

# ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITY EDUCATION, USING ETHNIC MINORITY LANGUAGE THROUGH THE RADIO, TELEVISION: A CASE STUDY OF CO HO PEOPLE IN LAM DONG, VIETNAM\*

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*Lam Dong is a mountainous province in the south of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The locality is inhabited by a large number of ethnic minority people, including Co Ho, Ma, Chu Ru, M Nông, Raglai, XTiêng, etc. Some ethnic minorities in the Northern provinces migrating to this area include Hoa, Tay, Nung, Thai, Muong, etc. However, most of them are Co Ho people. This article will analyze and indicate the important role of communication activities in ethnic minority languages in general, radio and television activities in particular in educating the ethnic minority community, in case of Co Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong. The main method used are questionnaire survey and in-depth interviewing with two subjects: the person performing radio and television broadcasting in Co Ho ethnic minority and the Co Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong. The fact is that the majority of Co Ho people want to access radio and television programs through their language because of the usefulness of their lives, but it is difficult to do so because of living conditions, technical conditions, cultural habits... Therefore, it is necessary to have specific and appropriate solutions to promote the role of this activity to meet the needs and urgent needs of the Co Ho people in particular, the ethnic minorities in general.*

**Keywords:** Ethnic media; Co Ho ethnic minority; Community education; Ethnic language.

## 1. Introduction

Communication activities using ethnic minority languages, or “ethnic media”, or “minority media”, help to engage ethnic minority communities, and preserve the minority languages, native culture; develop livelihoods and help members of ethnic minority communities better integrate into the social life.

Lam Dong is a mountainous province in the south of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The locality is inhabited by a large number of ethnic minority people, including Co Ho, Ma, Chu Ru, M Nông, Raglai, XTiêng, etc. Some ethnic

minorities in the Northern provinces migrating to this area include Hoa, Tay, Nung, Thai, Muong, etc. However, most of them are Co Ho people. Communication activities in Co Ho language, particularly in Lam Dong province, have played an important role in educating the Co Ho community. To preserve indigenous culture, and to develop well-being socially for the people, broadcasting in Co Ho language in Lam Dong is one of the important activities. It contributes to educate the community to preserve and promote cultural values not only within the Co Ho ethnic group, but also to expand the scope of a large cultural area - the South of the Central Highlands.

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## 2. Overview of issues research

Researchers around the world have pointed out that: ethnic media helps to connect minority communities together, preserve ethnic minority languages and cultures. It also helps members of ethnic minority communities better integrate into social life and improve livelihoods. It is the important function that communication in ethnic minority languages should be further strengthened, especially for those languages which are potentially at risk of extinction (Riggins, 1992). Researchers at the Mercator Forum in Europe also state that beside preserving personal and ethnic identity, by using minority languages in broadcasting, ethnic minority groups are guaranteed the right to freedom of expression, practice of equal rights and anti-racism (Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, 2003).

On emphasizing the function of preserving ethnic minority languages, especially those that are at risk of extinction, Cormack (Fishman, 1991), and Cottle (Fishman, ed. 2001) in their studies state that ethnic media activities will: 1) Help ethnic minority community to have its own public sphere; and in that space, they are free to speak their voices and aspirations; 2) Help to maintain and raise the community's awareness of ethnic minority languages; further improve the position of that language; 3) Help to disseminate modern knowledge of science and technology, and bring good elements of contemporary life into ethnic minority communities. This helps "modernize" the community and the very language of that ethnic minority is also "modernized"; 4) Help to create more jobs and improve the standards of living for ethnic minority community, motivating younger generations of ethnic minority groups maintain their mother tongue. Thus, researchers highly appreciate the importance of communication using ethnic minority languages. How does the communication activity in Co Ho language in Lam Dong perform the above four functions? Below, we will analyze the status of radio and television in Co Ho language in Lam Dong through the results of the survey and in-depth interviews with two subjects: radio and television broadcasters in Co Ho and the Co Ho ethnic minority in Lam Dong to clarify this issue.

Mentioning common characteristics of ethnic media, Matthew & Matsagan is in their works: *Understanding Ethnic Media: Producers, Consumers, and Societies* (Matsaganis et al., 2010) have identified that participants in the production of communication products for ethnic minority groups

are members of ethnic minority communities or media companies; Languages used in ethnic minority communication are often ethnic minority languages (in rare cases using both national and ethnic minority languages); The beneficiaries of these communication products are the ethnic minority communities in the country or other countries in the region and in the world; The scale of ethnic minority communication is diverse with local family-based media companies, regional medium-sized media companies, major national media companies, and multinational media companies. The forms of publishing communication products include printed media, communication via e-mail system, via radio broadcasting stations, personal television, through radio stations, public television, satellite communication, internet communication, etc. Moreover, each type of communication has different roles that affect the development of the community. Within the framework of this paper, we are interested in communication in ethnic minority languages through radio and television in the language of Co Ho in Lam Dong.

## 3. The main method

The main method used are questionnaire survey and in-depth interviewing with two subjects: the person performing radio and television broadcasting in Co Ho ethnic minority and the Co Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong.

## 4. Research results

In Lam Dong, the Co Ho ethnic group has the second largest population after the Kinh, with 145,665 people (according to the 2009 census), mainly living in Di Linh, Duc Trong, Lam Ha, Luoyang, Dam Rong.

Co Ho people mainly live on wet rice cultivation, sticking to agricultural production. Traditional house of Co Ho people is house on stilts. Co Ho people live in small villages, and have their own management. They also retain many traditional customs with national identity, showing a rich and unique spiritual life. The Co Ho ethnic group has a remarkable artistic background. On the occasion of sacrifice to idols and community cultural activities, the Co Ho dance is performed in the tone of ethnic musical instruments, including 6 gongs, tubular tubes, bamboo pipes, etc. The poetry of the Co Ho minority lyrical is very lyrical and rich in both music and lyrics.

The Co Ho people have a habit of shifting cultivation, so in the process of development, some local branches of Co Ho have gradually been formed

such as Co Ho Sre, Co Ho To Rinh (T'ring), K Ho Nop (Tu nop), Chil, Co Ho Lach, Co Ho Don, etc. However, at present, based on the local residence and language, the Co Ho people are temporarily divided into the following groups:

- Co Ho Sre is the most populated group of Co Ho ethnic groups.
- The Co Ho Chil group resides in Duc Trong, Lam Ha, Lac Duong, Don Duong and neighboring districts of Da Lat city.
- The Co Ho Lat group is located in Xa Lat and some valley areas around Da Lat city.
- The Co Ho Nop group resides in Di Linh, along the road from Di Linh to Phan Thiet.
- The Co Ho Co Don ethnic group resides in the mountainous region of Southeast Di Linh, adjacent to Co Ho Nop people's residence area, most concentrated in Dinh Trang Hoa commune, Di Linh district.
- The Co Ho T'ring group resides in Khanh Hoa, Lam Dong (Lam Dong Party Committee, 2008).

The Co Ho language belongs to the South Asian language, Mon-Khmer group. It is the common language in this community. It is also the language used on the radio and television in Lam Dong to serve the Co Ho people in Lam Dong and neighboring provinces.

Lam Dong radio and television, and Lam Ha district radio and television station (Lam Dong province) have done quite well with radio and television programs in the Co Ho ethnic language. Since 2002, the Lam Dong Broadcasting and Television Station has established a national radio and television broadcasting division that is responsible for producing programs for Co Ho, Chu Ru and other ethnic minorities in the province. At present, the number of staffs is quite large, working very effectively. Ms. Dong Thuy Giang, head of the team of the ethnic minority Broadcasting and Television Station of Lam Dong, said that at the moment, the office of minority program has 18 people, of which 6 are ethnic minorities, including 4 Chu Ru, and 2 Co Ho people, weekly producing 3 twenty-five-minute television programs broadcast at 14h45, and 4 thirty-minute radio programs 12h00, and replayed the following day. Compared to other provinces, the frequency of broadcasting the ethnic language program of Lam Dong is much higher, and repeated more. Basically, ethnic minority radio and television programs have partly met the spiritual needs of Co Ho people in the province, contributing to popularizing the Party's ideas to the minority

people; help exchange cultures, and connect ethnic people together.

A random survey sample of 70 Co Ho residents living in Lam Ha district showed that 100% of respondents were able to hear the mother tongue, but only about 40% of them were literate. This literacy group is focused on older people over their working age - beyond their sixties; the majority of young people can only hear, speak the familiar Co Ho words in daily life.

Investigating the situation and the aspirations to access different types of communication in Co Ho language of the Co Ho people, we found impressive figures: only 25% of Co Ho people often listen to radio in Co Ho language, 75% listen occasionally. In Co Ho television programs, the situation seems to be more optimistic, but only 37.5% of respondents said that they often watched TV in their mother tongue. When asked whether they would like to listen to and watch television in their own language, 90% responded that they would like to. The reasons include: easy to understand (30% for radio, ~ 42% for television); helping maintain their own language (54% for radio, 61% for television); practical (24% for radio, 31% for television); attractive (26% for radio, 33% for television); other reasons (for life, etc) (0.4% for radio, 9.6% for television). The question of whether or not their language is heard and watched on radio and television gives us a clearer picture of accessing two types of media that both have similarities and differences. 72% of the respondents voted for radio was understandable; this figure for television was 91%. Is it because television is a form of communication that incorporates both visual and auditory elements that help most people feel understandable?

In general, the minority people evaluated the language used in broadcasting as understandable; the voice of radio/television announcers was inspirational and standard, with moderate pace, expressing ideas in the style of ethnic minority compatriots. The contents of TV and radio shows were rated as good by 80% of the surveyed people. However, people also suggested to increase the amount of cultural and entertainment contents and add contents on security, and contents for children; especially, strengthening the contents of local political and social education. Some argue that many ethnic minority language programs are heavily academic and not very attractive.

Comparing the rate of people who like to listen to radio and watch TV with the rate of people often hear and watch in ethnic minority language, it seems

incompatible. Many people like to listen and watch while not many people often do it. When carrying out in-depth interviews with some people about the reasons why they did not listen often, the answer was that the people did not have time to watch and listen often because they were busy working for a living. Sometimes a person would like to see the program in my mother tongue, but other family members would like to watch other program such as Kinh language program or entertainment program. Listening to the radio is mainly prevented by the fact that there is no radio.

Thus, low standards of living is one of the reasons that hinders the access to communication media; however, less access to communication will limit people's understandings and ability to improve their living. Therefore, local authorities and relevant levels should have a plan to expand access to ethnic minority language communication programs in order to sustainably develop ethnic minority areas.

At present, in Lam Dong, Co Ho is one of the languages that are focused on teaching in schools, used in broadcasting, printing of traditional art works, making dictionaries, printing textbooks to teach. It is also considered one of the key languages of the province and the region, but the actual reception still has many contradictions. For example, older people are very respectful and consciously reserve language and culture but for many reasons, the younger generation, their children have to pay attention to learn Vietnamese, so the language is gradually lost. When they approach the media, ethnic people are very excited about the programs in their own language but sometimes "want to see Vietnamese for convenience" because they are familiar with Vietnamese language and their mother tongue is limited. Therefore, promoting the role of using Co Ho in radio and television is an urgent matter.

In order to achieve effective communication education in ethnic minority languages, we need to focus on improving the program quality, in particular:

- There should be programs that enhance interactivity with viewers; Cultural programs with the ethnic identity of Co Ho people. At present, writings from Co Ho artists are less and less, both in song and dance. Most of the music programs broadcast on television and radio mainly exploit old songs, folk songs, traditional music, less new songs, not exciting, attractive for young Co Ho people.

- It is necessary to focus on the teaching of Co Ho language on radio and television for both adults

and children. When adults realize the practical meaning of learning and mastering their own language, children will be educated and oriented from the family to have a sense of preservation of their mother tongue.

- The problem of language characteristics, specialized terminology for broadcasting system in Co Ho language is not consistent. In fact, the language used on radio and television is still academic, which does not match the language of the Co Ho people in their daily life, so people are difficult to accept.

- The editorial staff in charge of Co Ho language is still limited, and the skills of the press are still limited, so they have not kept up with the new requirements of radio and television broadcasting.

- It is necessary to encourage district-level localities to establish and develop radio and television programs in ethnic minority languages, and have mechanisms to support the radio stations in terms of funding, human resources and techniques.

- Investing more in central broadcasting techniques to effectively cover all ethnic minority areas.

## 5. Conclusion

Lam Dong is a potential province in all aspects. Good communication will create opportunities for strong economic and cultural development. Arriving in Lam Dong on Saturday or Sunday, visitors have the opportunity to experience the unique culture shows made by Co Ho people, enjoy the Co Ho music and dance, eat barbecue and drink Rượu Cần (wine drunk out of a jar through pipes). These activities not only become a valuable source of livelihoods but also preserves and promote the cultural identity of Co Ho people. So, how can the Co Ho cultural identity not only be saved but also developed? Communication issues are also are the key to the development of the Co Ho ethnic minority in Lam Dong.

In order to preserve national cultural identity and sustainable economic development for Co Ho people, broadcasting in Co Ho language is a very important educational factor. Through watching television, listening to the radio in their own language, Co Ho people have chance to access the guidelines of the Party, learn the experience of developing household economy, promote the traditional profession. livelihoods; developing spiritual culture to help exchange cultures and connect ethnic people together. It is, therefore, necessary to raise the awareness of ethnic minorities through radio and television using ethnic minority languages.

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## GIÁO DỤC CỘNG ĐỒNG DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ SỬ DỤNG NGÔN NGỮ DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ QUA PHÁT THANH, TRUYỀN HÌNH: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP NGƯỜI CƠ HO Ở LÂM ĐỒNG, VIỆT NAM

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**Tóm tắt:** Lâm Đồng là một tỉnh miền núi phía nam Tây Nguyên của Việt Nam. Địa phương có nhiều người dân tộc thiểu số gồm Cơ Ho, Mạ, Chu Ru, MNông, Raglai, XTiêng... Một số dân tộc thiểu số ở các tỉnh phía Bắc di cư đến khu vực này gồm người Hoa, Tày, Nùng, Thái, Mường... Song, hầu hết trong số đó là người Cơ Ho. Bài viết phân tích và chỉ ra vai trò quan trọng của các hoạt động giao tiếp trong ngôn ngữ dân tộc thiểu số nói chung, các hoạt động phát thanh và truyền hình nói riêng trong việc giáo dục cộng đồng dân tộc thiểu số đối với dân tộc Cơ Ho ở Lâm Đồng. Phương pháp chính được sử dụng là khảo sát bằng bảng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn sâu hai đối tượng: Người thực hiện kênh phát thanh, truyền hình trong cộng đồng dân tộc Cơ Ho và đồng bào Cơ Ho ở Lâm Đồng. Thực tế là phần lớn người Cơ Ho muốn tiếp cận các chương trình phát thanh và truyền hình thông qua ngôn ngữ của họ vì hữu ích cho cuộc sống của họ, nhưng rất khó thực hiện điều đó vì điều kiện sống, điều kiện kỹ thuật, thói quen văn hóa... Do đó, cần có giải pháp cụ thể và phù hợp để phát huy vai trò của hoạt động này nhằm đáp ứng nhu cầu và nhu cầu cấp thiết của người dân Cơ Ho nói riêng, dân tộc thiểu số nói chung.

**Từ khóa:** Truyền thông dân tộc; Đồng bào Cơ Ho; Giáo dục cộng đồng; Ngôn ngữ dân tộc.