

Inclusion of ethnic minority children in Vietnamese education: Lessons learned from a pilot project.

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Unless children can easily understand the language their teacher is using, they learn very little. In Viet Nam, that means the door to education slams shut almost as soon as ethnic minority children enrol for their first classes because their first language is not the language of the classroom. Research done by Save the Children show clearly that children's learning outcomes are very low due to language, as the national curriculum, learning materials and language of instruction are in a language unfamiliar to them.

Since 2006, Save the Children has started a pilot project of bilingual education to create a viable approach to educating minority children. People from minority communities are recruited and trained to work as teaching assistants to qualified teachers. The teaching assistant delivers most of the lesson in the child's first language while the teacher introduces key Vietnamese terms for the learning points taught. In this way, children learn new concepts in a language they can understand, and gradually learn more and more Vietnamese.

The adapted curriculum, materials and bilingual education model were piloted in eight primary schools. From the very start, children were participating and performing at a much higher level than before: they went from tense, confused and silent children straining to understand, to vibrant and happy children delighted to be learning and performing like other children.

Save the Children is working in close cooperation with other organizations to promote mother tongue-based education. The integration of this new approach into national education policy will take some time, but it is an effective way to provide quality education to ethnic minority children.