

3. Tips for maintaining Vietnamese (your home language)

1. Tell your children why it is valuable to speak Vietnamese

Explain to children that lots of families use more than one language. Talk to your child about the benefits outlined above and how it is a great superhero skill to speak more than one language.

2. Positive attitudes are the key to home language maintenance

Children are very good at working out if something is important or not. If they don't see speaking Vietnamese as important or valuable, then they won't be motivated to learn it. Having a positive attitude towards your home language has a big impact upon how much children value the language and their desire to speak it.

3. Use the language every day in lots of different ways

The amount of Vietnamese a child hears has a big impact on their success at learning it. Use Vietnamese as much as possible at home and in your daily activities with your child so that they can learn many Vietnamese words and get lots of practice in using the language. Be aware of your language use and how often you are speaking Vietnamese with your child.

4. Involve the whole family

Researchers have shown that home language maintenance is more successful when the whole family works together to learn the language. Children learn language best when both their parents speak the language. If one parent does not know the home language, then having a supportive attitude towards their partner teaching the language is very important. Older siblings also play a big role in which language younger children learn. If older siblings always speak in English, then younger siblings may find it more difficult to learn and maintain Vietnamese. Encourage the whole family to have a positive attitude towards learning and speaking Vietnamese. Include grandparents and other relatives in home language maintenance activities so that children gain lots of experience with different people using the language.

5. Make your language visible in your home and environment

Children learn that a language is important and valuable when they see it in their everyday environment. Think about how you could display more Vietnamese in your home through books, artwork, signs, food packaging, etc. Children also learn that their language is valuable when they see it outside of the home. Encourage your child's pre-school or school to display Vietnamese words or images to show your child that their language is valued and belongs everywhere, not just inside their home. Attend cultural events where your child can see their culture alive in their surroundings and see the link between language and culture.

6. Play with other children who speak Vietnamese

– being part of a community is important

One of the best ways to support home language maintenance is to give children the opportunity to speak it with other children. Setting up play dates, regular play groups or attending cultural events with other Vietnamese-speaking children will help children to see how their language can be used in other settings and with people outside of their family. This can make children more excited about learning the language as they have a fun and playful environment in which to use their language skills.

7. Read with your child

Reading has so many benefits for children's language development. It teaches children about culture and takes their imagination of exciting journeys using the Vietnamese language. Exposing children to Vietnamese words and text from an early age can help them to develop strong skills in both spoken and written Vietnamese. Choose books that have pictures of children who look like your child. It is helpful for children to see themselves, their language and their culture in books to build identity and connection.

8. Teach your child to read in Vietnamese

Learning to read in Vietnamese is easier than learning to read in English because the letters match the sounds. Once children know about the letters and what sound they make they can quickly start learning to read words and go on to learn to read books. Teaching your child to read together with explaining to them the meanings of the words helps your child learn Vietnamese faster. Being able to read Vietnamese gives children the key to a whole new world of Vietnamese learning because they can access information that has only been written in Vietnamese. Also, researchers have shown that learning to read in Vietnamese can help children to learn to read in English as their brain has a good understanding of how to understand print and take meaning from words on a page.

9. Make language learning functional

– the best way to maintain a home language is to take it out of the home

The reason people speak more than one language is because they use them for different purposes. For example, you might use English for work or school and use Vietnamese to communicate with your family or for cultural events. It is hard to maintain a language if there is no need for it. The best way to learn a language is to use it for tasks in everyday life. You could use Vietnamese to teach children how to cook, to write a letter to their grandparents, to go shopping etc. Children need to have a reason to use Vietnamese so that they can get lots of practice and see the purpose of using Vietnamese. If children can't see a need for using Vietnamese, they might switch to using English only.

10. MAKE IT FUN!

This is the most important tip of all. Children may not want to learn a language if they think it is boring, not relevant, or different from what everyone else is doing. Sharing fun experiences in Vietnamese will help children to associate it with positive memories and experiences which can

create a spark and a passion for learning and maintaining their home language. Children also love spending time with their parents in fun shared activities.

You can read books, play games, cook, sing, draw, make arts and crafts, watch TV and movies, and write in Vietnamese. Children love to use computers, tablets and phones. There are many free great resources available online to help children to learn Vietnamese in a fun, interactive and motivating way.

There are lots of fun ideas in this book to get you started with making your home practice fun and exciting for children. Let your children choose what fun activity they would like to do.

11. More information

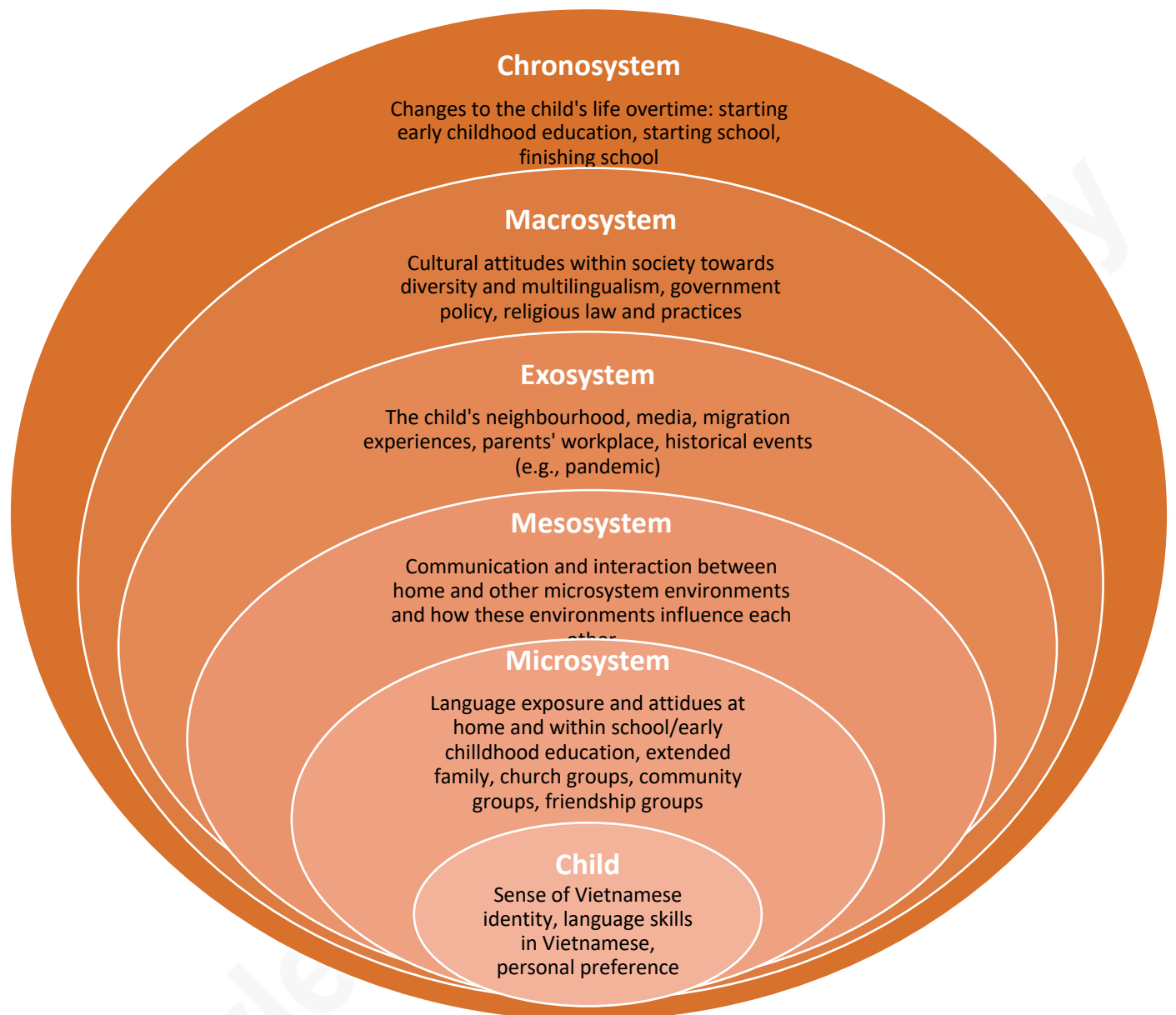
Children's development of their home languages is affected by multiple levels of their surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, norms, laws, and practices according to the Bioecological Systems Model of Home Language Maintenance (Verdon et al., 2022). A child's bioecological system consists of 5 subsystems that both affect and are affected by the child, these are: the microsystem (the most immediate environmental settings containing the developing child, such as family and school) the mesosystem (interconnections between other microsystem environments, such as between the family and teachers or relationship between the child's peers and the family), the exosystem (factors that lie beyond the immediate environment of the child as an active participant but still affect the child), the macrosystem (the larger cultural context), and the chronosystem (changes over time, including normal life transitions such as starting school or leaving high school) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This means that each of these systems impacts whether, a child will learn their home language, how they feel about using the language and whether they will maintain the language over time. By supporting home language maintenance in each of these systems, the child's chances of successfully maintaining their home language are increased.

References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Verdon, S. (2022). *A bioecological framework model for children's home language maintenance*. Charles Sturt University.
- Tran, H. V. (2019). Làm thế nào để giữ tiếng Việt cho con khi sống ở nước ngoài? (How to maintain Vietnamese for your children when living overseas?). *BBC Vietnamese*. <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/forum-47147158>



Bioecological Systems Model of Home Language Maintenance (Verdon, 2022)



The tips above will help you to support your child's Vietnamese development and consider the influence of each of these systems upon their home language maintenance.