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CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE INTENSIVE VIETNAMESE PROGRAM FOR ETHNIC MINORITY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: This study examines the challenges in implementing the Intensive Vietnamese Program for ethnic minority preschool children from the perspective of educational managers. The research was conducted in a mountainous area where ethnic minority children constituted the majority of the preschool population. A qualitative case study design was employed, with in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. The participants included seven educational managers: one commune-level official responsible for education and six preschool leaders (three principals and three vice-principals). The findings indicated that the implementation of the program was shaped by a set of interrelated challenges. Five major constraints were identified: (i) limited teacher capacity and shortages of qualified staff; (ii) inadequate facilities and teaching materials; (iii) insufficient parental and community engagement; (iv) managerial difficulties following administrative restructuring, particularly due to the absence of specialized education personnel; and (v) adverse geographical and socio-economic conditions, including remoteness, poverty, and poor transportation infrastructure. In response to these constraints, the managers reported adopting a number of adaptive strategies, such as flexible planning, reallocating available resources, and strengthening coordination with local communities. The study provides empirical insights into the managerial dimensions of implementing language education policies in disadvantaged ethnic minority areas and offers implications for improving the effectiveness of Vietnamese language support programs in similar contexts in Vietnam.

Keywords: Intensive Vietnamese Program, ethnic minority preschool children, educational management, Khau Vai Commune, implementation challenges

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NHỮNG THÁCH THỨC TRONG TRIỂN KHAI CHƯƠNG TRÌNH TĂNG CƯỜNG TIẾNG VIỆT CHO TRẺ EM MẦM NON DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ: GÓC NHÌN CỦA CÁC NHÀ QUẢN LÝ GIÁO DỤC

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này[°] phân tích những thách thức trong việc triển khai Chương trình tăng cường tiếng Việt cho trẻ em mầm non dân tộc thiểu số dưới góc nhìn của các nhà quản lý giáo dục. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện tại một địa bàn miền núi nơi trẻ em dân tộc thiểu số chiếm đa số trong hệ thống giáo dục mầm non. Thiết kế nghiên cứu trường hợp định tính được sử dụng, với phỏng vấn sâu là phương pháp thu thập dữ liệu chính. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu gồm bảy cán bộ quản lý giáo dục: một cán bộ cấp xã phụ trách lĩnh vực giáo dục và sáu cán bộ quản lý trường mầm non (ba hiệu trưởng và ba phó hiệu trưởng). Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy việc triển khai chương trình chịu tác động của nhiều thách thức có mối liên hệ chặt chẽ với nhau. Năm nhóm khó khăn chính được xác định gồm: (i) hạn chế về năng lực giáo viên và thiếu hụt đội ngũ đạt chuẩn; (ii) cơ sở vật chất và học liệu chưa đáp ứng yêu cầu; (iii) sự tham gia của phụ huynh và cộng đồng còn hạn chế; (iv) khó khăn trong công tác quản lý sau quá trình sáp nhập hành chính, đặc biệt do thiếu cán bộ chuyên trách giáo dục; và (v) các điều kiện địa lý và kinh tế – xã hội bất lợi, bao gồm: địa bàn xa xôi, nghèo đói và hệ thống giao thông khó khăn. Trước những thách thức này, các nhà quản lý đã áp dụng một số biện pháp thích ứng như: điều chỉnh kế hoạch linh hoạt, tận dụng và phân bổ lại nguồn lực hiện có, cũng như tăng cường phối hợp với cộng đồng địa phương. Nghiên cứu cung cấp bằng chứng thực tiễn về khía cạnh quản lý trong việc triển khai các chính sách giáo dục ngôn ngữ tại các vùng dân tộc thiểu số còn nhiều khó khăn, đồng thời gợi ý một số đề xuất nhằm nâng cao hiệu quả các chương trình hỗ trợ tiếng Việt trong những bối cảnh tương tự ở Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: Chương trình tăng cường tiếng Việt, trẻ em mầm non dân tộc thiểu số, quản lý giáo dục, xã Khâu Vai, thách thức trong triển khai

1. Introduction

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 officially recognized ethnic groups, in which ethnic minority children account for more than 16% of the total preschool population (Ministry of Education and Training - MOET, 2024). Despite substantial progress in expanding access to early childhood education, persistent disparities in language competence remain a major concern, particularly in ethnic minority areas (UNICEF, 2015; UNESCO, 2016). Many ethnic minority children enter preschool with limited or no knowledge of Vietnamese, the national language and the primary medium of instruction. This linguistic barrier constrains their ability to participate effectively in classroom activities, interact with teachers and peers, and achieve expected learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2015). Over time, such disadvantages may accumulate,

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contributing to lower educational attainment and higher risks of early dropout compared with children from the Kinh majority (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Therefore, strengthening early Vietnamese language acquisition for ethnic minority preschool children has become a critical strategy for promoting educational equity and inclusion.

In response to these challenges, the Vietnamese government approved the national scheme entitled “*Strengthening Vietnamese for preschool and primary school children in ethnic minority areas, 2016 - 2020, with orientation to 2025*” under Decision No. 1008/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2016). The program aims to enhance children’s Vietnamese proficiency while acknowledging the supportive role of their mother tongues in early learning. According to the mid-term review by the Ministry of Education and Training, the program has achieved significant progress in expanding coverage, reaching a large proportion of ethnic minority preschool children nationwide (MOET, 2024). However, these achievements should be interpreted cautiously, as implementation outcomes remain uneven across regions, particularly in remote and disadvantaged areas where structural constraints are most pronounced. Persistent challenges include shortages of qualified teachers, inadequate teaching materials, limited infrastructure, and uneven levels of parental engagement (MOET, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). At the international level, research on mother tongue-based multilingual education suggests that the effectiveness of language support programs depends not only on pedagogical approaches but also on broader institutional and contextual conditions (UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO Bangkok, 2017). These insights highlight the need to examine how such conditions shape the implementation of language education policies in specific local contexts.

Khau Vai Commune in Tuyen Quang Province provides a particularly relevant case for examining these issues. Established in August 2025 through the administrative merger of three former communes (Khau Vai, Lung Pu, and Can Chu Phin), it is located in a mountainous region where more than 95% of residents belong to H’Mông and Dao ethnic groups. The local preschool system comprises three central schools and 38 satellite sites, serving over 2,100 children aged three to five with a workforce of 77 teachers. The geographical dispersion of schools, with some sites up to 28 kilometers from the commune center, creates significant challenges for management, supervision, and teacher deployment, while infrastructure remains limited, including semi-permanent classrooms and the lack of boarding services at most satellite sites despite long travel distances. Following administrative restructuring, the commune lacks a specialized education officer, with responsibility assigned to a local leader without formal training in education, requiring school leaders to assume expanded roles in planning, coordination, and program implementation. These conditions illustrate how structural and institutional constraints intersect at the local level, shaping how educational policies are translated into practice.

Against this backdrop, building on parallel research that focuses on the implementation of the Intensive Vietnamese Program (IVP) for ethnic minority preschool children in Khau Vai Commune from the teachers’ perspective, the present study examines the implementation of the IVP in the same locale from the perspective of educational managers. Rather than focusing solely on identifying challenges, the study also explores how local managers respond to and navigate these constraints in practice. Despite a growing body of research on language education for ethnic minority children, much of the existing literature has primarily focused on classroom practices, learners’ outcomes, or pedagogical approaches. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the perspectives of educational managers, who play a critical role in interpreting policies, coordinating implementation, and responding to contextual constraints at the local level. This gap is particularly significant in remote and disadvantaged settings, where

institutional and socio-economic conditions strongly shape educational practice. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a managerial perspective to examine both perceived challenges and the ways in which these challenges are addressed in practice. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1. What challenges do educational managers perceive in implementing the IVP for ethnic minority preschool children in Khau Vai Commune?*
- 2. How do they respond to these challenges in implementing the IVP for ethnic minority preschool children in the locale?*

The study draws on qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with seven educational managers, including one commune-level official and six preschool leaders (three principals and three vice-principals). Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and explored participants' experiences, perceived difficulties, and responses to implementation challenges. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and variations across management levels. By situating the analysis within discussions of language policy implementation, educational management, and multilingual education in disadvantaged contexts, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how local actors mediate policy implementation under complex conditions. It provides empirical insights that may inform more context-sensitive strategies for improving Vietnamese language support in ethnic minority areas.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Key Concepts

In the context of education in Vietnam, the IVP represents a key policy initiative aimed at improving educational opportunities for ethnic minority children. According to Decision No. 1008/QĐ-TTg issued on June 2, 2016 by the Prime Minister, the IVP refers to a systematic set of pedagogical and institutional measures designed to strengthen Vietnamese language proficiency among ethnic minority children while building on their mother tongues. The program aims to ensure that children are linguistically prepared for entry into Grade 1 and can participate effectively in subsequent schooling.

The primary beneficiaries of the IVP are ethnic minority preschool children, particularly those aged three to five attending early childhood education institutions in areas where Vietnamese is not the dominant language used in families and communities. Research by UNICEF (2015) indicates that these children often experience a "double disadvantage": limited access to quality education services and restricted exposure to Vietnamese, which reduces their opportunities to communicate with teachers and peers and to participate confidently in learning activities.

This study approaches the issue from the perspective of educational managers. At the local level, this group includes commune officials responsible for education as well as preschool principals and vice-principals. According to UNESCO-IIEP and the Global Partnership for Education (2015), educational managers play an important role in translating education policies into practice. Their responsibilities include planning, organizing program implementation, mobilizing resources, and monitoring educational activities at the local level. In addition, they are required to respond to implementation challenges within specific institutional and contextual constraints. Examining the perspectives of educational managers can therefore provide insights not only into classroom-related challenges but also into organizational, administrative, and contextual factors affecting the implementation of the IVP.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations of Language Education for IVP

The implementation of the IVP can be understood through several theoretical perspectives explaining how young children acquire a second language and how educational systems support such processes. Three key traditions are particularly relevant: Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Cummins's distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In this study, these theories are considered as a pedagogical foundation for understanding conditions that support Vietnamese language development, rather than as the primary framework for analyzing managerial and institutional challenges.

Krashen (1982) argues that SLA is most effective when learners are exposed to comprehensible input language slightly beyond their current level but made understandable through contextual support and interaction. For ethnic minority preschool children, this suggests that Vietnamese learning is most effective when language exposure occurs in meaningful and supportive contexts. Building on this perspective, Cummins (1979) distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which develop through everyday interaction, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is required for formal learning. He also proposes the interdependence hypothesis, suggesting that proficiency in the first language can support second-language academic development. In the context of the IVP, this highlights the importance of recognizing the role of children's mother tongues alongside Vietnamese language learning. From a socio-cultural perspective, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive and linguistic development. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights how learning occurs through guided interaction, supported by more knowledgeable others, with scaffolding enabling the gradual development of higher-level competencies. This perspective implies the need for appropriate conditions that allow teachers to support children's language development effectively.

These perspectives emphasize meaningful language exposure, the progression from basic communication to academic language, and the role of guided interaction in language learning. While they primarily address classroom-level processes, they provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the conditions necessary for effective IVP implementation. However, they are not sufficient to explain the managerial and contextual dimensions of implementation. Therefore, the present study adopts a broader ecological and partnership-based framework, presented in Section 2.4.

2.3. Bilingual Education and Language-in-Education Policies

In addition to theories of language acquisition, the IVP can be understood within the broader framework of mother tongue-based multilingual education and language-in-education policies, which shape the institutional context in which educational managers operate. From a managerial perspective, these frameworks define policy expectations, resource requirements, and implementation conditions that must be interpreted and operationalized at the local level.

At the international level, UNESCO (2016) identifies mother tongue-based multilingual education as an important strategy for improving educational quality and equity for linguistic minority children. More recent UNESCO discussions further emphasize that linguistic diversity remains a major policy concern in education, as only a limited number of languages are used as languages of instruction globally despite the continued use of thousands of spoken and signed

languages. UNESCO (2025) also highlights that mother language-based literacy can support children's cognitive development, academic success, and multilingual skills, while implementation continues to face challenges related to localized content, digital access, resource constraints, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Evidence from Asia (UNESCO Bangkok, 2017) and Vietnam (UNICEF, 2015) suggests that bilingual or multilingual education can improve learning outcomes, reduce dropout rates, and enhance students' engagement and confidence. In Vietnam, Decision No. 1008/QĐ-TTg (2016) represents the key policy guiding the IVP. While the program has achieved notable progress (MOET, 2024), persistent challenges remain, including shortages of bilingual teachers, inadequate facilities, limited localized teaching materials, and uneven parental awareness.

From a managerial perspective, these policies provide both a guiding framework and a set of constraints. In remote contexts such as Khau Vai Commune, where schools are geographically dispersed and resources are limited, translating policy into practice requires adaptation through planning, coordination, and resource mobilization. However, while policy frameworks explain the broader institutional context, they do not fully capture the complex interactions among schools, families, communities, and administrative structures. To address this limitation, the present study adopts an ecological and partnership-based analytical framework, presented in the following section.

2.4. Analytical Framework

While the theoretical perspectives discussed above explain key aspects of language acquisition and bilingual education, examining the challenges of implementing the IVP from the perspective of educational managers requires a broader analytical framework that connects classroom processes with institutional and socio-contextual factors. In particular, given that this study focuses on how educational managers perceive and respond to implementation challenges, the framework must account for interactions across multiple levels of the education system rather than focusing solely on classroom-level processes. For this reason, the present study adopts Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory together with Epstein's (2010) model of school-family-community partnerships as the primary analytical frameworks. These models provide complementary lenses for understanding both the structural conditions and relational dynamics that shape program implementation in disadvantaged contexts.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework conceptualizes child development as occurring within interconnected systems. The microsystem includes immediate environments such as classrooms and families. The mesosystem refers to interactions between institutions, including relationships between schools and communities. The exosystem encompasses organizational and administrative structures that indirectly influence educational processes, such as local governance and resource allocation. The macrosystem represents broader policy frameworks, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms. In the context of this study, these system levels are reinterpreted to analyze not only children's development but also the conditions under which educational managers operate when implementing the IVP. Complementing this perspective, Epstein's (2010) model further emphasizes the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities in supporting children's learning. From a managerial perspective, this model highlights the role of educational leaders in facilitating partnerships, mobilizing community resources, and ensuring continuity of language exposure across home and school environments.

Based on these frameworks, the study operationalizes five key analytical dimensions that guide both data collection and analysis. Each dimension is explicitly mapped onto the

ecological system levels to ensure conceptual coherence and methodological rigor:

- **Teacher capacity and professional development (Microsystem/Exosystem):** This dimension reflects the immediate instructional environment (teachers interacting with children) while also incorporating managerial decisions related to teacher deployment, training, and professional support.

- **Facilities and teaching materials (Exosystem):** This dimension captures the organizational and resource-related conditions that shape the learning environment, including infrastructure, availability of materials, and investment decisions at the institutional level.

- **Managerial effectiveness in planning, coordination, and supervision (Exosystem):** This dimension directly corresponds to administrative processes, including planning, monitoring, and coordination across commune, school, and district levels.

- **Family and community engagement (Mesosystem):** This dimension reflects the relationships between schools, families, and local communities, emphasizing the role of collaboration in supporting children's Vietnamese language development.

- **Geographical and socio-economic conditions (Macrosystem):** This dimension captures broader structural factors such as remoteness, poverty, infrastructure limitations, and policy environments that shape the overall conditions of program implementation.

In addition to these system-level mappings, the earlier SLA-related theories developed by Krashen (1982), Cummins (1979), Vygotsky (1978) are incorporated as complementary lenses at the pedagogical level. Specifically, they inform how educational managers interpret and support language-related practices within the microsystem, such as ensuring exposure to comprehensible input, facilitating progression from BICS to CALP, and enabling scaffolding through teacher-child interaction. Rather than serving as the primary analytical framework, these theories are used to contextualize the pedagogical implications of managerial decisions.

Overall, this integrated framework enables the study to analyze the implementation of the IVP as a multi-layered process shaped by interactions between pedagogical practices, organizational structures, and broader socio-economic conditions. It also provides a basis for examining both the challenges perceived by educational managers and their responses within institutional constraints, while guiding data collection, coding, and the thematic organization of findings.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of the IVP from the perspective of educational managers, focusing on how challenges are perceived and addressed in local contexts. Khau Vai Commune was selected as a representative case of remote ethnic minority areas characterized by geographical dispersion, limited infrastructure, and resource constraints. The unit of analysis comprises seven educational managers, including one commune-level leader and six preschool managers (three principals and three vice-principals), who are directly responsible for planning, coordinating, and supervising IVP implementation.

The unit of analysis is educational managers responsible for preschool education at the commune and school levels. Following recent administrative restructuring, educational affairs at the commune level are managed by a Vice Chair responsible for cultural and social affairs, while each central preschool is led by a principal supported by vice-principals. Given this institutional context, a total of seven participants were selected through purposive sampling to represent the core managerial actors in the local preschool system. These include one commune-

level leader and six school managers (three principals and three vice-principals), all directly involved in planning, coordinating, and supervising IVP implementation. Focusing on participants with formal managerial responsibilities enables an in-depth examination of governance and implementation processes.

The interview protocol was developed based on the analytical framework presented in Section 2.4, covering five dimensions: teacher capacity and professional development; facilities and teaching materials; managerial effectiveness; family and community engagement; and geographical and socio-economic conditions. This design ensures alignment between the theoretical framework, research questions, and data collection. Detailed interview questions are provided in the Appendix.

3.2. Research Site and Context

Khau Vai Commune represents a critical case for examining the implementation of the IVP under geographical, institutional, and socio-economic constraints. Located in a mountainous and remote area with dispersed settlements and predominantly ethnic minority populations, the commune administers three central preschools (Khau Vai, Lung Pu, and Can Chu Phin), which oversee nearly 40 satellite sites, creating significant challenges for school management and supervision.

According to the official report on preschool education for the 2025–2026 school year (Khau Vai Preschool Cluster, 2025), the commune had 2,153 children aged three to five, of whom 2,056 were enrolled (approximately 95%). Enrollment among five-year-old children was nearly universal (773/774), while no children aged zero to two were enrolled, reflecting ongoing difficulties in expanding early childhood services in remote areas. In terms of infrastructure, conditions remain uneven. While some permanent classrooms have been constructed, many sites continue to rely on semi-permanent or shared facilities, and no schools currently provide boarding services. Teaching materials and outdoor learning spaces are limited, and some remote areas still lack reliable access to roads or electricity. These constraints directly affect the organization of teaching and learning activities. With regard to human resources, the teaching workforce consists of 77 preschool teachers, most of whom meet national professional standards. However, staffing remains below required norms, and uneven teacher distribution across satellite sites places additional pressure on certain classes, particularly those preparing children for primary school. Beyond institutional factors, family and community engagement also presents challenges. Although most parents send their children to preschool, many have limited awareness of the importance of supporting Vietnamese language development at home. The widespread use of ethnic minority languages further limits children's exposure to Vietnamese outside the classroom.

Overall, these contextual conditions reflect multiple ecological layers, from classroom-level constraints to broader socio-economic factors, and provide a basis for understanding how educational managers perceive and respond to implementation challenges in Khau Vai Commune.

3.3. Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to align with the study's focus on the perspectives of educational managers involved in implementing the IVP in Khau Vai Commune. Consistent with the research questions, the selection aimed to capture how challenges are both perceived and addressed at the managerial level.

A total of seven participants took part in the in-depth interviews. These included one commune-level leader responsible for socio-cultural affairs, including education, and six preschool

managers consisting of three principals and three vice-principals from the three central preschools in the commune: Khau Vai, Lung Pu, and Can Chu Phin. Following recent administrative restructuring, educational affairs at the commune level are overseen by a Vice Chair responsible for cultural and social affairs, while each central preschool is led by a principal supported by vice-principals. Satellite sites do not have independent management structures; instead, they are administratively managed by the central schools. As a result, school leaders oversee both central schools and their satellite sites, providing system-wide managerial perspectives.

Given this structure, the number of individuals directly responsible for managing preschool education and IVP implementation at the local level is limited. The selected participants therefore represent the core managerial actors involved in planning, coordination, and supervision across the commune. Participants were selected based on their formal managerial responsibilities and their roles at different administrative levels, enabling the study to capture both policy-level coordination and school-level implementation processes. While the study does not include other stakeholder groups (e.g., teachers or parents), this focus allows for an in-depth examination of governance and implementation from a managerial perspective.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, with follow-up written clarifications where necessary to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were primarily collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven educational managers in Khau Vai Commune. The interview protocol was developed around five analytical criteria: teacher capacity, facilities and materials, managerial effectiveness, family and community engagement, and geographical and socio-economic conditions. In line with the research questions, the interviews explored both how managers perceived implementation challenges and how they responded to them in practice. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants' consent, using field notes and, where permitted, audio recordings, and were supplemented by written clarifications from principals and vice-principals to enhance accuracy. In parallel, the study also incorporated secondary data from the *Report on Preschool Scale, School Year 2025–2026* of the Khau Vai Preschool Cluster (2025), which provided official statistics on enrollment, facilities, teacher qualifications, and reported challenges. These data were used to contextualize the case and triangulate participants' accounts, particularly given the study's focus on managerial perspectives rather than classroom observation.

All data were anonymized and securely managed. Participants were assigned codes (e.g., KV-C1, KV-P1, KV-VP1), and personal identifiers were removed from transcripts and drafts. Notes, recordings, written responses, and secondary documents were stored in a secure repository and used solely for academic purposes. Data were translated into English for presentation. To ensure trustworthiness, the study drew on strategies outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Shenton (2004), including data triangulation, audit trail maintenance, and internal consistency checks across schools and management levels. Although the study did not include teachers, parents, or classroom observation, credibility was strengthened through cross-source validation and comparison of perspectives across participants occupying different positions within the same implementation system.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis that combined deductive and inductive coding. Preliminary codes were developed from the five analytical dimensions derived from the theoretical framework, ensuring alignment between the framework and coding structure. Inductive coding was then used to identify emerging patterns and variations within each

category. The analysis involved iterative reading of transcripts, comparison across participants, and refinement of themes to ensure internal consistency and analytical rigor.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section presents findings derived from in-depth interviews with educational managers, triangulated with secondary data from the Report on Preschool Scale for the 2025–2026 school year of the Khau Vai Preschool Cluster (2025). The analysis is structured around five themes corresponding to the analytical dimensions introduced in Section 2.4, ensuring alignment with the ecological and partnership-based framework. These include teacher capacity and professional development; facilities and teaching materials; managerial effectiveness; family and community engagement; and geographical and socio-economic conditions.

4.1. Theme 1. Teacher Capacity and Professional Development

All interviewed managers identified teacher capacity as a major challenge in implementing the IVP.

At the commune level, KV-C1 noted that *“the teaching staff is insufficient compared to the quota; many five-year-old classes still exceed the prescribed size”*. School leaders reported similar pressures, with KV-P1 highlighting that *“teachers are overextended in five-year-old classes, with little time left to prepare for IVP activities”*, and KV-P3 emphasizing that at remote satellite sites *“teachers must handle multi-grade classes without collegial support”*. Beyond staffing constraints, vice-principals further pointed to limited professional development opportunities. KV-VP2 reported that training on Vietnamese as a second language remains minimal and overly general, while KV-VP1 highlighted difficulties in staff rotation, leaving teachers at remote sites professionally isolated.

These accounts indicate three interconnected constraints: insufficient staffing, limited access to specialized training, and uneven teacher deployment. These factors restrict teachers’ capacity to provide consistent language support and to organize sustained Vietnamese language exposure. In response, managers reported coping strategies such as reallocating teaching responsibilities, promoting peer support, and developing locally adapted teaching materials; however, these efforts remain largely improvised and constrained by structural limitations. From an ecological perspective, these challenges span both the microsystem (teacher–child interaction) and the exosystem (staffing, training, and deployment decisions).

4.2. Theme 2. Facilities and Teaching Materials

All interviewed managers consistently identified inadequate facilities and limited teaching materials as major obstacles to implementing the IVP.

At the commune level, KV-C1 noted that *“many sites still rely on semi-permanent classrooms, with no boarding facilities, and children lack language-rich play spaces”*. School leaders reported similar constraints, with KV-P2 observing that *“playgrounds and outdoor equipment are almost nonexistent, and classrooms are cramped, making it difficult to organize extended language activities”*, while KV-P1 explained that some satellite sites *“must borrow classrooms from primary schools, leading to instability”*. These infrastructural limitations restrict opportunities for organizing sustained language-rich learning activities. In addition, vice-principals highlighted challenges related to teaching materials. KV-VP1 noted that *“teachers mostly create their own teaching aids, but there is no standardized set of IVP materials”*, while KV-VP3 remarked that *“the training documents provided are too general and not contextualized”*.

for ethnic minority settings". As a result, teachers often rely on improvised resources that may not fully reflect the linguistic and cultural contexts of ethnic minority children.

These findings indicate that both infrastructural constraints and the lack of appropriate teaching materials limit the creation of effective language-learning environments. In response, managers reported adopting practical measures such as flexibly using available spaces, sharing resources across sites, and encouraging locally adapted teaching materials; however, these efforts remain limited and insufficient to ensure consistent implementation across the preschool network. From an ecological perspective, these challenges are situated primarily within the exosystem, reflecting institutional and resource-related conditions that shape the learning environment.

4.3. Theme 3. Managerial Effectiveness: Planning, Coordination, and Supervision

The interview data reveal significant weaknesses in managerial coordination and supervision affecting IVP implementation. At the commune level, KV-C1 noted that *"the commune has no dedicated education officer; schools must take the initiative in all educational planning"*, placing substantial responsibility on school leaders. Principals reported similar challenges, with KV-P3 stating that *"when support is needed, schools often have to wait, and procedures take too long"*, and KV-P1 observing that *"plans for the IVP are mostly devised by schools themselves, with little concrete guidance from higher levels"*. These conditions require school leaders to assume both administrative and pedagogical responsibilities typically shared with specialized education personnel.

Vice-principals highlighted further limitations in coordination and supervision mechanisms. KV-VP2 noted that *"monitoring is based mainly on paperwork, with few tools for real-time tracking"*, while KV-VP1 emphasized that *"coordination between schools, the commune, and the district education office is weak"*. Communication across administrative levels is therefore fragmented, hindering consistent implementation across the preschool network.

These findings indicate that the absence of specialized education management and weak coordination mechanisms create gaps in planning, supervision, and institutional support. In response, school leaders reported adopting more proactive and flexible approaches, including independently developing implementation plans, coordinating with district authorities, and monitoring activities across dispersed sites. However, these efforts remain dependent on individual capacity and informal coordination, limiting their effectiveness in ensuring systematic implementation. From an ecological perspective, these challenges are situated within the exosystem, reflecting constraints in administrative structures and institutional support systems.

4.4. Theme 4. Family and Community Engagement

Interviewed managers identified limited family and community involvement as a key challenge in supporting children's Vietnamese language development.

At the commune level, KV-C1 remarked that *"some parents do not fully recognize the importance of strengthening Vietnamese at home"*, indicating uneven parental awareness of the role of home environments in language learning. School leaders reported similar concerns, with KV-P2 noting that *"parents are busy with farming and often withdraw children for seasonal labor, making it difficult to sustain attendance"*, and KV-P3 explaining that *"children have little exposure to Vietnamese outside the classroom"*. These conditions suggest that many children rely primarily on school settings for Vietnamese language exposure, with limited opportunities for practice in everyday family interactions. Vice-principals also highlighted weak community participation, as KV-VP3 observed that *"village elders and mass organizations are not consistently mobilized to support IVP"*, while KV-VP1 noted

that “*communication activities to parents about IVP are fragmented, not continuous*”. As a result, awareness-raising efforts remain sporadic and insufficiently coordinated.

These findings underscore the importance of stronger school - family - community collaboration in supporting children’s language development. In response, managers reported efforts such as organizing parent meetings, providing guidance for home-based language support, and engaging local actors in educational activities. However, these initiatives remain irregular and are constrained by parents’ work commitments, linguistic barriers, and limited community participation, leading to uneven engagement across localities. From an ecological perspective, these challenges are situated within the mesosystem, reflecting weak interactions between schools, families, and community actors.

4.5. Theme 5. Geographical and Socio-economic Conditions

Geographical and socio-economic conditions were consistently identified as cross-cutting constraints affecting IVP implementation. At the commune level, KV-C1 noted that “*some sites are up to 28 km away; roads are degraded, and travel during the rainy season is extremely difficult, affecting class continuity*”, highlighting barriers to both supervision and regular attendance. School leaders reported similar constraints, with KV-P1 stating that “*some sites still have no electricity, making it hard to conduct language-rich activities*”, and KV-P2 observing that “*children in remote areas often miss school to follow their parents, interrupting Vietnamese exposure*”. Vice-principals further pointed to household economic difficulties, as KV-VP2 noted that “*many families are poor and prioritize labor over education, so children receive little support for learning Vietnamese at home*”, while KV-VP1 explained that “*teachers at distant sites must stay in villages for long periods, with limited opportunities for training and collegial exchange*”. These conditions reduce continuity of learning and constrain both student engagement and teacher support.

These findings show how geographical isolation and socio-economic hardship shape the broader environment in which the IVP is implemented. Limited infrastructure, irregular attendance, and restricted professional support create structural constraints that intensify challenges identified in other domains. Managers reported adaptive responses such as adjusting teaching schedules, assigning teachers to remain in remote villages, and prioritizing support for disadvantaged sites; however, these measures remain constrained by persistent structural barriers. From an ecological perspective, these conditions are situated within the macrosystem, reflecting broader factors related to geography, poverty, and infrastructure.

Across the five themes, the findings illustrate how multiple factors interact to shape IVP implementation in Khau Vai Commune. Challenges related to teacher capacity, facilities, managerial coordination, and family engagement are closely interconnected, with geographical and socio-economic conditions amplifying these constraints. Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of implementing language support programs in remote ethnic minority contexts and underscore the need for coordinated institutional support, improved infrastructure, and stronger school and community engagement. The implications of these findings are discussed in the following section.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This study identified five interrelated domains of difficulty affecting the implementation of the IVP for ethnic minority preschool children in Khau Vai Commune. These include limited

teacher capacity and professional development, inadequate facilities and teaching materials, weak managerial coordination and supervision, limited engagement of families and communities, and challenging geographical and socio-economic conditions.

Although enrollment among five-year-old children has reached nearly universal levels, the findings suggest that expanding access to preschool education does not necessarily guarantee the quality of language support. Instead, the implementation of the IVP in Khau Vai is shaped by a combination of human resource constraints, institutional limitations, and broader contextual conditions that influence how language learning opportunities are organized in everyday preschool environments. In addition to identifying these difficulties, the study also found that educational managers adopted a number of context-specific responses, including flexible planning, informal resource reallocation, and efforts to strengthen coordination with schools, families, and local communities.

5.2. Interpreting the Findings in Relation to Previous Research

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with previous research on multilingual education in disadvantaged contexts, particularly in relation to teacher preparation and the conditions required for effective second-language support. Earlier studies have shown that teachers working with ethnic minority children often lack specialized preparation for supporting the learning of a national language as a second language, with classroom practices tending to prioritize basic communication rather than longer-term language development (Cummins, 1979; UNESCO Bangkok, 2017). The present study confirms that similar conditions exist in Khau Vai Commune, where managers reported limited access to contextualized training and uneven professional support across geographically dispersed sites. However, the current findings extend this body of research by showing that these pedagogical limitations are not solely classroom-level issues; they are also shaped by managerial decisions concerning teacher deployment, training opportunities, and the allocation of scarce human resources. In this sense, the study adds a managerial dimension to earlier research that has primarily focused on teachers or learning outcomes.

The findings also highlight the importance of institutional and organizational conditions in shaping the implementation of the IVP. Previous research and policy guidance have emphasized that effective education reform depends on coherent planning, coordination, and monitoring across administrative levels (UNESCO-IIEP & Global Partnership for Education, 2015a, 2015b). The present study supports this view by showing that the absence of a specialized education officer at the commune level creates substantial pressure on school leaders, who must assume expanded responsibilities in planning, coordination, and supervision. At the same time, the study goes beyond earlier general discussions of governance by demonstrating how managers in Khau Vai Commune respond to these constraints through flexible and locally adapted practices, such as taking greater initiative in implementation planning and relying on informal coordination mechanisms. These responses suggest that policy implementation in remote areas depends not only on formal administrative structures but also on the adaptive capacity of local actors operating under constrained conditions.

A further point of convergence with previous research concerns the role of broader structural conditions. Studies on language-in-education policy have consistently shown that remoteness, poverty, and infrastructural disadvantage shape children's educational opportunities and influence the extent to which language support can be sustained in practice (UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO Bangkok, 2017). The findings from Khau Vai Commune confirm this pattern. Geographical distance, poor roads, limited electricity, and economic hardship were

all reported as factors that constrained attendance, teaching continuity, and teachers' access to professional support. From an ecological perspective, these findings are significant because they show that the implementation of the IVP is shaped not only by microsystem factors such as classroom interaction, but also by exosystem and macrosystem conditions that affect schools indirectly through infrastructure, governance, and socio-economic realities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This ecological reading helps explain why managerial responses, while necessary, often remain limited in their impact when broader structural barriers remain unchanged.

Finally, the study reinforces the importance of school-family-community relationships in supporting language development, while also showing the fragility of these relationships in remote ethnic minority contexts. Previous research has suggested that when children are able to use both their mother tongue and the national language across home and school environments, their engagement and confidence in learning tend to improve (UNICEF, 2015). Likewise, Epstein's (2010) model emphasizes that sustained collaboration between schools, families, and communities is essential for effective educational support. The present findings are in line with this perspective, as managers consistently identified limited parental awareness and weak community participation as barriers to sustained Vietnamese exposure outside school. At the same time, the study adds nuance by showing that educational managers do attempt to respond through communication with parents and local mobilization efforts, although these responses remain uneven and often constrained by work patterns, linguistic differences, and the limited participation of community organizations. Compared with previous studies that emphasize the value of partnership in principle, this study illustrates the practical difficulty of building such partnerships under conditions of geographical isolation and institutional fragility.

These findings contribute to the existing literature in several important ways. While previous studies have primarily focused on classroom practices or learning outcomes in multilingual education, this study shifts attention to the managerial level, highlighting how educational leaders interpret and respond to implementation challenges in a remote ethnic minority context. In addition, by situating the analysis within a post-administrative restructuring setting, the study reveals how institutional changes reshape local governance and place new demands on school-level management. These insights provide a more nuanced understanding of how language education policies are enacted in practice under complex and resource-constrained conditions.

5.3. Managerial and Policy Implications

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications for improving the implementation of the IVP in ethnic minority areas. More specifically, they highlight the need to strengthen the capacity of local educational managers to respond to implementation challenges within resource-constrained settings.

At the commune level, strengthening local educational governance is particularly important. The appointment of a dedicated education officer could help improve coordination between schools, commune authorities, and district education departments, thereby providing more consistent support for preschool management and the IVP implementation. This is particularly necessary in contexts such as Khau Vai Commune, where recent administrative restructuring has increased the managerial burden on school leaders while reducing specialized support at the commune level.

At the school level, greater attention should be given to teacher professional development. Training programs should focus more specifically on strategies for supporting

Vietnamese language development among ethnic minority children and should be adapted to the realities of remote and multilingual learning environments. The findings also suggest that managerial support for teachers should go beyond formal training and include ongoing professional guidance, peer learning opportunities, and more flexible forms of internal coordination across central and satellite sites. In addition, improving learning conditions in remote preschool sites remains a priority. Investments in infrastructure, teaching materials, and basic facilities, such as electricity and playground equipment, as well as more localized language learning resources, can contribute to creating more language rich learning environments where children have greater opportunities to encounter and practice Vietnamese. Finally, strengthening collaboration with families and local communities may help extend children's exposure to Vietnamese beyond the classroom. Awareness raising activities involving parents, community organizations, and local leaders could support more continuous language use across school and home environments. From a managerial perspective, such collaboration should not be treated as a peripheral activity but as an integral part of the IVP implementation, especially in settings where children have limited contact with Vietnamese outside school.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on a single commune and involves a relatively small number of participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. However, this design is consistent with the purpose of qualitative case study research, which aims to provide in-depth insights into context-specific processes rather than broad generalization. Second, the data rely primarily on interviews with educational managers and therefore reflect managerial perspectives on program implementation. The absence of direct data from teachers, parents, and children limits the extent of data triangulation, particularly at the classroom (microsystem) level. Consequently, the study does not aim to evaluate pedagogical effectiveness or children's learning outcomes, but rather to examine how implementation challenges are perceived and addressed at the managerial level. In addition, while the analytical framework draws on an ecological perspective, the empirical data are more strongly situated at the exosystem and mesosystem levels (management and institutional coordination), with more limited direct evidence from the microsystem (classroom practices). This represents an important boundary of the study. Therefore, future research could expand the scope of investigation to include multiple communes or provinces in order to compare different implementation contexts. In particular, incorporating multiple stakeholder groups, such as teachers, parents, and community members would allow for stronger triangulation and a more comprehensive ecological analysis of IVP implementation. Studies incorporating classroom observations, alongside interview data, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Vietnamese language support programs function in practice and how managerial decisions translate into pedagogical processes.

5.5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical insights into the challenges of implementing the Intensive Vietnamese Program for ethnic minority preschool children in Khau Vai Commune. The findings highlight how limitations in teacher capacity, educational resources, managerial coordination, family engagement, and broader contextual conditions interact to shape the implementation of language support initiatives. Importantly, the study also shows how educational managers respond to these challenges through a range of adaptive, context-specific

strategies, although such responses remain constrained by structural limitations. Although the study focuses on a single case, it illustrates how examining implementation challenges at the local level can contribute to a better understanding of the complexities involved in delivering language education policies in disadvantaged contexts. By focusing on the perspectives and practices of educational managers in a post-administrative restructuring context, the study contributes to the literature by linking policy implementation with everyday managerial decision-making in remote ethnic minority settings. Addressing these challenges requires not only pedagogical improvements but also stronger institutional coordination, improved infrastructure, and greater collaboration between schools and communities. From a managerial perspective, enhancing the effectiveness of the IVP depends on strengthening the capacity of local actors to coordinate resources, support teachers, and mobilize community engagement within complex socio-geographical conditions. Strengthening these areas may help ensure that ethnic minority children have more equitable opportunities to develop the language skills necessary for successful participation in formal schooling.

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APPENDIX

The full interview protocol is available via the QR code below:

