MLE competencies among ethnic teachers in Myanmar: a cross-comparative analysis

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There are 116 living languages in Myanmar (Lewis et al 2013). Currently, the official language of oral and written instruction in all government schools in Myanmar is the national language, Burmese. In many of Myanmar’s ethnic minority communities the national language is only first encountered in school and rarely used at home. An extensive body of literature demonstrates the benefits of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in promoting the learning of further languages. But what key teacher competencies should be employed in order to maximize this benefit?

This paper will present a review of education policies addressing minority language use in basic education, and indigenous models of teacher training that support MTB-MLE. From this platform, this paper will seek to identify MLE competencies exhibited by teachers within three ethnic education systems in Myanmar and will include a cross-comparative analysis of non-state education systems in Kayah, Mon, and Kayin state. Here, an examination of MTB-MLE practices and strategies employed in these minority ethnolinguistic communities will be presented. Recommendations will be presented based upon the reported and observed MLE competencies as well as mechanisms for operationalization in order to inform national language policy.