

**Where minds have not met: Fighting language barriers  
to assure quality UPE for ethnic minority children in Viet Nam.**

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Language barriers have been the major obstacle to the achievement and quality of Universal Primary Education in Viet Nam. The majority of ethnic minority children start school with little or no Vietnamese knowledge. They therefore cannot understand lessons and soon drop out.

Recently, there have been pilot initiatives to tackle language barriers by teaching Vietnamese as a second language to five-year-old ethnic minority children to prepare them for school. However, the impact has not yet yielded satisfactory results. This stresses the need for more empirical research on the issue for better implementation of these programmes.

Responding to this call, a study<sup>1</sup> was conducted to investigate how different stakeholders perceive the advantages and disadvantages that these children face when learning Vietnamese as a second language. The findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with different stakeholders show that one major cause of the current poor outcome is the mismatches in perception and awareness between the education providers (education authorities and school), the beneficiaries (the students themselves) and the socio-linguistic factors affecting the education, including family and community. The dim response and participation from the latter two groups of stakeholders, due to their insufficient awareness of the issue, particularly of the importance of creating a Vietnamese-friendly environment for the children, have severely affected the outcome of the current efforts by the government and several international and non-governmental organizations in fighting language barriers. The study suggests several practical solutions to make their minds meet and to create more advantageous conditions for the children's study.

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