

Multilingual education as a way towards achieving quality Universal Primary Education in Vietnam: good practices and policy implications
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PART 1

Overview ; Vietnam has a population of 86 million; within this there are some 53 ethnic minority (EM) groups making up 11 million people (13% of the total population), and speaking approximately 100 languages (30 with orthographies).

Minority language policy principles in Vietnam; Recognise and secure the legal rights of minority groups to speak their own languages; Recognise and secure legal and equal rights of minority groups to protect and promote their languages; Encourage minority groups to use their languages in various domains of social life, Encourage minority people to learn and use Vietnamese.

Ethnic Minorities Education and Universal Primary Education in Vietnam; The language of instruction in schools is almost exclusively Vietnamese. Few teachers can communicate in ethnic minority languages. Most teachers do not have the skills and capacity to teach Vietnamese as a second language; Most government officials see the teaching of Vietnamese to ethnic minority children as early as possible as the best way to alleviate the situation.

Issues of EQUITY and QUALITY of basic education for the most disadvantaged groups like Ethnic Minorities are major challenges for Vietnam in terms of meeting the Millenium Development Goals.

There are now several national programs to increase ethnic minority children's ability in Vietnamese, including an intensive school readiness course; Vietnamese-strengthening programs; and the provision of minority languages (now seven in total with one more in process) as a optional subject in school.

Donor-supported pilot projects in the use of Mother Tongue-based education include: A Save the Children (SC) pilot emphasising mother tongue orally through the use of Teaching Assistants (TA); the Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children (PEDC) project with TAs for translation of difficult words and concepts in class, and the Ministry of Education and Training and UNICEF's Action Research on mother tongue-based bilingual education (MTBBE).

PART 2

MOET¹-UNICEF's Action Research on MTBBE (2008-2015)

Goal Ensure minority students have access to quality and equitable education in their mother tongues and Vietnamese.

Specific Objectives: to successfully implement a valid and feasible design of bilingual education in EM languages in selected preschool and primary schools; to contribute to the development of policies and practices (including legal framework) that will promote use and development of ethnic minority languages.

Pilot design: Ethnic minority languages as the main language of instruction; Introducing Vietnamese as a second language for one year of preschool, and primary school grade 1 and 2; Introducing

¹ Ministry of Education and Training

Vietnamese as a language of instruction in grade 3, together with the mother tongue. Three year transition period from grade 3 to grade 5.

Location; Three provinces; Lao Cai (Hmong)- 3 Preschools and 3 Primary schools; Gia Lai (J'rai)-3 Preschools and 3 Primary schools; Tra Vinh (Khmer)- 2 Preschool and 2 Primary schools.

Main strategies: Applying key principles of quality education: Children learning new concepts in relation to familiar things; learning in a child-friendly way, relevant and responsive environment; Inclusive participation to ensure its relevance to the target groups; Curriculum based on the national curriculum ; Learning/teaching material adapted to be more appropriate in local contexts.

Progress to date: Development of curricula in 3 languages, based on the national curriculum; Over 100 teachers and education managers, trained in bilingual education methodology; Teaching and learning materials for preschool, Grades 1 and 2 developed; Assessment of preschool and Grade 1.

Among the key initial results are included:

Preschool assessment, reading: In a comparison between MTBBE and non-MTBBE students in Vietnamese (May 2010, 2nd cohort of students), MTBBE pupils performed significantly better than non-MTBBE students in listening comprehension, knowing names and functions, knowing names of people and animals, and implementing commands.

Grade 1 assessment, maths: In a comparison between MTBBE and Non-MTBBE Grade 1 students in Mathematics (May 2010, 1st cohort of students) – Almost 98 per cent of all MTBBE students scored above the average standard, while only 79 per cent of non-MTBBE did so.

Non-academic outcomes; Among MTBBE pupils there was a more positive attitude to school life in general; greater confidence in their own abilities; more active participation in classroom activities and school life.

Dissemination and documentation: Senior Vietnamese officials Madame Trieu Thi Nai, Vice President of the Council for Ethnic Minority Affairs, and Mr. Nguyen Van Xua, Deputy Director of the Policies Department have reported very positively on the program results.

Provincial Plans for Expansion and Continuation; In Lao Cai, it is planned that by the end of the 2015 school year, a total of 1300 students will have been taught through the MTBBE approach in preschool, followed by MTBBE primary education. In Tra Vinh, there will be continuation of the 4 MTBBE preschool classes in 2 communes.

Next Steps: Continuation of the implementation of the action research with a focus on teacher training, material development and revision, monitoring and evaluation and capacity building at the national, provincial, district and school levels. There will also be refining of the design to be more relevant to the Vietnamese context; scaling up in provinces where the program has been implemented, documenting and disseminating results and strengthening MoET capacity and leadership and partnerships for policy advocacy.