

Where minds have not met: Fighting language barriers to assure quality Universal Primary Education for ethnic minority children in Vietnam
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A qualitative analysis was undertaken on the perspectives of different stakeholders on the teaching and learning of five-year-old ethnic minority children to prepare them for school; partial findings are presented here.

The study focused on two Hmong communities in a mountainous Northern province which has been the focus of various language-based interventions for school children.

Four groups from each community participated: Educational authorities, Schools, Community members and child beneficiaries.

The findings in relation to the community and family participants were as follows (other findings will be published later in the final paper).

Advantages: Establishment of new kindergarten satellite schools; Increase of teaching time; Policies for the poor; Support from international organisations and NGOs; Support from community officers (enrolment, attendance).

Disadvantages: Lack of adequate school and classroom facilities; Lack of Vietnamese exposure and speaking environment ; Lack of care, support and supervision from parents; Lack of communicative and social skills; poverty, malnutrition, weather and infrastructure barriers to children attending school; teaching methodology, teacher qualifications and teacher-student relationships; unsuitable curriculum; inaccurate birth registration.

Expected changes and solutions: Improvement of school and classroom infrastructure; Supply of teaching and learning tools and materials; Improvement of teaching methodology and teacher qualifications; Training of local ethnic teaching assistants and teachers; Enhancement of Vietnamese teaching; making it a priority to bring children aged 3 and 4 to school; Support from community and family to create a Vietnamese-friendly environment.

Comparison of stakeholders' perspectives:

A) Perspectives on Vietnamese teaching and learning at pre-primary level

Education authorities and school teachers: it is essential for school readiness, the earlier the better

Community and family: the necessity for this is questionable, five years old is too young to learn

B) Vietnamese teaching: whose job is it?

Education authorities and school teachers: all stakeholders should be involved

Community and family: the school is wholly responsible

C) Role of Community and Family?

Education authorities and school teachers: community should create Vietnamese-friendly environment

Community and family: our job is to make sure that students go to school

Overall findings; there is good awareness and commitment on the part of education authorities (policy-makers) and school teachers (service providers). There is poor awareness and lack of participation on the part of community and family. For UPE goals to be achieved, more work needs to be done to involve the community.