Study on the Use of Language(s) in Classrooms in Ethnolinguistic Communities in Viet Nam
1. **Country context:** *Linguistic/cultural diversity in Viet Nam (1)*

- **Population:**
  - 88.5 million;
  - 26 million are children (29% of population);
  - 12 million ethnic minority people (14% of population).

- **Rich diversity:**
  - 54 ethnic groups speaking approximately 100 languages;
  - 30 languages with scripts;
  - Language diversity in classrooms is common all over the country.

*Sources: SIL International (www.ethnologue.com)*
Language policies in Vietnam

• The constitutions, education laws, Government Council decisions, and MOET circulars over the last several decades have confirmed the policy of the government to enable ethnic minorities to learn in their own languages and to use these languages both to master Vietnamese and to maintain the richness of their own unique cultural and linguistic heritage.

• More recent documents, especially the Education Law of 2005, make clear that Vietnamese is the official language to be used in education, but also that ethnic minority groups should be enabled to learn their spoken and written languages.
Since 2015, Vietnam has put strong political commitment at all levels to education reform in Vietnam, in which language education has been paid attention to:

- Decision No. 404 dated 27th March 2015 by Prime Minister approving the Program on Vietnam Basic Curriculum Education/Textbook Reform including one point on the development of bilingual textbooks (Vietnamese-ethnic minority languages) for a number of subjects at primary level.

- In Draft National Curriculum on General Education announced by MOET in August 2015, ethnic minority language is stipulated as an optional subject from primary to lower secondary level
Language use in classroom

Main practices

- Mother tongue as the medium of instruction (MTB-MLE approach)
- Mother tongue as a supplementary language used orally in classroom
- Mother tongue as a subject for study
- Vietnamese as a second language
- Vietnamese as medium of instruction only
## MT as medium of instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>MOI</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955 to 1960</td>
<td>1. MT: Mong and Thai</td>
<td>Preprimary to grade 2</td>
<td>Two-stage teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Vietnamese</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1987</td>
<td>1. MT: Mong, Tay-Nung, Thai, Ede, Jrai,</td>
<td>Preprimary</td>
<td>Alternatively use both languages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bahnar</td>
<td>Grade 1 to Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. MT and Vietnamese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-2004</td>
<td>1. MT: Jrai</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Transitional bilingual education</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Jrai-Vietnamese</td>
<td>Grade 2 to Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 to date</td>
<td>1. MT: Mong, Jrai and Khmer</td>
<td>Preprimary to grade 3</td>
<td>Flexible MTB-MLE approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. MT-Vietnamese</td>
<td>Grade 3 to Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**MTB-MLE approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-primary</th>
<th>Gr. 1</th>
<th>Gr. 2</th>
<th>Gr. 3</th>
<th>Gr. 4</th>
<th>Gr. 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1-EML /L2-Viet</td>
<td>L1-EML</td>
<td>L1-EML</td>
<td>L1-EML</td>
<td>L1-EML</td>
<td>L1-EML</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L2-Viet</td>
<td>L2-Viet</td>
<td>L2-Viet</td>
<td>L2-Viet</td>
<td>L2-Viet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pilot phrase (from 2008 to 2015)** in 3 provinces: Lao Cai, Gia Lai and Tra Vinh

1st cohort pre- to primary 2008-2014: 262 students;

2nd cohort pre- to primary 2009-2015: 248 students;

**Extension phrase (from 2010 to date)** in 2 provinces: Lao Cai and An Giang province
Impacts of MTB-MLE in Vietnam

• The overwhelming positive academic results, consistent with national standards, confirm the pedagogical value of MTB-MLE.

• The attitudes/perceptions of parents and community members changed when they saw MTB-MLE’s positive educational and sociocultural outcomes.

• Bilingual education also helps ethnic minorities to participate more effectively in social, economic and political life.

• MTB-MLE teachers and education managers improved their professional capacity

(Evaluation of UNICEF-Supported MOET’S Initiative of Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education in Viet Nam by an independent consultancy firm)
• **MLE in minority communities has an initial positive impact on the policy makers in Vietnam:**

National Assembly's Ethnic Council held a number of round-table meetings among NA members to discuss improving the quality of education for ethnic students through the enhancement of Vietnamese learning solution and MTB MLE; Guide for development of textbooks (Vietnamese – ethnic minority language) is included in Decision No.404 by Prime Minister.
Challenges of MLE in Vietnam

- The absence of explicit policies and legal frameworks regarding EMLs as languages of teaching and learning constrain MT-BE expansion and scaling up.
- The lack of resources in some provinces, especially qualified academic teachers from EM groups.
- Language diversity in some provinces where children from different minority groups, speaking up to 6 different languages, can be found in the same classroom.
- Lack of capable ethnic minority elite that can afford to compile high quality learning materials.
1. Ethnic minority Teaching Assistants are employed to use mother tongue orally with classroom teachers to deliver the lecture at grade 1 and 2 under MOET project “School Education Quality Assurance Project” and other INGOs all over the country

“Teaching Assistants play an active role in promoting early reading skills of EM students“  
(Early Grade Reading Assessment – EGRA by MOET Vietnam 2015)

2. In informal settings, EM teachers are observed using student’s language in order to explain difficult concepts or knowledge or even teachers who do not share student’s language asking for help of excellent EM students to interpret lessons to other classmates.
• This is the most dominant and large-scale practice of using EM language in Vietnamese classrooms. Vietnamese Government carries out this practice with a view to implement in line Article 7 of Education Law 2005 “The Government creates conditions for ethnic minorities to learn their oral and writing systems of their languages to promote the cultures and support EM children to learn easily in schools and other education center. The teaching/learning of ethnic minority oral and written languages should be in line with the Government regulations”

• In school year 2014-2015: 7 minority languages were taught as a subject for 124,246 students in 5,515 classrooms in 782 schools of 20 provinces in Vietnam

• Student were provided with textbooks and reference materials free of charge
• Teachers were entitled to subsidy when they taught EM language subjects.
• Up till now, all students were expected to study the same content with the same textbooks regardless of their language skills.
• MOET’s Document [114/BGDĐT-GDTH in 2009](#) provided the guideline on the use of Vietnamese as a second language for instruction at kindergartens in minority areas with using handbook for the 2-month course which useful and relevant for this purpose. However, after the course, they are observed to be able to use Vietnamese for the simplest communication such as saying hello and goodbye; asking and answering questions relating to family and themselves; answering teacher by gestures (nodding, ..) or by saying only one word or some very simple sentences.
• Teaching Vietnamese as second language is also supported by a number of INGO such as Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision in their project classes.
• Recently, MoET has developed manual on teaching Vietnamese as second language to integrate in curriculum at Teacher Training Colleges. Thanks to support by Save the Children, they provide trainings to key trainers of Teacher Colleges in northern region.
• In some settings, Vietnamese is taught as L1 methods and a sole medium to teach other subjects. the teachers who do not share the same language with student can only try to help their students by speaking slowly, repeat several times, request their students to talk after them with the hope to make them understand lessons.
“My students don’t understand Vietnamese at all. Even when I asked them to take out the workbook they didn’t know what I was saying. In classes, I could only try to talk slowly, repeat, come down to their table and give them hands-on teaching”

(Teacher group discussion in the study)

• In order to meet these challenges, MOET has provided a number of solutions:
  • Increase Vietnamese class hours from 350 periods to 500 periods in ethnic minority.
  • Strengthen Vietnamese through integration in other subjects, learning games.
  • Organize exchange events such as “My Vietnamese”, “I speak Vietnamese well” for primary EM student
  • Creating Vietnamese learning environment in EM classrooms.
## Language use in etholinguistic communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places where languages are used</th>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>EM Language</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local government office</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnamese is mainly used but sometimes EM languages are used to explain/interprete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune health center</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnamese is mainly used but sometimes EM languages are used to explain or interprete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>EM or Regional languages such as Mong, Tay-Nung, Khmer, Jrai...are mainly used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>VTV4 in12 EM languages, VOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings/Gatherings at village level</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Vietnamese is used first then EM is used for interpretation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

• Vietnamese legal texts from the constitutions, education laws, Government Council decisions to MOET circulars support ethnic minorities to learn their own languages and to use these languages both to master Vietnamese and to maintain the richness of their own unique cultural and linguistic heritage.

• The MTB-MLE, through test results, have proved to be a feasible educational approach towards a good quality education (more inclusive and fairer) to ethnic minority students.

• Developing MTB-MLE model in compliance with the principle of approaching to languages of the children. Mother Tongue first, Vietnamese as second language, make full use of language transfer.
• MTB-MLE has created basic favourable conditions for future replication and scaling up and the socio-political climate is also supportive but the lack of a clear policy on MTB-MLE, language diversity in classrooms and the existence of alternative approaches are main challenges for implementing MTB-MLE in Vietnam

• Teaching EM as a subject is most popular practice and supported by Vietnam Government at large scale

• Using EM teaching assistants and teaching Vietnamese as second language are still dominantly supported by MOET and international NGOs in Vietnam.

• Speaking Vietnamese-the national language with great fluency, is regarded as the door leading the ethnic students to social integration, creating more opportunities for success in school and in their lives by both EM students and parents.
Xin cảm ơn!
Thank you!