Equality in English language education policy for minority students in Viet Nam

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This presentation will focus on Vietnamese minority students’ experience of learning and using English when they are simultaneously learning the majority language, Vietnamese, and attempting to maintain their ethnic languages. The situation indicates some issues for the current English-in-education policy in Viet Nam. Semistructured interviews with a group of Vietnamese college-age minority students were used as the main source of the data.

Based on the findings, it will be argued that the English-in-education policy has failed to fully consider the factors related to the students’ language and culture as well as their needs and attitudes towards English and English learning. The policy has not ensured equality in education for minority groups, which is a precondition for social and economic equity. It is therefore suggested that in implementing English language policies for minority people, both positive and negative impacts on students (who are the direct objects of the policies) as well as student agency in responding to the policies need to be carefully considered.

The language used to teach English for minority students and the culture applied in English lessons should be further researched and debated. It is also important that language policymakers carefully analyze the roles, benefits, risks, and costs of English education for minority students to better understand their linguistic needs as well as desires. In addition, multilingualism policies which allow students to determine their own language target can provide a way forward to enhance equality in education for minority people.