

An Evaluation of the Multigrade and Bilingual Education Project in Vietnam*

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The Government of Vietnam has established the National Program of Action on Education stipulating the goals of Education for All by the year 2000: 90% of children should complete grade 5, the rest should complete grade 3, and no child should be illiterate by age 15. The goal of the Universal Primary Education Project (UPE Project) supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is in line with the Government's goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), especially Article 28:

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

The main objective of the UPE Project is to increase enrollment of primary-school-aged children, 6–14 years, particularly girls and ethnic minorities.

UNICEF has been supporting children's education programs in Vietnam for over a decade. Although significant progress has been made, problems still exist, such as low enrollment and completion rates, and high drop-out and repetition rates, particularly among the ethnic minorities. Of 1.2 million primary-school-aged children not in school, over 50% are from ethnic minorities in thinly populated mountainous and remote rural areas in the Mekong River Delta. Reasons for nonenrollment and dropping out are numerous, includ-

ing poverty, the need for children to work, distant schools, expensive schooling, irrelevant curriculum, and a medium of instruction that children do not speak at home. Teacher salaries are low and teachers are leaving their jobs. Resources and equipment for primary schools are scarce.

Programs are needed to encourage children to return to school or to provide alternatives and home-based education where formal education is nonexistent. The Universal Primary Education for Ethnic Minority Children Project (a UNICEF project) which includes multigrade and bilingual education, aims to bring school closer to children, improve learning facilities, and reduce parents' poverty. The project will also encourage enrollment and reduce the number of drop-outs and repeaters, and promote education for girls.

Support for the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) Project and the Multigrade and Bilingual Education (M&BE) Project includes the following activities:

- development of teaching and learning materials—textbooks, handbooks of les-

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son plans, a training manual for teacher-training, localized materials and readers for girls);

- teacher-training—in-service training for teachers and preservice training for student teachers at teacher-training colleges;
- distribution of supplies for students and teachers; and
- capacity building for project staff at all levels including staff from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET).

Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

Overall objectives of the evaluation

- Assess the present status of the UNICEF-MOET program on education until 2000, including progress, constraints, and contribution to achieving the Socialist Republic of Vietnam goals under UNICEF's framework for education, CRC, and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
- Identify trends and issues that need to be explored in the situation next year (1999) and that may become the focus of program activities in the next country program.
- Suggest cost-efficient strategies, including refinement and improvement of program components and development of new ones.

Methodology

Details of the methodology were determined after discussions among selected consultants, MOET, and UNICEF staff members. However, the following guidelines governed the process of the evaluation:

- *Site selection.* A limited number of representative communities and schools for in-depth analysis were chosen and stratified along one or more of the following criteria: geographic/cultural area, urban/ru-

ral location, nature of social and economic development, and quality/length of program execution.

- *Informant selection.* The principal informants were chosen from selected field visit sites and at provincial and central levels.

At the field level, informants were local education officials and district project steering committee members; local authorities, decision makers, supervisors, and trainers; school headmasters, teachers, and students; parents; and community members and leaders.

At the provincial and central levels, informants included MOET officials, supervisors, curriculum developers, trainers, decision makers, and central and provincial project steering committee members.

Other agencies involved are Committee for Protection and Care of Children and other nongovernmental organizations.

Data collection

Two kinds of data were collected:

- *quantitative data*, gathered from all program areas, on the impact of the project on number of children out of school, in ABE and M&BE classes, and in UNICEF-supported ABE and M&BE classes; ABE students moved to regular classes; teachers; classes; teaching and learning books printed and distributed; training courses; and teachers trained; and
- *qualitative data*, collected through interviews; research (review of policy documents, trip reports, annual reviews, and other documents produced by MOET and UNICEF on coverage and inputs); focus group discussions with teachers, students, and parents; and observation of classes.

Bilingual education

Bilingual education is the teaching of Vietnamese and an ethnic minority language (the

mother tongue). In Vietnam, which has as many as 53 ethnic groups, some form of bilingual education is inevitable and has been implemented since the 1920s.

The government has enforced the policy of using ethnic languages along with the national language since the country's founding. Article 15 of the first Constitution (1946) stated: "Ethnic minorities have the right to receive compulsory and free primary and lower-secondary education in their languages." Article 5 of the 1981 Constitution reconfirms this principle: "Ethnic minorities have the right to use their own languages and scripts, maintain and develop their good traditions, practices, custom and culture." CRC, which Vietnam has ratified, also states that children have a right to use their own language.

All government decrees, decisions, and instructions on education in ethnic areas mention that ethnic minority languages are to be taught in addition to the national language. Decree 206/CP (27 November 1961) officially ratified the use of the "improved" Tay-Nung, Meo (H'mong), and Thai languages, and also stipulated the scope and level of their use, including the teaching of these languages in kindergarten and primary school.

On 10 August 1969 the Government Council issued Decision 153/CP on the establishment, improvement, and use of ethnic scripts; reviewed the results of the implementation of Decree 206/CP; and stipulated the scope and extent of using the scripts of the ethnic groups in primary and lower-secondary schools: "Where the pupils know a little of the national language, the ethnic minority scripts together with the Vietnamese language and scripts shall be taught in kindergarten and other grades of primary education."

After the liberation of South Vietnam the Secretary of the of the Central Communist Party Committee issued a decree on 11 November 1977, which specified: "The languages and writings of all ethnic groups shall be respected, and Decision 153-CP of the Govern-

ment Council shall be implemented in accordance with the situation of Southern Vietnam. To settle the language policy, the Government Council promulgated Decision 53-CP on 22 February 1980, concerning the writing systems of ethnic minority groups. The decision emphasized "the right and duty of all Vietnamese citizens to learn the national language" and stipulated that "in ethnic minority areas, the ethnic minority languages and writing shall be taught together with the national language in primary and continuing education."

MOET supports a plan to teach ethnic minority writing, draws up curriculums, publishes teaching manuals and textbooks, trains teachers, and directs the plans and teaching methodology for different languages.

The Council of Ministers' directives require Khmer (1981) and Cham (1982) provinces to strictly follow the policy on teaching ethnic writing together with the national language.

It is clear that the government has always encouraged ethnic minority groups to strengthen and unify themselves by learning Vietnamese as well as their own language. The policies cited clearly pave the way for a comprehensive bilingual education program that will improve the teaching of Vietnamese and integrate ethnic minorities into mainstream society.

Vietnam has 53 ethnic minorities and 53 minority languages, but only 22 groups have a writing system and only 11 languages have been taught in school. In 1945 Vietnamese was declared to be the national language.

It is important to separate the political from the methodological considerations of bilingual education. Countries create language policies for different reasons, and language is a sensitive issue when different language groups interact.

Bilingual education: How is it done and why?

Bilingual education has a long history in Vietnam and has taken different forms at different times. Three policies were tried out:

Policy #1	
Grade 5	Vietnamese instruction
Grade 4	Vietnamese instruction
Grade 3	Vernacular instruction
Grade 2	Vernacular instruction
Grade 1	Vernacular instruction

The mother tongue was used exclusively for the first three years and Vietnamese was introduced in grade 3.

Policy #2	
Grade 5	Vietnamese language
Grade 4	
Grade 3	Local language
Grade 2	
Grade 1	

This pattern is the most similar to the international pattern of bilingual education that starts with both languages and gradually moves to more Vietnamese instruction by grade 5 while continuing the use of the mother tongue.

Policy #3		
Grade 5	Vietnamese instruction	15%
Grade 4		local
Grade 3		language
Grade 2		as a
Grade 1		subject

This policy is the one most in use. It allows the teaching of the mother tongue as a subject within the 15% local component of the curriculum, if the community requests it.

However, there is a fourth policy that was not fully discussed. It applies to languages that have a Romanized orthography similar to Vietnamese, such as H'mong.

Policy #4		
Grade 5	Vietnamese instruction	15%
Grade 4		Written
Grade 3		vernacular
Grade 2		Only oral
Grade 1		vernacular

This policy permits the oral use of the ethnic minority language within the 15% component of grades 1 and 2, but deliberately delays teaching literacy in the ethnic minority language until grade 3 when it is assumed that the children have already acquired literacy in the second language (Vietnamese). Written ethnic minority language is taught as a subject rather than used as a medium of instruction. It was argued that teaching mother-tongue literacy in such languages would confuse the children because of the similarity of the scripts.

How research and international experience say it can be done

These policies go against the bulk of research in education (including in Vietnam) showing that initial literacy is best acquired in the mother tongue and transferred to the second language, which improves understanding and literacy skills in the second language. Bilingual education has long been considered a valid strategy for improving the quality of education. From the early 1950s, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasized the advantages of education in the individual's mother tongue. Research has also shown that interrupting the development of the mother tongue and then not learning the second language well interferes with children's cognitive development. Thinking and problem solving require good language skills in at least one language.

Studies conducted on bilingual intercultural education in Latin America over the past two decades (Lopez 1992, 1993, 1994) have found the following:

- Bilingualism does not adversely affect the intellectual growth of children, nor does it prevent them from learning a second language.
- It is easier and more efficient to learn to read and write in the language best known and most widely used in everyday communication, particularly if the aim is read-

ing comprehension and written expression and not merely mechanical reading and writing.

- Students should practice speaking the second language before they can read and write it.
- Bilingualism gives students an advantage, since the use of two linguistic systems is associated with greater cognitive flexibility and enhanced ability to use language in general in new contexts.
- A close relationship (even interdependence) is evident between initial linguistic development in the mother tongue and subsequent acquisition of a second language.
- Students must reach a certain degree of proficiency in a language before they can participate actively in classes and develop complex logical and cognitive facilities in that language. The entry level is fairly high. Merely being able to communicate “socially” in the second language is not enough. This distinction has important implications for the development of education programs for children who are in the process of becoming bilingual.

Bilingual education should not be viewed as contributing to separation and isolation, but rather as helping ethnic minority children join mainstream society, which is the desire of the government and the children’s parents.

What has the system achieved?

The system is not achieving this goal. Many educators interviewed said that academic achievement of ethnic minority children was poorer than average. In fact, the system may be alienating these children, resulting in their dropping out with little or no education. They are denied the chance to participate in the national culture and economy, resulting in even more alienation and poverty.

The first principle of education is that the learner must move from the known to the un-

known. Non-Vietnamese-speaking children are not learning to read and write according to this basic principle.

Teaching children to read and write in a language that they do not yet speak is to teach them to manipulate meaningless symbols and emit meaningless sounds. Literacy is the ability to get meaning from the text, which is virtually impossible until the learner knows some of the language. This places an enormous burden on the child, usually resulting in confusion and often causing the child to give up and drop out.

The drop-out problem is compounded by teacher-centered methods that force children to stand and respond to the teacher in front of the whole class in a language that they do not speak, embarrassing them.

The bilingual component was added to the multigrade program in 1996 and implemented in 1997. It is too early to fully evaluate the bilingual component, but it should be reassessed to clarify its objectives and improve its design.

Findings

Objective A

Develop localized bilingual teaching and learning materials to provide students with appropriate knowledge, skills, values, experiences, and healthy attitudes.

Materials

Materials have been developed under the project for

- multigrade teaching,
- teaching Khmer children, and
- teaching minority language and bilingual education.

Bilingual materials either support the 15% local ethnic component of the curriculum or are teacher resource books for teaching ethnic minority children. The materials are almost

always diglot or in Vietnamese for teachers who often are not literate in other languages.

Identification and development of materials

Most multigrade materials have been developed for teacher training, including a useful handbook for teachers on multigrade and bilingual classes, which is being revised to compile the separate modules into a single volume and to improve its content. The handbook includes a module on second-language teaching and learning and a lesson on matching words but does not much develop the methodology of teaching a second language. The handbook includes a large section on preparing teaching and learning aids.

The project has developed and produced 21 bilingual large size books and 12 workbooks in four languages (6 in Khmer, 5 in Bahnar, 5 in Cham, and 5 in H'mong). A second workshop in Lao Cai produced more materials in these languages. These materials are good and include instructions for the teacher on how to use them, but they are yet to be published. The World Bank helped develop more materials, including 15 diglot books in Cham, 9 in Gia Rai, 9 in Bahnar, and 9 in H'mong.

Module 7 in the *Multigrade and Bilingual Education Handbook* deals with the objective of the diglot big books and includes instructions on how to use them and information about the accompanying teacher's guidebooks.

A decision to work in only four languages was determined by MOET and UNICEF in cooperation with the World Bank project. However, the World Bank project works in the Gia Rai language and UNICEF works in Khmer. They overlap in Cham, H'mong, and Bahnar.

Materials developed by the Khmer component were for teachers. The component could not develop materials for children as this was the prerogative of another section of MOET. The Khmer component developed materials including the following:

- *Methods of Writing in Khmer* (Vietnamese);
- *Viet-Khmer Dictionary* (does not include a Khmer-Viet section);
- *Landscapes and Resort Sites in the Mekong Delta* (Vietnamese and Khmer, with photographs);
- *Teachers' Resource Book on Khmer Grammar* (Vietnamese);
- *People and Land of Ethnic Groups* (Vietnamese);
- *Methods of Teaching Vietnamese in Primary School* (Vietnamese and Khmer);
- *Methods of Teaching Math in Primary School in Khmer Regions* (Vietnamese);
- *Problems of Educational Levels in Primary School* (Vietnamese);
- *Educational Management* (Vietnamese);
- *Teaching Vietnamese in Primary School* (Vietnamese);
- *Raising and Processing Aquatic Products* (Vietnamese);
- *Methods of Teaching Khmer Language* (Vietnamese); and
- *Methods of Teaching Math in Primary School* (Vietnamese and Khmer).

A book, which the evaluation team did not see, was developed for a psychology course for Khmer teachers, but UNICEF found it unsuitable and rejected a request to fund it. However, the book was published and is used in teacher-training colleges.

Complete sets of books for grades 1–5 for teaching Khmer and Hoa were developed by MOET. The program has also given funds to teachers in selected provinces to develop teaching aids. However, the evaluation team did not see any evidence of such aids in the classrooms.

Use of materials in the field

The evaluation team did not see any of the materials used in the classrooms except the level-one and -two student workbooks in the Khmer language. The big books have not yet arrived.

Provision of UNICEF Supplies for M&BE (1996–1997)				
Supplies	1996		1997	
	Quantity	Target	Quantity	Target
Radio cassette	40	Teachers		
Vehicle (Land Cruiser)	1	Lai Chau		
Workbooks	42,000 sets	For pupils in 21 provinces		
Notebooks	67,600 sets	For pupils in 21 provinces		
School bags	4,200	Pupils		
Ball-point pens	16,800	Teachers in 33 provinces		
Cash for building four classrooms, with tables, chairs, blackboards, bookshelves, and wardrobes	US\$20,000	Da Bac pilot district		
Equipment for 11 classrooms in four provinces	44 sets	Ninh Binh, Tra Vinh, Kien giang, Thua Thien-Hue	12 classrooms	4 poor provinces
Cash for buying materials to make teaching aids	US\$5/each for 5,700 teachers		10 schools with girl pupils	5 districts with many girl pupils
Provision of funds for gardening, fish farming, and animal husbandry	US\$50/per teacher	Teachers for 240 teachers		
Bilingual workbooks				For provinces teaching two languages
Motorbikes			5	
Motor boats			7	Concentrated districts
Cases with teaching aids			12	

The evaluation team did not see any of the teachers' resource books in use, but some teachers said that they were familiar with them. Perhaps because teachers must share a classroom under shift teaching, materials were not stored in the classrooms visited.

The main evidence of the impact of the program is the supply of workbooks for children in selected areas. However, an official in Long Xuyen said that the books were distributed equally to Vietnamese and minority children as it was his understanding that the support was for districts with minority populations, not for children of minority groups.

Promoting knowledge, skills, values, and healthy attitudes

The materials did not seem to have any direct impact on the children. Teachers strictly followed either the 120-week or 165-week programs using texts approved by MOET for all children. There was little evidence that the children were being taught any differently as a result of using bilingual materials, but it may be too soon to tell.

There was almost no evidence of any work done by the children. When a grade-2 teacher in the Sa Pa district was repeatedly asked to

show examples of the children's work, she finally showed some done by her grade-1 class the year before. However, the teachers kept saying that children did work and had examinations only after a certain period of time.

Developing materials

Texts have been developed for schools where the multigrade project is underway. The government chose the languages used, then teams of international consultants, Vietnamese linguists, provincial education staff, community leaders, and primary-school teachers met for 2–3-week workshops to develop texts based on local content. Texts were accompanied by some lesson plans, which have been part of a series of teacher-training modules for use in multigrade classrooms for the last four years.

UNICEF funded four recently established centers that produce materials to promote ethnic minority languages. These centers have a computer, photocopier, camera, and air conditioner. The evaluation team visited two centers but they were not yet operating as the training was just taking place in Lao Cai. The team was told that a third center in the Khmer area did not have any Khmer-speaking staff.

It was unclear what type of materials these centers would produce, but it was assumed that they would not produce any curriculum materials without ministry approval. The centers might produce only supplementary materials for use outside the core curriculum to support the 15% ethnic component. Previous texts that were produced were developed in a few weeks but took over eight months to get permission from central authorities to be published, and then only in limited numbers for use by specific groups.

Some of the staff of the production centers attended the workshop in Lao Cai to learn how to produce books for children and how to use the equipment. A visit to the Cham center confirmed that the staff had returned confident in their ability to produce material in

Cham. It also became clear in MOET Circular 7779/DT that the equipment was donated by UNICEF but that the staff of 10–15 persons, office space, purchase of consumable supplies (such as toner), and the installation and maintenance of equipment were the responsibility of the local authorities. However, provincial officials stated that there was no budget for this.

Donors have given mainly classrooms, furniture, motorbikes, bicycles, and other material support for teachers. UNICEF is usually asked for this kind of support.

Recommendations

Materials

- The program should continue to develop supplementary materials in minority languages, especially books that can be read for pleasure. These could be in Vietnamese with content relevant to minority children, or diglot. But some should also be in minority languages only.
- The use of diglot materials should be discussed in workshops on bilingual education and new materials developed to support the recommended bilingual education research trial.
- Materials developed for teachers in minority areas, such as those developed by the Southern Institute for Educational Science (SIES), should be encouraged. However, the materials should be reviewed and revised by minority-language speakers.
- Materials should be developed for all minority-language groups.
- The community should be involved in shaping the content of the books.
- Where a minority language does not have a script, one should be developed by Vietnamese linguistic experts. The new scripts should be as similar as possible (sounds and tones permitting) to the Vietnamese script to ease the transfer of literacy skills.
- The development of teaching aids should be encouraged. For example, teachers can

be given small grants or kits of basic supplies to make the aids as explained in the draft book on multigrade and bilingual education.

- Under MOET circular 7779/DT the province must contribute to staffing, office space, repairs and maintenance of equipment, and provision of consumable supplies to ensure the sustainability of the center. Such support should be monitored.
- The program should continue to supply textbooks and notebooks for the poorest children. However, textbooks should be given to schools, not individual children. The school should establish a system of loaning textbooks to children and collecting them at the end of the year. Children who lose or destroy a book should be encouraged to replace it.
- Dictionaries should be developed for those languages (ethnic minority and Vietnamese languages) and distributed to teachers.
- Dictionaries should be useable both ways (e.g., Viet-Khmer as well as Khmer-Viet).
- The project should continue to de-emphasize the supply of classrooms, furniture, and such things as bicycles and materials for gardening, fish farming, and animal raising for teachers, and emphasize teaching and learning materials and training.

Objective B

Encourage community participation to reduce the number of drop-outs and repeaters.

Main findings

Government and UNICEF efforts to involve parents in enrolling their children are successful. Community involvement in keeping children in school was less evident. In Xuan Quang 2 School, the People's Committee and the Women's Union were involved to ensure that every child in the commune was enrolled and stayed in school. Drop-out rates of ethnic mi-

nority children of grades 1–5 are alarmingly high. Ethnic minority children also find it difficult to enter secondary school.

Communities in all the multigrade program areas were involved in enrolling children in school and keeping them there. Local officials were trained to mobilize the community to open new schools. Commune leaders actively encouraged 6–14-year-olds to go to school.

In Lao Cai province, the leader of the Women's Union reported that the interest earned from Oxfam-supported income-generating activities supported poor pupils. This type of initiative should be publicized elsewhere.

Community support was evident in another Lao Cai school that had been damaged in a storm the evening before the team visited. The teacher reported the problem to the chairman of the Community Education Council and the people of the commune were mobilized to repair the school that afternoon. The local district officer was raising awareness in a nearby community to build a new multigrade school to begin in 1999. He said that he had attended a UNICEF workshop as part of his training.

The community participates through National Enrollment Day activities organized each year by education services all over the country. These activities were mentioned everywhere as the most effective strategy to get children into school.

The campaign conducted among H'mong minority parents in Sa Pa district was successful. The H'mong traditionally do not allow girls to go to school. Parents were paid Vietnamese Dong (VND) 20,000 (roughly US\$1.30, to compensate them for lost time in the fields) to attend meetings on the importance of enrolling girls, which has resulted in the impressive achievement of having 25% of girls in school compared with none a few years ago.

Although the community helped enroll children, drop-out and repeater rates are alarming, especially among ethnic minority children. The only strategy mentioned to cope with the problem was the teacher visiting the parents

to convince them that the child should return to school. However, children who did not return to school after completing only one or two years were often not even included in the drop-out statistics.

Parents did not seem to be involved in curriculum planning or any other school activity related to teaching and learning. It was made clear that such parent involvement would be strongly resisted by school officials, as curriculum and activities are all centrally determined.

Parents everywhere want their children to learn Vietnamese so they can participate in the national culture and economy. Although many officials said that some ethnic minority parents do not want their children to learn their own language, there was no evidence that this was true or that the parents had been asked or that bilingualism had been explained to them.

In Tri Ton district in An Giang province the parents asked that Khmer be taught, and 66 out of 68 children signed up for classes. However, many dropped out for a variety of reasons, but especially because classes are voluntary and held in the early morning before school starts, after regular classes, or on Thursdays and Sundays when the rest of the children are free. Even so, some parents force their children to continue to learn Khmer.

Monks are involved in Khmer literacy, with some holding classes in the pagodas, mostly to help new monks to read the Scriptures but also to train primary-school teachers.

Any trial of bilingual education must involve the community in a discussion on its advantages. The community should contribute to the design of any bilingual program.

Recommendations

Community participation

- The community should be involved in keeping children in school at least until grade 5 by, among other methods, reducing costs for children who drop out because they are poor.

- The community should help develop minority-language materials for students and teachers by participating in writing workshops and other material production activities.
- The community should know the advantages of a bilingual program for children who do not speak Vietnamese when they enter school.
- The community should be consulted on any trial of kindergarten or primary-level bilingual education program.
- Khmer monks should be asked to help improve bilingual education.

Objective C

Current status and role of bilingual education in the context of national educational policies.

Main findings

The main language policy is to require all students to learn and use Vietnamese as the national language and to support the development and use of minority languages. However, non-Vietnamese-speaking ethnic minority children have much difficulty with the school curriculum and methodology.

Such children may learn their own language from grade 1 as a subject for a few periods a week if requested by the community and if most of the children in the school are from an ethnic minority. The language of instruction is always Vietnamese. The team did not see any form of bilingual education as defined internationally.

Many of the younger children simply did not understand what the teacher was saying judging from their expressions and answers to questions asked. Children read without understanding and simply repeated after the teacher what they had memorized. All the older children interviewed said that they did not begin to understand what the teacher was saying until grade 3.

No one seemed to recognize that the language of instruction and the methodology in

Khmer Students in Tri Ton District								
Total number of students	Khmer students	School year	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Drop-outs
14,203	4,807	1994–95	2,117	1,220	688	507	281	301
15,445	5,348	1995–96	1,984	1,345	1,988	593	438	142
16,520	5,640	1996–97	1,961	1,284	1,098	805	492	117
16,241	5,779	1997–98	1,566	1,426	1,140	963	684	193

the classrooms may contribute to children dropping out. The little data that could be gathered in Tri Ton show that the high drop-out rate is a tremendous problem.

The above data demonstrate an alarming pattern. Of the 2,117 Khmer children who entered grade 1 in 1994, only 1,345 were left in grade 2, and 1,098 in grade 3. This means that the system lost 49% of the children in the first two years of school. The drop-out numbers on the table's right-most column do not show the actual number of drop-outs as it is not clear how many dropped out and how many were repeating. However, it is clear that less than half (45%) the children who started grade 1 were left in grade 4. The system also lost 43% of the children who started in 1995. This is a small and incomplete sample but it should serve to sound the alarm. The least that needs to be done is to gather more data to see if other districts and provinces have the same problem. The drop-out rate seems to slow down after grade 2, which could indicate that language might be part of the problem.

Teachers are permitted to explain the lessons in the children's language, but the teacher usually does not speak the language or think that it is acceptable. One teacher admitted to using more Khmer in her daily life but did not feel comfortable doing so in front of visitors and education officials.

The teaching of Khmer is haphazard. Khmer classes exist only in some schools as an extra-curricular activity but are compulsory in boarding schools. There are no state examinations for Khmer. Parents generally support the teaching of Khmer mainly to preserve their culture

rather than for educational reasons. A monk with much experience in teaching Khmer literacy to mother tongue (Khmer) speakers revealed that his students could read and understand religious texts in as little as two months. But primary-school pupils need much more time to understand Khmer written language.

Khmer monks are willing to support the teaching of Khmer in primary schools when requested and some have already helped train teachers. In some areas such as Soc Trang monks give extra Khmer lessons during the holidays. Teachers agree that the monks have the ability and methodology to teach Khmer.

The teaching of a minority language depends on whether it has a Romanized script or not. Languages that do not, such as Khmer, may be taught beginning in grade 1, but most often they are not. Even where Khmer texts have been developed up to grade 5, children are repeatedly instructed using only the grade-1 text for five consecutive years as the teachers are not literate enough in Khmer to use the more advanced texts.

However, languages that do have a Romanized script, such as H'mong, are taught starting only in grade 3 as it is believed that teaching two Romanized scripts at one time would confuse children. This is contrary to international research findings that support initial literacy in mother tongue and transfer of skills to the second language. Children were massively confused by learning to read a language they did not understand. Every time children were asked to explain in their own language what they had just read in Vietnamese, they were unable (or sometimes unwilling) to do so.

Even worse for the acquisition of good first-language literacy skills is the fact that teachers either do not speak the language or, if they do, are barely literate in it. Even good Khmer speakers were just slightly ahead of their students in Khmer literacy. Another bad practice is teaching mother-tongue literacy using Vietnamese and techniques for teaching non-speakers of the language. This was evident in a classroom in Sa Pa district.

Adequately trained teachers who are capable of bilingual education are lacking. Any attempt to establish a bilingual program would require a strong teacher-training component. There is a sincere effort to train teachers from ethnic minorities and to post them where most people belong to ethnic minorities, usually in remote areas. This should continue to be supported.

What is the purpose of bilingual education?

It should be to enable non-Vietnamese speakers to become literate in two languages and to better integrate into the social and economic life of the nation. A new bilingual education program should consider how to do the following:

- help non-Vietnamese-speaking children learn better;
- keep minority children in primary school and increase their participation at the secondary and tertiary level;
- enable minority children to acquire better Vietnamese language skills as well as literacy in their mother tongue;
- enable minority children to better participate in mainstream social and economic life and thereby break the cycle of poverty;
- enable independent learning in the lower grades to allow multigrade teaching in remote ethnic minority areas; and
- reduce the feeling of alienation of minority children in the school system.

A short-term option that UNICEF and MOET might explore might include funding the development of a teacher-training course for Vietnamese-speaking teachers who are as-

signed to ethnic minority areas. The course should be designed not only to teach teachers the second language but also to demonstrate or model effective second-language teaching methodology and better classroom practice.

The advantages of bilingual education including initial literacy in the mother tongue, should be shown to all stakeholders. There should also be some instruction in the mother tongue until children acquire enough Vietnamese to understand the subject content.

An environment should be created to bring together those who are covered by the policy as well as decision makers to improve the teaching and learning conditions of minority children in the lower grades. UNICEF should start discussions on the design of a bilingual education pilot program in cooperation with the Research Centre for Ethnic Minority Education (RCEME) and SIES. People who are most affected and those who understand the problems at the grass-roots level should be involved. Any trial for a bilingual education program should be in at least two distinct clusters.

The languages chosen for the trial must have a script. The trial should demonstrate that initial literacy in the mother tongue and the transfer of literacy skills to Vietnamese improves the learning of the children. The trial should incorporate the whole language as well as phonics into the curriculum and should employ child-centered classroom teaching techniques such as those used in the M&BE project

The selection of the sites and the design of the research trial should be done in cooperation with MOET and the RCEME. Workshops to explain the principles of bilingual education and the objectives of the trial should be held. Subsequent workshops should be held to design the courses and work out the execution, monitoring, and evaluation of the trial. The workshops should encourage community participation, raising awareness, designing curriculum, strengthening materials production centers, producing materials, training teachers, etc. Workshop participants should include teach-

ers whose mother tongue is the minority language and who are excellent speakers of Vietnamese. This factor will be critical to the success of the trial.

UNICEF should start with a kindergarten class similar to the one-year Tok Ples Pri Skul program in Papua New Guinea. This would require selecting teachers and training them in initial literacy methodology. Such training packages can easily be acquired and adapted from training courses in other countries.

Where children enter school not speaking any Vietnamese, a trial should be designed that includes grades 1 and 2. As we have seen, most children can learn in Vietnamese by about grade 3. The Director of Education Services in Ninh Thuan has said that his agency could pay for the kindergarten teachers' salaries if such a trial were held in his province.

Everyone—from parents to top officials—agreed that the objective of bilingual education is to improve the learner's use of both languages. If the children are not reading, writing, and understanding Vietnamese better by grade 4 than in the existing system, then the pilot project will be considered to have failed.

There is no provision to deal with a lack of a minority language orthography. UNICEF could start the debate and could offer to fund the development of such orthography in cooperation with the Government.

Recommendations

Role of bilingual education

- UNICEF and MOET should clarify the purpose and objectives of bilingual education.
- UNICEF should continue to support the development of curriculum and of good reading materials in minority languages. Children must have reading materials that are interesting and relevant in their own language.
- UNICEF should continue to support the local materials production centers and do

everything possible to ensure their sustainability, including monitoring them to ensure that they are properly staffed and resourced.

- UNICEF should support the development of a teacher-training course for Vietnamese-speaking teachers where most children do not speak Vietnamese. These teachers should learn the second language.
- A program should be developed to train kindergarten teachers in bilingual education for Cham, Khmer, H'mong, and Bahnar, including initial literacy in the mother tongue.
- UNICEF and MOET should study how to better link the kindergarten program to the primary school to make the transition easier for ethnic minority children.
- UNICEF should sponsor a series of workshops with all the stakeholders (especially RCEME and SIES) to discuss and design a primary-school program, to be tested in selected areas, to improve the teaching and learning conditions of non-Vietnamese-speaking children in the lower grades. This should include a study of the international experience as well as previous bilingual education programs in Vietnam.
- UNICEF should work with RCEME to explore the possibility of designing orthography for minority languages that do not have scripts and that are used in the all the bilingual education programs.

Khmer component

Main findings

The Basic Education for Khmer Children (KBE) Project came into being in 1992 at the formal request of Pham Minh Hac (Former First Vice Minister of MOET). It has similar objectives to M&BE. UNICEF Hanoi then incorporated KBE into M&BE at the request of the Central Steering Committee of MOET in 1995. The M&BE project team held discussions with the project management team

at SIES in Ho Chi Minh, but the cooperation has not been very effective. However, all these activities have now become a component of M&BE within UNICEF.

It became clear that the shift in focus and the new structure of the projects have resulted in a lack of understanding on the objectives of M&BE between the project management team of what was the Khmer project and UNICEF. For instance, the Khmer project greatly emphasized materials for gardening, fish farming, and animal raising as an incentive to keep Vietnamese teachers in ethnic minority areas. This is no longer a priority for UNICEF. While these activities are laudable, they are no longer the main strategy of M&BE, but this was not clear to the project management team. Everyone should have a clear understanding of the structural changes that have taken place and agree on the project's objectives.

The project management team in Ho Chi Minh had no data on the achievement of the objectives of the project nor a clear accounting of its various inputs and outputs. Data, which were gathered at the provincial and district level, did not show the retention rates of Khmer versus Vietnamese children even though it was stated repeatedly that Khmer children were more at risk.

Different provinces ran the project in different ways. For instance, officials in the An Giang provincial office said that they thought that the materials sent to them were not necessarily for minority children but for all children in provinces with a large minority population. It was not clear if the materials were distributed to poor children or to all children in a particular area. This should be clarified.

The Khmer project no longer exists on its own. The problems of the Khmer children are the same as those of other ethnic minorities, and M&BE objectives should be applied equally to Khmer and other children. UNICEF, MOET, and SIES need to discuss changing what is now the Khmer component of M&BE. Discussions should cover the man-

agement, implementation, and monitoring of the component so that it is consistent for all ethnic minorities. RCEME is responsible for the rest of the areas. RCEME and SIES should improve communication with each other. This situation should be clarified before the beginning of the next country program cycle.

Recommendations

Khmer component

- If UNICEF and MOET agree that the objective of the Khmer component is to support the enrollment and retention of Khmer children, then the agencies should work together to improve the monitoring of the project to ensure that it consistently pursues its objectives.
- UNICEF offices in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh should work with SIES in the short term to improve the monitoring of project activities.
- An awareness-raising program should be conducted on the nature of M&BE among the district- and provincial-level officers who are running the project.
- A workshop should be organized with UNICEF and SIES to decide what data are required to monitor the project—drop-out and enrollment rates of minority children, by age and gender, and the reason for leaving school—then decide how to gather the data and who will compile them.
- More effective channels of communication should be established between SIES and RCEME.
- SIES and RCEME should work closely with UNICEF to research and design a bilingual program to improve education in the lower grades for non-Vietnamese-speaking children.
- The activities of M&BE should be implemented consistently everywhere, with discussions between UNICEF and MOET to integrate management of M&BE.