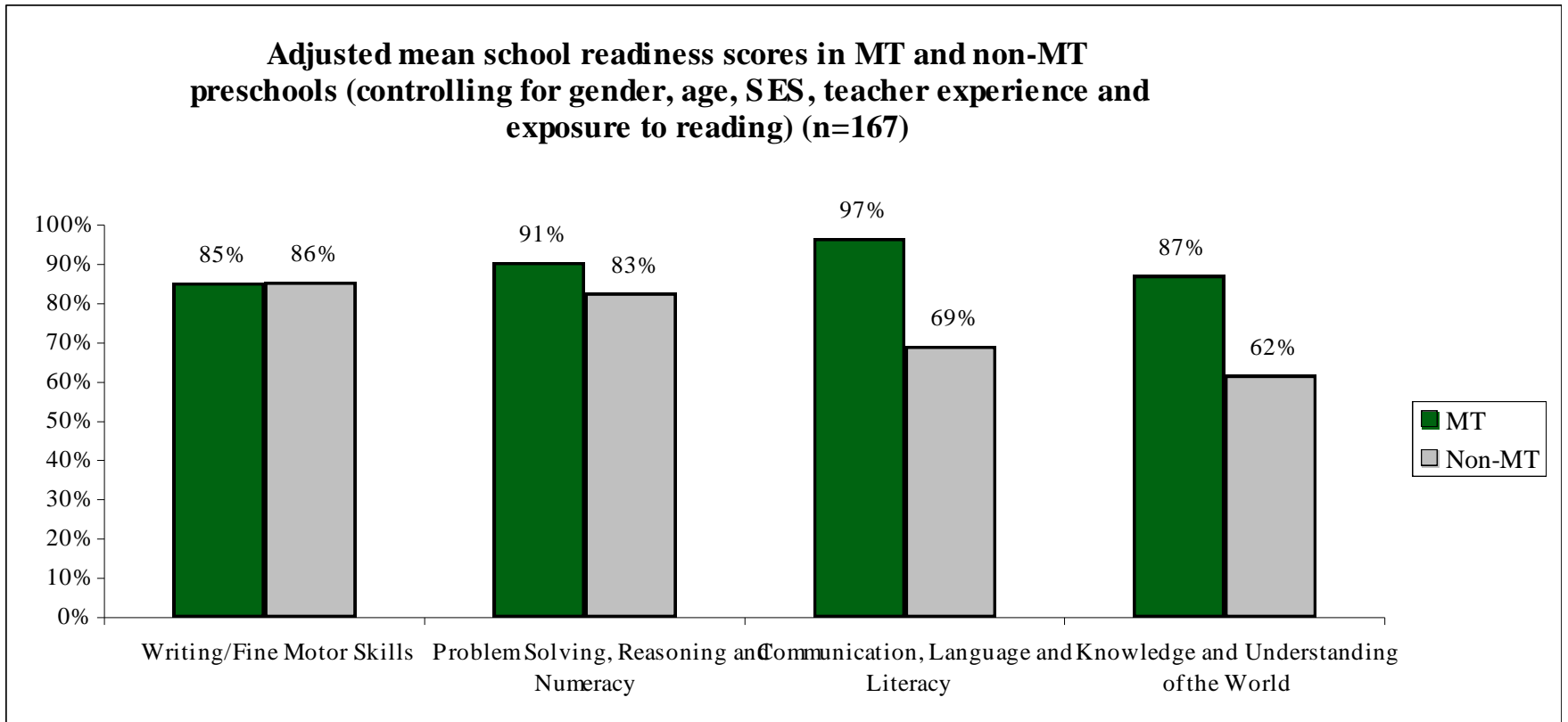
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One-on-One Assessment Results (Adjusted)



Results by Competency Area (Adjusted)



Letter Recognition and Language (Adjusted)

Adjusted mean percent of letters recognized, by language of instruction (controlling for age, gender, SES, teacher experience, and exposure to reading) (n=167)

