Research on Social Interaction Trends Between Tourists and Children in The Northern Mountain Tourist Areas

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Abstract:

Tourism is currently very developed in Vietnam, opening up opportunities to promote culture, sceneries and lives in remote areas to domestic and foreign tourists. Tourists coming to the mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam, in addition of the desire to enjoy the majestic and poetic view of the place, also aim to interact with people, especially children, who are said to be innocent and happy. In this research article, the authors studied the current trend of social interactions between tourists and children in northern mountain tourist areas after reviewing the theory of social interaction. In addition, the article also provides assessments and solutions to promote positive trends and limit negative trends of these interactions for authorities and children as well as families and schools in this area.

Keywords: trends, social interactions, tourists, highland children, tourist areas, Northern mountain areas, Vietnam

1. Introduction:

Society is an entity that exists around us; it contains each individual in society, social relationships, and issues that affect people's lives. Society is associated with the birth of humanity. It evolves through many different levels, from the simplest to the most complex. Society in different regions of the world has progressed in different ways, but in general, up to the present time, all of them are moving towards a civilized, democratic society for the benefit of their people.

Society, from the perspective of sociology, is a collection of people who have close relationships with each other in all areas of social life. It is the comprehensive expression of social relationships.

In society, people cannot live alone without interacting with the world. Each purposeful human activity only becomes a social activity when it lies within many relationships between active subjects and through those relationships. It is the mutual influences of people in the surrounding world with many forms, activities, and appearances that create a system of social relationships in which people are influenced, and they influence each other by their roles, their specific tasks in that environment.

Social interaction is used to refer to the process of contact and mutual influence between two or more individuals or groups of people. Social interaction is a form of social communication or exchange between individuals and communities, in which their mutual relationship is realized, their social actions are performed and the adaptation of one action to another, thereby also finding common ground in understanding the situation, the meaning of the action, in order to achieve a certain level of cooperation or agreement between them. (luathoangphi.vn, 2022)

Due to the convenience of transportation and the development of science and technology, social relations have been increasingly expanded, and social interaction through various methods has also become popular.

Nowadays, social interaction between people from geographical areas with different languages and religions, as well as ages is more common. Traveling has brought people from different countries closer.

Tourism is currently considered a key economic sector of the Vietnamese economy, in which tourism development in ethnic minorities and mountain areas is the key focus. In recent years, the northern midland and mountain areas have emerged as a favorite tourist destination for domestic and international tourists, reflected in the number of tourists and tourism revenue brought to localities. (quanlynhanuoc.vn, 2024)

Tourists coming to the northern mountain areas, in addition to activities like sightseeing, relaxing, and exploring the beautiful scenery and culture, can also immerse themselves in the lives of the ethnic minorities there. Social interactions between tourists and children here can include: smiling, talking with each other, visitors guiding, exchanging gifts, teaching foreign languages,

buying and selling souvenirs, etc. With the reality that people are more open, interactions between these subjects have increasingly developed. Besides positive interactions, there are still negative ones. This is understandable because these are interactions between people, the things exchanged during the interaction process are very rich and diverse, not just tangible things that can be measured and counted. Therefore, research on the trend of social interactions between tourists and highland children in the mountain tourist areas of northern Vietnam is necessary.

2. Research methodology:

For the research, the authors used two methods including desk research (reviewing documents published in the media) and conducting sociological surveys (collecting questionnaires for tourists in many locations). The data will be synthesized and analyzed using Excel software.

For the desk research method, the authors reviewed literature on social exchange theory and social interaction; and characteristics of tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam.

The authors developed a survey form to conduct a sociological investigation, with questions about:

1. What are the common social interactions between tourists and highland children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam (list, evaluate)?

2. Should children in mountain tourist areas in northern Vietnam interact socially with tourists?

3. What are the benefits/risks for children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam when interacting socially with tourists?

4. What knowledge and skills do children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam

need to be equipped with when interacting socially with tourists?

5. What do tourists expect when coming to the mountain tourist areas in the North of Vietnam?

6. Communication between tourists and highland children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam after trips?

7. What are the ways that local authorities can facilitate good interactions between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam?

8. What measures can the authorities in charge of culture – tourism – sports – security – health… take to limit negative interactions between tourists and children in the mountain tourist areas of Northern Vietnam?

9. What actions should families and schools take when children interact with tourists in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam?

In addition, the survey also has an open-ended question for respondents: Share your own experiences of interacting with children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam.

The data collection method was conducted by the research team based on the convenience sampling method. The survey was built on Google drive, and the survey was conducted via the link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeOS OanS9tFgtoWAavGapYsQoKk9ATGcXBLipzGI kYq3j_7LQ/viewform?usp=sharing or all survey subjects via social media such as: Facebook, Zalo, Email…The total number of collected ballots was 169 and all were valid. The survey data was compiled and statistically analyzed using Excel software, from which it was analyzed and demonstrated the research problem. ach question has answers for the survey subjects to choose from (one answer or multiple answers, or choose 1 level/5-level scale from low to high). The research team collected survey data and used it to analyze, compare, and illustrate the content of the article
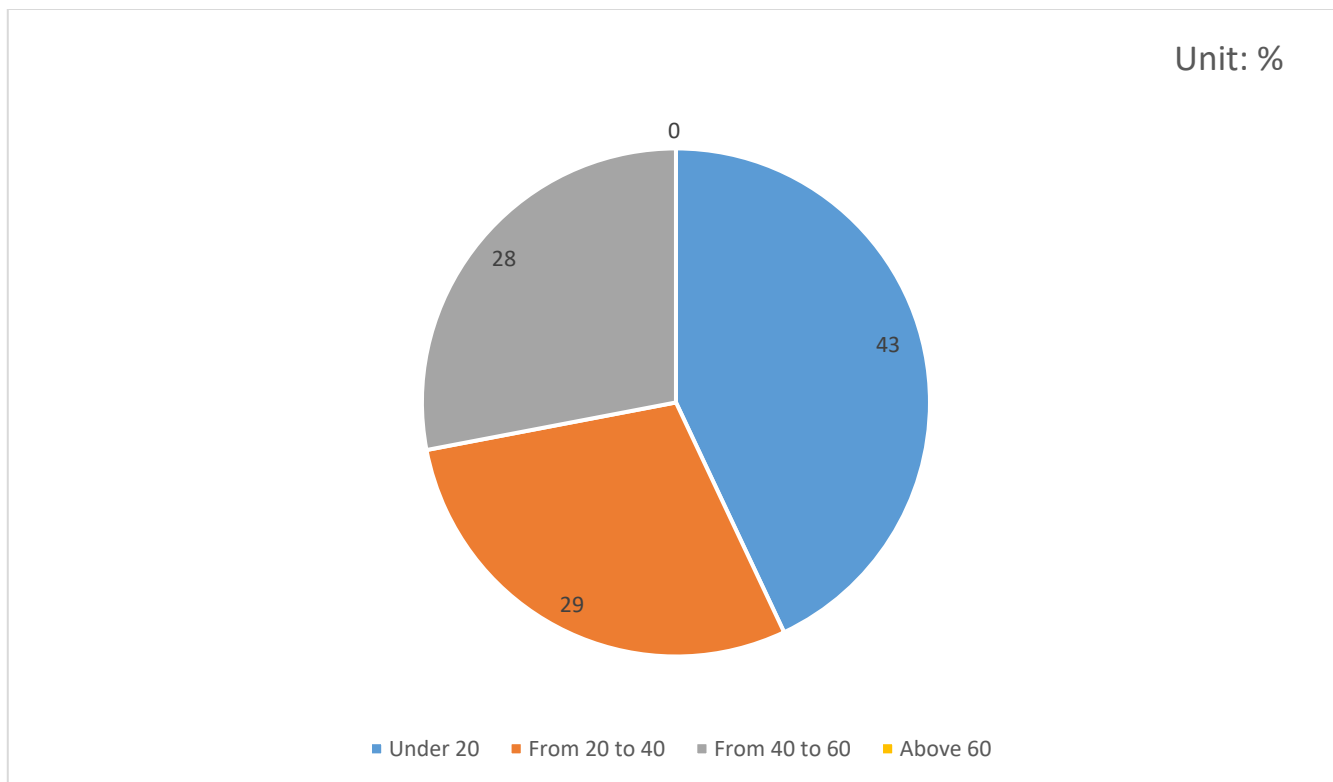

Figure 1. Age of survey respondents

Source: Survey results

With 100% Vietnamese, the average age of the surveyed subjects is from 20 to 40 years old, this is the age of youth who are about exploring and also have income to take part in experiential activities. Therefore, the answers obtained from these subjects in the survey are reliable.

3. Overview of social interaction:

3.1. Some social exchange theories:

3.1.1. Origin of the theory:

Social exchange theory describes how people interact with relationships in society as a result of a process of exchanging benefits. (tamlytrilieunhc.vn, 2023)

Social exchange theory is a psychological and sociological perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchange between parties. Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed using a subjective cost-benefit analysis and a comparison of alternatives. The theory has roots in economics, psychology, and sociology. Social exchange theory shares many key assumptions in rational choice theory and structuralism. It is also often used in business to imply a two-sided, mutually meaningful and rewarding process involving transactions or simply exchanges.

Social exchange theory was introduced in 1958 by sociologist George Homans (1910–1989) with the publication of his work "Social Behavior as Exchange". He defined social exchange as the exchange of activities, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two people. After Homans established the theory, other theorists continued to write about it, notably Peter M. Blau and Richard M. Emerson, who in addition to Homans are often considered the major developers of the exchange sociological perspective. Homan's work emphasized the individual behavior of actors in interaction with each other. Although there were different modes of exchange, Homans focused his research on dyadic exchange. John Thibaut and Harold Kelley are noted for their focus on the theory of psychological concepts, duality, and small groups. Lévi-Strauss is credited with contributing to the emergence of this theoretical perspective from his work in anthropology focusing on general systems of exchange, such as kinship systems and gift exchange. (xahoihocsociology, 2020)

3.1.2. Main components of social exchange theory:

The main components of social exchange theory are the basis for people to understand and apply appropriately. These four components include benefits, costs, expectations, and comparison levels.

- Benefits and Costs:

The things you desire to have and receive in return are considered benefits in theory.

Benefit is understood as the benefit received in a relationship. It can be material or spiritual benefit.

Material: money, jewelry, clothes, vehicles, houses…

Emotion: joy, happiness, pride, encouragement, confidence…

The negative things you get when you give away are called costs in theory.

Costs are often seen as a disadvantage in a relationship. They can be material or emotional.

Material: money, houses, cars, jewelry…

Emotion: waste of time, effort, sadness, disappointment, suffering…

In a positive, healthy relationship, the benefits will outweigh the costs. On the contrary, if the relationship is toxic or negative, the costs will dominate.

According to social exchange theory, to calculate the value of a relationship, we will take the total benefits received minus the total costs incurred. But in reality, the value of a relationship cannot be completely calculated by numbers. They are a combination of many factors, including emotions.

In a business relationship, both parties are very clear about their interests, giving and receiving fairly. However, they still cooperate closely thanks to trust, love, admiration or respect for each other.

- Expectations and comparison levels

Expectations and comparisons are also two important factors in the social exchange process. This is considered a consequence of benefits and costs.

These two factors are formed by the level of experience of a past relationship.

The healthier the relationship, the more benefits received, the higher the expectations and comparisons will be. If the relationship is full of negativity, then the comparisons and expectations will be lower.

When you expect benefits, but the results are not worth it. At this time, conflicts are likely to occur, making the relationship unable to last. (tamlytrilieunhc.vn, 2023)

3.2. Some theories on social interaction:

3.2.1. Origin:

Social interaction theory is a sociological perspective that has been influential in many areas of sociology. Notable authors of symbolic interactionism are Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Herbert Bluner. Symbolic interactionism has its roots in American pragmatism and especially in the works of George Herbert Mead. Mead sought to translate the insights of pragmatists into a theory and method for the social sciences.

The general thesis of symbolic interactionism is that individuals in the process of interacting with each other based on the meanings they perceive must interpret the actions, gestures, and objects of others (symbols). To be able to understand the actions and gestures of that person, we must enter that person's role, that is, we must put ourselves in that person's position. Only when we put ourselves in the position of the interaction object, can we fully understand the meaning of their statements, gestures, and actions and interpret their types of actions. This is an important process in the formation of individual personality.

Mead considers the ability of humans to put themselves in the position and role of partners and to see themselves as an action partner as an important mechanism in their interaction with the surrounding social environment. It is this mechanism that helps humans create meaning for objects, phenomena, and actions around them - that is, to form symbols... all objects, images, actions, and gestures around us can be assigned meanings by humans and become symbols in communication. (luatminhkhue.vn, 2021)

3.2.2. Concept:

Social exchange theory is social interactions in which individuals believe that they will gain certain benefits from exchange behaviors (Blau, 1964).

The process of social interaction is the process of exchange between individuals as well as social groups to build social relations as the pillars of social structures. The change of social structure is also due to the change of social relations and its consequence is social change.

According to P. Blau, the process of social exchange leading to social change takes place in four steps:

+ Step 1, the transfer of exchange between individuals;

+ Step 2, the differentiation of status and power;

+ Step 3, legitimization and organization, sowing the seeds for change;

+ Step 4, opposition and transformation. (vietnambiz.vn, 2020)

Social interaction is considered the process of carrying out behaviors and actions in the process of exchange between one subject and another. Social interaction is a form of social communication or exchange between individuals and the community in which their mutual relationship is realized. Thanks to the mutual impact between individuals, groups, and communities, they exist and operate. In society, it is the mutual impacts with many forms, activities, and appearances that create a system of social relationships in which people are influenced and mutually affected by their specific roles, functions, and tasks in the environment.

Therefore, social interaction is defined as follows: "Social interaction is used to refer to the process of contact and mutual influence between two or more individuals or groups of people"

The basic sign of social interaction between two individuals is a change in the perception, attitude, or behavior of both individuals. (luatminhkhue.vn, 2021)

3.2.3. Characteristics:

- In human life, there are always social interactions. Through social interactions, individuals can perform actions aimed at a specific purpose and also create connections and relationships as the basis for social stability and order. Through social interactions, people create behavioral, activity patterns, value systems, standards, and rules of action.

- Social interaction is the process of communication between at least two actors. In the process of interaction between individuals, spoken and written language are the two most important languages that people use. Each person must not only use spoken and written language assigned to sounds and characters to express the meaning of actions, but also use spoken and written language to make decisions about actions directed towards others. The rules, values and standards of action and interaction are also expressed through signs and symbols. Individuals can only interact with each other when each person grasps and understands the meaning of the signs and symbols used. Therefore, social interaction is closely linked to language, to the system of signs and symbols.

- People are both subjects and objects in the interaction process and are influenced by values, social norms, subcultures, and even different parts of culture. That is, the level of influence of norms and values on them is not the same. Therefore, the subjects of action often have difficulty in communication, often leading to debate to find a common voice in a given situation.

- In the process of interaction, each person is subject to different forces of interaction, has different meanings and has different impacts. Thus, social interaction both creates the shapes of each person and creates cooperation and non-cooperation of each person.

- Through interaction, the subject will transform and automatically adjust his or her behavior and actions to suit the other subject.

3.2.4. Classification of social interactions

- Classification by levels

- Personal interaction: a social interaction between two or more individuals. In this interaction, individuals can know and directly relate and exchange with each other.

- Group interaction: This is a social interaction between two or more groups. Group interaction may take place through individuals but each individual in this interaction acts as a representative of the group of which he or she is a member.

- Interaction between individuals and groups: is the interaction between an individual on one side and a group on the other side. The power relationship in this interaction does not depend entirely on the number of participants but on the position and role of specific people.

- Classification according to the nature, purpose, and meaning of interaction

- Cooperative interaction: This is a positive, constructive interaction, working together to help and support each other in a job or field for a common goal. For example: international cooperation in environmental protection, poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS prevention, and the fight against terrorism.

- Competitive interaction: This is a type of interaction that is negative, destructive, antagonistic and prevents common standards, in which the participating parties all try their best to achieve certain goals, and if one side achieves a lot, the other side achieves little. For example: Competition in fields such as economics, trade, law, politics, military, and sports.

- Conflict interaction: is the opposition of needs, values and interests between individuals, groups and organizations. In which the parties break the principles of peaceful cooperation and have violent behaviors and activities that harm the rights and interests of each other, which can lead to struggle or armed conflict if there is no satisfactory regulation and reconciliation, conflict may occur.

- Classification by level of interaction

- Direct interaction: The subjects interact directly with each other.

- Indirect interaction: Subjects interact with each other through intermediaries such as Fax, computer, telephone, internet, mail, etc (luatminhkhue.vn, 2021)

4. The current situation of social interaction trends between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam:

4.1. Overview of mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam:

The northern mountain provinces include 11 provinces: Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh, Tuyen Quang, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Yen Bai, Bac Kan, and the midland region includes: Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Bac Giang. According to Decision No. 369/QD-TTg dated May 4, 2024 of the Prime Minister on the current regional planning, these localities are calculated to include 14 provinces: Cao Bang, Dien Bien, Bac Giang, Bac Kan, Ha Giang, Hoa Binh, Lang Son, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Phu Tho, Son La, Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai. The north borders the provincial-level localities of Guangxi and Yunnan of China; the west borders the Lao People's Democratic Republic; the east and south borders the Red River Delta and the North Central and Central Coast regions.

The total area of the region is about 116,898 km2, accounting for 35% of the country's natural area, with many rare resources and minerals; there are more than 30 ethnic groups living there, the total population in 2022 is 13,023,200 people,

accounting for about 15.2% of the country's population, a place with many cultural heritages, revolutionary historical relics and with a geographical location with terrain types serving tourism development. (quanlynhanuoc.vn, 2024)

There are many famous tourist destinations in the mountain region of Northern Vietnam including:

1. Sapa Lao Cai - beautiful scenery of the Northwest mountains

2. Moc Chau - a must-see tourist destination in the mountain region of the North

3. Ta Xua, Son La - Northern mountain tourism

4. Mai Chau, Hoa Binh - A small and pretty valley in the North of Vietnam

5. Mu Cang Chai, Yen Bai - Immersed in the golden rice fields

6. Tam Dao, Vinh Phuc - Lost in a Fairyland

7. Dong Van Stone Plateau - Majestic and splendid

8. Ba Be Lake - The Elysian field

Table 1. Total number of tourists and tourism revenue of localities in the Northern Midlands and Mountains region in 2023

Sections	Localities	Number of visitors (thousand people)			Revenue (billion VND)	Note
		Domestic	International	Total		
1	Ha Giang	2.700	282	3000	7.100	
2	Cao Bang	1.560	34	1.700	1.334	
3	Bac Kan	–	–	776.1	554,4	No quantity available
4	Tuyen Quang	–	–	2.650	3.200	No quantity available
5	Lao Cai	6.700	500	7.200	22.000	
6	Yen Bai	1.936	151,026	2.088	1.721	
7	Thai Nguyen	2480	20	2.500	2.144	
8	Lang Son	–	–	3.900	3.100	No quantity available
9	Bac Giang	–	–	2.005	1.450	No quantity available

10	Phu Tho	690	8,6	776	3.365	
11	Dien Bien	992,5	7,5	1.000	1.700	
12	Lai Chau	–	–	1.045	974,756	No quantity available
13	Son La	–	–	4.500	4.700	No quantity available
14	Hoa Binh	3400	400	3.800	4000	

Source: quanlynhanuoc.vn, 2024

Tourists can go to the Northern mountain tourist areas to carry out various types of tourism such as community tourism, resort tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, entertainment tourism, sports tourism, discovery tourism, adventure tourism, charity tourism, spiritual tourism, etc, and in most types of tourism, tourists interact with the people in these tourist areas.

The survey results of the subjects show that tourists to the tourist areas in the Northern mountain region of Vietnam have many desires and expectations as well as comparisons, in which social interaction with local people also accounts for a large number of choices (81.7%) just after the desire to visit beautiful landscapes (95.3%) - because the Northern mountain region has a great attraction of natural beauty different from other areas in Vietnam.
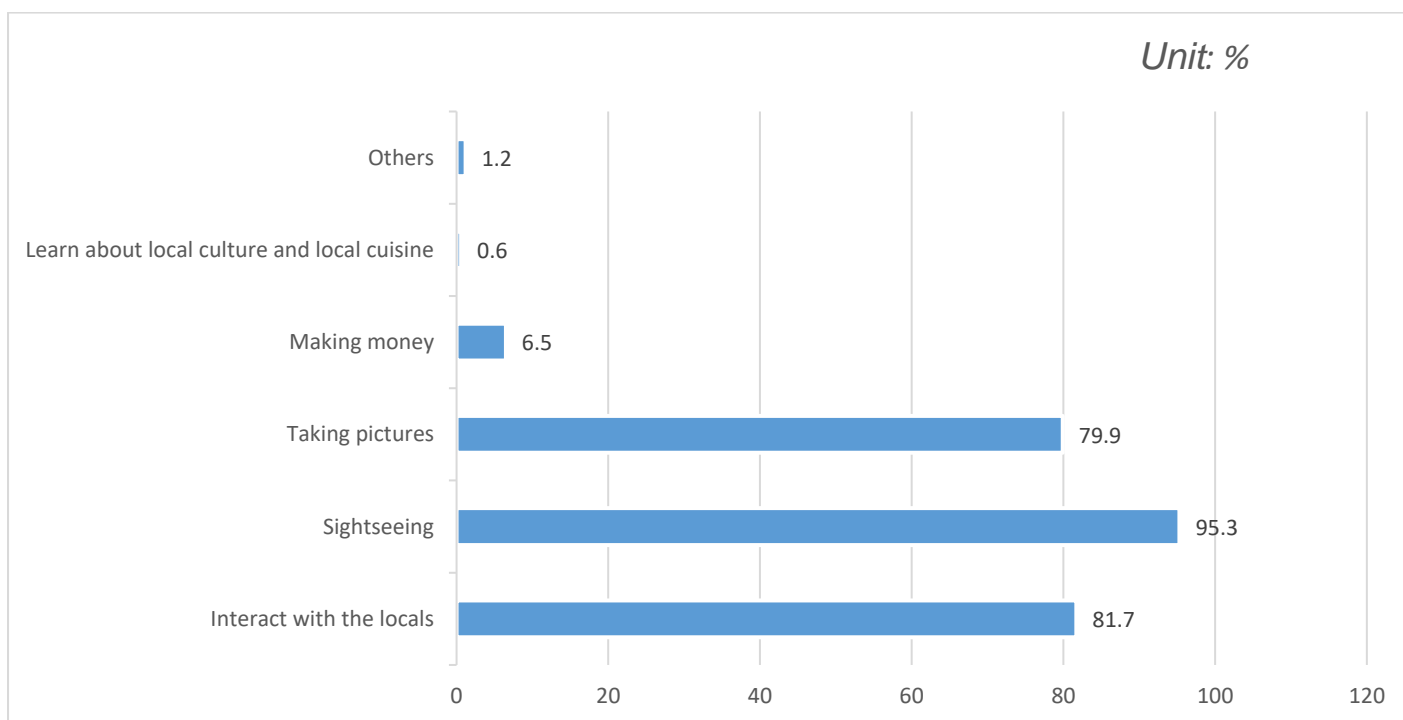
Figure 2. Survey results on tourists' expectations when visiting mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam

Source: Survey result

The Northern mountain region has a diverse population of more than 30 different ethnic groups such as Kinh, Thai, Muong, Mong, Dao, Tay, Nung, Kho Mu, Giay, Ha Nhi, Lao, Lu, Cong, Si La, San Diu... in which ethnic minorities account for more than 60% of the population with the most populous

ethnic minorities, including Tay, Thai, Muong, Mong, Nung, Dao.

The lives of children in the mountain tourist areas of Northern Vietnam have their difficulties. This is an area with difficult and unfavorable natural conditions, so children suffer from harshness, backwardness, and bone-chilling cold in winter. In addition, they will lack food, clothing, nutrition, hygiene, health care, education in schools, and parental care.

When tourists come to the mountainous tourist areas of Northern Vietnam, there will also be many social interactions with the children.

According to the survey results, 94.7% of people think that children in the northern mountain tourist areas **should** interact with tourists. This proves that social interactions between tourists and children in this area are noteworthy and need to be studied.

4.2. Study on social interaction trends between tourists and highland children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam

4.2.1. Social interaction activities between tourists and highland children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam

Theoretically, as discussed in section 3.2, there are many types of social interactions between individuals or groups of people. In fact, tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam also have many interactions with each other, including the following common activities:

- Greetings
- Talking
- Giving gifts
- Tour guiding
- Learning foreign languages
- Learning local languages
- Learning daily pratices
- Learning local vocational works
- Souvenir shopping
- Performing arts
- Take actions to protect the environment together

Besides, there are negative interactions such as:

- Begging for money/extorting
- Scamming
- Fighting
- Sexual assault…

Among them, greeting is still the most interactive activity between tourists and children in the Northern mountain region (85.8% of opinions). Children are still innocent and open, easy to approach and greeting is known as one of the simplest social interactions.
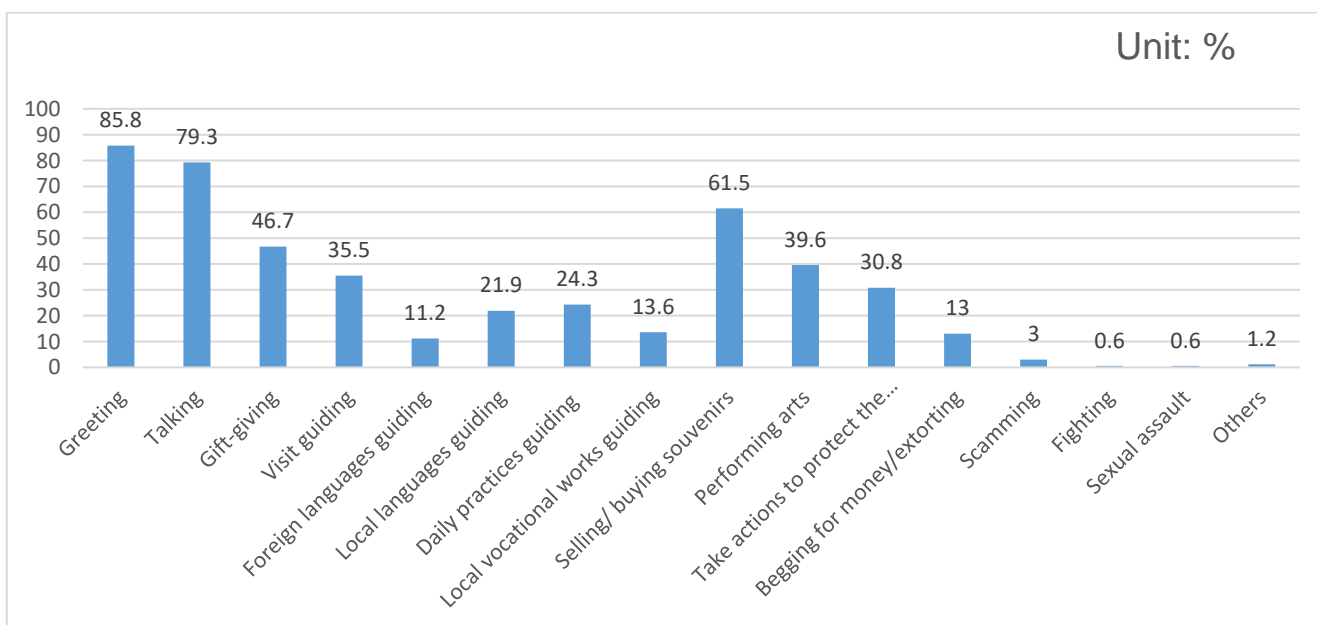
Figure 3. Survey results on common social interactions between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam
Source: Survey results

Children in the Northern mountain region, after greeting tourists, often start conversations and have conversations (79.3% of opinions said that the common interaction is talking). Many tourist groups combine tourism and gift-giving, but the main recipients are still children (accounting for 46.7% of the common interactive activities). Gifts given to children are commonly candy, clothes, books, and toys. Children often see the benefits of this interaction. In return, they can guide tourists to speak the local language, practice daily activities in the locality, or guide tourists to perform some steps in traditional local work such as weaving brocade, farming, etc. These are really meaningful interactions. Tourists will have many interesting experiences such as jute picking, indigo dyeing... In addition, many tourists who were born rich will immerse themselves in the nature of the Northwest region; they can wade streams, climb forests with local children, learn how to distinguish which fruits are edible, which forest leaves are poisonous, which mushrooms can cause death or survival skills which will be developed after exploring and camping together in the forest. For the rest of the trip, tourists carry out community activities such as: teaching foreign languages, teaching life skills to children, consulting, orienting tourism for local people…

Thus, in addition to giving gifts and visiting local children and people, tourists can immerse themselves in the nature and humanity here, be led by children to their families, experience the simple work of the people, or participate in cultural exchange activities imbued with the ethnic identity of this place, which is very fun... In addition,

children here and tourists will participate in activities like tree planting sessions, picking up trash, or recycling used items into other items or very useful decorations.

At the end of the tour, tourists will often buy souvenirs that children can suggest and sell such as brocade, regional specialties... (61.5% of opinions choose the interaction between children and tourists in the Northern mountain region as buying and selling souvenirs)

However, there are still negative interactions, there are still opinions that there are still conflicts, fraud, and sometimes even abuse between tourists and children here... Giving gifts to children along the mountain roads is completely inappropriate since the high mountain terrain makes the roads already narrow and steep, and crowds of people gathering at a place can cause traffic jams. This also creates a habit for children to gather on the roadside more just to wait for someone to come and give them gifts. Not only that, giving money and gifts to children also causes children to develop many other bad habits such as clinging to tourists to ask for money. Many families, seeing the benefits of asking for money from tourists, let their children drop out of school to ask for money and street vendors to solve their daily problems. The acts of giving money, treats, and candies have unintentionally harmed the culture as well as the lives of local people.

However, according to the assessment of the surveyed subjects, the interactions between these subjects are still positive, accounting for 36.1% of opinions.
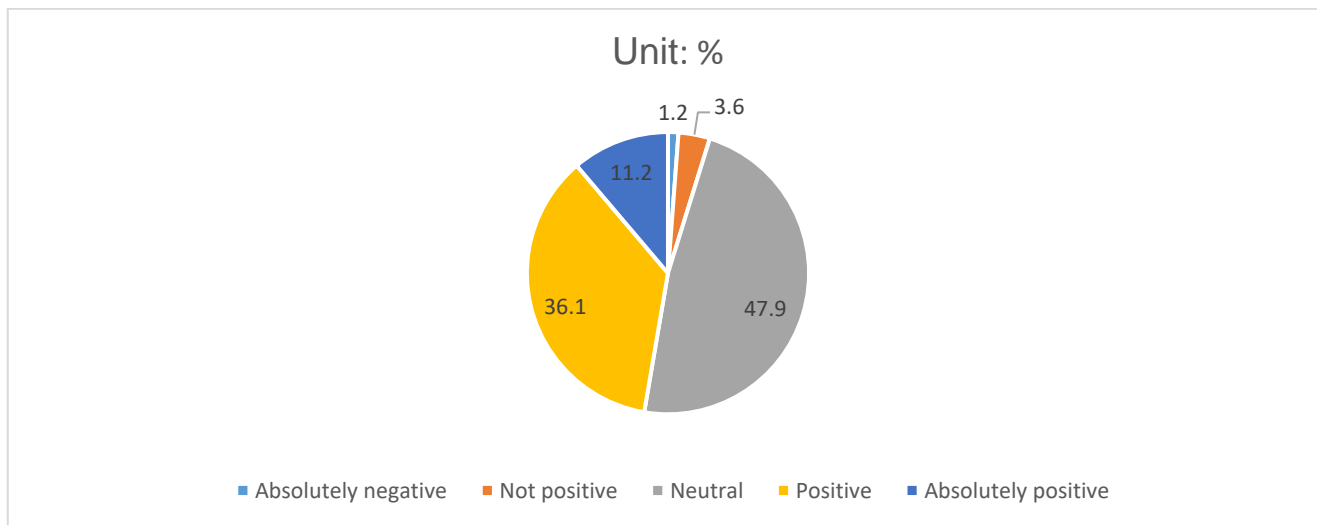

Figure 4. Survey results assessing common social interactions between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam
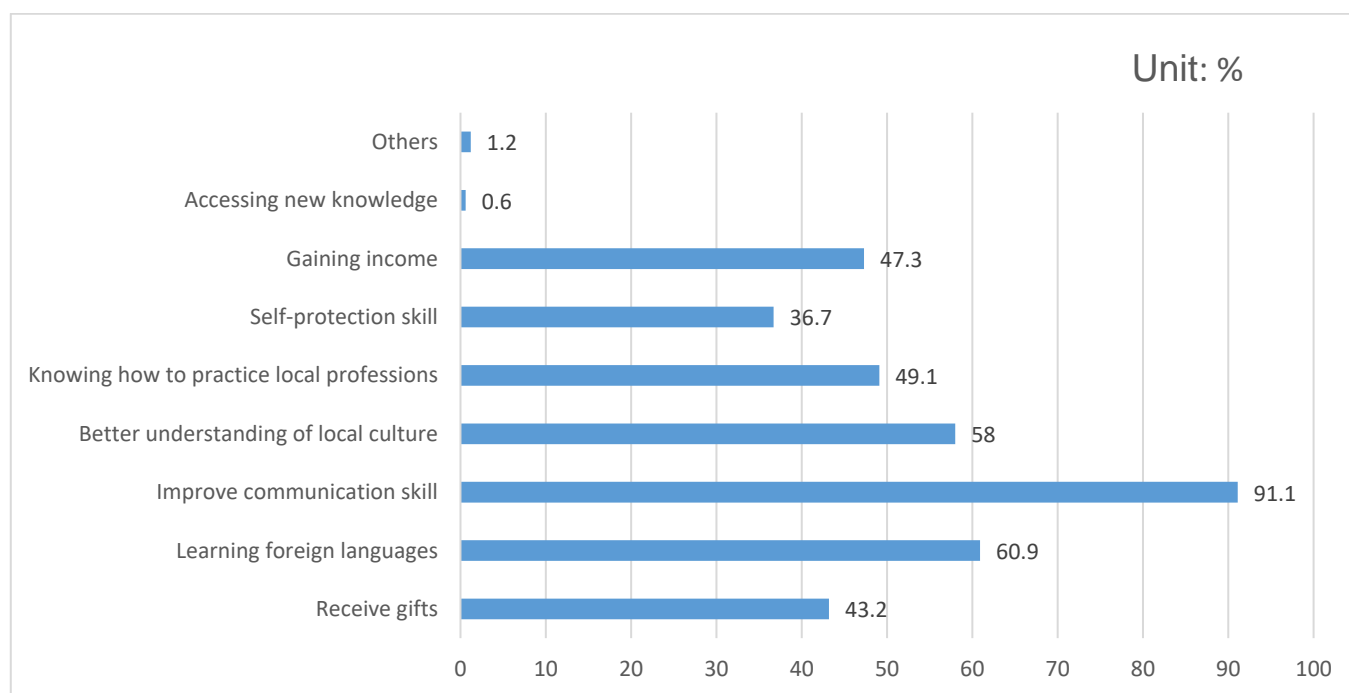Source: Survey results

4.2.2. Highland children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam when interacting with tourists

In recent years, due to the development trend of tourism in the Northern mountain region, children in these areas have been exposed to tourists from an early age. When interacting with tourists, children in the Northern mountain region will have many benefits, including:

+ receiving gifts

+ learning foreign languages

+ improving communication skills

+ better understanding of local culture

+ knowing how to practice local professions

+ self-protection skills

+ gaining income

+ accessing new knowledge…

Specifically, according to the survey, the subjects assessed that the greatest benefit that highland children receive when interacting with tourists is to increase communication skills (91.1% of opinions).

Figure 5. Survey results on children's benefits in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam when interacting socially with tourists

Source: Survey results

Thanks to introducing local culture to tourists, practicing traditional local occupations and protecting the environment in tourist areas, children in the Northern mountain region have had to learn and understand the local culture (58% of opinions), be more responsible for the environment and know how to practice local occupations such as farming, weaving brocade for clothes and bedding... (49.1%). However, children have not yet achieved self-protection skills (36.7%). Receiving gifts, learning foreign languages and having income are also great benefits that children in this region receive. That is why children are still very eager to interact with tourists and families still force or create conditions for them to increase contact with tourists.

For a long time, people in the highlands, where there are tourist attractions, seem to consider their children as "tools" to make money. From the age of 3, many families have taught their children how to make money instead of sending them to nursery schools or kindergartens. When they learn to talk,

children also learn a few sentences of Kinh language and broken English to invite customers to buy stuff. Not only that, they have to memorize the same heartbreaking "sentences" that their relatives teach them when tourists ask about their family's situation. Children often ask for 20,000-30,000 VND, even hundreds of thousands of VND to buy books, milk, and clothes to keep warm. Hearing the children telling their stories and the amount of money they asked for is not large, so many tourists are moved and give them money. Each day passes, by receiving money from a large number of people, that amount of money becomes really huge for young children as well as the average income of families in mountain areas. Adults make children go out to sell goods and ask for gifts. As for the children, they consider it a familiar game of exchanging goods for money. However, this "game" makes them lose their innocent childhood and become pragmatic. With the "complicity" of their parents, they drop out of school very early. Most of the children are not interested in going to school.

There is a case when a child spoke fluently in Kinh's language: "We like to walk around the tourist area. We can play and earn a lot of money. Why study, why go to school? It's tiring!" If in coastal tourist destinations, the children there only take advantage of the summer days to sell goods and ask for money from tourists, the children in the highlands, where domestic and foreign tourists come in all four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter, are willing to skip school to... serve tourists. (baophapluat.vn, 2021)

Thus, children are vulnerable subjects, and when interacting with tourists in the Northern mountain tourist areas, they will also encounter many risks. According to the survey subjects, the most common risks are: not having time to study, receiving gifts that cannot be used, or fighting with tourists and being abused; the risk of having their images used without permission is the biggest (76.3%), followed by being lured into participating in fraud rings (73.4%).
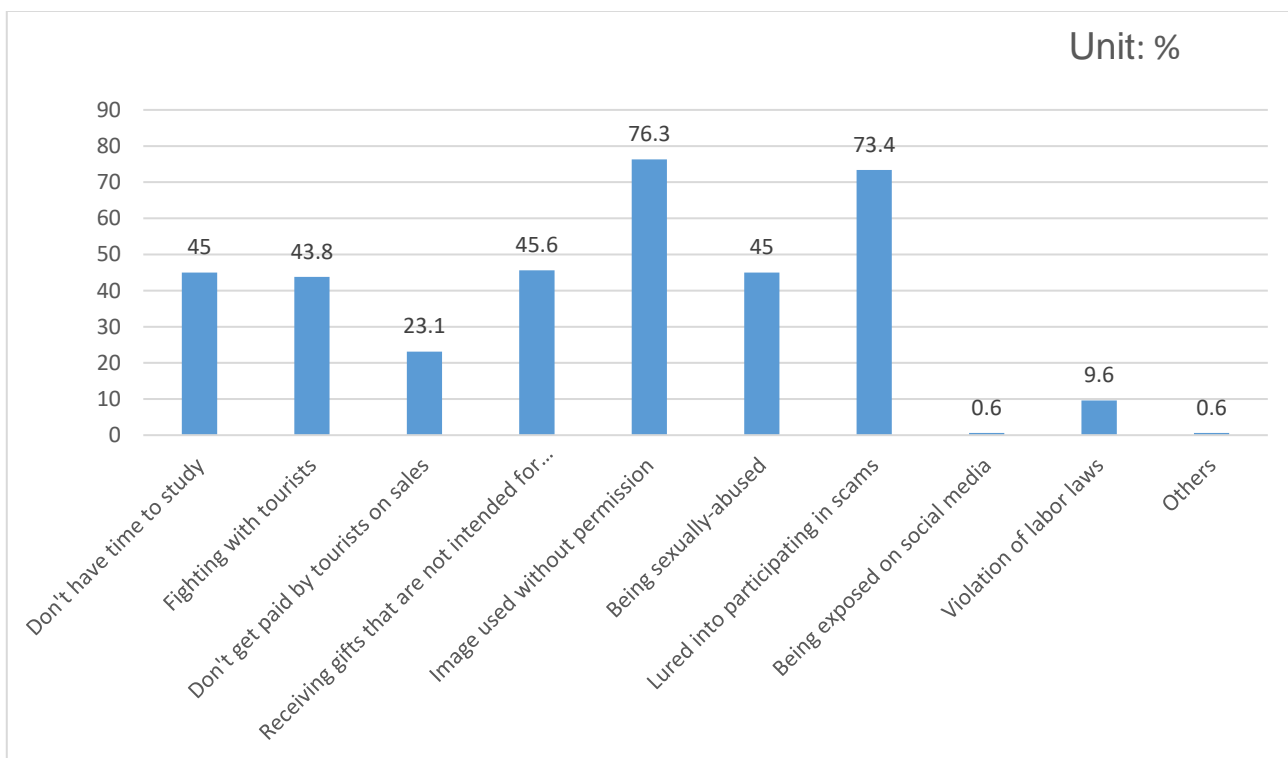
Figure 6. Survey results on risks that children in northern mountain tourist areas may encounter when interacting with tourists

Source: Survey results

Using child labor in tourist areas and tourism activities also poses a risk of children being exploited through being forced to panhandle, street vending, and stealing from tourists. Dropping out of school to work in tourism activities is not only due to the children's wishes but also because their families force them. They cannot live in a healthy environment when tourist areas suddenly flourish, villages and hamlets are suddenly filled with strangers that stay with local people for their travel. In addition to the local culture being mixed, the children also have difficulty forming their personalities and lifestyles to adapt to a developing tourist area. Misconceptions can penetrate children's souls and cause them to drop out of school. And the children themselves, valuable local human resources, cannot develop into positive factors, becoming knowledgeable and high-quality workers.

In fact, children's participation in tourism activities is still acceptable in forms such as: working in the production of tourism products, painting, performing circus acts, cleaning homestays with grandparents and parents, participating in folk culture classes, folk games, festival activities... Some young children can participate as interpreters and tour guides if appropriate. The children must agree upon these activities and they must be their needs, and are conditions for children to develop their abilities and personal skills, in order to equip them with knowledge about work awareness and life skills. (bienphongcom.vn, 2020)

To get the benefits and minimize the risks that may occur when interacting with tourists, according to the surveyed subjects, children in the mountain tourist areas of Northern Vietnam need to be equipped with a lot of knowledge and skills, mainly: need to equip them with social communication skills (91.7% of opinions), need to increase their knowledge of local culture (79.9% of opinions), educate them with knowledge and skills to protect themselves (69.2% of opinions). When children have social communication skills, they will behave appropriately with domestic and foreign tourists, initially have good interactions with tourists, and form a polite and cultured mountain population in the future. Knowledge and skills to protect themselves not only help children in the mountain areas of the North avoid risks when fighting with tourists or having their images used without permission but also avoid being lured into participating in scams.
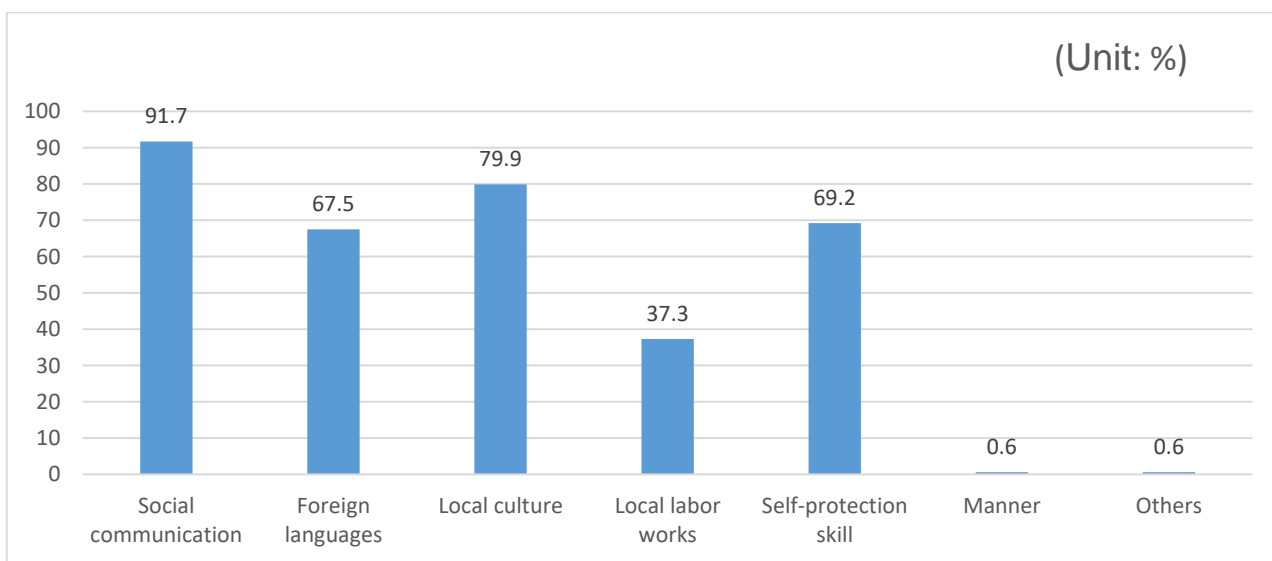

Figure 7. Survey results on knowledge and skills that children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam need to be equipped with when interacting socially with tourists
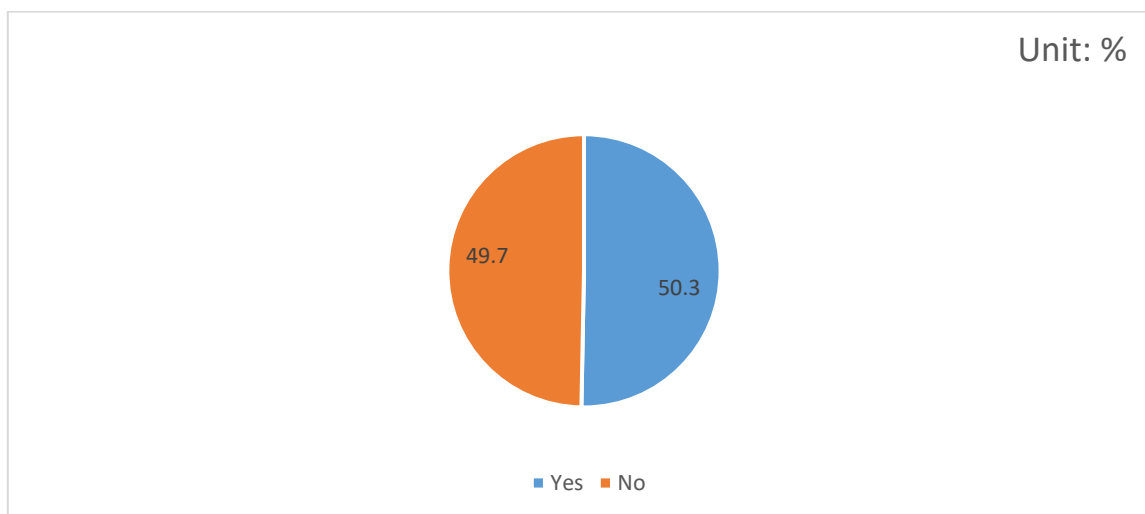Source: Survey results

To interact well socially, we need a combination of many skills. Among them, the most important are communication, sharing, listening, and teamwork skills (novaedu.vn, 2019).

According to the survey respondents, children in the highlands must also be equipped with foreign language knowledge or languages such as Kinh language or English (67.5% of opinions). They are the ones who spread the culture of the region to tourists. They also need to understand more thoroughly about the specific jobs of the locality, not only to continue the family's profession but also to introduce them to tourists as a tourism activity. This is the basis for developing tourism in this area.

Assessing social interactions between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in northern Vietnam

According to the survey, up to 83.4% of opinions said that families and schools in the mountain tourist areas of Northern Vietnam **should allow** children to interact with tourists. People also perceive some positive aspects of this interaction. That is: children will be more confident, understand more about local culture, as well as local occupations, can earn more income for the family, make more friends in many places... In addition, tourists also satisfy their needs, desires and expectations such as doing charity and volunteering, visiting and understanding more about culture, history, terrain, and climate as well as occupations at the destination. According to the survey, after each trip, tourists and children in the mountain tourist areas of Northern Vietnam have contact with each other (50.3% of opinions say yes).

Figure 8. Survey results on whether or not tourists and highland children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam will contact each other

Source: Survey results

According to the survey, the most popular means of interaction and communication between tourists and children in the mountain areas of Northern Vietnam are social networks (82.4%) and telephones (45.9%). Due to the development of transportation and tourism services, it is convenient for tourists to visit the tourist areas in the Northern mountain areas, so their interactions with children

often occur. After each trip, thanks to the development of technology, interactions and communication are still carried out through social networks and telephones. This will be the basis for future interactions between these groups. Tourists will have more trips to the tourist areas in the Northern mountain areas, and children here, thanks to the support and connection, will grow up and

have the opportunity to go further than where they were born.

But besides that, the interaction between tourists and children in the mountain tourist areas of Northern Vietnam also has negative aspects. That is: children may have to drop out of school to interact with tourists, children might face many risks, children may develop deviant personalities and habits... And tourists may be disappointed when children beg for things, scam, harass them, etc.

It is from studying the current situation to see the positive and negative aspects of social interactions between tourists and children in the northern mountain tourist areas that the authors can propose some solutions and recommendations to promote positive interactions and limit negative interactions, thereby contributing to the development of healthy, valuable tourism in this area.

5. Some solutions to promote social interaction between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam

With the current orientation of the locality and tourism business organizations and individuals: Continue to maintain tourism in the Northern mountain region; Diversify tourism activities and social interactions; Combine tourism with other types of commerce. The group of authors has proposed some solutions as follows:

- Local authorities need to take measures to facilitate positive interactions between tourists and children in northern mountain tourist areas such as:

- Equip children in mountain areas with local cultural knowledge. This can be done through easy-to-read and easy-to-understand books and newspapers suitable for children, or propaganda sessions at cultural houses or in schools…

- Establish rules for permitted interactions with tourists. To avoid situations where tourists have harmful interactions with children or are negatively affected by children, authorities should also establish rules for communication, giving gifts, buying souvenirs, guiding, etc.

- Create many cultural - tourism - sports activities in the locality. Creatively developing many cultural - sports activities and types of tourism will attract more tourists to the northern mountain tourist areas, thereby also increasing the interaction of tourists with local children.

- Promote the good actions of tourists towards local children. Children are always easily manipulated and followed, so if the authorities promote the good actions of tourists towards children, it will help guide their thoughts and lead them towards good things. Tourists can also adjust their behavior from there.

According to the survey, the respondents believed that the authorities should equip children with local cultural knowledge as the best way to facilitate good interactions between tourists and children in the northern mountain tourist areas (88.8% of opinions), followed by issuing regulations on permitted interactions for tourists (80.5%).

- Authorities in charge of culture - tourism - sports - security – health... must also take measures to limit negative interactions between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam, such as:

- Equip children with self-protection skills. Children need to be aware that they are still young, they need to be cared for, need education at school, if they help their families, it should be limited to a certain time and work, avoid becoming a tool to make money. In

addition, when interacting with tourists, it is also necessary to recognize which tourists are trustworthy, avoid contact with people pretending to be tourists to do fraudulent activities, rob or kidnap…

- Rescue children in distress. At the same time, authorities and families also need to make commitments to protect children in social interactions between tourists and children in the northern mountain region of Vietnam.

- Set rules for interactions that are not allowed for tourists and rules for interactions that are not allowed for children. This way, both parties will know the limits of their interactions.

- Operate a whistleblower box or hotline to receive information. Each tourist area needs to install whistleblower boxes for violations in tourism activities in general and in interactions between tourists and children in the Northern Mountain tourist areas in particular. In addition, the authorities must also have a hotline to receive violations on this issue. Timely information capture will help the authorities prevent and resolve violations quickly and effectively as well as protect vulnerable groups.

- Organize an interdisciplinary patrol team to regularly patrol the tourist areas in the Northern mountain region to grasp the actual interactions between tourists and children. For any negative behaviors, this patrol team can take immediate measures to resolve them, avoiding too big consequences later, affecting tourism development as well as the lives of children and tourists.

- Educate and aware tourists. Tourists are an important group in interacting with children. However, this group is diverse and complex,

so there needs to be warnings, instructions and increased awareness for tourists so that they can interact with children in the Northern highlands most positively.

- Establish specific guidelines for families and schools to promote, educate, care for and fully equip knowledge and health for children in mountain areas.

According to the survey, the subjects surveyed said that the most important thing that the functional agencies of culture - sports - security – health... need to do is equip children with self-protection skills (up to 94.7% of opinions) while using the alert mailbox or hotline to receive information is also very necessary (63.9% of opinions), but organizing an interdisciplinary patrol team to regularly investigate is not feasible for the subjects surveyed (only 1 person chose this solution).

On the part of children and families in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam, it is necessary to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and risks when interacting with tourists. Children need to be educated, protected, and well-oriented when interacting with tourists. Families also need to care for, educate, and limit the use of children as money-making tools and must create conditions for them to attend kindergartens and primary schools.

Conclusion:

Thus, the study has provided readers with very basic theories on social exchange and social interaction, and analyzed the current situation of interaction trends between tourists and children in mountain tourist areas in Northern Vietnam according to secondary data and through survey results, thereby proposing some solutions to promote positive interactions and limit negative interactions between the two above subjects.

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