An on-site teacher education model and MLE for ethnic minority children in China

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In China, ethnic minorities comprise 8.49 percent of the national population. The population of 113 million is classified into 55 ethnic minorities, of which 53 have their own languages (2010 national census, China NBS, 2011). In Yunnan province, where ethnic minorities comprise over 30 percent of the population, children barely speak Mandarin before schooling. They struggle to learn academic knowledge in Mandarin while developing language proficiency. Meanwhile, teachers are not capable in ethnic minority languages or bilingual/multilingual education (MLE).

These contribute to the gap of academic performance between Han and ethnic minority students. This presentation presents the findings from an evaluation of a recently completed pilot project reaching 50,000 children and their 2,800 teachers in 190 schools with large numbers of ethnic minority children in Yunnan province of China. The project explored a sustainable model of teaching training for rural teachers – on-site school-based teacher training by mobile resource teachers (Mobile Education and Training Resource Units, METRU) – and developed effective MLE teaching strategies and materials – a package of Language Sensitive and Culture Appropriate Pedagogy (LaSCAP) to help ethnic minority children improve their academic performance, strengthen their cultural identity, and promote their well-rounded development.

Findings highlight the key challenges in improving quality of education for ethnic minority children and also demonstrate the effectiveness of the approaches that emerged to address them – ethnic minority children’s learning outcomes improved, their positive attitudes to school more than doubled, teachers’ implementation of multilingual approaches three times higher than teachers in non-project schools.