

BARRIERS TO CHILDREN'S SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND SOLUTIONS FOR VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Of the 17 goals and 169 specific targets on the Agenda, Goal 4 addresses sustainable development in education. The goal includes many specific targets, including Target 4.1 and Target 4.2, which define the tasks of mobilizing children of preschool, primary, and lower secondary ages to school. This is one of the key requirements for increasing the number of students that achieve sustainable development goals in education. Based on reviews and analyses to get an overview of the context and the implementation of targets 4.1 and 4.2 in Asia-Pacific, the paper analyzes the situation of out-of-school children in Vietnam from the results of the study "The Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children" by the United Nations. And based on a better view of the number, age structure, ethnicity, gender, and social composition of out-of-school children, the article analyzes and finds out the barriers to children's school attendance; and then it proposes solutions to send them to school. Three questions to be answered from the paper, namely "Who are out-of-school children?", "Why do they have to stay out of school?" and "What can be done to send them to school?" will hopefully contribute to creating equal learning opportunities for children, aiming at the achievement of sustainable development goals by 2030.

KEYWORDS: Out-of-school children, barriers, solutions to mobilize children to school, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

At the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015, 193 world leaders adopted the Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 goals and 169 targets to end poverty and combat inequality, injustice, and climate change by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Goal 4 on sustainable development in education is to “ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. In Goal 4, two specific targets refer to the *mobilization of school-aged children to school*, namely i) 4.1. To ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education, moving towards appropriate and effective learning outcomes. Quantified assessment indicators are the proportion of children enrolled at primary and lower secondary levels, ensuring gender equality; and ii) 4.2 To ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood care, development, and education in order to prepare them for primary education. Quantified indicators include the proportion of children aged under 6 and attending preschool, which is gender-disaggregated.

From 2015 to 2020, some countries already made steady progress in implementing Goal 4 in education. There is only a decade left to achieve the goals of sustainable development, but many difficulties remain. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the progress of schools' participation and operation, widened the gap between regions and countries; presented an urgent requirement to re-examine efforts, re-evaluate data, implementation conditions as well as implementation measures to make necessary adjustments to the plan.

Like other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Vietnam is working to achieve sustainable development goals, including the goal of mobilizing school-aged children to school under the government's commitments. The country also reported on the implementation of sustainable development goals by 2020 (Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2021). The remaining time to achieve these goals is just over 8 years, but there still exist many difficulties and bottlenecks. The questions as to educational management that need to be addressed are: What is the current achievement level compared to the set goals? Who are out-of-school children? What barriers have prevented children from attending school? In the general context, what solutions should Vietnam adopt to improve the problem?

The paper is limited to the analysis of and comments on the mobilization of children to school at the ages of preschool (from 0 to under 6 years old), primary school (from 6 to 10 years old), and lower secondary school (from 11 to 14 years old). The focus is placed on children in those age groups who are out of school in order to find barriers to their school attendance and point out solutions that have been implemented to eliminate the barriers and send them to school.

Reducing the number of out-of-school children means contributing to the achievement of the sustainable development goal of “promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The article uses Vietnam's data as a case study. Hopefully, the views will also be valid for those countries with similar conditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2015, in Incheon, South Korea, the "Education World Forum" issued a declaration on education until 2030 with the participation of more than 1,600 delegates from 160 countries (UNESCO et al. 2015). The declaration affirmed the extension of access to education for school-aged children, especially at the preschool, primary, and lower secondary levels. It saw equity and mainstreaming in education as the cornerstones of transformative education while acknowledging the importance of gender equality in achieving the right to education for all. All the countries were committed to working together on a common agenda. This was an affirmation of the goal of education in the sustainable development goals by 2030. The declaration was a very important beginning, as affirmed by Irina Bokova (Director-General of UNESCO at the time), "It reflects our determination to ensure that all children, young people, and adults have the necessary knowledge and skills to live in dignity, reach all potentials, and contribute to society as responsible global citizens. It also encourages governments to provide lifelong learning opportunities so that people can continue to grow and bring positive changes. Moreover, it affirms that education is a fundamental human right, and a key to global peace and sustainable development.”

On September 25, 2015, four months after the Incheon declaration, in New York, the United Nations issued the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” with an attendance of 193 countries. The agenda consisted of 17 goals and 169 specific targets to serve as a guiding framework for sustainable development activities of the whole world (United Nations, 2015).

In response to the UN sustainable development program, from November 25 to 27, 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand, UNESCO and UNICEF jointly organized the "Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030" (APMED 2030) to agree on a sustainable development program for education in the Region. APMER 2030 has a common consensus that focuses on Goal 4 on lifelong learning and its contribution to sustainable development and global citizenship formation. It requires the participation and coordination of different sectors of ministries, branches, and civil society with a wide range of activities of stakeholders at all levels. APMER 2030 also indicates groups of immediate actions by member countries including i) Establishing and strengthening

national coordination mechanisms; ii) Planning policies and programs for the implementation of Goal 4 for the country; iii) Organizing national and local consultations to analyze the 2030 education targets and national action frameworks, drawing up action plans for the implementation and monitoring of Goal 4; and iv) Strengthening intergovernmental cooperation to promote coordination and mutual learning on the implementation of Goal 4.

Since 2016, many countries across the globe have put into effect their sustainable development plans for education (Goal 4). In 2019, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics initiated the collection of data to review the implementation of national commitments. According to the new assessment method, there were 258 million out-of-school children and adolescents in 2019 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019a). And it was estimated that more than 220 million children would remain out of primary and secondary schools by 2030. Access to early childhood education is expanding but low and middle-income countries must make big efforts to catch up. The difficult situation in mobilizing children to school was mainly concentrated in Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019c). The percentage of primary school attendance in Europe and South America was 99%, while the figure was only 63% in the Saharan region of Africa, and 85% in North Africa and West Asia (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019b).

The gender disparity in the number of out-of-school children remains very different across regions. According to All in School (2019), 54% of the 376 million out-of-school children and adolescents were female in 2000. The number was reduced to 50% in 2018. But these global averages did not show differences at the national and regional levels. Boys were more likely to leave school in Europe and North America, except for Latin America and the Caribbean while girls were more at a disadvantage at primary school age in all other regions. In 2018, the global percentage of out-of-school children at the primary level was 8.2% (7.2% for boys and 9.3% for girls), while the figure was 1.7% (1.9% and 1.5%) in Europe and Northern America, 3.8% (4.2% and 3.5%) in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2.0% (1.7% and 2.3%) in Central Asia, 6.8% (5.9% and 7.8%) in Southern Asia, and 18.8% (16.3% and 21.4%) in Sub-Saharan Africa. The global respective percentage at the lower secondary level was 15.6% (15.5 % for boys and 15.6 % for girls) while it was 1.6 % (1.5% and 1.7 %) in Europe and Northern America, 7.2 % (7.4 % and 7.1 %) in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.2 % (4.1 % and 6.4 %) in Central Asia, 15.2 % (16.2 % and 14.1 %) in Southern Asia, and 36.7 % (35.3% and 38.1 %) in Sub-Saharan Africa.

By the end of 2020, as recommended by UNESCO and UNICEF, most countries in the world reported on summarizing the implementation of sustainable development goals, including Goal

4. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a growing need to use data on out-of-school children - Target 4.1.4, UNESCO Institute of Statistics has updated data for more than 100 countries and added new countries to its database. Currently, based on this database, it is possible to compare the situation of out-of-school children at all levels of education in more than 200 countries and territories (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2021).

In the Asia-Pacific region, there have also been many studies related to the mobilization of children to school. Many countries in the region have been involved since the beginning in the global initiative on out-of-school children. Some countries specified the number and structure of out-of-school children as well as barriers preventing them from attending school, and proposed solutions to send children to school as follows:

- Out-of-School Children and Youth in the Philippines (The Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015) shows that 22.9% out of nearly 4 million children and young people who were out of school were married or about to get married, 19.2% of them attributed non-schooling to insufficient family income, and 19.1% did not care about schooling. Four out of 10 girls were married while three out of 10 boys did not want to go to school. The percentage of out-of-school children and young people with an insufficient family income for schooling was 22.7% for boys and 17.0% for girls.
- Children Out of School (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017) shows the Malaysian government's efforts to invest in education, thus improving the rate of mobilization of children to school. However, there remained the situation of out-of-school children, in which children at preschool and lower secondary levels had the highest rate of non-attendance at 16.7% and 12.2% respectively. Barriers are mainly economic issues (premature labor, poverty, and income segregation); socio-cultural issues (parents' awareness, curriculum, community participation...); children's unwillingness to go to school; and children's disabilities and diseases.
- Out-of-school Children in Vietnam country study (Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam and UNICEF, 2013 and first update, 2016) are very detailed reports highly appreciated at the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference (UNICEF in Viet Nam, 2014). These reports provided detailed statistics on the number of out-of-school children, explained who they were, identified the reasons that prevented them from attending school, and pointed out solutions. The relevant contents will be presented later in this article.

In addition to national reports, there have been a number of in-depth studies by scientists, such as Suggesting the Causes of Children's Non-schooling in Semi-urban Areas (Nousheen Akber Pradhan et al, 2018); Comprehensively Referring to a Country's Out-of-school Children (Le Khanh Tuan, 2016); Researching the Impacts of the Teacher-Student Relationship on the Quality (Rito Baring et al, 2021); Reviewing Both the Immediate and Long-term Socioeconomic Status on Children's School Attendance (Natthani Meemon et al, 2022).

The most recent comprehensive and complete report on the implementation of the sustainable development goals on education by UNESCO and UNICEF (2021) is entitled "5 - Year Progress Review of SDG 4 - Education 2030 in Asia-Pacific". The situation of mobilization of children to school in the Asia-Pacific region before the COVID-19 pandemic is basically as follows:

- For early childhood education: All 50 countries had support policies for the level from 1 to 4 years. From 2015 to 2019, all countries saw an increase in school attendance for all ages. The total enrollment rate in preschool education rose from 79% to 88% in East Asia, and from 71% to 76% in Oceania. However, only 7 countries offered free and compulsory early childhood education, so children in difficult circumstances were still out of school, especially those at nursery ages (0 to under 3 years old).
- For general education: Most children of this age group were mobilized to school, completed the primary education program and then continued to lower secondary school. However, the percentage of children who had not completed secondary education was still high and directly proportional to the level of education. Out-of-school youth of upper secondary school age accounted for 65% of the total non-attending population in the region.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented major challenges for global education in general and in the Asia-Pacific region in particular. Schooling was disrupted and the number of dropouts increased. This created greater difficulties for the mobilization of children to school and widened the gap for the achievement of sustainable development goals in education. In Asia alone, the education of more than 800 million children - 400 million in South Asia, 260 million in East Asia, and 140 million in Southeast Asia - was disrupted by school closures. Of those, more than 27 million children waited more than a year to return to school. An estimated 4% of the students in Asia were at risk of dropping out of school due to the pandemic. Education budgets in the region would need to increase by an average of 10% per year to make up for the damage to achieve the sustainable development goals for education (UNICEF, 2021).

Vietnam is a middle-income country in the Asia-Pacific region and has also been influenced by the overall context. After 5 years of implementing the 2030 Agenda, Vietnam made efforts in poverty eradication, education, climate change response, and global partnerships. However, with the advent of new difficulties, many challenges remain in ensuring the implementation of 17 sustainable development goals. It is expected that by 2030, Vietnam will achieve 5 out of the 17 goals, and up to 10 out of the 17 goals will still face difficulties and challenges in completion (Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2021). Although the indicators of mobilization of children to school in Vietnam reach quite high levels in the region, many barriers remain, and effective solutions are needed to achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030.

METHODOLOGY

Implementing the United Nations' "The Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children" together with UNICEF's team of experts in 2013, we completed the "Report on Out-of-School Children: Vietnam Study" (MOET of Vietnam and UNICEF, 2013). In 2016, we updated data and completed the "Report on Out-of-School Children: Vietnam Study 2016" (MOET of Vietnam and UNICEF, 2016).

The objective of this report is to analyze the data, find the causes and propose solutions to minimize the number of out-of-school children by the following measures: Developing a profile as complete and comprehensive as possible on the number and characteristics of out-of-school children; and connecting the profile with the barriers and bottlenecks that lead to exclusion from education; thereby identifying and promoting the implementation of policies to address such exclusion. The report uses a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- The quantitative method analyzes the situation and characteristics of out-of-school children, and adopts the model of five factors of exclusion from education in the global study on out-of-school children conducted by UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics. The exclusion factors are: i) Children of preschool age who are not attending preschool or primary school; ii) Children of primary school age who are not attending primary or lower secondary school; iii) Children of lower secondary school age who are not attending primary or lower secondary school; iv) Children who are attending primary school but are at risk of dropping out; and v) Children who are attending lower secondary school but are at risk of dropping out. Data sources for quantitative analysis include a sample of 15% of the total population and housing census of Vietnam in 2009 and the midterm census in 2014 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2009, 2014).

- The qualitative method is used to better understand some key findings of quantitative research and to identify the barriers and bottlenecks that currently prevent children from attending school. A survey was conducted in the first half of 2016 in 6 provinces/cities, namely Lao Cai, Ninh Thuan, Kon Tum, Dong Thap, An Giang, and Ho Chi Minh City. Work was done with relevant agencies of the 6 provinces/cities, districts, and schools to find out the causes of children's non-schooling, the adopted solutions, the barriers and bottlenecks that still exist, and recommendations to reduce the number of out-of-school children in the coming time.

The report analyses the following: the situation of out-of-school children aged 5-14; the situation of children who are attending primary and lower secondary schools but are at risk of dropping out; and the barriers and bottlenecks that limit their ability to attend school. The report thereby proposes recommendations to reduce the number of out-of-school children, ensuring educational equality and the right to education for all children in Vietnam. Out-of-school children are analyzed by their age, gender, ethnicity, urban and rural areas, migration, and disability. The data are based on the 2009 and 2014 censuses according to a 5-year cycle for comparison.

RESULTS

Based on the analysis of the census data in 2014 and 2019, and after comparing with the sources of education statistics (MOET of Vietnam, 2009 - 2014) and organizing scientific seminars to collect opinions from provinces, education management agencies, and schools (MOET of Vietnam and UNICEF, 2016), we draw some results below.

Regarding the number of out-of-school children

- The percentage of out-of-school children aged 5 in 2014 was 6.7%, equivalent to about 99,200 children, nearly halving compared to 12.2% in 2009. This progress was achieved thanks to the results of the universalization of early childhood education for five-year-olds. However, in 2014, the percentage of children aged 0-3 years old who were out of school was still close to 70%, which posed a major difficulty.
- The percentage of out-of-school children of primary school age (6-10 years old) in 2014 was 2.5%, down by 1.5% compared to 4% in 2009. The enrollment rate at the primary level was quite high, but there were still about 180,500 out-of-school children.
- The percentage of out-of-school children of lower secondary school age (11 to 14 years old) was 8.1% in 2014, equivalent to about 435,700 children, a decrease of 2.9%

compared to 2009. So the number of children not attending school increased at the lower secondary level.

The total number of out-of-school children aged between 5 and 14 was 1,127,300 in 2009 and 715,400 in 2014, a fall of 36.5%, equivalent to 411,900. With the two exclusion factors being excluded, namely children in primary and lower secondary schools who are at risk of dropping out of school, the data on out-of-school children in 2009 and 2014 in Vietnam are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of out-of-school children between 2009 and 2014

	Out-of-school children (Thousand)						2014 decrease as against 2009 (%)		
	Male		Female		Total		Male	Female	Total
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014			
Factor 1: Preschool age - 5 years old	924	521	835	471	175.8	99.2	43.6	43.6	43.6
Factor 2: Primary school age	136.3	946	126.3	859	262.6	180.5	30.6	32.0	31.3
Factor 3: Lower Secondary School Age	377.7	238.1	311.2	197.6	688.8	435.7	37.0	36.5	36.8

Total 3 Factors	606.4	384.8	521.0	330.6	1,127.2	715.4	36.5	36.6	36.5
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(Source: The MOET and UNICEF in Vietnam)

The above results show that despite positive changes in the five years 2009 - 2014, the situation of out-of-school children remained challenging in terms of quantity before the implementation of sustainable development goals until 2030 by the Vietnamese government. By 2014, there were still 715,400 children aged 5 to 14 who had not been enrolled in school. If the number of children under 5 years of age and that of primary and lower secondary dropouts were added, then the number of out-of-school children would be even higher and could rise annually (Le Khanh Tuan, 2016). What barriers prevented the children from attending school is a question that needs to be answered seriously.

Barriers to children's school attendance

From data analysis and consultation with students, parents, educators, educational managers, and scientists, we found the main barriers to children's school attendance belonged to the following basic groups.

- *Mindset and practices of the community, and socio-economic conditions:* The percentage of out-of-school children in rural areas is higher than in urban areas and the disparity between the two areas increases with age. In 2014, the percentage of out-of-school children in rural areas was 1.5 times higher than in urban areas at primary school age and 1.7 times at lower secondary school age. The Mekong Delta where people are less willing to study further sees the highest percentage of out-of-school children aged 5 at 14.7%, nearly 6 times higher than in the Red River Delta. Children aged 5 in rural areas of the northern midlands and mountainous are more disadvantaged than in urban areas in terms of kindergarten education, at 5.3% compared to 1.6%. The Mekong Delta and Central Highlands represent the highest percentage of out-of-school children of primary and lower secondary school age. The percentage of out-of-school children in the Mekong Delta and Central Highlands is 5 times higher than in the Red River Delta at primary school age, and 6-7 times at lower secondary school age. Children of primary and lower secondary school age in rural areas are more disadvantaged than in urban areas.
- *Gender barriers:* The gender gap between out-of-school children at the age of 5 and primary school age is very small, which is why most children have attended school at this age. At the lower secondary school age, although this is a universalized level, the gender

disparity becomes more obvious, with the percentage of out-of-school children standing at 8.6% for girls and 7.5% for boys.

- *Difficulties of school attendance among ethnic minority groups:* Although the percentage of out-of-school children in all three age groups in 2014 among ethnic minority groups decreased compared to 2009, there were still some shortcomings. Khmer and Hmong people made significant progress after 5 years but still accounted for the highest percentage of out-of-school children compared to other ethnic groups in all three age groups. It is noteworthy that the percentage of Khmer out-of-school children aged 5 is significantly higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This shows that despite more favorable conditions and environment in urban areas, Khmer children aged 5 do not have the advantage of attending school compared to their peers in rural areas. Khmer and Hmong people have the highest percentage of out-of-school children in both urban and rural areas compared to other ethnic groups. The poorest groups of the Khmer and Hmong account for the highest percentage of out-of-school children in all three age groups. The gender gap among ethnic minority students is also high, especially among Hmong people.
- *Findings regarding migration status:* The percentage of out-of-school children differs between migrants and non-migrants. The difference increases at older ages. In 2014, the out-of-school children rate in migrant families was 1.2 times higher than in non-migrant families at 5 years old, 1.6 times at primary school age, and 1.7 times at lower secondary school age. The gender parity index of migrant students is also unstable.
- *Barriers related to living standards:* There is a big difference in out-of-school children between the poorest and richest households. In particular, the higher the level of education is, the greater the difference becomes. At the age of 5, the percentage of out-of-school children in the poorest households is nearly 3 times higher than that of the richest, 5.5 times at primary school age, and 10 times at lower secondary school age.

The above groups of barriers to children's school attendance are very clearly seen in the 8 selected provinces/cities for surveying. Localities with better socio-economic conditions such as Ho Chi Minh City have fewer difficulties in children mobilization, but issues of disparity between rich and poor and migrant children must be given attention. In the provinces with average development levels in the Mekong Delta such as Dong Thap and An Giang, the factors of mindsets and regional practices have a strong impact. In poor provinces with many ethnic minorities such as Lao Cai, Dien Bien, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and Ninh Thuan, economic and public

awareness issues need to be seen about. This suggests that there is no common solution for all regions, and policy formulation needs to give appropriate priority to disadvantaged regions and populations.

SOLUTIONS

With a commitment to achieving sustainable development goals, the Vietnamese government issued a National Action Plan to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Government of Vietnam, 2017). Shortly after, the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam issued a Plan to implement the goal of sustainable development in the field of education and training by 2025 and toward 2030 including 45 targets (MOET of Vietnam, 2017a). With the barriers being analyzed above, in order to overcome the new obstacles brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to achieve sustainable development goals in education, it is necessary to implement a number of solutions as follows.

Review and update the sustainable development plan for education

The government should direct the sectors and localities to review, update, and refine the sustainable development plan in the field of education, and integrate it into the socio-economic development plan and the national education development strategy until 2030, thereby allocating sufficient human resources, budget, and other conditions for the implementation.

Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of targets on out-of-school children. Put the task of statistics on out-of-school children into educational statistics, and ensure that accurate, complete, and timely data on out-of-school and dropout children at all levels from the Ministry of Education and Training to the school units are available every year.

Implement national target programs

Continue to effectively implement the National Target Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2022a) and the National Program on New Rural Construction (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2022b) to enhance the conditions for sending children to school. Direct the synchronous implementation of social insurance and social protection policies related to education and out-of-school children; and strengthen measures to prevent the use of child labor.

Integrate climate change policies into the planning and budgeting process and develop a report to evaluate the implementation of education and training policies, etc. toward creating practical

support for disadvantaged children and establishing equal learning opportunities for all children so that no one is left behind.

Implement the policy on the universalization of education

Continue to implement the universalization of education for 5-year-old preschoolers, extend research to four-year-olds, and universalize access to primary, lower and upper secondary education in places with conditions; supplement support policies for students with the most difficult circumstances in line with the national social protection policy framework; facilitate the access of all migrant children to education in the places where they live as a way to implement the right to education; and reduce the overhead costs of education for extremely disadvantaged households.

Effectively implement policies to support children with disabilities in school attendance according to the 2010 Law on People with Disabilities (National Assembly of Vietnam 2010); build a network of "Mainstreaming Support Centers" in localities with appropriate conditions and many children with disabilities at the ages for early childhood, primary and secondary school, ensuring that children with disabilities are also part of programs of universal access to education.

Prioritize the development of education in mountainous, disadvantaged, and ethnic minority areas

Continue to prioritize investment in mountainous, disadvantaged, and ethnic minority areas to reduce difficulties for ethnic minority students, and create learning opportunities for all children; spreading typical role models in learning, thereby serving as factors to promote learning motivation of people in general and children in particular.

Expand the network of five-year-old kindergartens and primary schools near students' homes in mountainous and remote areas. Increase resources to support the development of full-day schooling models in schools with special hardship for ethnic minority children. Strengthen a friendly, inclusive, safe, exciting, and attractive school environment for ethnic minority children.

Improve Vietnamese language ability for ethnic minority students, including spreading the "Mother tongue-based bilingual education" model to ethnic minority areas appropriately and effectively. Continue the solutions to maintain and develop education for ethnic minorities with a very small population under the government's program (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2020).

Ensure that there are enough ethnic minority teachers in the locality or that the teachers know the ethnic dialect where they come to teach. Improve management efficiency of ethnic minority boarding and semi-boarding schools in remote ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

Build a learning environment and society

The education sector should work closely with the culture sector at all levels to develop communication and education programs to raise awareness of learning for the social community in places with outdated mindsets and practices, especially in some parts of the Mekong Delta, the Northwest, and the Central Highlands. Strive to form a cultural environment of learning, and self-consciousness about the society of learning and lifelong learning for young people.

Thoroughly eradicate the ideology of "favoring men over women", and implement the rights of gender equality in society in general and in terms of learning opportunities for children of all ages in particular. Put an end to child marriage in some ethnic minority areas, and ensure the right to school attendance and higher education for all children.

Effectively implement general education curriculum

Implement the new general education program synchronously and effectively (MOET of Vietnam, 2018), transform the teaching methods from rote memorization to teaching toward developing learners' capacity, and spark interest in students for them to enjoy schooling every day.

Reduce the teaching load under the new program while teaching students life skills through experiential activities; "embed" lessons into real life and implement the four pillars of the United Nations on learning, namely "learning to know", "learning to do", "learning to be" and "learning to live together"; ensure that the school creates interest and social values for learners, attracts children to school, and minimizes the dropout rate.

CONCLUSIONS

Minimizing the number of out-of-school children is of high social significance, creates equality in the enjoyment of education, and contributes to the achievement of the education goal among the sustainable development goals by 2030 in each country. The problem of mobilizing children to school can be solved by thoroughly answering questions about out-of-school children, namely "Who are they?", "Why do they have to stay out of school?", and "What can be done to send them to school?". This has a very practical methodological meaning. The current situation on

how to solve this problem in Vietnam has been highly appreciated at educational forums in the Asia-Pacific region. With practical experience and solutions that have been proven to be effective in Vietnam, the paper will hopefully be a valuable reference for countries with similar conditions./.

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