

Preserving the Khua Language of the Chut Ethnic Group through School Education: A Cultural Foundation for Sustainable Development in the North Central Region

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ABSTRACT: The languages of ethnic minorities are an important component of intangible cultural heritage, closely linked to cultural identity and sustainable community development. The Khua language of the Khua people, a local group of the Bru-Van Kieu ethnic group Minh Hoa Commune, is facing the risk of decline due to the impacts of integration and the dominant influence of Vietnamese in general education. Based on a survey of the use of the Khua language in teaching first-grade students at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No.2, this study analyzes the challenges involved and proposes solutions for preserving the Khua language through school education. The study affirms the role of schools not only as institutions for knowledge transmission but also as important spaces for maintaining, revitalizing, and promoting the mother tongue, thereby strengthening the cultural and social foundation and contributing to sustainable development in the North Central region.

Keywords: Khua language; bilingual education; ethnic minority language preservation; school-based education; sustainable development.

I. INTRODUCTION

The languages of ethnic minorities are not only a means of communication but also a place to store historical memories, indigenous knowledge, and the cultural value systems of a community. For the Khua people, belonging to the Bru-Van Kieu ethnic group, who have long resided in Minh Hoa communes of Quang Tri province, the Khua language plays a vital role in forming identity and community cohesion. However, under the impacts of integration, cultural interference, and the expansion of general education in Vietnamese, the usage space for the Khua language is gradually shrinking. It faces the risk of decline, particularly among the younger generation.

Reality shows that when Khua ethnic children start school, they must approach Vietnamese as a second language, while their mother tongue is rarely used in formal educational activities. This not only causes difficulties for students during the initial stages of learning but also disrupts the transmission of language and culture. Therefore, preserving the Khua language needs to be closely linked to school education through the integration of Khua-Vietnamese bilingualism, especially in teaching first-grade Vietnamese. This aims to both improve learning effectiveness and maintain and promote the mother tongue.

From the perspective of sustainable development, preserving and promoting the Khua language not only contributes to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage but also strengthens the socio-cultural foundation, enhances community cohesion, and improves the quality of human resources in ethnic minority areas. Based on this, the article clarifies the role of school education as a long-term approach to preserving the Khua language, thereby contributing to the promotion of sustainable development in the North Central region.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The article applies a combination of research methods from the social sciences and educational sciences, including document analysis and synthesis, practical surveys, and comparative analysis. Specifically, a practical survey was conducted with 74 students and 34 teachers at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2 to collect data on the status of teaching, the use of learning materials, and the conditions for preserving the Khua language within the school environment. Based on the collected data, analysis and comparison methods were used to clarify the role of school education in preserving the Khua language, linked to the goal of sustainable development in the North Central region.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Concepts related to the research

3.1.1. Concept of ethnic minority languages (speech)

UNESCO identifies the languages of ethnic minorities as a vital component of human cultural diversity and a means of preserving and transmitting history, indigenous knowledge, and community identity (UNESCO, 2003). From a sociolinguistic perspective, many studies argue that the speech of ethnic minorities does not only perform a communicative function but also reflects the way a community organizes social life, interacts with the natural environment, and maintains traditional cultural values (Nguyen Van Khang, 2012). In Vietnam, the Institute of Linguistics emphasizes that each ethnic minority language is associated with a specific socio-cultural space and plays an important role in preserving identity and community cohesion (Institute of Linguistics, 2016).

Based on this, in this article, ethnic minority language (speech) is understood as a unique linguistic sign system of an ethnic group, formed and developed throughout history, playing a central role in maintaining cultural identity, community cohesion, and the transmission of knowledge between generations.

3.1.2. Concept of language preservation linked to sustainable development

Language preservation, according to Fishman (1991), does not just stop at recording or storing linguistic forms; more importantly, it involves maintaining and expanding the environment in which the language is used in social life. UNESCO argues that the decline or loss of ethnic minority languages often leads to the disappearance of cultural and indigenous knowledge, directly affecting the community's capacity for selfdevelopment (UNESCO, 2017). Domestic studies also affirm that language preservation is an essential component of sustainable development, as it contributes to strengthening the socio-cultural foundation, improving human resource quality, and increasing community participation in the development process (Pham Quynh Phuong, 2019).

According to this approach, the article identifies language preservation linked to sustainable development as the process of maintaining, recovering, and promoting the mother tongue in social life and education to create a solid socio-cultural foundation for the long-term development of ethnic minority communities.

3.1.3. Concept of school education in a multicultural context

School education in a multicultural context is approached by many scholars as an educational process occurring in an environment of diverse languages, cultures, and identities. In this setting, the school fulfills universal educational goals while respecting and promoting indigenous cultural values (Banks, 2008). In Vietnam, studies on education in ethnic minority areas suggest that school education should become an intermediate space where the mother tongue and Vietnamese coexist and support each other in the process of forming linguistic capacity and the comprehensive development of students (Tran Thi Tuyet Oanh, 2020). Within the scope of this research, school education in a multicultural context is understood as educational activities taking place within the school that integrate the linguistic and cultural elements of ethnic minority students. This aims to ensure national educational goals while contributing to the preservation and promotion of community cultural identity.

3.2. Overview of the Khua community and the Khua language in the North Central region

The Khua people are a local group belonging to the Bru-Van Kieu ethnic group who have long resided in the western mountainous area of the North Central region, with Minh Hoa commune (Quang Tri province) being one of the concentrated residential areas. Throughout history, due to the specific natural conditions of high mountains, fragmented terrain, and a survival space closely linked to forests and mountains, the Khua people have formed unique characteristics in community organization, livelihoods, and cultural life while maintaining ethno-cultural ties with other Bru Van Kieu groups in the region.

The life of the Khua people is deeply marked by indigenous culture, expressed through slash-and-burn farming methods and a system of folk beliefs associated with nature and village communities. Social structure based on blood relations, lineages, and community conventions plays an important role in regulating social behavior and

maintaining internal cohesion. Within this cultural space, the Khua language was formed, used, and transmitted as a core element of spiritual life.

The Khua language holds a central role in family and community life, serving as the primary means of communication and a carrier of traditional cultural values. In the context where the written script of the Khua people has declined, speech has become the primary channel for preserving and passing down folk knowledge, production experience, customary laws, traditions, and forms of cultural-religious activities. Through this, it crystallizes the cultural identity and community consciousness of the Khua people in the North Central region.

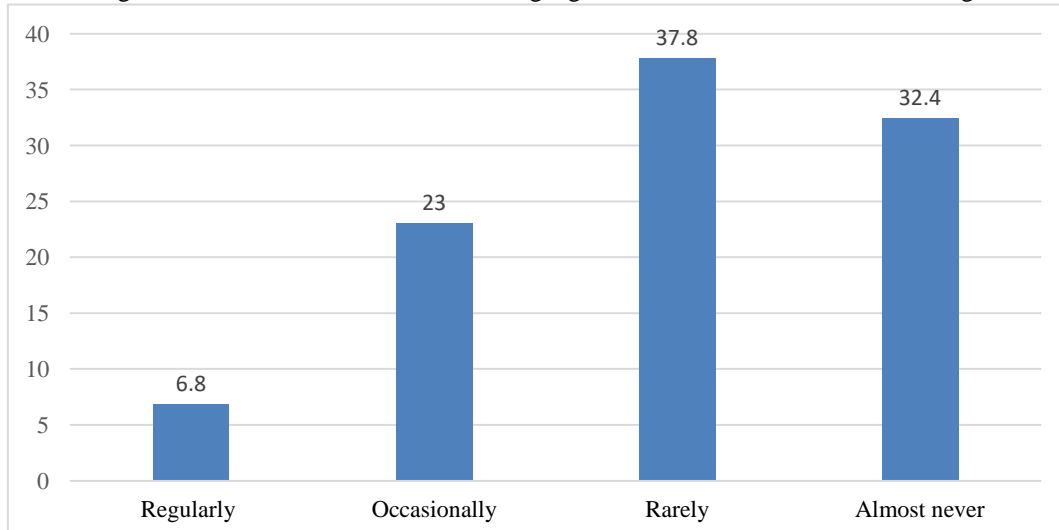
3.3. The role of school education in preserving the Khua language

As the spaces for using the Khua language in community life continue to shrink, school education becomes the key social institution for preserving and maintaining the language. Beyond teaching general knowledge, schools have the capacity to organize and maintain the directed, continuous, and sustainable use of the mother tongue. The school is an official space where the Khua language is recreated and maintained through teaching activities, pedagogical communication, and educational programs. Integrating the Khua language, especially in the early grades, both supports students in accessing Vietnamese more effectively and ensures the presence of the mother tongue within the school environment, thereby limiting the risk of a linguistic transmission break between generations. Preserving the Khua language in school education is simultaneously a process of preserving the cultural values associated with the language. Through the mother tongue, the folk knowledge, customs, and cultural norms of the ethnic group are identified and transmitted. This contributes to forming an awareness of respecting identity and nurturing pride and responsibility in the younger generation to safeguard their cultural heritage. In particular, preserving the Khua language through school education helps strengthen community cohesion, promote cultural equality, and create a socio-cultural foundation for sustainable development in the North Central region. Thus, school education becomes an important bridge between cultural preservation and sustainable development in the current context of integration.

3.4. The current status of Khua language use in teaching activities for first-grade students at Dan Hoa Primary School, Minh Hoa District, Quang Tri Province

Firstly, the current status of students' Khua language use in the school environment

Figure 1: The level of students' Khua language use in communication and learning



Source: Survey data

The survey evaluation by teachers at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2 shows that among the 74 first-grade Khua ethnic students, the levels of Khua language use in school vary specifically: only 5 students (accounting for 6.8%) were evaluated by teachers as regularly using the Khua language in communication and learning. This is a very low rate, considering that the Khua language was their mother tongue before entering school.

Meanwhile, 17 students (23.0%) only occasionally use the Khua language; this group of students still possesses the ability to use their mother tongue, but the frequency is low and lacks stability, showing that the Khua language no longer holds the role of the dominant communication language in the school life of these early-grade students. Notably, according to teacher evaluations, the number of students who rarely use the Khua

language is as high as 28 (accounting for 37.8%), and 24 students (accounting for 32.4%) almost never use the Khua language in communication and learning.

Thus, as many as 52/74 students (70.2%) almost never or very rarely use their mother tongue when participating in school activities. This reflects the reality that Vietnamese holds an absolute dominant position, while the Khua language exists only in a narrow, unofficial scope and is not reinforced during the learning process.

The above status shows that the generation of first-grade Khua ethnic students has not formed the habit of using their mother tongue in the educational environment. This is direct empirical evidence of the risk of the Khua language disappearing within the school space. It also sets an urgent requirement for preservation solutions to ensure the sustainable socio-cultural development of the Khua people (a group within the Bru - Van Kieu ethnic group) in the North Central region.

To clearly identify the status and the space of Khua language use in the school environment, the research surveyed the context of Khua language use by first-grade students at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2.

Table 1: Context of Khua language use among first-grade students

No.	Context of use	Use Khua language	Percentage (%)	Do not use Khua language	Percentage (%)
1	During formal classes	2	2.7	72	97.3
2	During recess	15	20.3	59	79.7
3	Communicating with friends	18	24.3	56	75.7
4	Communicating with teachers	3	4.1	71	95.9

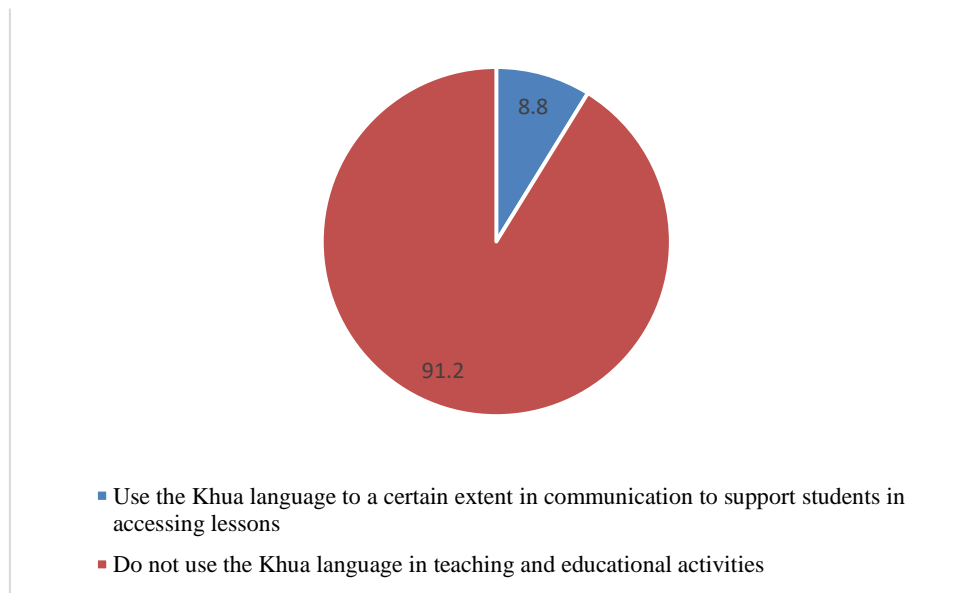
The survey results show that the Khua language is almost absent from official educational activities and only exists in a narrow, unstable scope in several informal communication contexts. Specifically: during formal classes, only 2/74 students (accounting for 2.7%) were recorded by teachers as using the Khua language, while 72 students (accounting for 97.3%) did not use it at all. This shows that Vietnamese plays an absolute dominant role in the teaching process; the Khua language is not used as a supporting tool for acquiring knowledge and has no position in the school's official pedagogical activities.

During recess, the percentage of students using the Khua language is higher but still low, with 15/74 students (accounting for 20.3%). However, the majority of students (accounting for 79.7%) still do not use the Khua language even in a free communication context. This shows that even when not directly governed by teaching activities, the Khua language is no longer a popular linguistic choice for students. In communication with friends, only 18 students (accounting for 24.3%) use the Khua language, while 56 students (accounting for 75.7%) do not. This is an important indicator reflecting a break in linguistic transmission among the younger generation, as peer-to-peer communication is traditionally considered the most favorable space for maintaining the mother tongue. The fact that the Khua language is no longer widely used even in interactions between students shows that this language is gradually losing its daily communicative function in school life.

Communication between students and teachers is the context with the second-lowest rate of Khua language use, reaching only 3/74 students (accounting for 4.1%), while 71 students (accounting for 95.9%) do not use it at all. This reality clearly reflects institutional and pedagogical barriers: teachers mainly use Vietnamese in communication and instruction, and the Khua language is not encouraged or integrated as a linguistic resource within the school.

Secondly, the current status of teachers integrating the Khua language into teaching and educational activities for first-grade students at Dan Hoa Primary School No. 2.

Figure 2: Percentage of teachers integrating the Khua language into teaching and educational activities



Source: Survey data

The survey results in Figure 2 show that the integration of the Khua language into the teaching process and the organization of educational activities by first-grade teachers at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2 is very limited. Specifically, out of a total of 34 surveyed teachers, only 3 teachers (accounting for 8.8%) reported using the Khua language to a certain extent in communication to support students in accessing lessons; meanwhile, 31 teachers (equivalent to 91.2%) do not use the Khua language in teaching or educational activities.

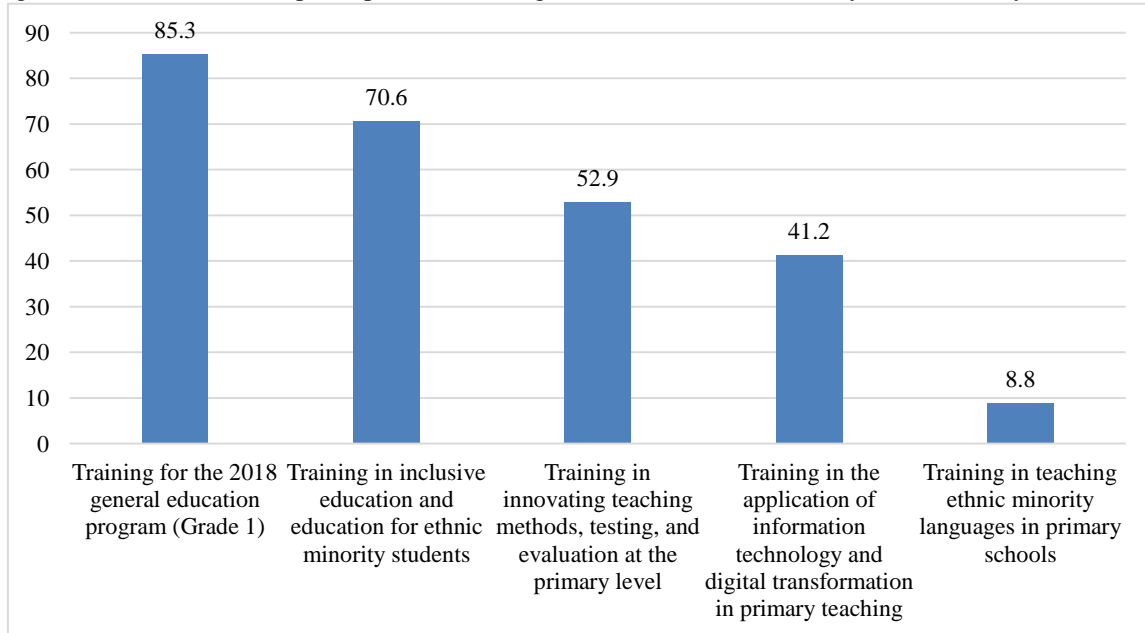
Considering the purpose of use, the Khua language is mainly applied by teachers in a situational manner, such as for quick explanations, reassurance, or individual support when students face difficulties. It has not yet been intentionally integrated into lesson content, teaching methods, or experiential educational activities. Notably, no teachers reported using the Khua language as an official component in organizing teaching or in designing learning materials.

This status shows that although teachers have begun to recognize the supporting role of the mother tongue for first-grade Khua ethnic students, the integration of this language into the school environment remains spontaneous and unsystematic. It lacks clear professional orientation and is not supported by learning materials or specific pedagogical guidelines.

Thirdly, the current status of conditions ensuring the preservation of the Khua language through school education at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2

The survey results of 34 teachers directly teaching first-grade students at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2 show that the conditions ensuring the integration and preservation of the Khua language in the school environment are currently very limited. This is clearly evident in terms of human resources, learning materials, and the orientation of educational organization. Specifically:

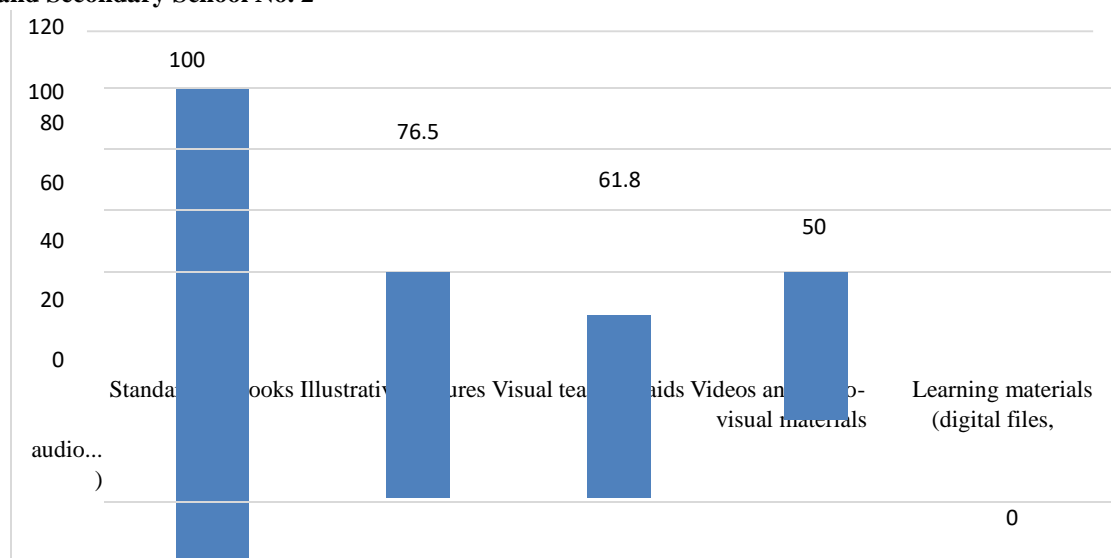
Figure 3: Status of teachers' participation in training sessions at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2



The survey results presented in Figure 3 show that the teaching staff at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2 has participated in many different training topics. Among them, 29/34 teachers (accounting for 85.3%) participated in training for the 2018 general education program; 24/34 teachers (accounting for 70.6%) were trained in inclusive education and the education of ethnic minority students. Additionally, training content on innovating teaching methods, testing, evaluation, and the application of information technology in primary teaching was implemented at a moderate level, with teacher participation rates reaching 52.9% and 41.2%, respectively.

However, professional training on teaching ethnic minority languages in the school has not yet been implemented fully or synchronously. Only 3/34 teachers in the whole school have ever participated in this training content, accounting for 8.8%, primarily being a few key teachers who were sent to attend. The fact that training has not been expanded to the direct teaching staff has led to limitations in preparing professional capacity. This makes teaching activities linked to the preservation of the Khua language experimental in nature, lacking an in-depth basis and failing to ensure sustainability within the school education environment.

Figure 4: Status of learning materials serving the teaching of Khua ethnic students at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2



The survey results of 34 teachers show that the learning materials used for teaching at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2 are currently mainly general educational materials. Specifically, 34/34 teachers (100%) confirmed using standard textbooks; 26/34 teachers (76.5%) use illustrative pictures; 21/34

teachers (61.8%) utilize visual teaching aids; and 17/34 teachers (50.0%) use videos and audio-visual materials during the teaching process.

However, the school currently does not have any official documents or learning materials in the Khua language for teaching activities. These figures show that the students' mother tongue has not been integrated into the school's learning material system at all, leaving teaching activities linked to Khua language preservation without the necessary material basis and failing to meet sustainable educational development requirements.

3.5. Evaluation of the current status and issues raised in preserving the Khua language through school education

From the survey results regarding the level of students' Khua language use, teachers' integration of the Khua language, and the conditions ensuring mother-tongue education at Dan Hoa Primary and Secondary School No. 2, the research draws several key observations and issues:

First, the Khua language is rapidly declining in its function and scope of use within the school environment. The data shows that the majority of first-grade Khua ethnic students almost never or very rarely use their mother tongue in communication and learning, with 70.2% of students belonging to the "rarely" or "almost never" groups. Notably, the Khua language is almost absent from official educational activities, especially during formal classes (only 2.7% of students use it). This reflects an almost absolute dependence on Vietnamese in school, causing the Khua language to be pushed out of the formal educational space and exist only fragmentedly in some informal communication situations. Without timely intervention, this trend will break the process of forming and maintaining mother-tongue competence from the very first years of school. Second, the role of teachers in maintaining and supporting the Khua language in school is very minor. The survey results show that only 8.8% of teachers use the Khua language to a certain extent, mainly in a situational and individual-supportive manner, while the vast majority of teachers do not use the Khua language in teaching or educational activities. The fact that the Khua language is not intentionally integrated into lesson content, teaching methods, or experiential activities shows that this language has not yet been recognized as a pedagogical resource but is only seen as a spontaneous, auxiliary means of communication. This significantly limits the potential to promote the role of the mother tongue in helping first-grade students access knowledge and adapt to the learning environment.

Third, the conditions ensuring Khua language preservation through school education have not yet been established. The fact that 100% of teachers have never been trained in teaching the Khua language or bilingual education, along with the school's total lack of learning materials in the Khua language, shows that the preservation of this language has not been supported by necessary resources. Furthermore, the Khua language has not been identified as a specific goal or task in the school's educational plan; there are no professional regulations, guidelines, or coordination mechanisms between the school and families. This leaves activities related to the Khua language lacking systematicity, making them unsustainable and highly dependent on individual teacher awareness.

From these evaluations, a fundamental conflict can be seen existing in Khua language preservation through school education: while the Khua language is the mother tongue linked to the cultural identity of Khua ethnic students, in educational practice, this language has not yet been recognized and utilized as an educational resource. The gap between the requirement to preserve the ethnic group's language and the conditions for implementation within the school sets an urgent requirement for synchronous solutions—from raising awareness and staff training to building learning materials and perfecting organizational mechanisms—to gradually bring the Khua language back into the school environment in an appropriate, oriented, and sustainable way.

3.6. Solutions for preserving the Khua language through school education toward sustainable development in the North Central region

Firstly, concretizing the bilingual education policies of the Ministry of Education and Training to fit the Khua language context

Although the Ministry of Education and Training has policies to enhance education for ethnic minority students, encouraging the use of the mother tongue as a supporting tool for learning at the primary level, in reality, the Khua language has not yet been concretized in educational programs and plans at the local and school levels. Therefore, the Quang Tri Department of Education and Training needs to concretize this policy by allowing and encouraging the integration of the Khua language into early-grade educational activities, especially in Grade 1—the stage for forming students' linguistic foundation and learning psychology. This concretization will create a legal and professional framework, helping teachers feel secure in using the mother tongue as a legitimate pedagogical resource, instead of the current spontaneous approach.

Secondly, building policies to attract, train, and utilize a team of Vietnamese–Khua bilingual teachers. Survey results show that only 8.8% of teachers have not yet been trained in teaching the Khua language or bilingual education (as written in the source text), clearly reflecting the limitations of the professional staff at the facility. On that basis, it is necessary to gradually build policies for training and utilizing teachers who are Khua ethnic people or teachers capable of fluently using both the Khua and Vietnamese languages. In the short term, priority can be given to recruiting and fostering local teachers; in the long term, there should be policies to train ethnic minority teachers in a bilingual direction to meet the requirements of teaching and ethnic cultural education. This is considered a foundational solution that determines the sustainability of Khua language preservation in the school environment.

Thirdly, building and designing Vietnamese–Khua bilingual materials for teaching first-grade students. In the context where there is no official Khua language teaching program, developing Vietnamese–Khua bilingual learning materials is identified as a key solution to bring the mother tongue into the school environment in a flexible and feasible way. On that basis, the research has built and operated a digital bilingual Vietnamese–Khua learning channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@Sacmausongngu>), providing learning products suitable for the cognitive characteristics of Khua ethnic primary students. Through a system of lesson videos, sample dialogues, and visual content, the materials not only support students in acquiring knowledge in Vietnamese more effectively but also contribute to maintaining and consolidating the Khua language vocabulary during daily learning. More importantly, the regular presence of the mother tongue in learning materials has aroused interest in learning, enhanced linguistic confidence, and gradually formed an awareness of preserving ethnic cultural identity right from the first level of school, thereby affirming the application value and practical significance of the research product.

Fourthly, strengthening coordination between the school - family - community in Khua language preservation.

Language preservation is only truly effective when there is a connection between the school environment and the community's cultural space. Schools need to coordinate with parents and the Khua community to encourage students to use their mother tongue in daily communication, experiential activities, collective living, and folklore. This coordination not only helps expand the space for using the Khua language but also contributes to affirming the social value of the ethnic language and limiting the trend of mother-tongue decline among the younger generation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Preserving the speech of the Khua people (Bru–Van Kieu ethnic group) through school education is not only a linguistic issue but also a key content in preserving cultural identity and ensuring sustainable development in the North Central region. The research results show that the Khua language is facing a clear risk of decline in the school environment, expressed through the limited usage level by students, the absence of the mother tongue in formal teaching, and shortages in staff, learning materials, and educational organization orientation. On that basis, the research affirms that school education holds a foundational role in preserving the Khua language, in which developing and using Vietnamese–Khua bilingual materials is a feasible solution suitable for practical conditions. This approach both brings the mother tongue back to the educational space flexibly and ensures comprehensive educational goals. The developed digital bilingual materials not only support teaching and learning but also contribute to linking university training with local cultural–linguistic preservation needs. They contribute to strengthening cultural identity, enhancing community cohesion, and creating a humanistic foundation for the socio-economic development of the North Central region.

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