Addressing language barrier issues for ethnic minority children in mountainous areas in Viet Nam via the teaching assistant model

By Le Thi Thuy Duong

Language is a major barrier to learning for ethnic minority children in Viet Nam. Most of the ethnic minority children use their mother tongue to communicate at home, so they do not speak or understand Vietnamese well or even at all. However, the language of instruction in school is Vietnamese, not the ethnic minority children’s mother tongue. Most teachers cannot speak the children’s mother tongue. There are a small number of teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds but many of them lack appropriate training, so they struggle to deliver quality teaching. All curriculum materials are in the national language, Vietnamese. Consequently, ethnic minority children suffer significantly high repetition rates, low performance outcomes, and high dropout rates compared to children from the majority Kinh ethnic group.

This presentation will focus on the initiative of using local teaching assistants as a bridge to support both main teachers and students in overcoming the language issues. The local teaching assistants are selected by the local community and are trained in basic teaching skills. They work closely with the Kinh majority teachers to develop a teaching plan and support the teaching of the ethnic minority children in both Vietnamese and their mother tongues.

This initiative helps to provide a nonconventional pathway for ethnic language speakers who do not have the opportunity to attend the formal training institutes to work as teachers in supporting ethnic minority children in overcoming language barriers.