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United Nations Literacy Decade

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Presented at the UNESCO sub-regional Conference *Addressing Literacy Challenges in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches*. (31 July - 1 August 2007, Beijing, China)

Programme name: Northern Pwo Karen Bilingual Education Project at Omkoi District (NPKOM)

Implemented by: Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC), Ministry of Education

Basic facts

Country: Thailand

Starting year: 2003

Outreach: 200

Target Population: children aged 4-12 year old

Language of instruction: Pwo Karen, Thai is used only occasionally

Operating in: Pwo Karen Community in Omkoi district of Chiang mai Province

Facilitator/Beneficiary ratio: 1 for 13-15

Main Funding: UNESCO Bangkok and ONFEC

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Brief Description

Northern Pwo Karen Bilingual Education Project at Omkoi District is the first pilot project for a bilingual literacy programme for the ethnic group and was implemented by ONFEC with support of UNESCO. The project was implemented with full participation of the community, teachers and learners, local leaders etc. with support of the community learning center and technical assistance from SIL International.

Rationale

Although research findings on literacy rates among ethnic minorities in Thailand are lacking, evidence from multiple sources indicates that many children growing up in non-Thai speaking environments lag behind in educational achievement.

The NPKOM project is working with the Pwo Karen community, an ethnic minority of agriculturalists who have little opportunity to interact with the outside world. The learners from this community have low performance when they join Thai-medium schools and the rate of dropout is very high because of difficulties in following the classroom instructions in Thai.

Objective

The aim of the project is to provide basic literacy skills in the mother tongue of the ethnic minority as a crucial value to facilitate further learning and education.

Conceptual Model and Methodology

At the beginning of the project, Pwo Karen was an oral language only. The first important activity was thus to develop its alphabet and orthography, some learning materials in Pwo Karen, such as a picture dictionary, a spelling guide and a basic primer. A strong mother-tongue-first curriculum framework which included both story and grammar tracks had been developed for students at pre-school level up to Grade 6. Several training workshops were organized for Pwo Karen teachers involved in this project.

The methodology of the project is participatory and child-centered.

Innovative features

The most important innovation of the programme was to promote literacy classes first in the local language, but including at a later stage classes in Thai to facilitate the integration of the learners in Thai schools. The content of the teaching materials is based on the community needs and reflects their culture and tradition.