



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Action Research on Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education:
Improving the equity and quality of education for ethnic minority children in Viet Nam

September 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

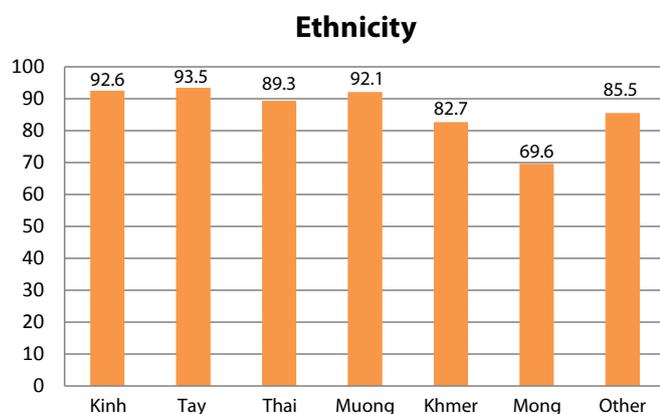
Page 2.	1. BACKGROUND
Page 3.	2. ACTION RESEARCH ON MOTHER TONGUE-BASED BILINGUAL EDUCATION
Page 4.	3. PROGRESS FROM 2008 TO 2011
Page 7.	4. LESSONS LEARNED
Page 8.	5. NEXT STEPS

1. BACKGROUND

Viet Nam has made overall progress in basic education. Net enrolment rates for primary and second level are 95.5 per cent and 86.2 per cent, respectively (2009 Census). Between 1992 and 2008, primary level completion rates rose from 45.0 per cent to 89.8 per cent¹.

Despite major achievements in the education sector in Viet Nam, however disparities still remain and education attainment is much lower among several groups, particularly among ethnic minority groups. For ethnic minority children, low enrolment and completion and high drop-out and repetition rates remain a challenge. According to the Government's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2011), the primary school completion rate² among ethnic minority children is significantly lower than that of Kinh and Hoa children: 79.8 per cent and 103.1 per cent, respectively. There is also inequality between different ethnic minority groups. Figure 1 shows that the primary school net attendance rate³ among the Mong is as low as 69.6 per cent, while the rate among the Tay is the highest of all, 93.5 per cent, followed by Kinh of 92.6 per cent (Census, 2009).

Figure 1. Primary school net attendance rate by different ethnic groups (%)



The 1992 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam enshrines the rights of ethnic minorities to use and protect their own languages and scripts, "Ethnic

minorities have the right to use their own languages and scripts, maintain and develop their good traditions, practices, custom and culture" (Article 5).

The Government has made efforts to fulfil its duties and commitment to ensure the right to education of every Vietnamese child.

However, many ethnic minority children are still facing language challenge when they start schooling as most teachers are Kinh and do not speak local languages and ethnic minority children have limited or in some cases no understanding of the Vietnamese language.

Evidence worldwide⁴ shows that teaching children for a recommended six to eight years in their mother tongue as well as gradually introducing national or other dominant languages has a number of advantages, including:

- Children learn better, are more self-confident and are well equipped to transfer their literacy and numeracy skills to additional languages;
- Children are less likely to experience frustration and failure, and to drop out of school, compared to children who start formal education in a second or foreign language;
- By including families and drawing on local cultural heritage, mother tongue-based education contributes to communities' social and cultural well-being and fosters inclusiveness within the wider society.

As one way to operationalise the Government's commitment to improve the quality of education for ethnic minorities, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has been implementing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE) through Action Research (AR) in Lao Cai, Gia Lai and Tra Vinh provinces with three respective ethnic minority languages, namely Mong, Jrai and Khmer, with the support of UNICEF since 2008⁵.

¹Viet Nam High Quality Education For All, The World Bank, The Belgian Development Cooperation and UKAid from the Department for International Development Volume I, June 2011

²This indicator is calculated as the number of children (of any age) attending the last grade of primary school (excluding repeaters) [numerator] over the total number of children of primary school completion age (age appropriate to final grade of primary school) [denominator].

³Primary school net attendance rate refers to the attendance rate of primary age children at primary school

⁴UNESCO Bangkok (2012) Why language matters for the Millennium Development Goals

⁵A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the MOET and UNICEF in August 2007 on the implementation and operation of the MTBBE Action Research



2. ACTION RESEARCH ON MOTHER TONGUE-BASED BILINGUAL EDUCATION

2.1. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS:

The objectives of the Action Research are to:

- Implement a valid and feasible design of bilingual education in ethnic minority languages and Vietnamese in pre-school⁶ and primary schools; and
- Contribute to the development of policies and practices, including legal frameworks, that will promote the use and development of ethnic minority languages as a means to improve access, quality and equity of education and other social services.

Through the Action Research, following results are expected to be achieved by end 2015:

- A detailed study design including methodology and tools to assess children's learning outcomes;
- The development of appropriate teaching, learning and advocacy bilingual materials in ethnic minority languages;
- Professional development for teachers through pre-service and on-the-job training and support;

- Understanding of Action Research and MTBBE methodology on the part of education managers, teachers, teaching assistants and student teachers;
- Successful implementation of MTBBE measured through assessment of children's learning outcomes;
- Understanding and support for MTBBE on the part of policymakers, education managers, education professionals, and local communities;
- A contextually-relevant and sustainable policies for ethnic minority language use and MTBBE education developed.

THE MTBBE APPROACH IN VIET NAM:

- Pre-school to Primary Grade 2: Mother Tongues used as the language of instruction with Vietnamese taught as a subject;
- Grade 3 to 5: Mother tongues continue to be used as language of instruction and Vietnamese is introduced as a language of instruction along with Mother Tongues.
- By the end of Grade 5, students will have developed bilingualism and biliteracy, and mastered the competencies expected as per the national curriculum, including the Vietnamese language.

⁶The Action Research on MTBBE commenced in the final year of preschool with five year old students. In May 2010 both cohorts completed the pre-school component.

2.2. LOCATIONS:



LAO CAI PROVINCE WITH MONG ETHNIC MINORITY

- 5 classes of Grade 2 in 3 primary schools
- 5 classes of Grade 3 in 3 primary schools

Total of Cohorts 1 and 2: 182 students

GIA LAI PROVINCE WITH JRAI ETHNIC MINORITY

- 4 classes of Grade 2 in 3 primary schools
- 4 classes of Grade 3 in 3 primary schools

Total of Cohorts 1 and 2: 146 students

TRA VINH PROVINCE WITH KHMER ETHNIC MINORITY

- 5 classes of Grade 2 in 2 primary schools
- 5 classes of Grade 3 in 2 primary schools

Total of Cohorts 1 and 2: 166 students

3. PROGRESS FROM 2008 TO 2011

There are two cohorts of students involved in AR: the first cohort comprising of 253 students who finished Grade 2 at the end of the 2010-2011⁷ school year; and the second cohort of 241 students finished Grade 1. The first and second cohorts are due to complete Grade 5 in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

3.1 THE FOLLOWING RESULTS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED FROM 2008 TO 2011:

- Annual assessments on MTBBE students' learning outcomes conducted at the end of every school year including comparison with non-MTBBE ethnic minority students in the same environment. The results of the two previous assessments at the end of the 2008-2009⁸ and 2009-2010⁹ school years proved positive learning outcome of MTBBE students compared to non-MTBBE students;
- The development of bilingual curricula for preschool and primary education based on the national curriculum and teaching and learning

materials for preschool and grades 1 to 3 in each of three ethnic minority languages of Mong, Jrai and Khmer;

- 187 teachers and education managers from national, provincial and district levels trained and have their capacity developed in bilingual education techniques, how to use bilingual teaching and learning materials, regular learning assessment;
- Greater understanding and recognition of MTBBE approach by parents, teachers, local leaders, communities and education managers at all levels;
- Engagement and greater support of policy and decision makers as MTBBE experiences documented and widely shared through policy advocacy initiatives with the members of the Ethnic Council of the National Assembly, senior officers from the National Assembly, Committee for Ethnic Minorities (CEM) and MOET, and representatives from international agencies.

⁷ Number of students are different to previous school year as few of them have migrated with their families to other places.

⁸ See Programme Brief (May 2010)

⁹ See Programme Brief (March 2011)

3.2 2010-2011 SCHOOL YEAR MTBBE ACTION RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS:

During the 2010 - 2011 school year, AR documented achievement in MTBBE students' learning outcome, teachers' capacity and partnerships.

3.2.1. Academic performance assessment of two cohorts

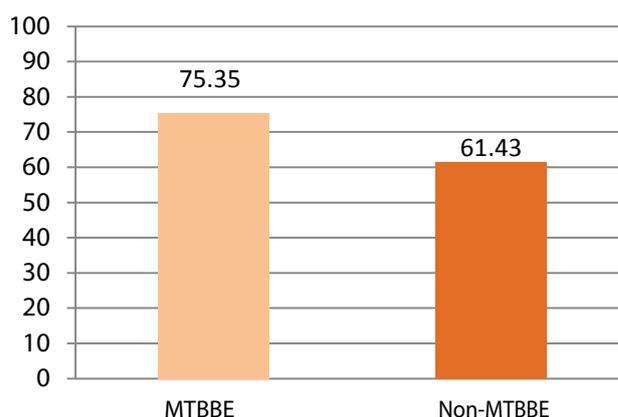
The assessment of learning outcomes was undertaken by the Primary Education Department of the MOET in May 2011, with the technical assistance of an international consultant. Both cohorts of students were assessed in three educational areas: Mathematics, oral Vietnamese, and reading in Mother Tongue. The Mathematics assessment was done also with ethnic minority children being taught in Vietnamese, and ethnic Kinh children who live in the areas where the MTBBE has been implemented¹⁰.

Grade 1 academic performance assessment of cohort 2

A graphical comparison of the performance of Grade 1 students in terms of Mathematics when performance is combined across all three provinces is presented in Figure 2. It is clear that MTBBE students outperformed non-MTBBE students, scoring 75.35 out of a maximum of 100 while the non-MTBBE scored only 61.43. In addition, it is important to note that the MTBBE students' performance (75.35) was closer to the Kinh students' performance (85.92) with a difference of 10.57 points, than to that of non-MTTBE (61.43) with a difference of 13.92 points. This indicates that learners' proficiency of the language of instruction significantly affects their academic performance.

¹⁰ Mathematics has been the subject for comparison within the Action Research, as the MTBBE curriculum is identical to the national one and it is a clear means of assessing the effectiveness of the MTBBE approach.

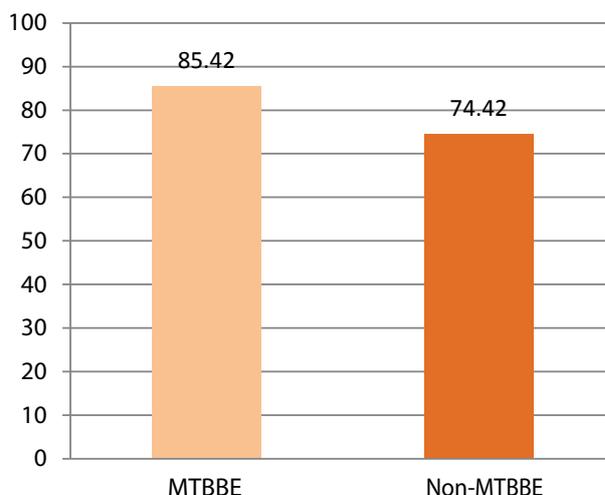
Figure 2. Mean scores of grade 1 Mathematics assessment results



Grade 2 academic performance assessment of cohort 1

Similarly in Grade 1, a comparison between MTBBE and non-MTBBE result in Mathematics shows that the difference is also statistically significant: the non-MTBBE group had an average score of 74.42 of a maximum of 100 while the MTBBE group scored 85.42. In addition, similar to the results of Grade 1 assessment, it is important to note that the MTBBE students' performance (85.42) was closer to the Kinh students' performance (90.78) with a difference of 5.36 points, than to that of non-MTTBE students (74.42) with a difference of 11 points. MTBBE students' better performance compared to non-MTBBE students is consistent with the results from the last two years' assessment.

Figure 3. Mean scores of grade 2 Mathematics assessment results



“When students have solid knowledge developed in their mother tongue, they can learn Vietnamese faster and better. The MOET has assigned its best and most experienced specialists to work on the Action Research on MTBBE in cooperation with UNICEF, and we recognize that this approach is an effective solution for ethnic minority education”

– **Le Tien Thanh, Director, Primary Education Department, MOET.**

3.2.2. Voices of schools and local communities

The approach continues to receive positive feedback at all levels and positive views have been expressed on benefits of the approach, particularly the education outcomes of children themselves, from the progress in learning results to their self-confidence and self-esteem. According to local education managers and project staff in all implementing schools, students of MTBBE classes maintain highest attendance record, enjoy a dynamic learning atmosphere and are proud of their classes and schools.

“The situation for children is much better than before. They are more confident, more enthusiastic and willing to speak out. Having taught in the Mong language for two years, I have noticed that, as well as their skills improving at school, they have been able to bring their knowledge and skills home. They continue to communicate and share experiences with their families and their community.” – **Chau A Tau, Mong ethnic minority, Teacher of Grade 2, Lao Chai primary school, Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province.**

‘My child is excited about going to school every day.’ ‘Our children are more willing to ask the teacher questions. They are not as shy as I was when I was in school.’ Community leaders and people said, ‘The project helps our children respect their community.’ – **Jrai parents and community representatives in Ia Phi commune, Chu Pah district, Gia Lai province.**

3.2.3. Expansion of the MTBBE Approach

In June 2011 the action plan for MTBBE expansion was officially approved by Lao Cai People’s Committee and included in its’ five year project to develop and improve education for the period 2011-

2015. At present, MTBBE expansion is implemented in 12 preschools and 12 primary Grade 1 classes with a total of 450 students.

The decision to expand MTBBE as an innovative teaching methodology to support ethnic minority learners in Lao Cai was achieved under the leadership of Lao Cai DOET Director Mr. Truong Kim Minh. This is highly welcomed by both the MOET and international organisations.

3.2.4. Policy Advocacy

Greater support from policy makers

The Second Round Table on Improving the Quality of Education for Ethnic Minority Children through Vietnamese Strengthening¹¹ was organised in November 2011 by the Ethnic Council of the National Assembly. On that occasion, the results, impacts and lessons learned from MTBBE AR received the attention of more than 100 participants, including attendees from the Ethnic Council and the Committee of Culture, Education, Youth and Children of the National Assembly, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities (CEM), senior officials of MOET, representatives from UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors, INGOs and leaders and education managers from provinces. The approach has been recognised by leaders of the MOET and National Assembly at the events.

“To date, the Action Research has shown positive results and we look forward to a comprehensive evaluation at the end of the programme in 2015.”
– **Mr. Nguyen Vinh Hien, Vice Minister of Education and Training.**

“We are very pleased with the Action Research on Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education programme. We hope that lessons learned from this programme will help us improve education quality in ethnic minority areas. I request National Assembly members in those areas continue to monitor the implementation of policies on ethnic minority education including bilingual education”.
– **Madam Trieu Thi Nai, Vice President of the Ethnic Council, National Assembly**

¹¹ “Vietnamese strengthening” is a term widely used within the education system to talk about solutions involving different teaching and learning initiatives to improve Vietnamese competencies of ethnic minority students.

Expanded diverse partnerships

In April 2011, 13 senior government officials from China and Malaysia visited Viet Nam to learn about the MTBBE experience. They were impressed with the results of MTBBE AR and the role of MOET in organising, implementing and monitoring the implementation of AR. Through classroom and school observation and interaction with students, teachers, local education managers and community leaders in Lao Cai, the delegation learned about the practical experiences of implementing the MTBBE AR in local settings and its enabling conditions. *"I am impressed with the participatory methodology that the teachers are using in the class. Teachers show respect to children. This has made children more self-confident and they actively participate in all learning activities".* - Mr. Tang Jingwei- Director of Teacher Department, the Chinese Ministry of Education.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons learned have emerged in relation to the two objectives of MTBBE AR.

Validate a feasible design of bilingual education in ethnic minority languages and Vietnamese:

- Teachers' capacity is key to the success of the approach, especially to apply flexible bilingual education techniques to ensure that all students within the MTBBE AR will reach the required national curriculum competencies at the end of grade 5.

- The support and engagement of schools, teachers, parents and students have contributed to the continued success of the MTBBE AR. On-going communication with all stakeholders is critical and information on project activities and results needs regular update to maintain the support of local authorities and education managers, parents, teachers and students.
- Support from local communities is vital, in terms of reflecting the distinct nature of each ethnic culture and its values in teaching and learning materials to ensure relevance and quality.
- Close and regular monitoring by technical staff and education managers at central, provincial and district levels is important as it helps them understand the status of teaching and learning activities, track the learning progress of students through bilingual education and gauge the relevance and practicality of the materials and activities and make adjustments as required.
- Annual assessment of students' learning outcomes is critical to produce accurate and reliable data in comparison with national standards and to disseminate evidence of the benefits of the MTBBE approach.

Contribute to the development of policies and good practices of languages in schools for ethnic minority children:

- Continuous sharing of results with the leaders of MOET and DOETs is fundamental to ensure their most updated knowledge on and effective



implementation of MTBBE AR. This also helps them integrate the approach in the MOET guidelines to the provinces on strengthening Vietnamese language skills of ethnic minority students.

- Greater support of the National Assembly's Ethnic Council is essential for policy advocacy, as the Council is responsible for studying and supervising the implementation of ethnic policies and issues and recommending actions to the National Assembly.
- The interest and support of international partners for the MTBBE approach has been vital in the effort to help MOET and the provinces recognise the benefits for its' continuation, expansion and replication.

5. NEXT STEPS

Policy advocacy:

- Policy advocacy through continuous sharing on the benefits of the approach with a wide range of partners and legal agencies, including the Ethnic Council of the National Assembly, the Communist Party, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities, MOET in order to promote and scale up the implementation of the MTBBE approach.
- Continue to advocate to provincial and district authorities for the expansion and replication of the MTBBE approach with action plans and budget allocation in provinces for ethnic minorities.

Knowledge generation:

- Continue the annual assessment of students' performance to produce evidence on their learning progress and outcomes to prove the benefits of children's beginning their learning in schools in their own languages.

- Undertake the Classroom Language Mapping to generate evidence and identify possibilities of expanding the MTBBE approach. This exercise has started in Lao Cai and it is planned for other provinces.

Capacity building:

- Further strengthen the capacity of teachers in bilingual education through on-the-job training, workshops, experience exchange and technical support.
- Make necessary adjustments to improve the quality and relevance of learning and teaching materials.
- Strengthen the management, technical capacity, monitoring and supervision of education managers at the national, provincial, district and school levels.

Monitoring and evaluation:

- Continue the regular joint monitoring by MOET departments e.g. Ethnic Minority Education, Primary Education in order to understand the enabling environment and operation of the approach in order to implement MOET language policies and guidance to enhance collective support within MOET.

This Programme Brief 3 is produced by MOET with support from UNICEF, outlining the approach and results after three years of implementation, particularly the results of Grade 1 and 2 MTBBE assessments from the 2010-2011 school year.

Photos: UNICEF Viet Nam\2011
Truong Viet Hung & Doan Bao Chau

UNICEF Viet Nam

Address: 81A Tran Quoc Toan, Hoan Kiem, Ha Noi | **Tel:** +84 439425706 - 11 | **Fax:** +84 439425705

Email: hanoi.registry@unicef.org | **Website:** <http://www.unicef.org/vietnam>