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**Evaluation and Learning: Bilingual and  
Biliterate Teaching Pilot Project in  
Changshun Buyei Community, Guizhou  
Province, China**

**Basic Education Programme**

## Evaluation and Learning: Bilingual and Biliterate Teaching Pilot Project in Changshun Buyei Community, Guizhou Province, China

*Through the project, local teachers' ability to teach students to be bilingual and biliterate improved, and students who were part of the project showed great interest in learning and achieving good results in their Chinese literature exam. The project also raised the government's awareness of bilingual and biliterate education. But the number of teachers is still small, and further exploration is needed on sustainability of the teaching and learning. Project Monitoring & Evaluation system has to be improved in tracking control group and related indicators for better quality of evidence.*

**Background:** Language and culture are intertwined; to preserve ethnic groups' cultures, their dialects must be well protected. Changshun County – located in Qiannan Buyei and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province – for instance, is a typical ethnic minority county. There, ethnic minorities account for 56.6 per cent of the population, 90 per cent of whom are Buyei people and Miao people.

Oxfam has piloted a project on bilingual and biliterate education for ethnic minority students in remote areas of China where students usually lack a quality education compared to their peers in the city. For this project, four Buyei primary schools/kindergartens in Changshun were selected to see how bilingual and biliterate education helps cultivate students' interest in their own culture and enhance their ability to learn Chinese, and what's the best ways to deliver the education through experimenting different teaching methods.



**Project's long-term goal:** there will be a smaller gap between students' education in the city and rural areas. Learning native ethnic language also enables ethnic minorities preserve their cultural heritage.

**Project cycle:** February 2012 - June 2017

**No. of people we work with:** 10 teachers (two from each school on average) and 330 students (aged 5 to 8 in preschool or P1 to P3) from four schools (Daihua Primary School, Guyang Kindergarten, Songgang Primary School, Ronglei pre-school class) participated in the pilot project.

**Project partner:** Changshun County Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CCPCC)

**Change path:** It is hoped that by *bilingual and biliterate study*, the ethnic minority children will improve their Chinese learning. As they can understand the mother tongue better thus build base to learn Chinese. Teachers from the four participating schools were trained on bilingual and biliterate teaching and curriculum design. The trainees were also invited to help design and edit the teaching material used in this project. During the project period, the project team monitored the materials' effectiveness through classroom observation and provided real-time feedback help improve the teaching. Students' grades in language studies, and their reading and writing abilities in their own ethnic language were also evaluated. These were then

compared with a control group which was made up of students from other classes who have a similar background (in terms of traits like age and ethnic minority group).

Oxfam and its partner also collaborated closely with government departments such as the local Ministry of Education, and Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs; both were invited to project monitoring and evaluation visits. The aim of this collaboration was to help them better understand the effectiveness of the project and listen to feedback about it, so they can help allocate educational resources in such a way that incorporates bilingual and biliterate education in the mainstream education system. This would then enable more students from ethnic minority groups to benefit both in terms of improving their linguistic abilities as well as preserving their ethnic language and culture.

**About the evaluation:** From May to June 2017, an evaluation team led by Oxfam’s project partner was formed. Members included an external evaluator, an ethnic linguist from Guizhou Minzu University, representatives from the ‘Let’s talk in Buyei’ teaching material design team, Oxfam, the Ministry of Education’s research office and the Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs. The team visited all participating schools for this evaluation.

To understand the effectiveness of the pilot project for students and with regard to teachers’ professional development, the following methods were adopted:

Method	Frequency	Content
Class observation	4 times, one in each school	The evaluation team observed the biliterate and bilingual classes. After class, they spoke with the teachers about the curriculum design and their teaching objectives. The evaluation team then commented on the class, held discussions and gave advice.
Secondary data research	Once	The evaluation team reviewed project relevant materials to understand and document the changes project have brought for teachers and students in all four schools. The data gathered included a summary of teachers’ teaching notes, students’ grades in the pilot class and control class, etc.
Group interview	4, one in each school	Participants included teachers, headmasters, an external evaluator and members of the project team. These interviews were conducted to understand the progress of targeted areas and lessons learnt during the project cycle and the interviewees’ thoughts on the possible future direction of the project.
Summary meeting	Once	After visiting all schools that participated in the project, the project team and external evaluator held a meeting to consolidate and discuss their observation and findings.

## Major findings

### 1. Project enhanced teachers’ ability to teach bilingual curriculum and biliteracy

The eight selected teachers (two from each school) speak both Buyei and Putonghua, but only two of them can write in Buyei (the Buyei pinyin writing system only came into existence in 1949); six of them did not have bilingual education experience. After receiving training though,

all eight teachers mastered the basics of the Buyei pinyin writing method, which enabled them to practice bilingual teaching. Another two teachers received this training later on; the 10 teachers then incorporated their own style into their teaching in this area. The progress of these trainees' professional development can be found in the 2015 and 2016 class observation notes, which can be seen in table below.

**1) Significant improvement in teachers' teaching quality:** More diverse and interactive teaching style.

	End of spring term 2015	End of fall term 2016
Ronglei pre-school class Ms. Chen	Having been teaching English for a long time, Chen has good pronunciation and emphasises the importance of tenses, which has laid a relatively solid foundation for students. However, it is hard for her to keep students' attention in class.	After teaching students to be bilingual and biliterate for past two years, Chen has modified her teaching methods. She now <b>mixes games into her teaching</b> , which has boosted <b>students' interest in learning Buyei</b> and reduced the pressure they feel to learn. This has resulted in more effective learning.
Daihua town Primary School Ms. Liang	Liang adopted a "stick to the plan" approach, so lessons were usually packed with too much information, which <b>limited opportunities for student interaction</b> .	After nearly two years of teaching Buyei, students have learnt more vocabulary. Liang's teaching has also become more effective, and <b>students are now much more pro-active</b> .

**2) Teachers adopted different methods to fit their context.** (Some only teach Buyei in one lower grade while some teach multigrade classes.)

Songgang Primary school Ms. Ban	Ban formed a <b>group of students from multi-higher grades</b> . They were taught grammar and writing, which helped lay a more solid foundation. Some of them now lead school morning sport exercises in Buyei.
Daihua Primary School Ms. Liang	Liang conducted experimental teaching in Grade 1 for about two years. The students have since gained more knowledge about the language. The teaching was effective, and students were more engaged.
Guyang Kindergarten Ms. Ban	Ban is a teacher who specialises in early childhood education. She integrated Chinese, numbers and Buyei into her teaching. She made use of teaching props and planned her game-based lessons, so students learnt through playing, which kept their attention and helped students improve significantly. She also found the effect is different on <b>classes of different age groups: younger students learnt slower and needed more repetition exercises to master the same content</b> .

## 2. Students had greater interest in class and were enthusiastic about learning



Since many students live in a rather Sinicised environment, there are few opportunities to learn Buyei systematically. Children were very happy that they could learn Buyei at their kindergarten/primary school. Buyei-Chinese bilingual and biliterate teaching not only helps preserve ethnic language, but also enhances student learning greatly. The evaluation team found that students in the experiment classes were very keen to learn Buyei. Both teachers and parents believed that bilingual and biliterate education is essential to student learning and development. Compared with students from control classes, students in the experiment classes were generally more competent in their ability to express themselves and better in critical thinking. They were also very proactive and confident in class, and had a strong desire to express their thoughts. According to statistical data about Changshun county in 2016, these students' academic results in Chinese literacy was higher than their peers of a similar background. However, more systematic evaluations on how bilingual education helps improve the academic performance of students should be carried out.

## 3. The pilot project received positive feedback from government officials

During the development of the Chinese-Buyei teaching project, the Changshun CCPCC, Ministry of Education of Changshun, Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Changshun showed support and great interest in the work reports. The local government TV channel even reported twice on the project progress. Both the CCPCC member of the Autonomous Prefecture and county level submitted a policy paper in this area to government departments.

While this project has left a positive impression on government officials, there is still a long way to go before there will be institutional/policy changes. It will also take time to obtain government resources to ensure the sustainability of the project, but the first step to raising the awareness and explore the possible solution towards this has already been achieved.

### Challenge and lessons learnt:

#### 1. Insufficient teaching human resources

At the beginning of the project, each school had arranged two teachers to join the project, but in the end, only one teacher from each school was able to join due to various reasons such as the trained teacher no longer in that school/incharge of the related task. As such, several teachers did not have anyone in their school they could talk to about what they had learnt when they went back to work.

Teaching resources are crucial to the success of bilingual and biliterate education. Buyei-Chinese teacher training at the county level should be conducted more regularly, and more peer sharing during the training. By doing this, teachers' language standards and teaching would be enhanced, and a stronger team of teachers in this area would be formed.

## **2. There is a lack of opportunities to practise for students**

Thanks to the efforts of the teachers, the students – pre-schoolers and those from grades 1 to 3 – learnt simple and commonly used words/phrases. However, when they get to higher grades, they are unable to continue progressing in this area as there are no classes that teach students to be bilingual or biliterate. Moreover, due to pressure from the exam-oriented culture and demanding curriculum, some parents and teachers were not interested in the idea of helping students to be bilingual and biliterate.

Further, at Daihua town and Guyang town in Changshun County, most Buyei families do not speak Buyei at home anymore, Buyei is only used when older people communicate among themselves. As such, students from all four participating schools only learnt Buyei at school with their teachers, and were unable to use it in everyday life.

To address this, it was suggested that Oxfam and its partner should start teaching students in middle and higher-level primary classes to be bilingual and biliterate for a minimum of three years. Teaching and learning models should also be standardised, and a better way to help students learn through trial and error should be developed. To create an environment of learning Buyei on campus, all schools and kindergartens could incorporate cultural elements on campus to promote the learning of Buyei language and culture, so that students can learn Buyei wherever they are. It was also suggested that activities such as competitions could be held in order to increase students' interest to learn Buyei. Having said that, teachers also need to pay attention to whether learning Buyei will hinder students' progress in learning Chinese, however, this is still being studied and further evidence is needed.

## **3. Monitoring and evaluation system need further improvement**

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system was an important element in this project, however, more stringent M&E is required. For example, class observation indicators were not consistently recorded in reports that were made at different times, which limited the completeness and comparability of the data. Data gathered about the control class was also insufficient – in the original project design, there was little consistent data about the experimental class and control class.

To better ensure the data's effectiveness, the project should have more systematic indicators and data collection methods, and it should track progress and report it more systematically. For example, a class observation template that includes crucial content such as various indicators should be created.

Further, there should be a stricter control group selection and tracking process. The selection criteria/tracking should include teacher's teaching capacity and progress, whether there was any interference from other projects, the level of interference, student progress, etc.

Lastly, each school adopted their own way of implementing bilingual and biliterate education. To increase the comparability of experimental and control classes across schools, data collected should be adjusted accordingly (e.g. multigrade classes should be compared with multigrade classes, grade 1 classes compared with grade 1 classes).



Oxfam Hong Kong's basic education team piloted this project. You can click [here](#) to learn more about OHK basic education programme. We hope this brief evaluation report and the programme brief can give you a better idea of what we are doing in China, and help facilitate the exchange of information and learning.

If you are interested in knowing more, please feel free to contact [Xiaoxi Lian](#), Programme Evaluation and Learning Officer, or [Paris Law](#), Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager of Oxfam Hong Kong.