

## **Multilingual education as a way towards achieving quality UPE in Viet Nam: Good practices and policy implications.**

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Viet Nam is an ethnically diverse society with 54 different ethnic groups, many of which have their own distinct languages. The country has made remarkable progress in achieving the MDG 2. However there are emerging issues: *Equity and Quality of Universal primary education*.

The official language of school instruction is Vietnamese. This creates a “language barrier” for many ethnic minority children and partly contributes to the fact that primary school completion rates among ethnic minority children (61 per cent) are significantly lower than the corresponding rate for the Kinh (86 per cent), i.e., the Vietnamese. Action Research on Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education (AR MTBBE) was implemented by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and UNICEF in 2008 in three provinces with three ethnic minority languages, namely: H’mong, J’rai and Khmer. Assessment results to date indicate positive evidence of MTBBE students’ improved performance compared to non-MTBBE students as well as increased confidence for ethnic minority students. Based on this positive experience, one of the three provinces, Lao Cai will expand the approach, using its own resources.

It is hoped that the evidence from this AR MTBBE study, together with other similar initiatives, will serve the development of a comprehensive approach. Under this method, the child’s home language will be used as the language of instruction in schools, especially in pre-primary and up to at least three years of primary education, to help ethnic minority children to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity, learn better and gain the level of fluency in Vietnamese they need to achieve their educational goals. Support should also be given to ethnic minority groups who do not possess a written language through the promotion of a flexible bilingual education approach focusing on oral communication. The hope is that this programme will help to improve equity and the quality of education for ethnic minority children in Viet Nam.