

## Joyful Literacy

I am doubtful about the sustainability and development of learning which are forced or given as a duty. Looking back to my school days or even professional trainings, I have to confess that I can not remember well about the lessons which I did mechanically without any interest. They may come back to me one day or may have completely disappeared from my head. Learning without the interest could be also painful. On the contrary, our learning can be much more intensive, deeper, wider and more sustainable when we are interested. It seems to me that this could be a universal rule which we all know from our life experiences.

Would you have an experience at school like this? You did not like a subject at the beginning but you came to like and be good at it because the teacher is good in person and its knowledge. Unfortunately, the opposite case also could happen as well. How about our learning at the working places? I find there is something similar between the school and the working place in terms of learning. Continuous learning is essential to develop our career. Have you ever met good facilitators who can help you to learn or improve yourself? They could be your boss, colleague, or anyone around you.

Interests and facilitations are very important factors to make learning more efficient and effective. The combination of two factors will make remarkable differences. However, I wonder how these realistic and simple factors are applied to our education system, in particular adult literacy in Pakistan. By looking into the reports and hearing, simple questions I may raise are "Why do many learners leave the literacy course before completion?", and "Why can't the obtained literacy skills be sustained after completing the course?"

Pakistan is one of the lowest literate countries among Asian countries. Its literacy rate is 48.7 %<sup>1</sup> and more than 47 million people are illiterate in the country. This illiterate population occupies 6.2 % of the world illiterate population. According to the national survey<sup>2</sup>, the literacy rate of male is 65% while that of female is only 40%. It is not difficult to imagine that there is a big gap between urban (71%) and rural (44%). As its constitution mentions, the Government of Pakistan has faced this challenge and made effort to improve it. Some time ago, the Prime Minister said "No country can make the real progress if the bulk of its people remain illiterate." Despite its policy and effort, literacy has pervaded much less than planned for the last decades.

I would like to see literacy learning centers where learners enjoy learning with interests and laughs with teachers/facilitators. Interesting and common topics in the family, community, and life are introduced with the text books. They go through the literacy course through their reflection and dialogue rather than mechanically memorizing scripts/symbols. Learning those symbols with concerned topics and interest will be more sustainable and developing. Needless to say, the roles of learning facilitators are crucial in this quality learning. Their skills and attitudes are as important as knowledge. A good facilitator is ready to learn together as one of learners rather than being an authoritarian who pretends to know everything. If the facilitator does not enjoy its facilitation, the quality learning can not be expected. I would like to stress this out from my experience as a teacher.

It looks there is a far distance between the vast illiteracy in the country and the literacy learning center mentioned above. In my view, they are close. Without ensuring the quality learning at the micro level, I wonder if the drastic change at the macro level could happen. Like other private services or products, I believe the quantity comes together with the quality. That is, without quality we could not expect the quantity expansion. Fortunately, the literacy center mentioned above is not a dream but it exists in Pakistan even though at the small scale. While recognizing severe external factors, like poverty, politics, etc., to hamper the literacy development, we shall be pleased to make continuous efforts in ensuring places/occasions for learners to learn with joy and interests.

<sup>1</sup> In this paragraph, all data source is Adult literacy rates (15+), UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2006, UNESCO Paris

<sup>2</sup> Literacy rates (10+) Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (2004/05)