

Universalization of Early Childhood Education in Vietnam

CHALLENGE

The journey of universalising Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Vietnam began with government's acknowledgment to address the issue of limited access especially for many children living in remote areas and from disadvantaged backgrounds, with inadequate opportunities to learn and develop. The government realised the need to act strategically and ensure that all children get equal chance to succeed.



GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

To make this commitment a reality, government made significant efforts through a range of policies level reforms to ensure that all children, regardless of their location or socio-economic background, have access to ECE. Starting with the Education Law in 2005 and its amendment in 2009 made pre-school attendance compulsory for all 5-year-olds. On September 2, 2010, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 239/QĐ-TTg approving the project on universalization of pre-primary/preschool education for 5-year-olds children for the period 2010-2015. The government recognized that universal pre-primary/preschool education for 5-year-olds is essential to ensure school readiness especially for children living in disadvantage areas. The government also introduced free education for 5-year-olds in remote and mountainous regions, recognizing that children in these areas were particularly vulnerable to missing out on ECE opportunities. Education law in 2019 confirmed that preschool education is the first official level of education in the national education system and mandated the development of a high-quality sub-sector that is universally accessible.

But the government didn't stop there. The National ECE Scheme was developed and implemented to promote ECE universalization. The scheme emphasized the importance of quality ECE programs and set standards for curriculum, teacher qualifications, and facilities. Further to strengthen these efforts, the development of National Education Development Strategic Plans (EDSPs) has also played a critical role in promoting ECE universalization. The EDSPs focused on improving access to and quality of education at all levels, including specific targets for ECE.

Towards universalising ECE, the government increased investments to support ECE, with the development of new ECE centres, capacity building of teachers, and provided resources and materials to support learning in the centres. The mother tongue was also emphasized in ECE, recognizing that children learn best in their native language. In terms of the financial commitment, the Government has always strived to ensure that the rate of spending on education, including ECE, accounts for 20% of GDP.

UNICEF SUPPORT

UNICEF Vietnam provided instrumental support for these efforts, ranging from system-level reforms to the development of new ECE curriculum and capacity-building initiatives. UNICEF continues to support with playing active role during the development and implementation of the ECE scheme for children in mountainous and disadvantaged areas with low enrolment and National Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) for the period 2021-2030, of which ECE is an integral component.

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O U T C O M E S

With these key processes in place, Vietnam was able to achieve significant progress in the universalization of ECE. More and more children were able to benefit from ECE services, and enrolment rates increased significantly, especially in rural and remote areas. By 2019, 99.4% of 5-year-olds attended preschool, with nearly all children having access to high-quality ECE programs. The efforts to maintain and expand access to quality ECE continues to this day.

Vietnam's success in universalizing ECE is a result of strong government commitment, policy level reforms, community-based approaches, and strategic partnerships with development partners. By investing in ECE, Vietnam is setting itself up for a brighter future and a more prosperous society.