Exploring indigenous knowledge to make the education curricula relevant to support ethnic minority children’s better learning in Viet Nam

By Le Thi Bitch Hanh

Viet Nam is a multi-ethnic society with more than 54 ethnic groups. While the Kinh group, who natively speak the national language, Vietnamese, comprise approximately 86 percent of the population, the remaining 14 percent belong to 53 different ethnic groups with diverse linguistic systems and culture. As Vietnamese is the official language of instruction, those who do not speak that language are prevented from fully engaging, leading to poor learning outcomes and dropouts. Moreover, it is known that learning in one’s mother tongue not only helps to contextualize abstract and academic knowledge, but also to acquire a second language. Many teachers, especially those relocated from Kinh-dominated provinces, simply teach Vietnamese in the same way they would teach it to children who speak the language at home. Hence, the language barrier is identified as a primary challenge faced by ethnic minorities in education.

Recognizing the importance of culturally appropriate education to children at an early age for their growth and development, a pilot project was developed targeting children between the ages of 0-8, focusing on adapting school curriculum and teaching methods to local contexts, languages, and cultural traditions in order to improve education accessibility and quality for ethnic minority children, nurturing their learning capacity and self confidence.

This presentation will share piloted initiatives such as: improving teachers’ capacity in application of preschool and primary education curricula relevant to the local context and cultures (including child-friendly teaching methodologies); promoting the use of indigenous knowledge in teaching/learning materials and curriculum; and mobilizing local people to provide assistance to address the language barrier in the classroom.