

**Linguistic minority learners in mainstream education in
Vietnam: an ethnographic case study of Muong pupils in
their early years**

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Abstract

This thesis presents a case study of some young linguistic minority learners in mainstream education in Vietnam. Using ethnographic approaches, the study focuses on some selected Muong-speaking children who experienced difficulties with learning in their first year of primary education. The study therefore aims to observe the process and situations in which these struggling children become categorised as 'slow' learners, and what the consequences are for these children.

By employing an ethnographic approach, the study involved an extended data collection period, during which semi-structured interviews and participant observations were extensively carried out. Such an approach allows for an in-depth study of the perspectives of participants, as well as emphasizing the significance of the researcher identity. In this process, a careful collection and analysis of relevant documentation and participants' work samples was also undertaken. The different layers surrounding these learners, both at school and at home, were observed and recorded. An analysis of observed lessons and samples of work from particular situations, identified in field notes, suggests that there are significant factors that may not be recognised in schools that negatively influence the learning of these children.

The study flags up complicated issues regarding pupils at the lowest end of the learning spectrum, where changes in the education system may not be enough to adequately or effectively address their learning problems. Such issues challenge any potential developments in education policy by suggesting that socioeconomic issues may negate any attempt to improve the learning experience of economically disadvantaged linguistic minority children in some situations.

The conclusion suggests that further study into the issue over a longer period of time would provide a fuller picture of the learning journey for children like those studied here. This also identifies the multifaceted difficulties that the education authorities in Vietnam face when addressing

educational equity for all groups of learners. Overall, the study offers an alternative perception when examining the underachievement of linguistic minority learners in mainstream classes, as well as exploring the extent to which a learning programme and/or an education system could be made more equitable and accessible for all learners.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Table of Contents | vi |
| List of Tables | xi |
| List of Figures | xii |
| List of Images | xiii |
| Chapter 1: Personal autobiography - Life experiences that shaped my research ideas | 1 |
| 1.1 How my interest in the topic started | 1 |
| 1.2 Early years and professional experiences | 4 |
| 1.3 Back to my ‘research problem’ | 7 |
| Chapter 2: Vietnam background | 10 |
| 2.1 Country introduction | 10 |
| 2.2 Administrative system of education | 11 |
| 2.2.1 DOET’s and BOET’s responsibilities | 12 |
| 2.2.2 Teachers in the competitive system | 13 |
| 2.3 Education in Vietnam at a glance | 16 |
| 2.3.1 A monolingual system in a multilingual society | 17 |
| 2.3.2 The linguistic minority situation and the Muong minority group – the wider educational and national context in Vietnam | 20 |
| 2.4 Conclusion | 25 |
| Chapter 3: Literature review | 26 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 26 |
| 3.2 Individual identity – similarities and differences..... | 27 |
| 3.2.1 Identity..... | 28 |
| 3.2.2 Identity and education | 29 |
| 3.3 Theory of learning in culturally diverse classrooms | 31 |
| 3.3.1 Inclusion of diversity - connecting culture with education | 31 |
| 3.3.2 Inclusion in practice..... | 34 |
| 3.3.3 Assessing young learners in culturally diverse classrooms..... | 36 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 3.3.3.1 Children’s learning, language and development - what and how adults make sense of that | 37 |
| 3.3.3.2 When – What – How and Who? | 39 |
| 3.4 Language in culturally diverse classrooms | 44 |
| 3.4.1 The role of language in education | 44 |
| 3.4.2 Minority languages and mainstream education: a connection needed? | 45 |
| 3.4.3 Bilingualism and bilingual education..... | 46 |
| 3.4.3.1 Bilingualism – the matter of rights and equality | 46 |
| 3.4.3.2 Bilingual education: concerns and arguments..... | 49 |
| 3.4.3.3 Bilingualism and special education | 54 |
| 3.5 Education for All – language diversity and equal opportunities | 56 |
| 3.5.1 International trends | 56 |
| 3.5.2 Regional trends | 59 |
| 3.5.3 Vietnam context | 63 |
| 3.5.3.1 Policy level | 64 |
| 3.5.3.2 Bilingualism through monolingualism? | 65 |
| 3.5.3.3 Transitional model? | 67 |
| 3.6 Research Questions..... | 67 |
| 3.7 Conclusion | 68 |
| Chapter 4: Research design and methodology | 69 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 69 |
| 4.2 Ethnography..... | 70 |
| 4.3 Data collection methods | 73 |
| 4.3.1 Participant Observation | 73 |
| 4.3.2 Interviews | 75 |
| 4.4 Research design | 76 |
| 4.4.1 Case study | 76 |
| 4.4.2 The aim | 78 |
| 4.4.3 Piloting and initial field visits | 78 |
| 4.4.3.1 Primary School A | 78 |
| 4.4.3.2 Primary School B | 79 |
| 4.4.3.3 Primary School C | 79 |
| 4.4.3.4 Common facts | 80 |
| 4.4.3.5 Statement of preference..... | 81 |
| 4.4.4 Participants | 82 |

| | | |
|--|--|------------|
| 4.4.5 | Justification of participants | 84 |
| 4.4.6 | Interviews | 85 |
| 4.4.6.1 | Interviews with teachers | 85 |
| 4.4.6.2 | Interviews with the head teacher and the deputy head | 86 |
| 4.4.6.3 | Interviews with parents..... | 87 |
| 4.4.6.4 | Interviews with children | 88 |
| 4.4.6.5 | Processing and analysing the interview data | 88 |
| 4.4.7 | Participant observations | 95 |
| 4.4.8 | Some reflections on my researcher identity | 98 |
| 4.4.9 | Data mapping and classifications | 100 |
| 4.4.10 | Data analysis procedure – an illustration..... | 103 |
| 4.5 | Ethical considerations | 107 |
| 4.5.1 | The participants..... | 107 |
| 4.5.2 | Safeguarding data | 108 |
| 4.5.3 | Researcher’s ethics..... | 109 |
| 4.6 | Summary of the chapter and preface for the next three chapters | 111 |
| Chapter 5: Regional context and the participants..... | | 113 |
| 5.1 | An introduction to the researched school, community and region | 113 |
| 5.1.1 | Families and community..... | 114 |
| 5.1.1.1 | Muong community nationwide..... | 114 |
| 5.1.1.2 | Muong community in the research location..... | 116 |
| 5.1.2 | The school..... | 118 |
| 5.2 | The participants..... | 119 |
| 5.2.1 | Teacher participants..... | 120 |
| 5.2.1.1 | Ms Phuong – the class teacher of Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong | 121 |
| 5.2.1.2 | Ms Quang – Nghieng’s class teacher..... | 124 |
| 5.2.1.3 | The mathematics teacher..... | 124 |
| 5.2.1.4 | The PE, art, and craft teacher | 125 |
| 5.2.1.5 | The singing teacher..... | 126 |
| 5.2.2 | The pupil participants and their homes..... | 127 |
| 5.2.2.1 | Hoanh and Quyen | 127 |
| 5.2.2.1.1 | Home circumstances..... | 128 |
| 5.2.2.1.2 | Hoanh..... | 133 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 5.2.2.1.3 Quyen | 134 |
| 5.2.2.2 Khuong..... | 135 |
| 5.2.2.3 Nghieng..... | 137 |
| 5.3 Conclusion | 138 |
| Chapter 6: The children and their learning | 139 |
| 6.1 In this school year | 139 |
| 6.1.1 Hoanh's learning progress | 140 |
| 6.1.2 Quyen's learning progress | 148 |
| 6.1.3 Khuong's learning progress..... | 158 |
| 6.1.4 Nghieng's learning progress..... | 165 |
| 6.2 What their learning tells us | 169 |
| 6.2.1 An analysis of their learning situation | 169 |
| 6.2.2 The home-school link | 174 |
| 6.3 What and how do they learn? Programme and assessment | 176 |
| 6.3.1 Curriculum..... | 177 |
| 6.3.1.1 Teaching Vietnamese..... | 180 |
| 6.3.1.2 Teaching mathematics | 186 |
| 6.3.2 Assessment..... | 190 |
| 6.3.2.1 End-of-kindergarten assessment | 191 |
| 6.3.2.2 Primary school assessment overview | 191 |
| 6.3.2.3 The participants and the Year 1 tests..... | 194 |
| 6.4 Conclusion | 200 |
| Chapter 7: Key themes synthesis and discussion | 201 |
| 7.1 Key themes synthesis – Assessment as a case study | 202 |
| 7.1.1 The WHEN issues | 202 |
| 7.1.2 The WHAT issues | 203 |
| 7.1.3 The HOW issues | 209 |
| 7.1.4 Summary of the themes | 215 |
| 7.2 Discussions | 217 |
| 7.2.1 Language issues | 217 |
| 7.2.2 Why are struggling learners affected more so than other learners?..... | 220 |
| 7.2.3 The two likely outcomes: SEN or repeating the year | 222 |
| 7.2.4 Back to identity matters | 228 |
| 7.3 Conclusion | 232 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chapter 8: Conclusion and implications of the study..... | 234 |
| 8.1 Implications of the study..... | 234 |
| 8.1.1 Suggestions for future research | 235 |
| 8.1.2 Suggestions for the development of policy | 236 |
| 8.1.3 Possible implications for practice | 238 |
| 8.1.4 Contribution to theory | 239 |
| 8.2 Limitations of the study..... | 240 |
| 8.3 Summary and Conclusions | 243 |
| List of References | 247 |
| Appendix A: Detailed data mapping | 257 |
| A.1 Phase 1: 18 Oct 11 – 8 Mar 12 | 257 |
| A.1.1 Interviews and observation recordings..... | 257 |
| A.1.2 Observation and field notes | 260 |
| A.1.3 Documents..... | 268 |
| A.2 Phase 2: 9-29 May 2012..... | 269 |
| A.2.1 Interviews and recordings | 269 |
| A.2.2 Observations and field notes | 269 |
| A.2.3 Documents..... | 270 |
| A.3 Phase 3 Dec 2012 – Jan 2013 and May, Dec 2013..... | 271 |
| A.3.1 Interviews and recordings | 271 |
| A.3.2 Observation and field notes | 271 |
| A.3.3 Documents..... | 271 |
| Appendix B: Some samples demonstrating data analysis in NVIVO.. | 272 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|------------|
| Table 1: Pupil participants (and their families)..... | 83 |
| Table 2: Teacher participants..... | 84 |
| Table 3: A sample of grouping data in timeline for analysing..... | 104 |
| Table 4: Vietnamese Administrative system..... | 116 |
| Table 5: List of workbooks | 123 |
| Table 6: Summary of children’s test scores in Year 1 – Marked out of 10..... | 199 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|------------|
| Figure 1: Educational management system | 12 |
| Figure 2: Piloting schools | 82 |
| Figure 3: Data types | 100 |
| Figure 4: Three phases of data collection..... | 101 |
| Figure 5: Data classified by methods | 102 |
| Figure 6: Data breakdown | 103 |
| Figure 7: First major theme identification..... | 105 |
| Figure 8: Issues relating to the tests | 106 |
| Figure 9: Weekly sessions scheduled for each subject | 179 |
| Figure 10: Breakdown of the Vietnamese subject..... | 180 |
| Figure 11: Test scores and rankings | 193 |
| Figure 12: Summary of sessions per class..... | 267 |

List of Images

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| Image 1: Hoanh's work sample 1..... | 143-144 |
| Image 2: Hoanh's work sample 2..... | 145-146 |
| Image 3: Quyen's work sample 1..... | 152-153 |
| Image 4: Quyen's work sample 2..... | 154-155 |
| Image 5: Khuong's work sample 1..... | 160 |
| Image 6: Khuong's work sample 2..... | 161-162 |
| Image 7: Weekly timetable..... | 177 |

Chapter 1: Personal autobiography - Life experiences that shaped my research ideas

This chapter is concerned with my personal and professional autobiography, in which I share my life experiences, from early years to my teaching and the time when the researched topic became of interest to me.

There are three sections: the first being 'How my interest in the topic started', which looks at the circumstances that initially provoked an interest in this area of study. 'Early years and professional experiences' is the second section, which recalls my first exposure to formal education and interactions with linguistic minority classmates. In this section, I also recall my professional experiences, starting as a novice teacher in a Vietnamese school before switching to international school teaching. The last section, titled 'Back to my research problem', returns to the research topic and adds some detail as to how my interest in the area of study led to the development of research questions.

1.1 How my interest in the topic started

By late autumn 2006 I had completed three linguistics courses focusing on learning in a second language and multilingual education, and had almost completed my master's degree studies at an Australian university. I accompanied a group of friends on a motorbike trip to a Thai linguistic minority village called Mai Chau for a weekend break. The village is roughly 100 kilometres from Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, where I was living at the time. Just before riding downhill into the village, we stopped on the edge of a mountain to view the beautiful valley below, where I could see all the stilt houses peacefully standing next to each other. Surrounding the village were mountains and rice fields, which had just been harvested, leaving yellow haystacks leaning against each other. The scenery was stunning and it made me think that it was well worth the long five hours of riding.

My excitement was not only about a tranquil break in a beautiful village; I was also looking forward to exploring the local language spoken by this linguistic minority group. This is because I had previously lived in Lao PDR (People's Democratic Republic) for one-and-a-half years, where I taught at an international school in the capital city, Vientiane. I found the people there to be nice, the food fantastic, and the language (especially the written form) beautiful. I managed to learn the language quite successfully by attending a private class for four months and by continually practising with the local people on a daily basis. Later, back in Hanoi in mid-2005, I had joined a Thai language course organised by the Embassy of Thailand. The intention and expectation was to maintain my Lao language, since Lao and Thai languages share at least 70% of the vocabulary and the written forms are very similar (Higbie, 2011). I enjoyed learning Thai as much as I had Lao, and unlike many other Vietnamese people, I was very proud of being able to speak these two languages. For many of our people, if you spend time learning a language it should be English or French, as these are believed to be high-status languages which give you access to a more powerful world – economically and politically. Some looked puzzled at me learning Lao and Thai.

It had been more than a year since I started learning Thai and I had obtained a decent level of the language – and more importantly, my Lao was still very good. The people in Mai Chau village in Vietnam are from the Thai minority and they speak a version of Thai that is a mixture of both Lao and Thai (from Thailand).

Very soon after our arrival in the village, I tried speaking Thai to the landlady where we were staying. She listened to me attentively and remarked that I spoke some ancient Thai, like very old people speak in this village. She also told me that a few weeks earlier, a group of tourists from Thailand had come to stay and they could communicate with each other, as the vocabulary is so similar. This lady then went on to tell me that most Thai people there now speak Vietnamese and that even when they switch to their Thai language, they use a mixture of Thai and Vietnamese, as there are many words they do not think exist in their original language. The prevalence of Vietnamese may

be because people in this village went to mainstream schools, where only Vietnamese language is used for instruction.

At this point, I would just like to add some further context to this. The education system in Vietnam uses one curriculum designed for the whole country. The curriculum is produced by educators and policy makers who are mostly from the Kinh majority group that speaks Vietnamese and the curriculum uses only the national language: Vietnamese. There have been written statements and policies recognising the need to include the languages of linguistic minority groups in education, but reality does not reflect such policies. Khanh The Bui (2005) recognises that about 10 different minority languages (out of over 100 languages) have been introduced into schools. The scale, however, is rather limited with a focus on teaching the languages at very early stages in primary schools but not using the languages as a language of instruction, or continuing to use the languages in higher grades. Here it can be seen that most minority languages in Vietnam remain completely outside the education system.

Back in Mai Chau, my conversations with other villagers revealed that there were at that time two living elders in this village who could read and write the Thai language; everybody else could read and write only Vietnamese. I left the village with confused and mixed feelings, wondering what would happen when these elders in the village pass away.

Leaving Mai Chau and returning to Hanoi, I continued gathering information and data for an assignment on a course about inclusive education and special needs. Through some international organisations working in education in Vietnam, I found some interesting research about inclusion and the efforts of the Vietnamese government in bringing children with disabilities back to school. This situation is a real challenge for Vietnam. The Education Development Strategic Plan for 2001-2010 of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2001) aimed to bring 50 percent of children with disabilities into schools by 2005: a target which could not be met, as by 2006 roughly 76 percent of children with disabilities still received no schooling (Le, 2006).

Children with disabilities in Vietnam have previously had very limited access to education, due to a general lack of awareness about including disabled children in education; transportation problems in more remote areas; unsuitability of the physical learning environment and teaching curriculum; limited teacher capacity for including children with disabilities, and a lack of confidence from the families and children themselves. Parents of these children have traditionally taken care of them in the home due to a feeling of inferiority from having such children, and many even considered them as burdens on society and a shame for the family (CRS, 2000).

An interesting response from one of my interviews with an education policy worker equated the difficulty of bringing children from linguistic minority groups into schools with the difficulty of getting children with disabilities into schools. This took my thoughts back to the village that we had visited about a month earlier. I started paying more attention and gave more interest to related news and research findings referring to linguistic minority groups and education.

1.2 Early years and professional experiences

At this point I also recalled my childhood growing up in a remote, mountainous area in the north of Vietnam, where there were a few nearby villages in which people from linguistic minorities lived.

By the time we completed middle school at the end of Year 9, the three linguistic minority children that had previously been in my class had all left school. Two had dropped out before the completion of primary school (at the end of Year 5) and the last linguistic minority classmate of mine dropped out in Year 6. My friends and I never wondered where all the other children from these villages were, or whether or not there were more of them who were not at school because they did not want to attend. We were aware that these children spoke some 'strange language', but we never actually heard them speaking that language in the classroom. We only heard their parents and other adults using that different language in the local market or in the woods. I remember hiding while feeling very scared whenever I saw these people in

the woods, as we were told by adults that the linguistic minority people would take us away if we were naughty. That perhaps resulted in our not feeling very close to those few linguistic minority children in our schools back then. In addition, after those linguistic minority children had dropped out of our classes, one by one, none of us Vietnamese majority children seemed to wonder why they no longer came to school. I remember also that none of us were surprised when the last one dropped out either. This never concerned us and we never talked about those children being absent from school, as though they were never part of our group.

I need to add that dropping out of school was not an uncommon practice in our area – a remote mountainous region where children needed to work with their parents on the hillsides to help support their families. Many of my Vietnamese majority friends also dropped out before completing middle school in Year 9, but they all at least completed primary school.

Looking back on this, I now feel fortunate that my parents had prevented me from dropping-out of school when I was in Year 7, when all the girls in my class left, leaving me as the only girl, along with three boys, constituting the whole class (though I must admit that my feelings were rather different back then, as I felt rather upset about not being allowed to stop schooling). I carried on studying and passed the entrance examination to university, where I trained to become a literature teacher.

After graduating, I found a teaching role in a secondary school which was a selective state school (the equivalent of a grammar school and highly prestigious), where obtaining high grades in all subjects is the essential focus for all learners. The first school year passed rapidly, and I was soon entering the final grades of my subject in the students' records, when it was suggested by a school manager that I should change the average score for my subject for a particular student. It appeared that his family had asked the manager to intervene after they had come to talk to me and I had refused to change the grade. A newly employed teacher, being asked by the school manager, what else could I do? I changed the score, so the student could pass my subject and was consequently promoted to the next class level.

The second Vietnamese school that I moved to was a private school and the practice of changing students' test scores was even more prevalent, most of the time at the head's request. I seemed to be unaffected by the system and did not protest against the practice of changing scores until the school terminated the enrolment of several students due to a fear that these students were unlikely to pass the end-of-secondary-school graduation examination. This is because private schools are often under pressure concerning their pass rates for graduation, not just to maintain their reputations in order to recruit more students but also, if their ranking is consistently low, they may face closure by the authorities. I handed in my resignation and left the school just three months before the school year ended, which was three months before my students took the national examination to graduate from their secondary school.

With my English language skills being quite good, I was fortunate enough to find a teaching role, initially as a substitute teacher, and then as the class teacher in an international primary school. This is where I felt my teaching career really started and I enjoyed the teaching as much as I enjoyed the freedom of being in charge of my own class, where nobody ever asked me to change any test scores. Teaching in such international schools means we use only English as the language of instruction and the pupils are from different countries. There are also selected classes that teach different languages, if the families wish to enrol. Annually, the school would hold cultural weeks to celebrate the different cultures represented by the children enrolled at the time, so we would fold origami and eat sushi on Japanese day, wear conical hats and eat spring-rolls on Vietnamese days and so on. This was when I realised that it would have been fun if we had done the same thing when I was at my primary school, so the children from the Da, Tay, Nung and Thai minorities in my area could have had their parents come to school to show us different things to do or different foods to try. That perhaps might have helped us majority Kinh children feel closer to them, rather than just scared of them due to our elders' tales about these minority people, which were commonly used as threats if we misbehaved.

1.3 Back to my 'research problem'

In the literature review of the assignment I was working on, I included findings from a number of education practitioners concerning education for linguistic minority groups in Vietnam. The general picture was very similar to that observed in the studies of children with disabilities and special needs. This included difficulty getting these children into schools, high dropout rates and low academic performance.

In one of my final meetings with an education officer from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and an educational practitioner working for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) specialising in children with special needs, I raised a question about why there had been much work associated with children with disabilities and less about those with circumstances which may prevent them from being successful in school. This could then provide more opportunities for children from ethnic minorities, whose home language is different from the language of instruction in schools. I was told then that linguistic minority groups are governed by a separate part of the ministry and that generally there was little information concerning this. My curiosity grew, and I became determined to find out more about the education situation for minority children.

Using contacts, I located the correct sources of information on this subject, including some international NGOs and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Research results from different organisations and groups of researchers, relating to different regions of the country, consistently mentioned a lack of Vietnamese language as being one of the major obstacles for linguistic minority children when engaging in mainstream education. While conducting research on the transition from primary to lower-secondary education (middle school) for linguistic minority children, a research group from Save the Children UK (SCUK) found a number of problems with education for minorities in Vietnam, including a lower rate of enrolment compared with the national rate (83% for minorities, compared with 98% nationally) and a high drop-out rate during primary education which becomes even more pronounced at lower-secondary level (SCUK, 2007).

The SCUUK research identifies a number of causes for these adverse indicators, with the main reason resulting from the language of instruction in mainstream schools being Vietnamese – a second language for most of these children. The parents of children who dropped out and the children themselves expressed that they could not continue going to school due to low performance. They attributed this to Vietnamese being too difficult to learn and that while their Vietnamese language remains poor studying academic content in this language appears impossible (SCUK, 2007). This supports the earlier findings of Bui Khanh The (Bui, 2001), who found that low academic performance amongst linguistic minority children was primarily due to the language barrier.

Reflecting on my four years of teaching children aged four to six at two English language international schools (one in Vientiane and one in Hanoi), I had seen some of our pupils really struggling with studying in English. These children, however, generally had difficulty during the early stages of learning. Some of them initially experienced a *silent period* (this terminology is associated with the studies of Krashen (1981), which have sometimes been misinterpreted as meaning that the children do nothing during this period, whereas in fact they are working hard but are as yet unable to speak the new language), but I could not see this continuing to be an obstacle for my pupils after a few years.

The most common period of difficulty that I observed in their initial education in English was during the first three to six months. I imagine that international children learning in English-medium schools may differ from the linguistic minority children in Vietnam in terms of their cultural/social/economic backgrounds, but they are clearly in the same learning situation – learning in a language that is different from their home language. I am now convinced that more studies about the learning contexts of these children need to be carried out, because without a fuller picture of the situation, we will be unable to minimise their learning difficulties.

My interest grew more towards the group of learners that struggle when studying in the system, as this group is the one that is most likely to discontinue schooling. More questions subsequently developed, including:

- Where does their struggle begin?
- How are they perceived by peers and teachers?
- What actually happens in their learning journey at the early stage?
- Other than discontinuing schooling, what could be the outcomes for those who struggle when learning in the system?

Finally, I began wondering if the quality of education in Vietnam could be improved to successfully reflect the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds? To pursue answers to these and other questions, I was finally able to organise the move to Leeds.

Chapter 2: Vietnam background

This chapter reviews my research context and is divided into three main sections. The first forms a brief introduction to the country, its people and languages. The second section is concerned with the education administration and management systems in Vietnam. The third is a general examination of the education programme in the country, particularly the language of instruction used in the system and how that matters for diverse groups of learners whose home language is different from that used by the education system. This section also reviews different issues relating to linguistic minority people in the country; their socio-economic situation, and how that may influence their learning in mainstream education. In order to contextualise the situation of the Muong people, who are the central participants in the study, a subsection about the Muong linguistic minority group is also briefly included before the conclusion closes the chapter and introduces the next.

2.1 Country introduction

Situated in Southeast Asia, Vietnam has a long coastline that runs from the north to the south. The country shares borders with China in the north, Lao PDR (People's Democratic Republic) in the northwest, and Cambodia to the southwest. There are 54 different ethnic groups represented in the country, but according to some national and international linguists there are more than 100 languages spoken, 28 of which have written scripts (Vu, 2008; Kosonen, 2004; Lewis *et al.*, 2009). Many scholars think that the significant difference between the number of ethnic groups and the number of languages spoken is due to the influence of the Soviet Union and Marxist-Leninist language planning and management policies and practices, which have imprecisely grouped ethnicities (Kosonen, 2009; Pholsena, 2006; Tsung, 2009).

The largest group, also the majority in the country, is the Kinh ethnicity which accounts for 86% of the population of 93.5 million people (World Population

Statistics, 2013). This group is also the group in power which dominates whole societal domains such as politics, the military, economics, education, and so on. The language of this majority group is Vietnamese and this is also the national and only official language used in the country. Of the 53 linguistic minority groups, the Hoa (Chinese) are often grouped with the Kinh, with living standards that are the highest in Vietnam, whereas the other 52 ethnic groups represent the poorest and least educated populations in the country (Vietnam Poverty Working Group, 1999). The Muong are the third largest minority group with over 1.3 million people and are also ranked amongst the country's poorest (GSO, 2006). The linguistic minority people mostly live in remote and disadvantaged areas in Vietnam, with the majority of them being poor farmers, whose education level is low, and where poverty and malnutrition are to be expected (Ginsburg, 2002; UNESCO, 2008; World Bank, 2009).

2.2 Administrative system of education

Officially there are five different levels of education in the national system: pre-school, for children aged 5-6 (this can be much younger in urban areas); primary education, for ages 6 to 11 (Year 1 to Year 5); middle school, for those aged 11 to 15 (Year 6 to Year 9); secondary school, for ages 15 to 18 (Year 10 to Year 12); and higher education, aged 18 and above.

Vietnam has 64 provinces, each with a Department of Education and Training (DOET) that comes under the management of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Each province is then comprised of different districts and each district has its own Bureau of Education and Training managed by the DOET – I will refer to this as a BOET. The lower levels of education are managed by the BOET and these are individual pre-schools, primary schools, and middle schools. The secondary schools are directly managed by the DOET. Therefore, when addressing the regional education context in my research area, I will mostly refer to the BOET as this governing body is the direct manager of my researched school. The table below further depicts the hierarchical education management system in Vietnam.

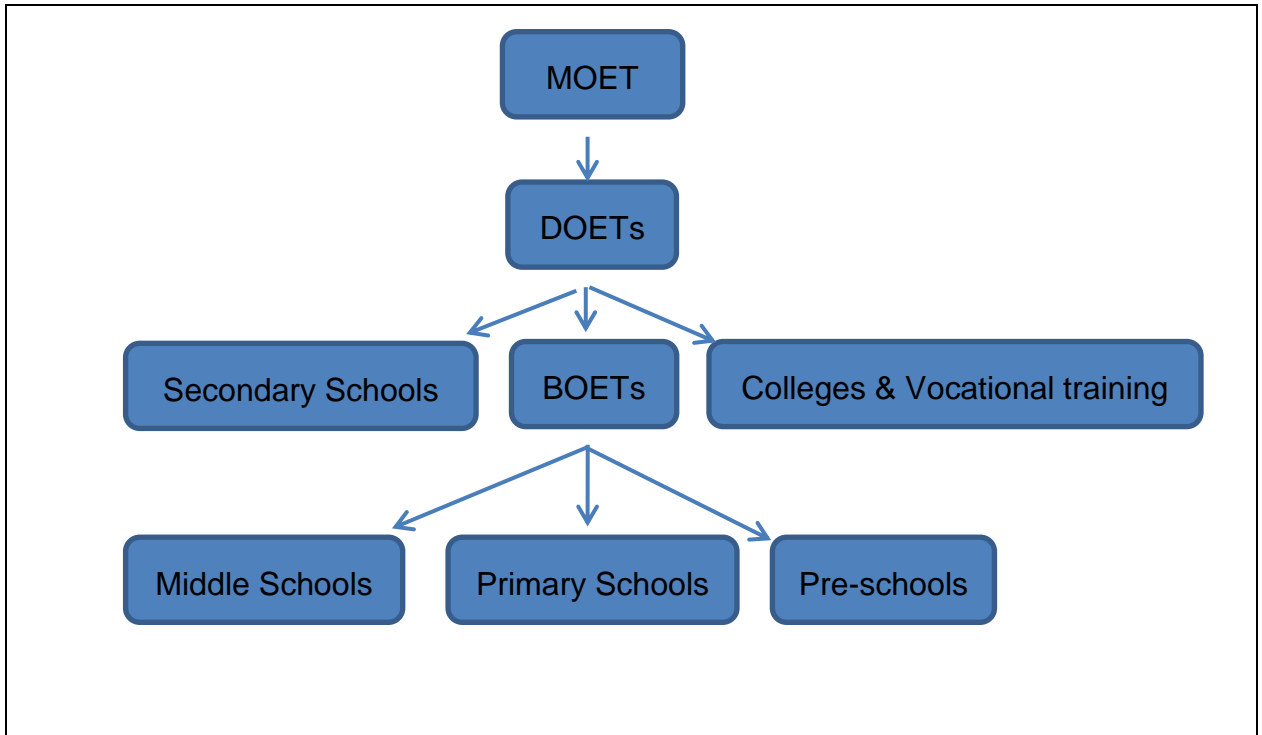


Figure 1: Educational management system

2.2.1 DOET's and BOET's responsibilities

From 1991, as part of a strategy to address the problem of illiteracy by bringing all primary-aged children into school, the government made primary education free of charge and compulsory (Government Congress, 1991). This places more pressure on the BOET and schools in terms of keeping control of student numbers and preventing children from dropping out. Middle and secondary school pupils still need to pay tuition fees for their attendance. In reality, however, there are still some fees applied to primary pupils, such as those for learning materials, school maintenance costs, and fees for extra hours. Moreover, pre-schools are not free and attending pre-school is significantly more expensive than attending primary school because, in addition to the school fees, pre-school children are required to pay for school meals and most schools do not allow food to be brought from home. This is a very important factor when considering the attendance count for children from different areas.

The management hierarchy above shows the BOET as being in charge of middle, primary and pre-schools. More specifically, what does a BOET actually do? Their tasks can be summarised as follows.

A BOET must work closely with the District People's Committee by:

- Directly managing all pre-, primary and middle schools in their region by supervising, observing and reporting
- Introducing standards for teachers and education managers
- Regulating and controlling standards for learning equipment, toys and facilities in schools
- Regulating policies (which they mostly adapt directly from the provincial DOET or MOET) for examinations and certificates, including producing test papers and test administration guidelines
- Ensuring and controlling the quality of education in the region

(MOET & MOI, 2011)

Staffing and other human resources issues are perhaps surprisingly not under the management of either the DOET or BOET. These are instead directly managed and controlled by a separate section belonging to the People's Committee, called the Department of the Interior (DOI) at provincial level, or the Bureau of the Interior (BOI) at district level. This means that neither schools nor the BOET/DOET are responsible for recruiting and do not get involved in selecting new teachers.

2.2.2 Teachers in the competitive system

The teachers are governed by different regulations and guidelines. One that attracts significant attention concerns awards for teacher achievement, which are made at the end of the school year. These could be translated as 'Advanced Worker', 'Initiative Contender' and 'Excellent Teacher'. The first two are for the overall achievement of a teacher in the previous year, and applications must be registered with the BOET at the beginning of the school year, making it a goal for the school and teachers to try and obtain. The last one is purely about teaching with professionalism and good practices or

employing great teaching methods. Teachers compete with each other for the title of Excellent Teacher, from school to district to provincial levels. It is rather rare for this to be awarded, so I will focus on the two titles that many teachers compete for at the end of each school year.

Advanced Worker: this title is awarded to teachers who are recognised by the BOET for their good work. There are important criteria for any teacher to secure the title, including that they must:

- 'Fulfil all their assigned work to a high standard
- Have a great attitude in following the state's policies and regulations; high self-commitment and work well with others and join in all school activities
- Continue learning more about politics, cultures and own professionalism
- Have an ethical and healthy way of living'

(BOET 168, 2011)

While these are listed in an official document sent to the school by the local BOET at the beginning of the school year, applications by the school are not always approved, even though the school and teachers may believe that they meet all the listed criteria.

The procedures for being awarded this title require that the school recognises the application and the teacher is then asked to make a summary report of her achievements over the past year. She will need to list the number of pupils she has been in charge of and to classify their achievements into percentages of Distinction – Credit – Pass – (Provisional) Fail.

Additionally, the teacher will need to write full statements about her commitment and efforts over the past year, concluding in her application for the title. The document is then signed by the head teacher and sealed with the school stamp. Finally, the document is sent to the local DOET for approval and here is where things can change completely because the

criteria listed in the document they produced at the beginning of the school year can be modified or enlarged without prior notification of the schools.

Initiative Contender: this title is more prestigious than 'Advanced Worker' and only a small number of individuals would ever qualify for this award. There are three levels of 'Initiative Contender' – at district level, at provincial level and, most prestigious of all, at state level.

Criteria for qualifying for the district level of 'Initiative Contender' are:

- Having two consecutive years of being awarded 'Advanced Worker' status
- Having initiated new ideas or scientific solutions/proposals for better education practices which obtain class A from the district's Science Council

Criteria for qualifying for the provincial level 'Initiative Contender' are:

- Having had three consecutive years of being awarded 'Initiative Contender' status at district level
- Having initiated new ideas or scientific solutions/proposals for better education practices which obtain class A from the district's Science Council and obtain a minimum class B from the province's Science Council

Criteria for qualifying for the state level 'Initiative Contender' are:

- Having for three consecutive years being awarded 'Initiative Contender' at provincial level
- Having special achievements or new ideas or scientific solutions/proposals for better education practices which have greatly impacted across the country

(BOET 168, 2011)

The schools, in a similar way to the teachers, also apply for different titles such as 'Collective Advanced Workers', 'Collective Excellent Workers' (*Tập thể lao động tiên tiến, Tập thể lao động xuất sắc*) and 'Competition Flag',

which are granted either by the Provincial People's Committee, or MOET, or the Central Government Office (*Cờ thi đua của UBND Tỉnh/ Bộ GD & ĐT/ Chính phủ*). In order to obtain such school awards, it is essential that individual teachers have been awarded their equivalent titles. For instance, to qualify for the 'Collective Advanced Workers' title, the school must have at least 50 percent of its teachers qualifying as Advanced Workers.

Although Vietnam does not issue yearly league tables for schools across the country, there seems to be some public knowledge of the titles each school is awarded annually. Individual teachers and schools therefore always strive for as many titles as they can and this creates additional pressure on everyone.

I have presented these awards in detail here because such policies are a powerful layer in the system which can then influence the behaviour of individuals (particularly teachers and school managers) within it. In the Vietnam context, this may well be one of the factors that influence a teacher's or school's decision as to whether children are allowed to pass the school year and progress to the next, or whether they may even have to repeat the school year. It may be difficult for a teacher or school to get an award if, for example, a high number of students fail or are required to repeat the school year. These awards are therefore directly associated with assessment and this forms a key part of this study.

2.3 Education in Vietnam at a glance

In this section there are two subsections, with the first introducing the monolingual education system that uses Vietnamese as the language of instruction. In doing so, this section reviews reports as well as significant issues observed by various national and international researchers regarding education for linguistic minority groups. The section therefore briefly discusses how minorities are perceived in Vietnam and the prevailing perceptions of minority learners in mainstream education. The second subsection is an introduction to the Muong minority group contextualised within the system as a whole, in order to introduce the group from a national basis, before portraying the Muong group residing in my research area in

Chapter 5, which forms part of the data collected from my research. As such, in Chapter 5, further details about the Muong minority group populating my researched area will be discussed before my research participants are individually introduced.

2.3.1 A monolingual system in a multilingual society

Since the Vietnamese language is the only official language of the country, this is also the language that dominates the education system. Although since 1946 the State Constitution has stated the right of linguistic minority children to receive free primary education in their indigenous languages, which was repeated again in the Constitutions of 1981 and 1992 and the Education Law of 2005; in reality, there is still a long way to go (Kosonen, 2009). Most class teachers are from the majority group, who often have little or no knowledge of the languages and cultures of the minority groups, including those of their students (ADB, 2007).

There has been a growing number of minority languages introduced in schooling, but most remain as a subject and not the language of instruction and the time spent learning the language can be as little as one period (45 minutes) per week (Vu, 2008; World Bank, 2009). As a result, an official report from the Vietnamese government still shows that the rate of minority children completing primary school in Vietnam is significantly lower than that recorded for the majority Kinh children – 60.6 percent as compared with 86.4 percent (GSO, 2006; GSO, 2011). Furthermore, the percentage of minority children in Vietnam that have never attended school is significantly higher than that recorded for majority Kinh children – 4.3 percent as compared with 1.4 percent in Hoa Binh, and 7.2 percent compared with 2.9 percent for Thanh Hoa (the provinces where most Muong reside). In a more extreme example, these figures are 38.7 percent compared with 1.5 percent in Lai Chau province (GSO, 2011).

At primary level, one in five children never completes school. Seventy percent of those dropping out are girls, and language, financial and cultural barriers are thought to be the main reasons for not finishing primary school (ADB, 2007). This is supported by AITPN (2003), who attribute difficulties for

the linguistic minority groups in learning Vietnamese in mainstream classes as the cause of poor performance, with having to repeat the class or dropping out being seen as the final result.

When studying the country's education situation for linguistic minority children in boarding schools, the World Bank (2005) reports unfavourably on the learning and assessment processes for the children in their studied schools. Kosonen (2009) study suggests that the language barrier remains the most challenging factor for children from linguistic minority groups when learning in mainstream education. This author claims that while the use of minority languages in education may help these children conquer such challenges, such an idea is still alien to the educational ideology of Vietnam. Moreover, officials in his study identified bilingual education in Vietnam as too much of a sensitive issue to be considered, since lots of investment could be made only to result in failure. This is mainly because of a lack of support or cooperation from central or local authorities in Vietnam, which is essential for such research to be carried out successfully (Kosonen, 2009).

As a citizen of the country and a member of the majority group, I perceive that the education system in Vietnam reflects the fact that this is a place where the ideological beliefs and cultural values of the majority Kinh group are applied on a daily basis. There is one national curriculum, created for all schools in Vietnam. The curriculum is written in the Vietnamese language and the textbooks and teaching syllabus are written by educators who are also from the majority group, and so examples and illustrations in books to contextualise learning are likely to be relevant to this group only (Nguyen Quoc Binh, 2011). Dao (Nguyen, 1999) and MOET, UNICEF and CEMA (2004), however, report that the government has made changes to provide an 'official window', which allows for 15 percent of curricular content to be set aside for local teachers to incorporate local language, culture, history and traditions into learning programmes. This policy would be improved if there were also detailed guidelines for teachers on how to create and carry out the tasks, but according to Dao (Nguyen, 1999), most local teachers show little understanding and much confusion as to what they can do when using this window. In this situation, I believe, realistically, that mainstream education

creates little opportunity for culturally and linguistically diverse children and their communities to see themselves as an asset to society, where they can participate and contribute towards wider society.

Writing in a United States context, but equally applicable to Vietnam, Crawford (1992) argues that providing the same teachers, textbooks, curriculum and learning facilities to children who are not from the majority speaking background, means that these children do not get equal treatment. Vietnam has practised a model of *submersion*, where all children from linguistic minority groups are taught in only the Vietnamese language, with the final outcome expected by the government that they will become fluent in Vietnamese (Save the Children UK, 2002; Kosonen, 2004).

Baker (2011) and Berthold (2006) list the two main reasons why authorities would implement this type of education, which are poverty and a strong desire to assimilate the minority language within the majority language. Otheguy and Otto (1980), however, stress that a lack of finances is not always the main reason for the absence of bilingual programmes for multicultural and multilingual children; rather, it is the presence of an educational philosophy and political issues embedded in the system. Ricento (2003) further reveals a situation of the tightly controlled bilingual education in the United States as proof of restricting equal opportunities to wider society, in order to keep access to opportunities firmly in the hands of monolinguals.

In the Vietnam context, I would argue that the use of local resources is not costly and is very feasible for the government. For instance, training local linguistic minority teachers is viable, and they are willing to stay and work in their villages, whereas many teachers from the majority group refuse to go and teach in remote areas because they believe their abilities are not best used in such places (World Bank, 2009). One paradox observed by World Bank researchers is that, while there is a lack of teachers willing to teach in remote areas, local teachers from linguistic minority groups are not welcomed so much by their own communities and pupils. Linguistic minority children prefer to be in classes where the teachers are from the Kinh majority

group, because the Vietnamese proficiency of minority teachers is not at the same level as that of Kinh teachers (World Bank, 2009).

In addition, this submersion education model, which mainly happens by default, as there may be a lack of better alternatives, can be seen in societies where only the language of the majority is recognised in economic, political and social terms. There are several reasons why submersion is used in Vietnam. Firstly, there are 54 different linguistic minority groups in the country and some of them are represented by very few qualified teachers. Also, some of the languages are not well developed in terms of written scripts, so teaching materials are consequently rare or non-existent. In addition, some regions where the minority groups live are remote with poor communications, often with several minorities sharing the area and some groups are very small. It would be difficult, therefore, even given the resources available to a very developed country, to teach multiple languages in one class. For these reasons, children are taught using only Vietnamese (Vu, 2008; Vuong *et al.*, 2002)

In the end, however, a standardised education system which insists on teaching in one national and standard language has much to do with Foucault's concept of *governmentality* (Foucault *et al.*, 1991), which sees the 'hegemonic practices' of languaging as a means to systematically restrict opportunities for people who are not members of the dominant or majority group (Erickson, 1987; Ricento, 2003).

2.3.2 The linguistic minority situation and the Muong minority group – the wider educational and national context in Vietnam

Studying linguistic minority groups in Vietnam remains a complex issue because the authorities always see this as a sensitive matter, politically and socially. Roche and Michaud (2000) suggest that one of the reasons may be that geographical minorities mainly live in remote and highland regions, which are mostly strategic areas, such as the borders between Vietnam and the neighbouring countries. Minority Rights Group International (2005) further suggest that political matters are also relevant, with the government being

led by the majority Kinh group. These authors therefore acknowledge that foreign researchers in particular encounter difficulties, such as gaining access or approval from the authorities when wanting to conduct research relating to linguistic minority groups in Vietnam.

As presented earlier in the introduction to this chapter, of the 54 ethnic groups in the country, the Kinh is the majority and is also the group in power. There have been certain efforts by the government to take linguistic minority groups into consideration in policy development and decision-making processes, in order to create a more equal society (Yukio, 2001; Dang, 2012). Nevertheless, researchers from different international groups have felt that policies are often 'Kinh-loaded', showing an absolute and non-negotiable hierarchical order in society between the different ethnic groups, with the Kinh being placed on top, followed by those whose similarity to the Kinh is visible (Minority Rights Group International, 2005; Kosonen, 2004). Thus, despite efforts by the government to include linguistic minority groups in the national development process, most linguistic minority groups remain marginal to the process of economic growth (UNDP Vietnam Researchers, 2002). UNDP researchers also observed an underrepresentation of linguistic minority groups in government and political structures. These researchers, together with (Dang, 2012), expressed concerns regarding the widening economic and social gaps between the majority and ethnic minorities.

When reviewing the education system presented earlier in this chapter, one could relate the 'Kinh-loaded' issue to Vietnamese being the only language of instruction in the system with the content of learning programmes being designed by the majority Kinh authorities, most suitably for Kinh learners (Nguyen Quoc Binh, 2011; Phyak and Bui, 2014). As such, low educational achievement among the linguistic minority groups has always been a concern for the authorities which has been observed by researchers (Save the Children UK, 2002; Vu, 2008; World Bank, 2009). National and international researchers, however, recognise that it is not a language issue alone (learning in Vietnamese) but that many other factors contribute to low outcomes, such as the distance from home to school, the learning

programme, economic difficulties and child labour within these minority groups (Bui, 2005; World Bank, 2005; World Bank, 2009; Kosonen, 2009).

Nevertheless, few Kinh people in the country have access to these scientific research reports and it appears to be a common belief that learners from linguistic minority groups are simply not as good as Kinh students, since the Kinh group is at the top of the societal and educational hierarchy (Minority Rights Group International, 2005; Baulch *et al.*, 2002). This is not helped by the perception that the policy that allows linguistic minority learners to pass national exams (to graduate from secondary school and to enter colleges and universities) with lower grades than those applied to Kinh children, as an indication that linguistic minority learners simply cannot compete with the majority learners. I need to add, however, that Kinh majority children who live in remote and mountainous areas also receive priority in these exams but to a lesser extent than that given to linguistic minority children. The guidelines from MOET (Bo Giao Duc Va Dao Tao, 2014), for instance, state that children from linguistic minority groups living in rural areas will have 3.5 points added to their overall exam results. This means that if the pass score is 15 (out of 30 for three subjects), these children could pass the test with a score of 11.5 out of 30.

The belief by the Kinh majority that they are superior to minority peoples is exacerbated by the practice of publishing and reporting somewhat negative facts concerning minority learners in the mainstream media, including low enrolment rates, high drop-out rates and test scores that consistently reveal underachievement by linguistic minority learners without much explanation being provided as to why this may be the case. This is far from ideal but the more worrying outcome is that such a misconception could potentially be transferred to the minority people, which may lower their confidence and belief in themselves. This has been observed by Dang (2012), who finds that stereotyping and misconceptions, not just amongst the Kinh, but also amongst the ethnic minorities, has hindered their levels of participation and development. The author does, however, acknowledge that such observations may not be nationally consistent since the study only concerns minorities living in just three provinces in Vietnam. Such misconceptions

could originate simply from discrimination against linguistic minority people (Baulch *et al.*, 2002): for instance, recognising that one of the reasons that linguistic minority groups in Vietnam are much poorer than the majority Kinh people, is due to discrimination being directed at them which results in their facing more difficulties in getting a good job than an equivalently qualified candidate from the Kinh group.

Of the 53 linguistic minority groups, the Muong is the third largest with approximately 1.3 million people, but they also rank amongst the poorest (GSO, 2006). A large number of Muong live in the lowlands and amongst the Kinh majority people. Linguistically, the Muong language is closely related to Vietnamese, which is why researchers find that overall, when compared to other minorities, the Muong can speak Vietnamese rather competently (Kosonen, 2004; Kosonen, 2009; World Bank, 2009). In searching for literature and research about the Muong ethnicity, I came to a realisation that in comparison with other linguistic minority groups such as the Hmong, Thai or Khmer, the literature available for the Muong group is rather limited. Personally, I think this may be because many Muong people reside in the lowlands, amongst Kinh people, with a verbal language that is closely related to Vietnamese. Muong learners may therefore be perceived by educators and researchers as doing quite well when compared with many other linguistic minority groups, especially when official reports consistently show that the Muong have high enrolment rates in primary education (Baulch *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, researchers and international projects tend to focus more on the groups that struggle the most, such as the Hmong or Khmer.

There are also Muong minorities that live in mountainous and highland regions, who would inevitably face more challenges than those living in the lowlands. This is because most hillsides and highlands are in disadvantaged areas where crops are very much seasonal with lower yields, which is combined with poor infrastructure. The Muong minority group that I am researching is a lowland group, and one would think that such a geographical advantage (when compared with highland Muong and other ethnic minorities) would allow them to better keep up with the majority Kinh people, educationally, economically and politically. It was only when I arrived

in the region that I realised that, despite a relatively close proximity to the capital city (when compared with most other ethnic minorities), the overall level of development and infrastructure in the area is somewhat similar to that in my parents' village situated in a poor, remote, mountainous area in northern Vietnam, where they are located alongside different minority villages. A further analysis of the Muong minority group, this time specifically relating to my research area, will be presented in Chapter 5, in which I introduce my research context and research participants.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a background of education in Vietnam, my research country. Some significant aspects of the education sector have been briefly described, including the system within which it operates, the language of education, and the learning situations of language minority pupils. Muong-speaking learners are the particular focus here as this group is the basis for my study and as discussed above they have received much less attention from previous studies, which have mostly focussed on linguistic minority groups who are perceived to be struggling the most in mainstream education in Vietnam. In particular, I will be observing some Muong learners who are really struggling, to try to understand the reason for their difficulties and what the consequences could be for them. As such, I have briefly contextualised the Muong people in a national and educational setting as an introduction to further descriptions and discussions about the group that are continued in Chapter 5. The next chapter will widen these mentioned issues by examining them from a worldwide basis, through different viewpoints and research findings, and by theories and hypotheses from different scholars and researchers: the literature review chapter follows.

Chapter 3: Literature review

3.1 Introduction

Responding to the needs of all learners in multicultural classrooms appears to be an ongoing concern for all the educational stakeholders, including policy makers, head teachers, teaching staff, families and the community as a whole. Cummins (2001) believes that culturally diverse students can be academically successful only when there is genuine willingness shown by all those responsible for educating children. This literature review focuses on diversity and education, as well as learning theories, particularly relating to language in culturally diverse classrooms.

In the first part, I will briefly discuss the notion of identity and relate this to the Vietnam education context. My experience of coming from Vietnam and my latest research reveals that identity appears to be essential and can even open or shut the doors to success. I believe that in the Vietnam context, identity is especially important and is the most decisive factor in theories of learning as well as education policy. This is also why I chose to place identity as the first part and as a separate section of this literature review, before any theory of learning can be discussed.

The second part consists of different discussions of theories, with a particular focus on those relating to culturally diverse classrooms. Of these, I will discuss the sociocultural theory of learning which focuses on incorporating culturally and linguistically diverse students into education, followed by a discussion which links such theories to practice. This section also includes a discussion that looks at assessing young learners, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. Of this, some literature pertaining to child development and learning will be examined before assessment issues are explored in more detail.

The third part looks at language in education - an aspect that links closely to the learners' identities and cultures. I will firstly examine the learning

situations created for culturally diverse students in mainstream education, focussing on the relation between their home and school languages. At the end of this section, discussions of learning models which appear to be relevant to culturally diverse students will be connected to a discussion of bilingualism and bilingual education.

In the bilingualism and bilingual education section, I will initially discuss the issue of rights and equality. This is done to give the reader an overall understanding of the various reasons and situations which shape different types of bilingualism and diverse models of bilingual education. The second section reviews situations of and diverse opinions on bilingual education. In discussing this, some models of bilingual education are briefly examined as these are embedded in the context which supports or opposes each learning model. The third part in this section discusses the issues of bilingualism and special education. The focus is on aspects surrounding the linkage between minority and/or bilingual language learners with learning difficulties or special educational needs (SEND).

The fourth section of this chapter examines features of the Education for All policy. Firstly, I will briefly examine policies and practices from different countries around the world to review and to contextualise the issue worldwide before focusing on the local level. As such, the second part of this section focuses on the Vietnam context, where policy and practice in the country are both explored.

Finally, the research questions are presented just before the chapter is concluded.

3.2 Individual identity – similarities and differences

You can standardize commercial goods, but you cannot standardize people's identity.

(Euromosaic III, 2004)

3.2.1 Identity

Within the literature, the concept of identify is explained in ways that share similarities but which reveal its multifaceted nature. Blommaert (2005) asserts that identity can be as simple as who and what you are, but the author further claims that the spoken output of identity reflects an extensive and complex range of dynamic identity features. Hogg and Abrams (2006) display a similar understanding of the concept and add that identity is also about how someone relates himself or herself to others. Norton (2000), Katzenstein (1996), and Hall (1991) likewise see identity as self-perception and the understanding of one's relationship to the outside world, and vice-versa, and how such a relationship is constructed and evolves across time and space. Deng (1995) specifically refers to identity as the way individuals identify themselves and are identified by others based on the distinction of ethnicity, race, religion, language and culture.

To Wallace (2004), identity can be regarded as a relational aspect of human development, where an individual's membership is navigated through participating in group activity within and across community frameworks. Wallace also warns that although the concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'race', or 'heritage' and 'identity', are often merged together, *heritage* and *identity* need to be differentiated as a person's parentage does not always directly correspond to his or her identity. This has especially applied, in recent times, to mixed heritage children; thus, the orientation of identity should be dynamic and not fixed. Additionally, if an individual perceives that changing group membership could enhance his or her evaluative outcomes, she or he may choose to do that, which is when identity can be altered, as the boundaries between ethnic groups become permeable (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998).

From my personal experience and as my knowledge has been shaped by my origins, I understand and view identity as the interconnected nature of social classifications, including ethnicity, language background, gender, and social status, and which also encompasses geographical rural and urban differences. While some features in such an identity could remain stable or given, I do believe that most features of identity in my context could be

negotiated, changed or altered as individuals progress in their dynamic worlds.

In the introduction, I mentioned that identity can either facilitate or create obstacles to success in Vietnam (and in other locations). To further clarify this, Napier *et al.* (2004), in discussing the field of research, observe that in Vietnam a willingness to accept and to include does not always extend to strangers, especially when the researcher is a foreigner. This was not the case for me when I went to visit some schools in my intended research area. The first head teacher changed her attitude immediately after she found out that I came from the capital city, am head of a school, and am also conducting research with an overseas institute. The head teachers of other schools also showed much respect to me and they all commented positively about my success and position for 'such a young person'. My 'identity' clearly helped to smoothly open access to my research field, while many international researchers with whom I talked in my latest fieldtrip, all mentioned that gaining access to fieldwork in Vietnam is very problematic. In Vietnam, identity imposes much influence in gaining success in many other aspects of daily life. This recognition appears to be so important in order to understand all aspects of society, including education.

When discussing the identity issue in this context, I wish to relate it primarily to ethnicity, culture and language, as these three are the leading strands for observing the complicated interplays when trying to understand a learner. In my literature review and in my research, however, I will be studying identity in an educational context with specific regard to ethnicity, culture and language as self-imprinted and perceived by society. These can be personal and social, with the personal side referring to one's self and dignity, and the social side referring to how self and dignity are related to and how they may be perceived by the outside world, which in this context is school, an essential part of wider society.

3.2.2 Identity and education

In educational settings, individual learners (and educators) can make up diverse groups of identity, from gender and ethnic groups to social roles and

personal representations. Wallace (2004) observes that although representations of identity are varied, identity in education refers to issues of human diversity and schooling processes. The author further remarks that the relationship between schooling and the psychological and cultural aspects of ethnic identity is always complex. According to Cummins (2001), identity in this context is pronounced when there is a trusting and respectful relationship between educators and learners, so personal experiences and beliefs are critically reflected and regarded. Cummins thus believes that interactions between educators and learners reflect a process of identity negotiation which is likely to encounter difficulties when the culture, language and social class of educators are mismatched with those of their learners and vice-versa. Too often, the author continues, the identities or cultural connections that learners bring to school become barriers that hinder their academic achievement, and so removing such barriers seems to be essential for success at school.

Recognising personal identities in education and how this should be done have been on-going debates. Sheets and Hollins (Sheets, 1999) observe significance in recent educational psychology literature in that this largely emphasises the role of education in fostering sociocognitive growth as well as the positive development of ethnic identity for all students. Earlier, this had clearly not been the case, as observed by Platero (1975). In this work, Platero describes how Navajo children in the United States were taken away from their families to boarding schools, so that they could be assimilated into White society. In so doing, these children's culture, language, and identity were severely disregarded in schools. In line with Platero's findings, Cummins (2001) concludes that *education* is undermined in many situations in the United States, where schools are under pressure to restrict learning opportunities and identity alternatives. The idea of multicultural and bilingual education has been severely attacked by the media, such as the influential *U.S. English* campaign that supported the English-only programme in the 1990s (Cummins, 2001).

While reaching a goal of including and respecting all identities present in educational settings may be desirable for many educators, simple guidelines

of practices may not be sufficient. Such matters should be considered from the root of the challenge – the teaching and learning philosophy introduced to educators. Conteh and Brock (2010) affirm that learning theories must not disregard *context* and *identity*, which are the core notions of educational philosophy. *Identity* was discussed earlier, and *context* in this sense relates to the social and cultural environment and individual circumstances that surrounds a learner and through which learning takes place. Such *context* not only refers to the situation where the learners currently are but must also refer back to why they have become to be who they are. Such understanding will not be found if these learners' cultures are not connected together by the schools and educators.

3.3 Theory of learning in culturally diverse classrooms

Connecting to a learner's culture, to understand the environment which embraces and influences the learner, is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural approach. This theory contends that cultural artefacts, activities and concepts have control over one's mental functioning (Ratner, 2002), so factors such as family, peers, school, and teachers all play a role in a child's development and learning (Conteh, 2003). As such, the section below discusses culture and education, as this is seen as relevant to the theory of learning, especially in culturally diverse classrooms.

3.3.1 Inclusion of diversity - connecting culture with education

One's culture is embedded within one's identity. From my perspective, recognising someone's identity also means recognising the culture to which she or he is associated. In understanding sociocultural theory, I think that if educators want to fully understand and respond to the diverse needs of their multi-ethnic learners and why they learn, behave, interact and think the way they do, referring and making a connection to the learners' culture is essential. This will be discussed in more detail below, building on theory from Ladson-Billings (1995) and McCarty (1993). In addition to this, Conteh and Brock (2010) argue that while learning is a process of participating, joining, sharing ideas and understanding, in order to construct new meanings, such a

process is unlikely to be effectively co-constructed if disagreement exists between school and home.

Also in support of the sociocultural approach, Cole (1998) posits that human behaviour should be understood relationally and contextually because thought is partly influenced by culture. When relating this to education, Cole develops Bronfenbrenner's (1979) diagram and represents this with layers shown surrounding a learner. These layers include the influences of community, family, school, classroom, and lessons planned by teachers. This indicates that any interpretation about one learner's situation should not be viewed in isolation from all these surrounding influences.

I concur in that the interrelationship between culture and learning undeniably contributes to the effectiveness of the learning process, so that a significant lack of similarity between school and home may result in difficulties being experienced by learners, where some may be successful but others may be adversely affected. In the foreword to Cummins's (2001) book, Kazoullis shares her own experiences of initially struggling at school, due to being from a non-dominant background. The author finally progressed and no longer lagged behind her peers. In doing so, however, due to great demands from teachers, peers and society, she had to throw away 'a lot of things' associated with her identity which had become a burden for her. From such an experience, Kazoullis then claims that the inclusion of children from diverse cultures in education is not just about multicultural or intercultural education, it is also about similarities and differences, as well as acceptance and individuality. Observing the issue more closely, we can see that Kazoullis was under pressure to respond to expectations both from wider society (which in this case is her teachers and peers) *and* from her own community (her home). Kazoullis sacrificed many things that were associated with her identity, culture and community, in response to the demands placed on her by the different layers identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Not all individuals may want, even if they are able, to act like Kazoullis, and such cases may be misjudged or misinterpreted by educators. Such misinterpretation may have further adverse impacts on learners, as in the

case of Latino students in Texas who were regarded as 'learning disabled' (Ortiz and Yates, 1983). In this case, educators were advised to lower their academic expectations of these children after they were labelled as having special educational needs. A similar issue is raised by Conteh (Brock and Conteh, 2011), when the author identifies conflicts between the concepts of *diversity* and *inclusion*, which resulted in English as an additional language (EAL) students in England being categorised as having disabilities or special needs and seen as having 'barriers to learning'.

In addition to the constraints placed on these learners by wider society, represented by schools, teachers and peers, multi-ethnic children may also struggle in their own communities. In his studies of 14 biracial or ethnic heritage students at high school and college, Wallace (2004) observes that a number of these children and young adults, due to their dissimilar appearance or limited language skills, were partially marginalised from their own heritage communities, despite their constant, conscious efforts to dress and act like their peers in the hope that their identity would be recognised and accepted.

To return to the earlier discussion about the sociocultural theory of learning, I agree that understanding learners' failures or successes must not take place separately from the other factors or layers that surround them. This is why, when explaining the reasons behind the failure of many students, Cummins (2001) states that this is mainly due to these students' identities, cultures and languages being diminished and misrepresented by wider society. This author further maintains that the way in which students from diverse cultures are disadvantaged educationally is also the way that their communities are historically disadvantaged in their relations with society. In sharing the same opinion, Ogbu (1994; 1992) observes that students in different societies, who experience severe educational difficulties, are likely to be those whose communities have inferior social status and are discriminated against by the dominant majority group. Ladson-Billings (1995) reports the situation of African-American children, where their culture is devalued in schooling and societal contexts and is hence associated with low academic performance. Similarly, Darder (1991) and Walsh (1991) observe that students from some

minority or cross-cultural families in the United States dropped out of school due to experiencing their cultures and languages being devalued in school contexts. This, Cummins (2001) believes, is because the students perceive their identity as being endangered by such devaluation, and withdrawal from schooling is the only way for them to protect 'their sense of self'.

Ogbu (1994) notes that the historical, political and economic differences between different ethnic groups may lead to dissimilar cultural frames of reference and these frames of reference are how the students view themselves and their peers whilst in the school setting. To effectively incorporate children from diverse cultures into education, their cultural references must not be disregarded by educators. Wallace (2004) continues that achieving academic success in education will need active roles for non-dominant background students in negotiating their own identity in mainstream education. Ladson-Billings (1995) also posits that a 'culturally relevant pedagogy' may help culturally diverse students succeed academically whilst effectively maintaining their identities. McCarty (1993) supports this by asserting that a child's potential is realised when learning from a curriculum and pedagogy which is built on and relevant to their linguistic and cultural assets.

3.3.2 Inclusion in practice

When given the opportunity, learners are usually willing and more than happy to contribute towards including their cultures and identities in education. However, transferring policy from macro to micro level cannot be instantaneous and may not always be easy or even feasible. Personally, I propose that despite the challenges of making immediate changes to a system and the pressure for schools to adhere to national policies, individual educators at classroom level can still redress imbalance using their daily interactions with multi-ethnic learners.

Nieto (1999) stresses the importance of the teacher's role in providing culturally diverse students with adequate and equal opportunities and including their strengths and talents in classrooms for a positive educational outcome for these children. This opinion matches that of Conteh and Brock

(2010) and Cole (1998), when stating that inclusion of diversity cannot be achieved effectively if there is no connection to the diversity of culture that each child brings to school. Conteh (Brock and Conteh, 2011) further affirms the essential role of the school-home connection and relationships between educators and learners from different contexts. This requires that learners be viewed together with all the strands to which they are connected when trying to understand the factors contributing to their academic outcomes. The author suggests that flexibility be employed when developing educational policy, to allow 'local threads' (schools and communities) to be included as contributing to all educational activities. Finally, when it comes down to equality and children's rights, to which education should not be an exception, considering the cultural differences of all children must mean ensuring the rights of all children and not just some (Bligh, 2011).

Educators responding to the diverse needs of their learners can be as simple as positive interactions with learners and their families. Conteh and Brock (2010) emphasise the importance of participation between educators and families and communities in helping to reinforce self-identity and to support the development of the mother tongue language of young children. The authors advocate 'safe spaces' – time where educators allow children to 'take it easy' when they initially enter the school or class – as much needed for building the learners' confidence, hence successful learning, especially for those from diverse backgrounds. In later work, Conteh (2011) presents a case study which illustrates how teachers could influence and make micro-level changes in response to their individual learners, whilst still following the national agenda.

Bligh (2011) further suggests that educators refer to learners' rights, including the right to remain silent. The author observes that the fallacy of silence is that many people perceive being silent as an indicator of error or inadequacy, and so educators use silence as a punishment in early years: for example, when asking a child who is believed to have misbehaved to sit on a chair *quietly* for a certain amount of time. Bligh's work could be used to explain why many learners, whose diverse backgrounds, languages and cultures differ from the mainstream, may be categorised as having special

educational needs. This is because once the concept of *silence* is mistakenly interpreted, the silence of these learners is considered as undesirable and the silent period (which will further be discussed below), although maybe not needed by all learners, is hence unlikely to be granted following such an interpretation. Added to this, the *safe spaces* discussed by Conteh and Brock (2010) above, however valuable, are also unlikely to be granted to learners by these educators.

I would suggest that one of the main processes in education which directly affects the *silent period* and *safe spaces* could be early assessment. This is because the *silent period* and *safe spaces* require a non-threatening time period, provided for learners who do not speak the school language at home, in order for them to get to know the system. Early assessment, however, could be invasive as it could push learners to produce something that they are not yet ready for, or to express ideas and knowledge in an unfamiliar system and/or language where they have insufficient confidence. The following section will further explore the impacts of assessment, with a particular focus on assessing young learners who are from non-dominant groups.

3.3.3 Assessing young learners in culturally diverse classrooms

To Foucault (1977), testing is never neutral and it is the combination of power with experiment, and of the placement of force with the founding of truth. In terms of the exercising of power, this is why testing is often directly under the control of those in power, such as local, regional and national authorities. In the context of testing in culturally diverse classrooms, García and Baetens-Beardsmore (2009) observe that official assessments too frequently ignore children's bilingualism by assessing them as though they are monolingual in the education language, which is the language of the dominant group, who are also in power.

When examining factors that are prominent when assessing young learners in culturally diverse classrooms, questions of when, what, how and who are discussed in turn below. Before exploring these questions however, I will briefly discuss some theories as to how children think and learn, with an

emphasis on child development and how adults can influence this process. This is because I believe that assessment cannot be separated from an understanding of child learning and development; thus, this needs to be discussed before assessment issues can be examined.

3.3.3.1 Children's learning, language and development - what and how adults make sense of that

How are children's learning and their language acquisition perceived by adults? According to Bernstein (Bernstein, 1960; Bernstein, 1972; Bernstein and Younie, 1961), the link between the performance of children in school and their socioeconomic background is evident and undeniable. With a particular focus on the language development of young children and their language performance at school, the author's findings suggest that any linguistic differences between groups of learners are more pronounced when the socioeconomic gaps between them are larger. In line with this, Wood (1998) also confirms that one of the most reliable predictors of children's school performance is their social background, but also finds that the way in which the two variables are related remains open to debate. The author summarises attempts to explain the relationship between these two variables, including the self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher quality, including their skills in communicating with children from diverse cultures. These are now discussed in turn.

The study of the *self-fulfilling prophecy* (Merton, 1948) by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) suggests that a teacher's expectations of children's learning corresponds with what the children bring with them initially: for instance, those whose language and backgrounds are close to that of the standard dominant group perhaps receive more favourable teacher expectations than those from non-dominant backgrounds. Such lowered expectations of child learning, these authors conclude, consequently result in lower performance due to the children being taught less and hence learning less. Pilling and Pringle (1978), however, argue that this outcome is debatable since their studies into the self-fulfilling prophecy did not reveal the same results. Wood (1998), although only finding insubstantial evidence for the self-fulfilling prophecy, still acknowledges the possible existence of

teachers' expectations of children being based on social stereotypes, which would lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy being a reality. Nevertheless, Jussim *et al.* (1996) claim that even when a teacher's negative expectations do not equate to student failure, such negative expectations could still be associated with those students failing. The authors, together with Madon *et al.* (1997), further posit that students from marginalised groups are more vulnerable to the self-fulfilling prophecy than those whose identities belong to a more prestigious and desirable group.

Teacher quality and an ability for them to communicate effectively with children from diverse cultures, are identified as factors when attempting to explain the relationship between children's backgrounds and performances in school (Wood, 1998). The author warns, however, that such issues appear to be more complex than has been suggested and that comprehension issues, arising from some features of classroom language that have to be mastered by these children, can cause complications. As a result, while they are still dealing with issues caused by their desire to make sense to others, their inability to produce coherent 'decontextualized' narratives of their knowledge and understanding may lead to them being seen as intellectually incompetent (Wood, 1998). This closely links to the identity matters and issues relating to the inclusion of children from diverse cultures in education which were discussed earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, a child's development and learning need to be considered before any assessment. While acknowledging that social experiences and interpersonal interactions are important in child development, Piaget and Inhelder (1969) assert that children's natural ability to actively construct their knowledge of the world plays a more vital role. Wood (1998) argues that adults and social interaction have much more important roles in this process of child development and learning, and that children's knowledge is jointly formed by their own understanding and through interactions with more knowledgeable and skilled members of the community. This is in line with Vygotsky's assertion (Vygotsky, 1974), that though a child may appear to be unable to solve a problem or perform a task independently, with some assistance from an adult the child could be successful. By being helped, this

process has contributed to the development, knowledge and ability of the child. Vygotsky considers that an ability to learn from others is an essential characteristic of human intelligence and that a child's learning potential is frequently realised by such interactions.

In this process, instruction from 'knowledgeable others', whether formal or informal, constitutes a transfer of culturally specific knowledge. In a formal context of instruction, such as in schools, Wood (1998) finds it natural that children may encounter learning tasks that are new or vague to them. The author warns, however, that child development may not be the same in different subjects or areas; thus, their ability in one area may not reflect that for other learning areas. This I find very important for educators to bear in mind when it comes to assessing young learners: early years assessment must be professionally carried out covering a range of different areas of development, whereas assessment results cannot be considered reliable if only one or two areas are assessed.

For instance, in early years education in the United Kingdom, prime and specific areas of developments are recognised, including:

| Prime areas | Specific areas |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal, Social and Emotional Development• Communication and Language• Physical Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Literacy• Mathematics• Understanding of the World• Expressive Arts and Design |

In this instance, if educators choose to assess a child's overall development using just one or two of the areas listed here, it is neither fair on that child, nor can it be said that the assessment result reliably reflects the child's overall development. Further issues regarding assessing young learners, with a special focus on those from diverse cultures, will now be further examined below.

3.3.3.2 When – What – How and Who?

Assessing learners from culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms must cover the When – What – How questions, especially when assessing young learners or learners at the early stages of learning (Atkins and Brown, 1985;

Clemson and Clemson, 1996a; Curtis, 1998; Hurst, 1991; Tyler and Fontana, 1984) .

In discussing the **When** factor, in relation to assessing young learners who learn in a language that is not their mother tongue, scholars and researchers around the world consistently find that these children may experience some receptive or 'silent period' at the early stages of learning (Krashen, 1981). This, Blight (2011) sees as a right of the child/learner – the right to remain silent.

While it may take up to two years for these children to develop interpersonal communication skills, it may take much longer for the development of the full range of academic language skills (Cummins, 1985; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). In discussing this, Cummins (2000) identifies two aspects of language proficiency which are 'conversational' (also termed *contextualized language* (Cummins, 1981b) or *surface fluency* (Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa, 1976) and 'academic'. The former was originally named *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS) and the latter *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). Of this, conversational language proficiency – BICS – refers to social fluency in that language which should develop in between two to three years' time. Academic language proficiency – CALP – relates to a much higher level of language development, involving the mastering of language skills such as synthesis, evaluation and analysis. These skills are believed to be obtained much later in the learning process, from five to seven years of learning the non-mother tongue language (Cummins, 2000).

When relating Cummins's BICS and CALP to learning and assessment, García (2009) finds that children need to have a 'different set of language skills', especially for accomplishing learning and assessment tasks. The author further clarifies that this is the stage at which the learners are considered to be independent school-language users, where no extralinguistic support is required. This appears to be very important in deciding when the time is suitable for evaluation or assessment. If the assessment is carried out when the children are still experiencing the silent period and are not ready to produce in the target language, or when the children are at the BICS (conversational) level but not at the CALP

(academic) level of language development, the assessment result may misrepresent the child's actual learning ability.

One example of delaying the testing of children learning in a second/additional language comes from Canada. In most schools in Metropolitan Toronto, a policy was introduced to delay testing language minority children for at least two years after their integration into the school system (Cummins, 1985). Although there have been debates and challenges regarding the amount of time (the two years), the system acknowledges the possible disadvantage created for this group of learners if they are tested too soon. This policy approach could be related to the concept of educators establishing a 'safe space' for language minority children (Conteh and Brock, 2010), to create a non-threatening learning environment and to make learners feel encouraged and motivated to learn.

The issue of **What** to test also appears to be very significant because tests have different purposes. Baker (2007) claims that bilingual children are far too often tested, with the main aim of diagnosing their 'disabilities' or insufficient proficiency in their second language. For instance, this can occur with norm-referenced tests to compare how different these children are in relation to the average level attained by 'normal' children. These average test scores are, however, usually based on results achieved by language majority children, which the author argues brings into question the equity of such standards in relation to language minority learners.

This helps us to see that if the test content is not carefully designed to cover all groups of learners, it could be biased or unfair to some. This is why public law in the United States asserts that all tests must not be culturally and linguistically discriminatory against learners (Baker, 2007). In reality though, non-discriminatory tests may not always be used. Hall *et al.* (2001) find that standardised tests, even those that include items to reflect the learning environments of minority children, are still culture-loaded because inevitably the test construction procedures only reflect the majority group's culture. When the authorities produce a one-size-fits-all test that does not consider the cognitive needs of children from different language backgrounds, the bilingual or minority language children could be placed at a disadvantage.

The **How** factor of assessment examines all the administrative matters and the critical issues of fairness and consistency. This is tightly linked to the test content, which is designed in a way that does not allow a lot of room for negotiation or flexibility, where testers can determine the outcome of the test on their own. This is because the decisions of different testers may vary even for the same child, so to avoid inconsistencies, clear guidelines on test administration and marking must be provided. In the case of assessing a child who is considered as problematic by one teacher and as doing well by another, there must be clear guidance and criteria applied. Without this, a situation can evolve in which inconsistent and subjective conclusions can be reached by teachers, which may reflect a teacher's favourable or less favourable judgement of learners. Such a problem is reflected on by Escamilla (Escamilla, 2000), when a teacher in a bilingual class reported one child as 'doing fine' and another as 'a poor reader in two languages' when both children's reading scores were identical.

Referring back to what was discussed in the identity section above, the identity of the teachers and assessors appears to be very significant for young linguistic minority children. This means that in addition to the **What – When – How** questions, the **Who** question could equally affect the reliability and validity of the test. This specifically refers to the administration of the assessment process, with a particular focus on the invigilators and the markers. Woodhouse (1992) warns that young children's behaviour can vary in different situations and so their potential performance in school may not be widely displayed. As such, contributions from home and other contexts are needed, if we would like to obtain a fuller picture of the development of such children. The author further urges that when assessing young children, the effects of external factors such as tester effects must be minimised, so that assessment is only about the child and the task performed, thereby allowing young children the best opportunity to display their abilities. Curtis (2002) further asserts that both the emotional stage and the personality of the child could affect assessment outcomes, so it is essential that young children are tested by familiar adults during formal assessments. This is the best possible way of reducing the tester effect, even with the cost of some subjectivity, the

author adds. When agreeing with these studies, Tyler (1984) and Clemson and Clemson (1996a) also acknowledge that the presence of a teacher or tester can, in various ways, affect the child's actions or the outcome of these actions, which ultimately influences the child's performance in such assessments.

This **Who** factor is also linked to the teacher's expectations of the various children, from which teachers may create a *self-fulfilling prophecy* (Merton, 1948) which may affect a learner's academic outcome, as discussed earlier. When questioning the extent to which the result of an assessment carries a prediction for the future, Clemson and Clemson (1996b) show concern about how predictions can become self-fulfilling. The authors insist that educators must not allow early judgements, or those of others, to interfere with subsequent teaching responses.

When observing assessment, the **When, What, How** and **Who** factors reflect the quality of an education system. Good systems must take these factors into account when designing and implementing the testing of minority language children, because inappropriately biased assessments affect their academic achievement (Baca and Cervantes, 1984). Sadly, though, Baker (2007) observes that when underachievement occurs with bilingual children, the children and their minority group are often blamed for it and not the school or the education system.

From the discussions here and in the identity section, I suggest that assessing linguistic minority children, when they are not yet ready and are still familiarising themselves with a new language and culture, does not only result in unreliable assessment outcomes but can also give learners an inaccurate picture of themselves and can adversely affect their self-esteem and motivation to learn. This, together with issues from assessing minority children and how this affects these learners, will be further discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, in which I will examine significant observations from my researched school.

3.4 Language in culturally diverse classrooms

In this section, I will explore factors relating to minority languages in mainstream education, which will then lead to a discussion of bilingualism and bilingual education. Before that, however, I will examine the role of language in education and bilingual education, in order to understand what language means to learners, particularly linguistic minority learners.

3.4.1 The role of language in education

In educational settings, language is not just about literacy, it is also the *medium of instruction*, where through language all other subjects are taught and learnt (Lwin and Silver, 2013). Language is therefore vital for learners in education, and in order for them to succeed students need to be competent users of the school language. This is because subject learning depends heavily on learners' access to and competence in the school language or the language of instruction (Byram, 2008). Byram further illustrates the point by identifying the importance of knowing concepts and terminology, of being able to understand and use subject specific expressions academically but still pre-scientifically, and then being capable of understanding and using this to produce texts that specifically relate to the subject and which adhere to the current mode of expression. In line with this, Vollmer (2008) argues that language in subject specific contexts goes far beyond the learning of terminology and new concepts, as it involves a new or different way of understanding, thinking and communicating, in forms which incorporate specific traditions and rules, whilst also being appropriate for the expectations of the other party or parties to whom the discourse is directed.

This means that learners need to master the language not just at the conversational level or BICS but to a higher academic degree, namely CALP, as identified by Cummins (2000) and discussed in the section above. Becoming competent in the language of education happens through a learning process for all learners, but children whose home language is different from the school's language first need to familiarise themselves with a new language, and that inevitably takes time. Vollmer (2008) nevertheless clarifies that not all discourse in subject areas is based on CALP as a good

part of everyday classroom discourse uses language at a BICS level: for example, basic interactions between students and teachers and many instructions given by teachers to learners.

Furthermore, language in education is not just about learning how to read and write; therefore, school language strategy has concerns that extend beyond the correction of sentence structure, grammar and spelling, but is also concerned with assisting students in learning how to use a language as well as using the language to learn (Fillion, 1979). Language education therefore incorporates all the non-linguistic subjects, so that learning a subject always means learning a 'new' language at the same time; thus, language competence is a prerequisite for subject competence and is vital for success in education (Vollmer, 2008).

Finally, as Kranjc (2008) states, when we think in a language, culture enters our mind, because language is a cultural system where the meanings are culturally embedded and the forms and structures of language all have a cultural history behind them. This points to the challenges faced by learners whose language differs from the language used across the curriculum, as they not only need to master the school language to be able to learn, but they also need to learn the culture behind the language and perhaps the school and classroom's culture in order to succeed.

3.4.2 Minority languages and mainstream education: a connection needed?

For children, the development of language is a development of social existence into individuated persons and into culture.

(John-Steiner and Tatter, 1983)

In the sections above, much discussion has focussed on language across the curriculum and the development and significance of academic language. Cummins (2001) asserts that the mother tongue language is a key to a person's identity, so when such languages, together with the culture and experiences of a student, are not recognised and validated in classroom interactions, that student's starting point is clearly a hindrance. Some years earlier, Fishman (1984) argued that each language has a capacity to index,

symbolise and enact its associated culture more precisely, powerfully and fully than others do. By this, he means that all languages have such capacity and not just the one that is being given the responsibility and status. As such, language and culture are interrelated, so if learners are not able to use their own language in school and are made to use another language, it becomes much more difficult to fit into the school culture.

In line with this, Conteh and Brock (2010) stress the importance of a positive home-school link through which all the learning experiences (in home, community and school) of bilingual learners are valued and recognised. The authors explain that the learners' sense of belonging to their learning environment is essential in this process but suggest that this only happens in 'safe spaces', with teachers expressing a thorough understanding of the interrelationships that exist between language and a child's learning and identity. The importance of a positive relationship between educators and multilingual and multicultural learners was previously emphasised by Cummins (2001), who maintains that such relationships must be developed towards empowering and providing equal opportunities for these learners.

Different starting points mean that the learning of these children is inevitably not the same as those whose first language is used in school. Conteh (Brock and Conteh, 2011) therefore urges 'a need to find ways to dialogically construct policies which allow schools and communities to build on their own funds of knowledge in teaching, learning and assessment' (p.14). This, the author continues, is important when advocating *additive bilingualism*, a model of learning which is sociocultural and is for the benefit of all and not just some learners. The following section looks at bilingualism, and will examine Conteh's point about additive bilingualism in more detail.

3.4.3 Bilingualism and bilingual education

3.4.3.1 Bilingualism – the matter of rights and equality

Baker (2011) maintains that bilingualism is clearly about two languages, but deciding who can be called bilingual is not that simple. Berthold (2006) states that definitions of bilingualism are not consistent and that being considered bilingual can range from very basic to demanding a high level of second

language development. From another viewpoint, an individual who has second language ability in at least one of the four macro language skills (speaking, listening, reading or writing) can be called bilingual (Mcnamara, 1967), but in other cases bilingual is defined as having a native-like level, indistinguishable from native speakers in two languages (Oestreicher, 1974); (Bloomfield, 1933). In my work, bilingual will refer to individuals who are able to use two languages, but where the level of each language will depend on the demands created by their daily lives and the environment in which they live (García, 2009).

Bilingualism can be further classified into different categorizations, with the two main divisions being *societal bilingualism* and *individual bilingualism* (Baker, 2011; Berthold, 2006). The former can be further analysed into *horizontal bilingualism*, environments where two languages are awarded equal status in society and are used by certain groups of the population; and *vertical bilingualism*, societies where people can speak both dialects and official languages. *Individual bilingualism* refers to the personal extent of bilingualism and this will be the focus of my work. Of this, I will concentrate on circumstances and situations surrounding groups of individuals that contribute to them becoming bilinguals. This means that much of the discussion will be about the types of bilingualism which sculpt individuals and their communities into who they are and how and why they have become who they are.

Hall *et al.* (2001) divide bilingual learners in the United Kingdom into four different categories. The first is named *elite bilinguals*, who are from middle/upper class families that chose to travel to the United Kingdom for business, diplomatic or academic purposes. Bilingualism for these children is enriching; their home language is unlikely to be threatened and they are also less likely to experience educational disadvantage, even when their second language competence is not of a high level. The second group is *linguistic majorities*, who learn a second language due to their school offering a more prestigious minority or international language. *Bilingual families* refers to the third group, in which each parent speaks a different language, and although there may be some cultural or religious pressure on the children to become

bilinguals, they are free from external pressure. The last category is *linguistic minorities*, comprised of those with low social status, such as refugees, immigrants or ethnic minorities. Being bilingual and learning the language of the majority group is not optional for these children as both external and internal pressures are placed upon them.

Valdes and Figueroa's (1994) sixth aspect of bilingualism is named *circumstantial* and *elective bilingualism*. The authors claim that while the former has much to do with individual choice and there is no threat to the mother tongue (often the prestigious language), the latter refers to a situation where there is little or no choice and these individuals' mother tongue (often the disadvantaged language) is likely to be under threat of being replaced or weakened by the advantaged language. Elective bilingualism can be well demonstrated by an English-speaking person choosing to learn a foreign language, whereas cases in which linguistic minority groups or migrants in a country learn the language of the dominant group in order to survive would be circumstantial bilingualism. To equate this to Lambert's (1980) analysis, we can relate *elective bilingualism* to what Lambert titles *additive bilingualism* and *circumstantial bilingualism* shares many features with *subtractive bilingualism*. A question that then arises is that if given equal rights and full access to the educational, political, social and economic worlds, without first having to master the language of the majority, would many linguistic minority people in Vietnam, or Tibetans in China, choose to become bilinguals? Many of these people are representative of circumstantial or even subtractive bilingualism. This does not imply that bilingualism is a negative model, rather this refers to the matter of rights and situations in which humans are circumstantially forced to learn a language, with a cost that may involve the sacrifice of some or all aspects of their heritage, language and culture. This process may be regarded as *language shift*, resulting from a personal desire to improve social standing, vocational prospects, living standards and identity value (Edwards, 2002; Edwards, 1985). This process may simply reflect the harsh realities faced by the disadvantaged individuals of minority communities (Baker, 2011), which makes them believe that in order to attain

such desires they must leave some affiliation of their identity behind – language may be one such factor.

García (2009a), on the other hand, recognises a positive practice observed in children growing up speaking a language at home and another language at school. To her, these bilingual children are actively engaged in *bilingual languaging* or *translanguaging* and this is a positive aspect of bilingualism. The author uses this name to describe the act through which bilinguals access different linguistic features from the different languages that they know in order to maximise their communicative capacity and potential. While this shows some great practical benefits, such as an enhancement of communicative effectiveness or preciseness, García nevertheless remarks that the translanguaging facility is often disregarded by the education system worldwide, simply because of a negative perception relating to the different way in which bilingual children communicate when compared to their monolingual peers (García, 2009a).

Nevertheless, while the study of bilingualism is inundated with report findings stating positive effects on cognitive and linguistic development, such as metalinguistic awareness, creativity, visual-spatial abilities (Cummins, 1976; Cummins and Swain, 1986; Bialystok, 1991), this is not the case for subtractive bilingualism. Lambert (Lambert, 1984; Lambert, 1980) claims that positive outcomes are only from additive bilingualism, where the first language is prestigious and is in no way replaced by the second language, whereas in subtractive bilingualism, the first language is likely to be threatened by the acquisition of the second language. The loss of language, the author continues, will further result in the loss of cultural, ethnic and/or ethnolinguistic identity and this is particularly worrying for the heritage of many minority groups around the world.

3.4.3.2 Bilingual education: concerns and arguments

Baker (2011) calls for a distinction to be made between education where two languages are used and advocated, and the situation where language minority children study using a different language. The author observes that the term 'bilingual education' is sometimes mistakenly used in both situations

and concludes that only the former could be described as bilingual education, as the latter may well be a case where bilingual children are present but only one dominant language is used in the curricular content and for instruction. Defining the term more simplistically, Berthold (2006) describes bilingual education as educating a person through two languages, including his or her mother tongue and another language. This is also the meaning used when discussing bilingual education in this section.

Together with the cognitive benefits discussed above, bilingual language learning can also be seen as educational enrichment and the maintenance and development of culture (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 1976; Cummins, 1981a). According to a number of scholars and researchers in the field, despite bilingual education being beneficial for promoting children's cognition; the appreciation of other identities, their communities and cultures; and the maintenance and development of languages which are under threat of extinction (Cummins and Swain, 1986; Baker, 2011; Conteh, 2006), the development of bilingual education has so far been limited.

There have been diverse opinions about the introduction of bilingual programmes. Alexander and Baker (1992) fear that learning using bilingual education may result in negative labels being placed on the children, thereby affecting their self-esteem. Adler (1977) states that bilingualism may result in splitting personality and even in experiencing some emotional instability, or being detached from reality or withdrawn into the self. In other extreme points of view, bilingualism and multilingualism are even seen as a threat to civil peace, causing cultural fragmentation (Hirsch, 1988) or that it 'shuts doors to the larger world' (Schlesinger, 1998). Such arguments support monolingual education and bilingual education can even be seen as posing a threat by some governments. This is why the *submersion* model has been used and is still common in many countries, and Vietnam is no exception. This model of education depicts situations where minority language children are placed in classes where only the majority language is used for instruction, aiming to assimilate the minority language speakers, thereby producing only monolingualism (Baker, 2011; Berthold, 2006).

Baker and Jones (1998) point out that political realities can be one of the main causes hindering the development of bilingualism. These authors list Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom as leading examples of having dominant monolingual politicians and administrators who insist on an English-only approach. Brock and Conteh (2011) support these findings with an analysis of the bilingual education situation in England. Although showing some positive progress lately, the authors find that contradictory policies still exist and there is ignorance regarding the rights of bilingual children.

Not only do bilingual programmes face challenges in terms of their introduction, those that have been launched continue to be questioned by some scholars, who caution that programmes are not always positive and yet remain the best solution for problems of language diversity, especially for languages of non-dominant or minority groups. To Fishman (1984), even in societies where there is some political equality and cultural interdependence between underprivileged ethnolinguistic groups and dominant groups, the former group is still vulnerable in relation to the latter. This is because, the author maintains, the pattern of initially using the disadvantaged language intensively as the language of instruction at school, will finally and inevitably give way to the advantaged language as the student progresses through to higher grades. Language minority children are too often initially instructed using their home language as the classroom language, after which they switch to a second language (the majority language), usually within a year or two when these children are thought to be proficient enough in the second language to cope with curricular content. This is intended to rapidly assimilate the language minority speakers within the majority, with the aim of producing relative monolingualism (Freeman, 1998; Otheguy and Otto, 1980; De Mejía, 2002).

Viewed from a strategic, political perspective, educational authorities that aim to gradually and safely assimilate minority language speakers within the language of the majority, will likely implement this *transitional model* – starting with the mother tongue and then moving to the target language for school instruction (Baker, 2011). This intends to reduce the likelihood of

community and family opposition to the assimilation process, since the children's home language is still included although only initially and briefly. As Freeman (1998), de Mejia (2002), and Otheguy and Otto (1980) observe, this also aims to get the children to learn the target language, often the language of the majority and the authorities, as quickly as possible. As a result of the negatives associated with the *transitional model*, it has been strongly argued against by many scholars and researchers in recent educational debates (Cummins, 2000). This explains why Conteh (Brock and Conteh, 2011), as discussed in the above section, also stresses the need to implement an *additive*, not a *transitional* model of bilingualism, in her studies of England.

The use of home or minority languages during early years, to ensure that children have developed enough of the first language before starting the second, is based on language learning theories and supported by research findings which indicate that: learning the second language is more effective and faster when the child's first language has been fully developed; the child's first language development is more important than the amount of exposure to the target language; knowledge of the first language can be transferred to the second language; and children with concrete development of their mother tongue have better academic performance in the second language (Dutcher and Tucker, 1996; Cummins, 1976; Cummins and Swain, 1986; Baker, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013; Thomas and Collier, 1997). Further work from Swain, Lapkin, Rowen and Hart (Swain *et al.*, 1990) also identifies the importance of being proficient in the mother tongue before starting to learn a second language. According to these researchers, children who lack a firm foundation in their first language cannot learn a second language as effectively as those who already display a strong knowledge of their first language.

The threshold theory, first hypothesised by Cummins (1976) and Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977), also supports the view that it is disadvantageous to start learning a second language when insufficiently capable in the first language. This is concerned not only with acquiring a second language but also in acquiring that language academically. Thus,

academic proficiency transfers across languages, so students who are more successful in acquiring a second language are likely to be those who have already developed literacy in their first language. This indicates that attaining a first language tends to enhance the student's ability in learning a second language, as well as improving cognitive skills (Dutcher and Tucker, 1996). May, Hill and Tiakiwai (2004), a group of researchers in New Zealand, also found that students from Maori-speaking groups, who enrolled in schools where English was the language of instruction, were very likely to struggle with academic English and learning in general when their literacy basis in Maori was insufficient. Berthold (2006) builds on these positions and, whilst acknowledging the advantages of early bilingualism, subsequently concludes that literacy in the mother tongue language definitely adds something more than just literacy to second language acquisition. In his later work, Cummins (2000), however, warns that the relevance of the threshold hypothesis to policy and practice is still vague, and its main relevance lies in terms of the positive educational and linguistic outcomes associated with the development of both languages.

Returning to concerns about bilingual programmes and their influence in promoting minority languages and including pupils from diverse backgrounds, the issue can also be viewed from the proportion of each language used for instruction. Real power in society, such as in the state services and the professions, employs the advantaged language, and the major sciences and technology subjects in schools also use the dominant language, thereby placing additional strain on disadvantaged languages (Fishman, 1984). The author therefore affirms that the need to control the advantaged language and its functions appears to be as important as the necessity of fostering the disadvantaged language. Macnamara (1971) further states that even with mother-tongue medium programmes, schools alone cannot efficiently foster and maintain the development of the disadvantaged languages associated with minority groups. Efforts from wider society and all stakeholders as a whole are essential for any bilingual or multilingual programmes in schools to be effective and for the maintenance and development of ethnolinguistic groups.

3.4.3.3 Bilingualism and special education

A child is not to be taken as having a learning difficulty solely because the language (or form of the language) in which he is, or will be, taught is different from a language (or form of a language) which has at any time been spoken in his home.

(Department of Education and Science, 1981)

Children who learn in a language other than their mother tongue face greater difficulties than those who do not. Not only do they need to learn a new language but also learn academic content taught in a language with which they are not yet familiar. Explaining the low academic achievement of these children is not easy because educators often find it challenging to differentiate between learning difficulties and the second language barriers encountered by learners, as Hall *et al.* (2001) acknowledge. Examining this issue in the United Kingdom, these authors report that there are still cases where teachers equate low English skills with intelligence deficit or learning problems. They call for low English proficiency not to be regarded as an indication of learning difficulties or special educational needs, and that the two issues – special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and English as an additional language (EAL) – must be separated (Hall *et al.*, 2001).

In support of this, Baker (2007) reports that in the United States there have been cases revealed in court where language minority children were misdiagnosed as needing special education. Teachers in these cases were uncertain about children whose English was 'weak'; therefore, special education was recommended for them. Cummins (1985) stresses that when underachievement occurs, educators must first evaluate their own pedagogical methods as well as the learning programmes, followed by trying out other alternative approaches, before considering deficits in cognitive processing as another explanation.

Wrongly labelling children in these cases not only creates an unhealthy psychological impact on the learners but produces a risk that changes may be made to their learning environment which are not always necessary or appropriate. In the context of EAL and SEND, Wright (1991) expresses a

concern that confusing these two concepts can cause children to be wrongly labelled and may also result in creating a less challenging learning environment for them. From the BICS and CALP perspective previously discussed in the theory of learning section, we can see that obtaining 'academic language' is vitally important for second language learners to be successful. Providing a less challenging learning environment, where children's potential is not stretched, will just further delay these children from progressing their language level from BICS to CALP. Rodriguez (2005) also observes that children with special needs from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are often placed in classrooms where academic instruction for them is less challenging.

We can therefore see that in cases where educators believe that children's academic levels are much lower than their peers, leading to a less challenging learning environment being provided may further widen the language gap between these EAL learners and their peers, because their potential is not stretched as much. Clearly, this is not beneficial for these learners since many researchers confirm that students, including those with special needs who are from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, learn more effectively when the content covered is sufficiently challenging and well-structured (Smith and Sanders, 1981; Schunk, 1983; Brophy, 1986).

Misdiagnosing learners and confusion between special educational needs and learning in a second language is a complex issue and requires high levels of educator competence. Avis (1994) recognises the importance of a teacher's expertise in assessing their learners and states that such professionalism must start with the teacher training process. The author acknowledges that diversity issues need to be addressed during training so teachers can conquer any challenges that arise in their diverse classrooms, to enhance the learning experience and achievement of all their students.

In short, while the two groups, SEND and EAL, both have some distinctive learning needs, the required provision to meet the needs of each group is not the same. Problems encountered by EAL learners can be resolved when their language competence is being developed, but problems encountered by SEND learners (such as those with physical disabilities or

emotional/behavioural difficulties) require targeted support from a different group of specialists (Hall *et al.*, 2001). Sadly, though, such support may not always be available in many parts of the world, so teachers and educators are left to handle the issues on their own. More significantly, these teachers are not equipped, through their training, with the skills and knowledge required to identify and respond to the differences between learners with special educational needs and those with difficulties derived purely from learning in a second or additional language. I will further discuss this issue within the Vietnamese context in Chapter 6.

3.5 Education for All – language diversity and equal opportunities

In this section I will briefly examine the policies and practices relating to Education for All in different geographical areas, starting with countries that have language diversity issues that have been well studied and documented, which mostly equates to developed countries. This is followed by a section that concentrates more specifically on countries that are close to Vietnam, either geographically or in relation to their being developing countries. The latter description is necessarily more brief, compared to the review of developed countries, due to less literature having been produced, but it is essential that it is presented here in order to identify commonalities and differences with which to better analyse the Vietnam context that was discussed in the previous chapter.

3.5.1 International trends

No country has had more deliberate educational policies in transitioning their immigrant, refugee, and Native American populations to monolingualism as the United States.

(García, 2009)

The inclusion of minority languages in education in the United States has fluctuated over different periods, initially with restrictions applied to minority and indigenous languages but tolerating some European languages such as German, Spanish and French (García, 2009; Crawford, 2008). Such

tolerance slowly disappeared at later dates and an English-only policy was prevalent in the early twentieth century, which was later relaxed, and bilingual education gained a certain place in the arena. The debate, however, has never ceased, with new restrictions introduced again in 1981 with the passing of English-only laws that came into effect in the majority of states and which identified English as the sole language for government use (García, 2009; Crawford, 2008). García further notes that the term *bilingual education* has also become gradually less visible, which has created an environment of restricting the use of languages other than English, thereby negatively affecting several ethnolinguistic groups. The author notes, however, that in addition to monolingual education in the US today, some bilingual programmes can be observed, including: the *transitional model* (the first 1-3 years with 90-50% of home language instruction, which then increases to 90% of English instruction), which aims for linguistic assimilation; the *developmental model* (introduced for the first 5-6 years of schooling, starting with 90-50% in the home language, which then decreases to 50% and the other 50% is instructed in English), which aims for bilingualism, biliteracy and English academic achievement; and *two-way bilingual education* which is for both bilingual children and native English speakers (this starts with instruction of 90% in the home language and 10% in the other language, which then moves to the equal use of both languages) and targets bilingualism, biliteracy and English academic achievement. Despite this, the conclusion is that bilingual capacity in the country is poor due to attacks on bilingualism and bilingual education (García, 2009).

The European situation is no brighter than that in the United States, since some countries (such as Ireland and Estonia) did not approve the Charter of Regional or Minority Languages, which is part of the plurilingualism scheme that the Council of Europe has tried to promote (Baetens Beardsmore, 2009). The author adds that articles in the charter clearly specified that the aim of such a plurilingualism or multilingualism policy is not about equal rights for minority or regional languages in relation to the state's majority language but to provide support for non-discrimination against minority and regional languages. The countries are given several options in the policy, from having

minority languages as a subject taught in the school system, to using the language when teaching non-language subjects. Such flexibility means that when countries approve this charter, the education situation for minority language learners will still vary from country to country, and that adopting the policy does not always ensure great outcomes when it comes down to differences in implementation. The European countries that are reported to be leading in implementing bilingual programmes or promoting minority languages, such as England, Italy and Austria, still encounter numerous issues, one of which is where a member of a language minority may still be diagnosed as having special educational needs (the confusion between EAL and SENDs in England is discussed above).

Elsewhere internationally, the transitional model of education is used widely for indigenous people in Canada, Aboriginal people in Australia, the Khmer in Cambodia, and in various Latin American countries (Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, etc.). Paraguay, on the other hand, has taken the lead by moving beyond the transitional model to bilingual education (García, 2009). García also reports that African countries, despite struggling with the legacy of colonialism in education, have been rather successful with their transitional models of bilingualism, with the leading country being Nigeria, followed by Kenya, Ghana and Malawi. Botswana's model of bilingualism was thought to be very strong, where Setswana and English are used in turn, as either a language as a subject or as the language of instruction (Grades 1-4: Setswana is the medium of instruction and English is a subject; from Grade 5 onwards, this is switched, so that English becomes the medium of instruction while Setswana is taught as a subject) (García, 2009).

In South Africa, mother tongue education was advocated in 1997 for inclusion in bilingual and multilingual education systems (Heugh, 2000) and the country appears to have a more desirable model of bilingualism, using the *additive* rather than the *transitional* bilingual model (Banda, 2000). Banda also points out that bilingual education in the country does not extend to higher education, which affects people's attitudes, such as where minority language families request that their school-aged children be educated in their second language, which is usually English. The policy in this case appears to

be positive, but the monolingual orientation in higher education and in the public domain creates a different practice, where schools carry on teaching minority language learners in their second language, which could be English or Afrikaans (Banda, 2000).

India, with a background as a multilingual country, is described by Sridhar (1996) as continuously promoting the study of three languages in the education system, which are often Hindi, English and a regional language. Mohanty (2006) nevertheless reveals that roughly 80% of minority languages in India are endangered due to the hierarchical order by which only some languages have access to power and resources in the social domain, including education. The author finds that minority language children suffer from a subtractive effect on their mother tongue, due to learning in a submersion system where only the language of the dominant group is recognised. Mohanty *et al.* (2009) later indicate that as *language shift* has occurred in some parts of India, a number of minority languages have been weakened and pushed to the margins of society, and that has restricted the development of these ethnic communities as a whole. For Kond and Saora children in Orissa, the mismatch between home and school languages is responsible for children discontinuing school and for education failures, as observed by Mohanty, Panda and Pal (Mohanty *et al.*, 2010)

3.5.2 Regional trends

In moving nearer to my research location, this section reviews some bilingual education trends in countries geographically closer to Vietnam, including Nepal, Laos and Cambodia.

In Nepal, researchers reveal that teaching in mainstream education using only Nepali language has created a great constraint on the learning of language minority children. Kadel (2013) observes that while the children in her study enjoy learning in Nepali when it is their mother tongue, the linguistic minority children in the same class struggled to tell the teachers what their names were in their first lessons. These children felt that they were discriminated against after they had enrolled into the school and when the enrolment campaign was over.

The author also found that the education authorities placed the blame for this on the parents and the school. Furthermore, the parents of language minority children expressed a preference for public schools using English language as the language of instruction, so that their children would be on a level playing field when competing for jobs with Nepali speakers in the future. The author, however, points out that the authorities have admitted that they have not been able to develop any research-based evidence regarding the benefit and impact of mother tongue education, which further restricts people's understanding of the matter before making their choice for their children's education.

Kadel also finds that the majority of second-generation parents of linguistic minority children said that it was not just linguistic constraints they experienced but that they were also harassed and ridiculed for using their mother tongue both in and outside the education context. This perhaps emanates from some mutual understanding of their languages being undesirable; hence, for their children's future, it is best they go with the majority's language.

According to Ghimire (2013), minority language children in Nepal experience difficulties due to learning in a language that is unfamiliar to them. The author asserts that while employing the early transitional model, in which these children learn in their mother tongue for the first three years of primary school, may create a smooth transition for them, the practice of teaching Nepali and English as subjects during that period is not a good practice for the multilingual education model.

Concerning the undermining of indigenous language, culture and identity in Nepal, Phyak and Bui (2014) report that over 50,000 indigenous people protested in Kathmandu in 2012 to oppose the central government's monolingual and monocultural policy. Awasthi (2013) and Yadava (2007) also strongly criticise the government's aggression when imposing the Nepali language on linguistic minority learners at school, as well as the banning of minority languages in public spaces.

In Laos, researchers have expressed concern with the absence of research focusing on education for linguistic minority groups. As a result, there may be a deficit of deep understanding of the matter by stakeholders and donors, and these are the groups who wish to improve the education quality for minorities in the country (Cincotta-Segi, 2011; Souvanvixay *et al.*, 2002). Having lived and taught in Laos, I can see that the way the Laos government functions is somewhat similar to Vietnam, where the central government holds almost all the power and the lower levels of government at provincial and district levels act as messengers and supervisors for the central's government's policies to be implemented. Benson and Kosonen (2010) report that, although there have been calls for bilingual education programmes for linguistic minority learners, the implementation of such programmes has not been instituted. This means that all linguistic minority learners in Laos learn in the mainstream programme, in which the medium of instruction is Lao language. In addition, since there has been so little research conducted in the field, there is insufficient information as to how these minority learners have been coping and what challenges or opportunities are presented to them in mainstream education. In her study, however, Cincotta-Segi (2011) observes that some practices of bilingualism through monolingualism existed in all the classes she studied, where linguistic minority teachers used their mother tongue in their instructions and communications with students. The author also acknowledged that such practices were not common and that the majority of teacher talk was still in the Lao language. Nevertheless, their students continued using both languages, Lao and the mother tongue, simultaneously, both to their peers and to their teachers, and even when the teacher was speaking to them in Lao, quite often they would reply to the teacher in their mother tongue and the teacher did not seem to prohibit them from doing so (Cincotta-Segi, 2011).

Cambodia has an educational starting point lower than that of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and its neighbouring countries, due to the Khmer Rouge regime that was in power in the late 70s and early 80s, during which they specifically aimed at ending all forms of education in the country, to turn the nation into

an egalitarian peasant society (Sokhom, 2004). There has since been a great effort from the government and international aid groups to bring education to all groups of people in the country, including those belonging to linguistic minority groups. However, Sokhom (2004) remarks that linguistic minority children living in highland areas start at a disadvantage since many do not speak Khmer, the official and only language used in education. The author suggests that having to learn in the Khmer language is the main reason for many non-Khmer-speaking children, especially in the early years of primary school, having to retake school years. This perhaps explains why many non-Khmer-speaking children, instead of repeating the year, chose to discontinue schooling before fully completing primary education (MoEYS, 2004; Sokhom, 2004; Middleborg, 2005). The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in Cambodia reports of one highland area, where the majority of students come from linguistic minorities and who do not speak Khmer prior to their schooling. This area not only has a low enrolment rate to start with, but also in their first year of schooling only 48% were promoted to Year 2, meaning that over 50% of the children have to repeat Year 1. Furthermore, of those who did not progress automatically, only 25.2% chose to re-sit the year, while 26.7% chose to discontinue schooling at that time (MoEYS, 2004).

In an attempt to bring more linguistic minority children into school, or to bring education to linguistic minority learners, the government has opened up to international aid groups. These organisations have been studying bilingual programmes, in order to use the mother tongue at early stages of schooling for these children. There have since been a small number of projects piloted by these organisations, but mainstream education remains monolingual with only the Khmer language being used, and while the government is aware and open to suggestions, there is still no explicit policy for bilingual education in the country (UNESCO, 2007).

At the beginning of a UNESCO pilot project on bilingual education in Cambodia, Middleborg (2005) observed several difficulties, including reservations from the various levels of government about the very idea of mother tongue or bilingual education. In addition, the educational materials

were lacking cultural relevance and not many were readily adaptable to new terms and language. Added to the challenges faced were reservations from some of the villagers about formal education and how it failed to meet their needs, and about some of the educational content being inappropriate or going against the cultural norms in their areas.

At the end of the project, however, the author noted significant acceptance from villagers and elders regarding the necessity of education for their youngsters. Furthermore, certain other successes were observed, including many children having an opportunity to learn how to read and write in their own languages, after which the school board felt more confident in leading the community towards a more cohesive yet open-minded policy. The increased confidence amongst the community was perhaps partly to do with the programme being designed with cultural sensitivity, when adapting the national curriculum to include local knowledge, making the learning more relevant to the locals. The transitional model of bilingual education used in the first three years of primary education (Year 1: 80% local language to 20% Khmer, with the ratio changing to 60-40 in Year 2 and 30-70 in Year 3; leading to Year 4 with only Khmer being used at school) slowly helped these children to get used to learning in Khmer (Middleborg, 2005).

The implementation of projects that use minority languages to help linguistic minority children acquire Khmer, although still at the piloting stage, has already nurtured learners and has heightened communities' interest in education and literacy, both in their mother tongue and the national language (UNESCO, 2007).

This overview of the learning situation for linguistic minority groups in Vietnam's neighbouring countries has shown that most of them are struggling to develop their learning systems to incorporate language minorities, if indeed that is a policy objective.

3.5.3 Vietnam context

In Chapter 2, I briefly discussed the education system in Vietnam, pictured as being monolingual, in which only Vietnamese is the official language of instruction, which is believed to be problematic for different minority language

learners in the country. In reviewing the international context in this chapter, I would like to add the sections below to reflect on responses to the education situation in Vietnam, both in policy and in reality.

3.5.3.1 Policy level

Given the problems that linguistic minority students encounter in mainstream education, the Vietnamese government has attempted to introduce education policies to address these difficulties. Together with allowing 15 percent of the curricular content to be created by local teachers, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) also sets different educational goals, which allow minority students to pass national exams (those for graduation from secondary school and entrance to colleges and universities) with lower grades relative to the majority students. For instance, the guidelines from MOET to all higher education institutes in 2014 listed a number of students who were to receive priority in entrance exams to their institutes, so linguistic minority students from rural areas get 3.5 points added to their actual exam results. For example, if university A sets a pass score of 18 (out of 30) for the three subjects used in their entrance exam, linguistic minority students can pass with a minimum score of 14.5 (Bo Giao Duc Va Dao Tao, 2014)

Lower academic expectations from educators for linguistic minority students has over the decades created a sense of superiority of the majority over the minority groups. According to Cummins (2001), educators may intellectually constrain students for whom they have lower expectations, because they are less likely to provide opportunities for academic development for such students. If this is the case, improvements will require further support mechanisms to help these children to learn better, rather than merely reducing the level of their expected academic achievement. This will be challenging and difficult and will take time, because this is not only about changing practices in schools, but also the beliefs, awareness and perception of wider society regarding the minority groups in the country.

The pilot studies which I carried out before selecting my research school show that the teaching style in mainstream education in Vietnam still contains a large proportion of teacher-talk and student listening, so that

students only speak when asked. This is similar to the studies of Goodlad (2004) in schools in the United States, where the author observed that teaching still depends upon the use of authority, where learners are socially apathetic and where learning is passive and hands-off.

With regard to students learning in a language that is not the same as their home language, this model of education with non-active roles created for students provides additional challenges for them. This is because such a teaching style is likely to be in line with the 'context-reduced continuum' as termed and explained by Cummins (2001), because learning depends primarily on listening to the teacher and other aids are not used. This does not encourage learners to actively and contextually negotiate meaning while learning, so that much of the communication in classrooms relies heavily on linguistic prompts. To fully understand such communication, students must have a strong background in the grammar and vocabulary of the language being used. This is not often the case for children from multi-ethnic backgrounds, whose home language is often different from the language of instruction in schools (Cummins, 2001). Vietnam is no exception to this.

Nevertheless, there has recently been greater government awareness concerning minority language issues, which has resulted in a number of minority languages being introduced as subjects taught in schools. In this process of raising awareness, international development agencies are at the forefront of trying to support linguistic minority learners in mainstream education in Vietnam. The government has also lately allowed some pilot projects from international organisations working on aspects of education for minorities. The following section briefly looks at two cases that currently stand out amongst education projects for minorities in Vietnam. Whilst presenting the two cases, I will also provide comments from a theoretical perspective.

3.5.3.2 Bilingualism through monolingualism?

During a trip to Vietnam, I visited World Vision Vietnam (WVV), an international NGO that works on multiple aspects of the lives of children from disadvantaged groups and areas. This organisation has been trialling a pilot

project that uses competent bilingual parents as interpreters in monolingual classrooms in a remote area where many Thai ethnicity children are enrolled (Than Thi Ha, interviewed on 4 May 2011). This reflects the principle of bilingualism through monolingualism (Cummins and Swain, 1986), referring to the method where teaching staff still use the dominant language for instruction and where the curriculum is not written for bilinguals. The WVV project does not use bilingual teachers who can switch between and use two languages simultaneously, but bilingual mothers are invited into the classroom to work as teaching assistants cum interpreters for the teachers. Although this is being tested on a small scale in two different schools enrolling two groups of linguistic minority children, the project director has expressed delight when observing the positive progress shown by these children in mainstream classes where usually only Vietnamese is used for all curricular content (Than Thi Ha, 2011).

Cummins and Swain (1986), however, warn that the use of two languages at the same time, which McLaughlin (1978) terms a *mixing approach*, may result in children disregarding the language they do not understand and only focussing on the other, thereby lessening their motivation for learning the second language. These authors advocate the use of the two languages separated by lessons, subject content or by teacher – namely, a *separation approach*. Their arguments for the *separation approach* include: increased effort shown by students when trying to make sense of the new language; teachers being less likely to be exhausted by using the two languages simultaneously for a long period of time; and the distribution of each language being more likely to be under control.

There needs to be recognition, however, that WVV's final goal is not bilingualism, rather a smooth transition from home life to school life for linguistic minority children, who initially have had little or no command of the Vietnamese language – the language of instruction. For the Vietnam context, with restrictions on funding within the education sector, such an effort is laudable and can be counted as part of a collective struggle towards Education for All in the country.

3.5.3.3 Transitional model?

A much larger project, involving systematic implementation of a model of bilingual education, has been carried out by UNICEF, in cooperation with the MOET. This is titled 'Action research on mother tongue-based bilingual education: achieving quality, equitable education'. The project represents a model of *transitional* education, with the first three years (Pre-school to Year 2) of schooling using the mother tongue as the language of instruction and Vietnamese as a subject. From Year 3 to Year 5, the Vietnamese language is then used as the language of instruction, together with the minority language. These children are expected to be able to overcome the language barrier from Year 5 onwards, so that when they enter lower-secondary school (Year 6) they are expected to be comfortable when studying in monolingual Vietnamese schools. The project started in 2008 and is piloting in eight to ten classes in three provinces. Reporting the results after two years of implementation, UNICEF (2010) describes a steep rise in the academic achievement of minority children from the piloted classes, compared with others in mainstream. The failure rate for those in the pilot project was zero percent, whereas outside the project the failure rate was ten percent and the figures for those achieving excellent grades was 68 percent for the pilot and 28 percent for those outside. The report also describes the confidence and enjoyment of the children when going to school, as well as great satisfaction and pride of families and communities from observing their language being used in schools, not to mention their children outperforming their peers who are not part of the project sample (UNICEF, 2010).

While positive results have come from the project, it is still important for us to remember that this is not about equal opportunities for bilingual children; it is purely about making a transition to the monolingual system.

3.6 Research Questions

In Vietnam, there is an academic gap between linguistic minority and majority children, with commonly held negative perceptions of linguistic minority people in general and linguistic minority learners in particular. There

is also a lack of studies about Muong-speaking learners in mainstream education, so in combining these factors, I would like to observe Muong children at the lower end of the scale: namely, those who are struggling in mainstream education. Of these, I will study children in their first year of primary education, and I am interested in finding out where and how their difficulties started. My first research question is therefore:

In which way do some linguistic minority pupils become categorised as 'slow'?

Specifically, this question aims to examine the procedures and circumstances whereby some young linguistic minority learners in my study were becoming categorised as slow learners.

The second question stems from the first question and focuses on the consequences for these children.

What may happen to those categorised as 'slow'?

This question aims to research the outcomes for the slow learners.

With these questions in mind, I plan to look for answers in the context of my country, Vietnam, with a population of approximately 93.5 million people and 54 different ethnic groups (World Population Statistics, 2013).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature relating to identity and learner identity matters, as well as theories regarding multi-cultural and multilingual classrooms. In discussing this, language matters are thoroughly researched, including minority language learners in mainstream education and issues surrounding bilingual education, such as socioeconomic factors and assessment for linguistic minority learners. At policy level, a global examination of the current trends from both developed and developing countries has been discussed. Policies and practices in Vietnam are also conferred before I introduced my research questions. The next chapter reveals the methodology and methods used to look for answers to those proposed questions.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology for this research and how the research has been carried out. This study aims to seek some understanding of the learning contexts of children from linguistic minority groups in Vietnam and their teachers' contributions towards this learning process, as well their language patterns used in the classroom. I would therefore like to capture the real-life quality of settings. As such, an ethnographic approach has been used and case studies were selected.

In the first part, I will introduce ethnography and its place in the qualitative paradigm. In doing so I will also further clarify my ontological and epistemological stance, which originated in Chapter 3. I will then examine what the approach offers to my research, and in so doing explain why I have chosen such orientation for this study. The second part briefly focuses on the different methods used for data collection, after which I reveal how these methods can be made ethnographic. These discussions will therefore be both theoretical and practical. This is then followed by a short report on the piloting for the study which helped to decide the research field.

The third part will form a discussion of case studies in the research design. Details of data collection and analysis and the timeline will be discussed. A detailed example of data analysis is also illustrated to show how the main themes and then sub-themes were identified. The final section addresses ethical considerations, in which the research participants, data protection and the researcher's ethnics are discussed in turn. The conclusion to this chapter summarises what has been discussed here but also introduces what will be discussed in the three chapters that follow.

4.2 Ethnography

As already mentioned, an ethnographic approach is to be used in my research. However, I wish to clarify that I am not presenting an ethnography but using ethnographic principles through which to design and carry out my research. One may then ask, what is ethnography and what can it produce as part of an educational research? There have been a number of definitions from different scholars aiming to capture the notion of ethnography. In general, all definitions feature ethnography as the study of people in natural settings (Brewer, 2000): in order to make the study depict a culture and to get an understanding of things from the 'native point of view' of the participants (Malinowski, 1922); and to understand what actions or events mean to the people we seek to understand (Spradley, 2016). Gregory (Conteh *et al.*, 2005) takes this a little further when describing ethnography in education as giving a voice to ordinary people, whilst challenging the researcher to question what is often considered to be the natural order of things. Ethnography, as suggested by Wolcott (1975), has so much to offer towards trying to answer the questions of *what, who, why, and how*.

All these authors are aware that it is almost impossible for a researcher to conduct a study in a completely natural setting, as once the researcher is present then automatically there is some external input added to that environment that makes it less natural than it could be. Another explanation about the nature of ethnographic work which I find useful is that ethnography learns from a culture to seek meaning (Lutz, 1981) and tries to understand this meaning internally without letting the external world, brought in by the researcher, impose itself on such understanding. There will be challenges for the researcher as an ethnographer, as they must learn to include themselves in a culture in order to perceive the 'native point of view' (Malinowski, 1922) with minimal interference on the culture that is being researched. This challenge will inevitably need incorporating into the methods adopted and adapted by the researcher to collect their data, which I will discuss in a later section.

In my research, I am seeking the answers to the questions:

In which way do some linguistic minority pupils become categorised as 'slow'? and

What may happen to those categorised as 'slow'?

These questions in themselves could already suggest certain approaches, including using multiple methods to establish different views, while examining small samples in order to investigate the issue in depth. This means that an observational, qualitative research method, employing an ethnographic approach, would be ideal when seeking a deep knowledge and understanding of the questions being asked. My ontological stance is therefore linked to the research questions for which no right or wrong answers could be offered, rather seeking an understanding of what is happening to the people and their situations. In particular, such a stance is linked to my understanding of language and learning, which I presented in Chapter 3, as being a social practice that is influenced by and associated with culture. In this sense I am not a neutral individual but a researcher who is driven by a desire for social justice for my participants in the learning system in Vietnam.

These research questions and the answers I need to look for could also be considered as a guiding factor for me in following a more interpretivist position. In order to answer the questions, an in-depth study of the case is needed, with interpretations that are culturally and historically situated (Raddon, 2010). As such, interpretivism has much to offer.

I believe answers for the above research questions would require an emphasis on the presentation of the 'voice', power, and inclusion of the participants. This needs to be combined with a 'thick description' of the situation, requiring a willingness to immerse in the field, in order to seek empathetic understanding and to appreciate the significance of cultural and historical contextualisation, with the ultimate goal of representing the 'native's point of view', which are distinctive features of ethnography (Jones and Watt, 2010). This approach can therefore be seen as a perfect match for my requirements and it explains why an ethnographic approach is used for my research.

This study seeks to investigate two related questions regarding linguistic minority children in mainstream education in Vietnam, with the main focuses being the teacher and their in-class practices and the language, culture and all the interconnected features of identities that contribute towards the learning process of these children. Such research aims require the researcher, myself in this case, to be there in the field, in the school and classrooms to see, hear and to take notes of what is observed. I believe that no previously documented information, such as school reports or official reports from any source, could be sufficient or reliable enough to answer my questions. This is because I will be researching something that has not been previously studied in any detail. I can only address this with real-life observations and meetings with participants, if I am to look for such 'contextualised descriptions'. Also, I am studying particular cases of teachers from the Muong and Kinh groups teaching Muong minority children – there may be records about these students' academic achievements in tests, but what I am looking for has never been focused on or discussed in any papers in Vietnam. Once again, it is the understanding of language and learning that are the foundations for the identification and consideration of what I need to find out in my research.

Practically, the research environment in Vietnam does not allow for modern technologies and electronic devices to be used in research. For instance, there is no internet coverage available in most areas, making it impossible for an electronic survey to be carried out. Furthermore, the postal service for questionnaires and surveys can be unreliable and is also culturally unfamiliar (Napier *et al.*, 2004). Politically, Napier *et al.* (2004) further note that most official documentary information made available is unreliable. Research in Vietnam therefore requires the researcher to be there in the field, physically and directly meeting with participants to collect data, especially if the researcher needs a 'thick and contextualised description' of the data, which is what my research requires. Again, this is yet another indication of an ethnographic approach matching my research design, in which Jones (2010) posits that one of the ethnographers' worthwhile and important acts is

'getting out there' to reveal some hidden social worlds and to bring a difference to people's lives.

4.3 Data collection methods

The above section discusses the ethnographic approach and the advantages this methodology offers to my research. This includes capturing participants' activities and their points of view in real-life settings and understanding them in relation to all the socio-cultural layers with which they are associated, such as school, home and community. I will now discuss two major methods used in my research: participant observations, and interviews. In doing so, I will also discuss how they can be compatible with an ethnographic approach and how I intend to make use of them ethnographically.

4.3.1 Participant Observation

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) claim that participant observation is part of a researcher's fieldwork which involves different activities being performed by the researcher, including: reassuring the participants to gain their acceptance; incorporating field tactics to obtain the data; and recording data using field notes. When discussing gaining the acceptance of participants, Warren and Rasmussen (1977) maintain that much of the participant reaction to the observer-researcher is based on how they perceive the identity of the researcher from features including race, gender, age, and his or her appearance and outfits.

My identity as a member of the Kinh majority group and a head teacher from an international school in the capital city generally gives me smooth access to the field. However, being accepted in the field is not only at the level of being permitted to be there, but also the extent to which the researcher is perceived as being an insider by participants. I am aware that class teachers may feel intimidated when being observed by me, especially those who are from the minority group. I believe, however, that given adequate time spent in the field, combined with cultural sensitivity, any feeling of intimidation will soon fade away. The school that I intended to choose as my research location has only female teachers, which I see as an advantage for myself in

terms of inclusion. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) also observe that in female-dominated environments, advantages in fieldwork are open more to women researchers than male researchers. I, however, acknowledge that this female-only environment restricts my data from representing gender equity in the teacher participants.

For ethnographers, Gregory (Conteh *et al.*, 2005) affirms that the observations they make should be *emic* rather than *etic* – researchers must try to balance their identity to make sure they are both insiders and outsiders within the observed group. In my study, I must be aware that I am an observer and am not there as a teacher. Therefore, I am there to record and describe what is being observed and not to interpret and judge the situation based on my existing experience. I acknowledge that this could be challenging, since I am a teacher and also a Vietnamese person, which makes me very much an insider. However, I also recognise that this could be a strength, since I can quickly understand what to expect and see what is happening in the classroom, whereas an observer who is not a teacher may take a while to understand the classroom culture and textures and to understand certain in-class situations. Also, an observer who is a teacher but not Vietnamese may have little idea about the classroom context in our culture and so the way s/he sees, understands and interprets certain classroom situations may not be accurate or appropriate.

Other aspects of my identity could also carry certain advantages and maybe disadvantages, such as my gender, language and ethnicity. With the environment being female-dominated, advantages in fieldwork are open more for me, a woman researcher, than for a male researcher, as per Taylor and Bogdan's observation (1998), and I also feel I would be able to see and share the teachers' perspectives with some mutual understanding from being female myself. I would say it may be quicker or easier for me than for a male researcher, to empathise and see things from the perspective of these teachers, but I also acknowledge that this may lead to me being predictive, rather than objective, when trying to understand or interpret different situations. Within the research environment all documents and learning materials are in Vietnamese and all learning activities and interactions

between teachers and pupils are done in Vietnamese only. This creates some advantages for me, as I am able to understand what is going on immediately when observing or when listening to research participants responding to my questions. I, however, also acknowledge that there is a slight disadvantage from my not being able to understand Muong language, since I would not be able to understand some conversations between the children in informal contexts, such as when they are in the playground.

4.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are recognised as one of the predominant means for collecting data, with approximately 90 percent of studies in social sciences using interviews for their investigations (Brenner, 1981; Briggs, 1986). My research uses ethnography as an approach, and so making sure the method is ethnographic is important. Blommaert and Jie (2010) observe that often people collocate 'ethnographic' with 'interview', but these authors urge for more careful consideration when using this terminology. They believe fundamentally that there is nothing intrinsically ethnographic about an interview, nor that the research automatically becomes ethnographic just because an interview-based method is employed.

Spradley (2016) identifies ethnographic interviews as being a specific type of talking, which is very similar to the friendly conversation which takes place in social discourses, and this he refers to as a 'speech event'. Burgess (2006) also describes such interviews as conversations but with a purpose. For this reason, Blommaert and Jie (2010) advise researchers to avoid acting as an interviewer in this conversation, if they do not want their respondents to behave like interviewees. This adopting of roles may make participants become more selective when giving responses, hence reducing and restricting the richness of the data collected. Together with Spradley (2016), Conteh (Conteh *et al.*, 2005) and Briggs (1986) also affirm that the rapport between the interviewer and the participant in such interviews occupies an essential role.

When listing the important information that can be gained from ethnographic interviews, Blommaert and Jie (2010) emphasise that anecdotes are 'raw

diamonds', which they consider to be the best and most valuable facts that can be collected. This stresses that ethnographers should collect and record everything, and that all stories, including those provided during informal chit-chat, may be important facts which could have some connection to what is being researched. These authors also stress the significance of collecting what they title 'rubbish', for a richer picture of the environment being studied and a thicker ethnographical description (Blommaert and Jie, 2010). In a culture of being open and friendly like in Vietnam, there is fertile soil as so many stories are revealed and shared in conversations. Factoring this into ethnographic interviews, I believe this forms an additional advantage which could contribute to the success of this particular type of research method.

In my research, I make sure the interviews are conducted after I have spent some time with my participants and a somewhat trusting relationship has been established between us. I have not scheduled interview lengths and have left them as open opportunities for me to get the most out of the situation, as naturally as possible. I was also aware that the time used would depend on the specific participants and circumstances, but flexibility is needed as I would like to get data that is a thick, contextualised description.

4.4 Research design

Having discussed research methods in the above sections, I will now consider the design for my research, including case study design, the aims of the research, piloting the research, and the participants and how they were chosen. Details of my activities in the field, such as interviewing or observing participants will also be discussed, followed by a brief timeline to identify the time needed for the whole research to be completed.

4.4.1 Case study

Yin (2009) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that studies in-depth an existing phenomenon in a real-life context, particularly when the borderlines between that phenomenon and the context are indistinct. The author further asserts that case studies are very much compatible with explanatory questions such as 'how' and 'why'. Thomas (2010) summarises

that case studies represent what has been chosen for study and focus on one thing specifically, in-depth and from many angles.

In relation to my research, if I want to know the academic outcomes of children from linguistic minority groups in mainstream education, I can refer to records from the government and NGOs working in the education sector in Vietnam. However, because I want to identify explanations for such outcomes and to see why this has been the case, I need to gather a wider collection of data than just documentary information. Developing some case studies, working under an ethnographic approach, will not only ensure a wider variety of data, including documents, artefacts, interviews, and participant observations but will also allow me to study in-depth the topic being researched, in a real-life environment, with participants in the context where they live and learn.

Although my research questions, presented in the previous chapter, are 'what' questions, rather than 'why' and 'how' questions, the answers to those questions ultimately contribute some descriptions of the learning context of linguistic minority children in Vietnam and provide some explanation as to why this has been the case. In my research I believe the 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions are very much interrelated.

As my study focuses on a group of people, I would like to have multiple cases and not just a single case, in order for the data to be triangulated, and thereby becoming more reliable. Although I will observe a number of cases, given the time restrictions for a PhD study, I will investigate cases to different depths. Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) claim that when multiple cases are studied, one or two of them can be studied in detail and others can be investigated more cursorily to support the findings that may be drawn from the main cases. My case, in detail, is about four different six-year-old Muong students, in two classrooms, with five teachers from both Muong and Kinh groups. This will represent a mainstream primary school that mostly enrolls Muong minority students.

4.4.2 The aim

The main aim of my research is to find out how the minority language children at the lower end of learning achievement cope in the system and how, in which ways, their identity is constructed in a particular context – education. This aim will require me to observe teachers' in-class practices and their interactions with children in a specific context: classrooms and school. This will contribute to the answer of my first question that aims to find out ways in which these children become categorised as slow learners.

The aim will also require me to find out how the children cope in different contexts: home and school, and what happens to them once their identities are constructed in certain ways in their learning environment. This will help to answer my second research question which means finding out the consequences of these identities and the outcomes for the 'categorised' children.

4.4.3 Piloting and initial field visits

In order to know more about the linguistic minority groups which I am researching and to decide later on which group is to be chosen, I went back to Vietnam and made my way to three different schools in three different locations. Below are some facts.

4.4.3.1 Primary School A

The school is located approximately 105 kilometres north-west of Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. This area is home to some Thai ethnicity people, the second largest linguistic minority group in Vietnam (Kosonen, 2009), who live in lowland areas and are generally more advantaged than those from upland minorities (World Bank, 2009). A former pupil, of Thai ethnicity, who recently graduated from secondary school and who is also the first graduate from the village, took me to the school to introduce me to the head teacher. After a first few awkward minutes, when the head teacher did not seem very friendly towards the girl, she quickly changed her attitude after I took over the role of talking and introduced myself to her. The meeting went well, and at the end of the meeting I was invited to come back the next day to observe some classes. In both classes I observed the teachers were Thai ethnicity, but

during my time in the classroom, their communication and instructions for their Year 1 pupils, most of whom were Thai, were in Vietnamese only.

In a conversation with the head teacher later, I further found out that this school ranks amongst those that have a high number (up to 50 percent) of teachers who are from an ethnic minority, also the same ethnicity as most of their pupils. The children in this school in particular, and in the Thai ethnicity in general, do well in mainstream education and their enrolment rate for primary education is significantly higher than those for other ethnicities.

4.4.3.2 Primary School B

This school is located approximately 50 kilometres north-west of Hanoi. The geographical distance from the capital city seems small, but I was surprised to see how remote and untouched the area is. This area is home to mostly Muong ethnicity, the third biggest linguistic minority group in Vietnam, who usually live in lowland regions (GSO, 2006).

A friend introduced me by phone to a teacher at the school. This teacher even gave me a lift from my hotel to the school and she then introduced me to the head teacher and other colleagues. I was encouraged to visit as many classrooms as I could, by the head teacher. All the teachers were excited to invite me into their classrooms and some even got a bit disappointed when I ran out of time and was unable to visit their classes.

Over 90 percent of the pupils are Muong, who, when speaking to each other, use only the Muong language. The teachers in the school are comprised of 80 percent from the Kinh majority and 20 percent Muong. From what I observed, I could see that the children in this school are not as well-dressed as those from the previous school and conversations with the head teacher, and then the classroom teachers revealed that the children from this ethnicity are mostly from poor families. Their academic performance is also not at the same level as the Thai children, and repeating classes is still a reality for some pupils.

4.4.3.3 Primary School C

This school is located in a province which is 215 kilometres north of Hanoi. This is the most remote of the three schools visited, and the ethnicity in this

area, the Dao, also rank among the poorest of all linguistic minority groups in Vietnam. This area is close to my parents' village, where I spent 13 years of my childhood.

A motorbike ride is needed from the little train station to go to the school, which is across a dam, where a stream runs into the Red River. There was no issue with access through gatekeeping, as a teacher whom I have known since childhood, took me to the school. The head teacher and all the other teachers were very warm towards me and seemed to see me as a returning member of the community.

Almost all the children in the school are Dao, whose people are highland or hillside residents. The teachers, in contrast, are all from the majority Kinh group, who mostly live in nearby villages and none of whom could speak the Dao language. The academic performance of the children, according to the teachers, is expected to be low, and many children never complete primary school.

4.4.3.4 Common facts

- There is a complete absence of any minority language and culture in the school learning programme. As presented in section 2.2 of Chapter 2, the government decided to make changes to the then national curriculum, in which a window of 15% is spared for the local DOET or BOET to adapt for their local context, so local languages, cultures, traditions and history can be added to the learning programme (Nguyen, 1999; MOET *et al.*, 2004). During observations, I did not see any of the 15% curriculum window being used for such purposes in the three schools visited, and none of these schools has included any local language in their teaching and learning programmes, whether formally or informally. All of them used exactly the same standard textbooks and teaching programmes designed by the MOET, and there was nothing intrinsically 'local' about their teaching and learning activities at all. This was a little surprising to me, because in 1999, the author Dao (Nguyen, 1999) already reported that no guidance had been given to the local teachers, so there was

much confusion as to how they should use the 15% curriculum window. It appears that this is yet to be addressed.

- All the children speak to each other in their minority languages, both in classrooms and in the playground. Although the first point listed above commented on the complete absence of the local or linguistic minority language being included in the learning programme, in informal settings when conversations between teachers and students are not required, the children would speak to each other in their local language only.
- Speaking a minority language loudly in the classroom may lead to an immediate reprimand from the teacher, so in-class conversations in the mother tongue are mostly whispered.
- All teachers, including those from ethnic minorities, use only Vietnamese with their pupils. This, I suspect, is because Vietnamese is the official language and the only one used in the education system, so using a language other than Vietnamese in classrooms is not desirable and is discouraged.

4.4.3.5 Statement of preference

Having looked practically at the research possibilities in the three schools that I visited, I placed Primary School B as the first choice location for conducting the research. Justification for this preference is based on practicality and feasibility factors presented in the justification of participants section below.

The following figure captures the overall process of piloting before my data collection started.

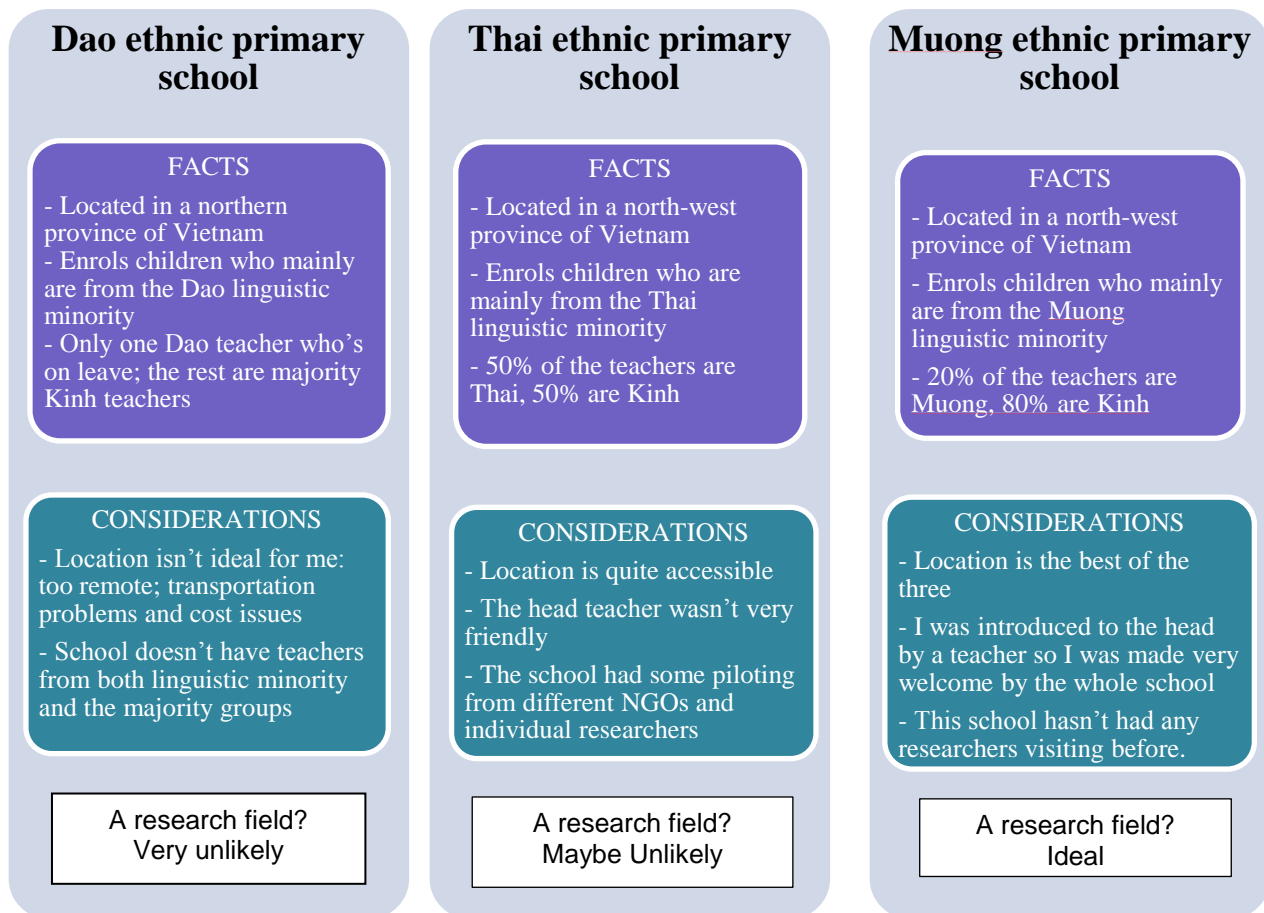


Figure 2: Piloting schools

4.4.4 Participants

- Four linguistic minority Muong children from Year 1 were chosen. Of the four, one was in a class where the class teacher is from the majority Kinh group and the other three were with a class teacher who is from the Muong minority
- The families and communities of these four children were also studied to get deeper descriptions of the learning context
- Five teachers: three from the majority Kinh and two from the minority Muong group
- The head teacher and the deputy head are both from the majority Kinh group

As described above, my research uses an ethnographic case study approach within a survey of the situation in Vietnam, and I believe the number of participants proposed is sufficient and will provide adequate data for my research.

The table below portrays the pupil and teacher participants. All the names have already been coded.

Table 1: Pupil participants (and their families)

| Name | Gender | Age | Class | Ethnicity | Note |
|------------|--------|-----|-------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. Quyen | Female | 6 | 1B | Muong | |
| 2. Hoanh | Female | 6 | 1B | Muong | |
| 3. Khuong | Male | 6 | 1B | Muong | |
| 4. Nghieng | Male | 7 | 1A | Muong | Repeating year |

Table 2: Teacher participants

| Names | Teacher | Years of experience | Ethnicity |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1. Ms Phuong | 1B class teacher | 26 years | Muong |
| 2. Ms Quang | 1A class teacher | 27 years | Kinh |
| 3. Ms Luyen | Mathematics teacher | 27 years | Kinh |
| 4. Ms Kieu | PE + Art & Craft | 12 years | Kinh |
| 5. Ms Tram Anh | Music teacher | 7 years | Muong |
| 6. Ms Quynh | Head teacher | 24 years | Kinh |
| 7. Ms Hai Yen | Deputy head | 27 years | Kinh |

4.4.5 Justification of participants

The chosen participants were from Primary School B, a school which enrolls a large number of children from the Muong ethnic minority. I decided to choose this school and this ethnicity based on the criteria below.

From my observations and a brief talk with the school head and the teachers, it seems that nobody has done a research study here before. There have been a number of schools that enrol children from linguistic minority groups around the country, where international organisations have tried out some pilot projects. I would like to avoid these, because I would like to study a sample of what is really happening in a normal mainstream school. Those that are familiar with international researchers, or international organisations working in education, may decide to predict or dictate what a researcher would like to see and to hear, so they may try to act in response to such perceived expectations. In that case, I may be limited by the head teacher as to which classes I could observe. In other words, my freedom for selecting classes, teachers and pupils may be restricted; hence, the results of the data may be biased.

There have been very few studies of the Muong ethnic minority, compared to the others, such as the H'mong or Thai, despite the Muong being the third largest minority group in Vietnam (GSO, 2006). A careful study should add to the current knowledge and understanding of the learning situation for Muong children in mainstream education.

The selected school had teachers from both the majority and minority groups, and this would provide me an opportunity to study and to get the perspectives from both groups of teachers (monolingual Vietnamese and bilingual Vietnamese-Muong) regarding teaching and learning in the Vietnamese monolingual system. This is not the case for Primary School C, which enrolls Dao minority children. This is because not all linguistic minority groups in Vietnam have teachers from that ethnic group, which is due to the low educational achievements of many minority groups. As a result, most pupils never make it to the end of high school, let alone go on to further or vocational training colleges (ADB, 2007).

As compared to the other two schools considered, the chosen research location was not too remote, only two hours on the bus from Hanoi, which saved time on travelling, thereby giving me more time to be spent in the field collecting richer data, not to mention the cost savings. I need to add that travelling by train in Vietnam for a distance of 200 kilometres can take roughly seven to eight hours; plus trains in Vietnam are not well designed with tables or power sockets to allow people to work and are often too crowded to even move around in. For the security of data collected and for contacting my supervisors during this period, I needed a reliable internet connection in the city, so this worked well for me given that I would need to travel back and forth to the capital city often.

4.4.6 Interviews

4.4.6.1 Interviews with teachers

The teachers took part in some unstructured and semi-structured interviews, concentrating on: the circumstances that had brought them to the school; their personal perspectives on teaching in a multi-cultural classroom; how they see themselves and their role in this setting; the concerns and

difficulties (if any) experienced by themselves or by their pupils; and their preparation for working with children from diverse cultures, many of whom do not have a shared language with their teacher, if that teacher is from the majority group.

Administration: the interviews were both short and long, depending on the time availability of the teacher and what they had to say. As an ethnographic approach was used, later interviews were sometimes used to follow up and add to previous ones. The interviews were all face-to-face and mostly on the school campus. The overall aims of the interviews were explained beforehand, together with seeking approval for using a voice recorder. I often asked for a quiet meeting room, in which to conduct the interviews, as schools in Vietnam are very noisy, but sometimes it was recess time and the children were outside in the school yard. I also chatted with the teachers inside the classrooms. The interviews were mostly recorded using the voice recorder, but I sometimes also took notes during interviews to make sure of getting the richest data – gestures and non-verbal communication that cannot be recorded were noted.

4.4.6.2 Interviews with the head teacher and the deputy head

The head teacher and the deputy head took part in some semi-structured interviews, concentrating on: working with children and families from diverse cultures, who do not often have a shared language with the head teacher (almost all head teachers in mainstream education in Vietnam are from the majority group); cooperation between school, families and local communities; and working in an environment where teachers are from different ethnic groups.

Administration: the interviews were conducted face-to-face and the overall aims of the interviews were also explained beforehand, together with requesting an agreement for the voice recorder to be used. The times and lengths of each interview were always flexible, mostly depending on the time available as well as the topic we talked about. Interviews sometimes were carried out in the head teacher's room at the school, which is generally a good way of avoiding noise and any distractions, but some of the interviews

were also done at her home. Data were recorded with a voice recorder, together with note-taking.

4.4.6.3 Interviews with parents

Some parents took part in unstructured or semi-structured interviews, concentrating on their child's learning and how it takes place at home. Sometimes our conversations looked at: their home situation in general, so we could focus on home support and whether this is affected in any way by the language at home not being the same at that used in school; parents' perspectives on sending their children into mainstream education; and their expectations, etc.

Administration: the interviews were conducted face-to-face at their homes. My initial plan was that I may need an interpreter for the interviews with parents and families. However, after visiting the region and talking to local linguistic minority people, I realised that their verbal Vietnamese is very fluent and this was the case with my research children's families. This is perhaps because mainstream education in Vietnam has been conducted solely through the Vietnamese language for some time, and also possibly because the Muong ethnicity is a lowland minority group, who live amongst Kinh people, so they would use Vietnamese more often than other linguistic minority groups in remote areas. My original plan was that I would choose to interview in Vietnamese language but if, after assessing the situation, I realised the parent's Vietnamese language was not competent for comprehensible conversations, then I would employ an interpreter from the Muong ethnicity. After spending just one week in the region, I realised an interpreter was definitely not needed for this area and for this ethnic group. This was a great advantage for me since I could communicate directly with the families rather than through an interpreter.

The times and lengths of each interview were rather flexible. Interviews were carried out in their homes and were recorded with a voice recorder, together with note-taking.

4.4.6.4 Interviews with children

Child participants were informally interviewed, mostly in the form of chatting and talking with each other – this was structured as friendly conversations to follow up observations, in order to seek clarification and explanations from the children. To make the children feel at ease, I sometimes gathered them in small focus groups for informal chats and discussions, and sometimes chatted one-to-one at their homes when I visited them.

Administration and analysis: the interviews were all done face-to-face. The times and lengths of each interview were also very flexible. Interviews were carried out in the classroom or at home, depending on feasibility of time and venue. The collective information from these ‘interviews’ contributed to a descriptive summary which addresses the aims of my research and contributes to the answers of both my research questions.

4.4.6.5 Processing and analysing the interview data

After the interview or after audio files were recorded, listening was done over and over again to identify the key sections that needed detailed transcription. The recorded data was reheard and transcribed within a few days of the interview. This was because it may have been difficult to find a quiet place for conducting interviews, without background noise and disruption, so the earlier the interview was transcribed, the more precise the information transcribed would be. This means I could combine the notes with memory, in case any disruptive sounds on the recorder were too much. The combination of recordings and notes also allows me to match the content of recorded conversations with non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, body gestures and the way the participant expresses ideas or answers a question. These are important aspects that need taking into account when analysing an interview because much of communication is conveyed by ‘things other than language’ (Liddicoat, 2011). The information from these interviews contributes towards a descriptive summary directed at the aims of my research and provides further assistance towards answering the research questions.

Transcriptions and analysis

NVIVO software was used when compiling the interview data, which shows the timespan automatically and also allows for the precise playback of transcribed data in each timespan for cross-checking. The data were transcribed selectively and illustratively but not entirely. However, selectively does not mean randomly, because I consciously listened through all the recordings and conversations and filtered them for themes or topics that closely related to my study. Particularly, I transcribed all the recorded audio files associated with my research participants (because I interviewed a wide range of teachers before focusing on just those I had chosen to be my participants) to get the basic idea of the content being discussed. After that, I filtered the data on the basis that they must be related to the learning ecology of my research participants and should contribute towards answering the research questions – such information was later transcribed. Once this was identified, I then went back to the transcriptions and added extra non-verbal cues, the Vietnamese tones and additional descriptions of the context at the time of interviewing or recording. These extra descriptions are put in brackets and are written in English using an italic font, while the transcriptions for oral conversations are transcribed in Vietnamese – the language used throughout the conversations. Also added in brackets are words that were omitted during conversations, so for grammatical accuracy and greater clarity I put these omitted words in brackets in the places where they should be.

NVivo software presents transcriptions in four columns, with the first being the section count, the second the timespan, the third the content, and the last column is for any notes. Below are also some examples of transcriptions where I only show the two main columns – timespan and content. Here, I have also added tones to the language, as Vietnamese is tonal with six tones placed above or below the letters: *huyền* (̀) – *sắc* (´) – *hỏi* (´) – *ngã* (ˋ) – *nặng* (ˊ) – *không* (tone zero). The reason I did not put tones in the transcripts in NVivo is because: 1) adding tones takes much longer to type; and 2) native Vietnamese speakers can read and write the language without tones, and this is a common practice, especially for personal usage. One would think that without the tones there would be some words that could be

misunderstood, but given that I was the interviewer and the transcriber myself, I had no problem reading and understanding these transcripts precisely without tones. Therefore, adding tones to NVivo transcripts is unnecessary for my purposes, but for my readers' convenience, any transcriptions that are included in this thesis will have the exact tones added to them.

File: Voice009_5: Visit to Hoanh and Quyen's home

The sample here shows the exact version exported from NVivo, in which there are three columns with the Vietnamese language written without tones

| Timespan | Content | Note |
|------------------|--|------|
| 2:21.7 2:54.3 | - <i>*Little brother's voice (inaudible)</i> C: huh? C: the con co biet sang nam ai la co giao chu nhiem cua con ko? H: ko a C: ko a? C: the sao hom nay con lai khong di den tap trung? H: Hom nay em con phai trong.. ah..hom nay em con phai trong em cua con a C: hom nay trong em a? H: Da C: the sao... H: bo day sang som di Kim Boi mat, con me day som de di lam a. | |

The sample below is the same file and as stated earlier this has added tones and was trimmed down to only two columns as I want to show the content and the way the content is presented. The writing in italics and in English denotes my description of the context or what happened during the conversation. The underlined words denote specific vocabulary or a word that must be kept as originally spoken, as it could be names of items, which if changed would alter the meaning. The multiple dots signal pauses during speech and when these are at the end of a sentence that means it is unfinished speech.

| Timespan | Content |
|------------------|--|
| 2:21.7 2:54.3 | <p>- *<i>Little brother's voice (inaudible)</i></p> <p>C: huh?</p> <p>C: Thế con có biết sang năm ai là cô giáo chủ nhiệm của con không?</p> <p>H: Không ạ</p> <p>C: Không à?</p> <p>C: Thế sao hôm nay con lại không đi đến tập trung?</p> <p>H: Hôm nay em còn phải trông...ahh...Hôm nay em còn phải trông em của con ạ.</p> <p>C: Hôm nay trông em á?</p> <p>H: Dạ Dạ</p> <p>C: thế sao...</p> <p>H: Bố dậy sáng sớm đi Kim Bôi mát, còn mẹ dậy sớm để đi làm ạ</p> |
| 2:54.2 3:19.5 | <p>-</p> <p>C: Bố đi Kim Bôi, mẹ đi làm à?</p> <p>H: dạ</p> <p>C: Thế...thế sao không gửi em ở nhà ông bà để đi tập trung?</p> <p>H: ông bà không có ở nhà ạ.. Ông bà phải đi gặt lúa ạ</p> <p>C: Ông bà đi gặt lúa à?</p> <p>H: dạ</p> <p>C Thế hôm nay , hôm nay sao bố mẹ không đưa em đi lên trường mầm non?:</p> <p>H: bố mẹ không có <u>giấy ăn</u> ạ.</p> <p>C: Không có gì?</p> <p>Q: <u>Phiếu ăn</u>.</p> <p>H Phiếu ăn ạ.</p> <p>C: Không có phiếu ăn á?</p> |
| 3:19.5 3:48.9 | <p>-</p> <p>C: Phiếu ăn là ở đâu?</p> <p>Q/H: ở dưới trường ạ. 10 nghìn 1 cái ạ</p> <p>C: 10 nghìn 1 cái à?</p> <p>H: Dạ</p> <p>C: à thế là đi học buổi sáng đưa em đến là phải mua phiếu ăn à?</p> <p>H/Q: (together) dạ</p> <p>C: Thế không có phiếu ăn thì không được đi học à?</p> <p>Q: Dạ! còn phải đóng tiền học nữa cơ ạ.</p> <p>C: Thế.. thế em đã nghỉ học ở nhà được bao lâu rồi?</p> <p>Q: Được mấy ngày rồi ạ.</p> <p>C: Thế à? (<i>the little boy said something inaudible</i>)</p> <p>H: :Đi học, nếu không có phiếu ăn lại nghỉ ạ.</p> |

This is a conversation between me and the two girl participants, and this section in particular is about me trying to find out why the girls did not come to school that day for their final assembly. The information given to me by the girls adds much more detail as compared to what their mother had said. The mother simply told me that the girls stayed at home to babysit their little brother, while the girls added that their brother could not attend kindergarten

for the last few days due to the parents being unable to pay the tuition fees or to purchase lunch vouchers for him, so he had to stay at home.

In addition to the transcribing codes described above, in this content the writing in brackets shows either that I added words or subjects omitted by the speakers for the sentence to make sense grammatically, or that I clarified any ambiguity in the words used in the conversation. The italic writing for this section does not only denote my description of the context or what happened during the conversation, but also acts as my personal notes and comments on the content's validity.

| Timespan | Content |
|-----------------|---|
| 0:05.9 - 0:31.1 | <p>C: Chị bảo này, thế cô Phượng đã thông báo là năm nay chúng nó (Hoành and Quyên) lên lớp hay ở lại đấy? M: À (em) cũng chưa nghe thấy thông báo gì đâu chị ạ C: Chưa có thông báo à? Thế nó (the children) về nó có nói gì ko? M: Ko cũng chưa nghe thấy thông báo gì cả, mà cũng chẳng nghe thấy chúng nó nói đến gì cả. Con bé (my children) nó bảo là hôm nay chỉ đi tập trung mà chơi thôi mẹ ạ, đi tập văn nghệ thôi, hôm nay mỗi tập trung, thế mà C: thế nó bảo hôm nay đi tập trung thì (em) lại bảo với nó là ở nhà cũng được à? M: KHÔNG, (em) bảo là, à... thế con đi lên tập trung</p> |
| 0:31.1 - 0:56.7 | <p>đi, thế (nó?) bảo là thế ko có ai trông em, thế (em) bảo để mẹ gửi em vào trong nội, nhưng mà vào bà nội lại ko có ai trông em cho thế là 2 đưa lại phải ở nhà trông em <i>(This information wasn't adequate as the children told more of a different story)</i> C: à thế à (M: vâng) thế bố nó đi đâu mà lại ko có nhà? M: Nhà em đi xe khách ở trong Kim Bôi chị ạ C: Cả hai vợ chồng à? M: không em thì đi làm ở ngoài khu công nghiệp chị ạ C: Bây giờ em đi làm gì? M: Em đi may ngoài khu công nghiệp chị ạ</p> |
| 0:56.6 - 1:12.3 | <p>C: à thế à (M: vâng) thế buổi trưa có ai về ko? M: Trưa có bố cháu về đấy ạ <i>(this information wasn't accurate, as their dad was nowhere to be seen at lunchtime)</i> C: à thế à (M: vâng) ừ thế thôi thế tý nữa chị sẽ qua nhà chị nói chuyện với nó, nhà M: dạ vâng...cám... (on chi?) C: Ừ thế nhé M: vâng em chào chị, vâng.</p> |

(File: Voice009_4: Conversation with Hoanh and Quyên's mum)

For instance, in minute 0:56.6 - 1:12.3, the note in italics is: *'this information wasn't accurate, as their dad was nowhere to be seen at lunchtime'*. This was noted after the transcription of a home visit to show that the children's father was not at home during lunchtime but in the conversation here the mother firmly stated that her husband would be home at that time.

The above transcribed data is a conversation with the two girl participants' mother, who explained why they had been absent from school today. She clearly stressed that the girls told her that that day was all about meeting and singing, as though she wanted to communicate with me about this being unimportant - 'meeting and singing only' - to justify her daughters being absent. However, she also admitted that the girls had to stay at home to look after their brother since their grandmothers were busy.

The samples above show transcriptions in Vietnamese language. In fact all the audio files were transcribed in Vietnamese – the language used in the interviews. However, when analysing these data, I actually used English while reading these Vietnamese transcriptions. In other words, rather than translating the transcripts into English before analysing, I left them in the original language recorded and analysed directly from there. This is because I would like to keep the data as original as possible and to avoid translating the data unnecessarily. Only those data used as samples, to illustrate points I am trying to make, have been translated into English. I perceive my being bilingual in Vietnamese and English as an advantage when doing this because not only do I understand exactly what is going on in my interviews, I also keep the transcription language as the original while, still analysing in another language.

For example, using the above conversation transcripts plus other data collected, the following English analysis was produced.

Most families in the studied region are not financially well-off since most of their incomes are from low-tech farming, which mostly is just enough to provide food for the family. Families who are not farm owners struggle more since they rely heavily on wages from the casual work in which they may be employed, such as Nghieng's father

or Hoanh and Quyen's parents. Such employment can be seasonal or occasional, putting them in further difficulty during times when they are not employed. Such financial problems result in these children missing schooling for various reasons, such as failing to pay tuition fees; failing to purchase a lunch voucher; or house/child minding when their parents go to work. (Chapter 6, section 6.1.3)

It is not easy for the parents to share their difficult situations with outsiders, including myself and the class teacher. The mother would relate the issue differently, or avoid providing too many details, as though she were embarrassed about such a situation and was perhaps worried that she may be blamed for her children's poor attendance, which to me is understandable. This, however, may not help her children since they lose the chance to gain the teachers' understanding of the whole situation (Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.1.1)

While focusing on the detailed transcriptions, I was aware I should concentrate on two linguistic aspects – the use of language and non-verbal cues, and phenomenological content. In particular, from the transcriptions, I focused more on the meanings which my participants made in their utterances and the way they expressed themselves. Nevertheless, there is some linguistic analysis, such as that relating to the accuracy of the language used by some participants in order to prove some point I was trying to make. For example, minute 2:54.2 - 3:19.5 on audio file Voice009_5 shown in the above samples, which says:

C: Thế hôm nay , hôm nay sao bố mẹ không đưa em đi lên trường mầm non? (Why didn't your parents send your little brother to kindergarten today?)

H: bố mẹ không có giấy ăn ạ. (Parents don't have *napkin*)

C: Không có gì? (Don't have what?)

Q: Phiếu ăn. (Meal voucher)

H: Phiếu ăn ạ. (Meal voucher)

C: Không có phiếu ăn á? (No meal voucher?)

In this sample I underlined the words giấy ăn and phiếu ăn, as one means *napkin* and the other means *meal voucher* and this shows that the wrong word used by the older sister was immediately spotted and corrected by her

younger sister. My transcription and analysis acknowledge this linguistic importance here, as it helps to show Vietnamese language competence in spotting the wrong choice of words and then correcting each other. This evidence differs from the opinion that most others have made of these children – that they are slow and not very smart pupils.

4.4.7 Participant observations

In the focal school, I observed two classrooms whilst the classes were in progress. This was to get data about the patterns of lessons carried out by the teachers and pupils, and to examine exactly what was happening in classes and how the children who are perceived as slow learners were coping in different lessons. As specified in the case study section, I looked at four classrooms initially: two from Year 2 and two from Year 1. After further assessment and observation of the four groups, I decided to concentrate on only two Year 1 classes, as my interest grew more towards the group of slow learners who were at the early stage of learning in the primary school.

I originally planned to study in the field for four to six consecutive months, but after spending a few weeks there, I decided to extend my fieldwork period to the whole academic year and then to follow up with the children as the new school year started. This is because my initial interest, before going to the field, was to study class settings arranged by the two different groups of teachers – majority Vietnamese and minority Muong teachers, as well as considering whether different teachers' identities (ethnicities) would result in different languages (Vietnamese or Muong) being used in the classroom. However, after observing the school and the classes for a few weeks, I realised that a homogeneous system is employed using one national curriculum, so the teachers' identities in my context do not mean much, as all teachers must carry out synchronised, identical teaching tasks with the same textbooks and learning materials and using the Vietnamese language only. There is no room for any flexibility as to which language and materials they could use in their teaching. Similar to the teachers, those pupils who are from the Muong minority speak to each other in their home language, whenever they can, as long as the conversation is not formal (talking to the teacher, for

example). The linguistic situation in both classes is pretty much identical, regardless of one class teacher being Muong and the other Vietnamese. In addition to realising that this aspect of my original research focus was not so significant here, I was immediately interested by the fact that some children had been categorised as slow learners by their teachers and peers, even at this very early stage of the school year. I then decided to find out more about this and so my research interest shifted, as I was determined to find out.

- *In which way do linguistic minority pupils (in my research) become categorised as slow learners? and*
- *What may happen to those being categorised as 'slow'?*

If I had stuck with the original plan which scheduled a shorter period for data collection, I would not have been able to follow up and observe the children for the full school year, whereas the first research question must be answered in a very informative way requiring the collection of rich data. To find out how these children become categorised as slow learners, I realised I would need to study throughout the entire school year, to witness the whole process of such categorisation, rather than observing one period in this process only. Furthermore, to answer the second question requires understanding of the consequences for these children after they become categorised as slow learners, which definitely required that I be there longer to find answers. This is because 'consequences' in this context also means the final outcomes for these learners and how their fates are decided by the learning system – such outcomes are only presented at the end of the school year. It was therefore not optional as to whether or not I should extend the data collection period – it was essential in order to search for reliable and valid answers to my research questions. In fact, the data collection period finally lasted longer than one academic year, as after the first year the situation for my research participants changed and some of them had to repeat the school year. I then decided to carry out some additional visits during the following school year to briefly observe whether their situation in the repeat year was similar to what had previously been observed with one of the participants who had to repeat the class the year before.

Administration and analysis: the observations were organised during the discussions between me and the class teachers, and these meetings were arranged after the head teacher introduced me to the teachers. Before the observations, I provided full information about my research to all the teachers and had them sign the informed consent. I clarified with the teachers what I would be doing in the classroom and what was the purpose. This was also to elicit the teachers' ideas and advice on how I could present myself to the class as naturally as possible. The length of each day's observation was planned for half-a-day, so I could spend the other half catching up with note-taking and/or recording. Sometimes, however, I stayed for the full day in the classroom, observing both the morning and afternoon sessions.

During my observations, I partially participated in classroom activities to make the situation more natural, so I asked the teachers to consider me as their teaching assistant. However, I also made sure I was not drawn into facilitating classroom activities, because I was there to observe and needed time to record my observations. Most of the time I would sit next to a child at the back of the classroom and sometimes I also walked around the room like teachers do. During my observations, I took notes extensively – all in English, although sometimes, when wanting to record the exact words or phrases used by the teachers and children, I would write in Vietnamese. In fact, I found that an advantage of writing in English was that it avoided having too many people reading my field notes. In Vietnamese culture, people show a curiosity and interest in knowing what others are doing, in this case, writing, so would have no hesitation in looking at your notebook while you are writing. The curious children and teachers would try to read my field notes but after a week they mostly gave up since they saw the writing was in English. Sometimes, when the teachers asked, I showed them the notes and translated for them what I had observed and they would laugh at the fact that I had described things in such detail. The notes taken were then typed up, often right after the observation or in the evening, to ensure the data were recorded as fully as possible. The table below portrays the total number of observations done for my research.

| Period | Sessions |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Phase 1 | 119 |
| Phase 2 | 10 |
| Phase 3 – following up | 4 |
| Total | 133 |

The breakdown of the observations in terms of classes and teachers, subject or activity, can be seen in the table and diagrams in Appendix 1.

The collective information from these observations and field notes contributes to a descriptive summary, to address the aim of my research and to answer both research questions.

4.4.8 Some reflections on my researcher identity

The researcher role appears to be significant in my research, as when I presented the importance of identity in Vietnam in section 3.2.1.1 of the literature review chapter as well as earlier in the ethnography section of this chapter. The social order in my country has been shaped under a Confucian philosophy with beliefs where younger people must obey their elders, so researching with linguistic minority children in my case requires an extra consideration of the role of the researcher and how I would present myself to get the most reliable data possible.

Bearing in mind that my identity as a head teacher from the capital city, who also belongs to the Kinh majority group, could be intimidating to the teachers and children in the researched school, I have been extra sensitive about how I present myself. Whenever I went to the focal school for fieldwork, I always dressed very differently from how I would at my school in Hanoi. In fact, I have some sets of clothes that I only wore for my fieldwork, so as not to really stand out in the school. Rather than wearing skirts and dresses, I would wear trousers and a shirt like all the teachers in this school wear. This, I hope, makes the teachers and children in the school feel I am less alien to them, and this worked really well as from my second day at the school, most teachers and children treated me as though I were just another teacher working for this school.

With my background as a Vietnamese national, and as a teacher specialising in the early years, my understanding and empathy for the children was a great advantage. Being partially educated overseas, I had an opportunity to reflect on the education system in the country from a wider perspective. This helped me to recognise the importance of the voice of the children in all aspects of life, including education and this is very different to the traditional philosophy of the country. While only acting as a teaching assistant for the class teachers, I showed the children patience and a willingness to listen to them and within a short period of time I gained so much trust from all of them. My research participants, for instance, would tell and share stories with me, which they never would with their teachers. This, I think sometimes, is because the teachers do not often ask them questions to try to understand the children, and this again is part of Confucianism's hierarchical order, where the voice of the smaller and/or smallest is often not heard.

With my being very approachable, friendly and fair, it was clear that the children felt they could confide in me, sometimes with little things like that they had had nothing to eat at lunch, or that their parents made them stay at home for child-minding, which was why they were absent from school. These may seem little details but it is very important in my research, as it is part of the learning ecology that surrounds my research participants. This is further discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1, where the notion of identity and context are analysed. Such context comprises both the individual circumstances and the social and cultural surroundings where learning happens, and that would help me to understand the situations of my participants, not just about where and who they currently are but also about why they have become who they are (Conteh and Brock, 2010).

With much sensitivity being shown by me, within about three weeks I developed a trusting relationship with all the children in both classes that I observed, as well as with the teachers and managers of the school. I believe I got a very different perspective when compared with that of a foreign researcher studying in a linguistic minority school, and yet I perceive I have got a very 'thick description' of my research environment and its people. In particular, as shown in Appendix 1, which is summarised in the figure below,

my data reflect an in-depth investigation of the participants' learning ecology which is comprised of all the different layers – community and home, system and learning programme, school, class, teachers and peers.

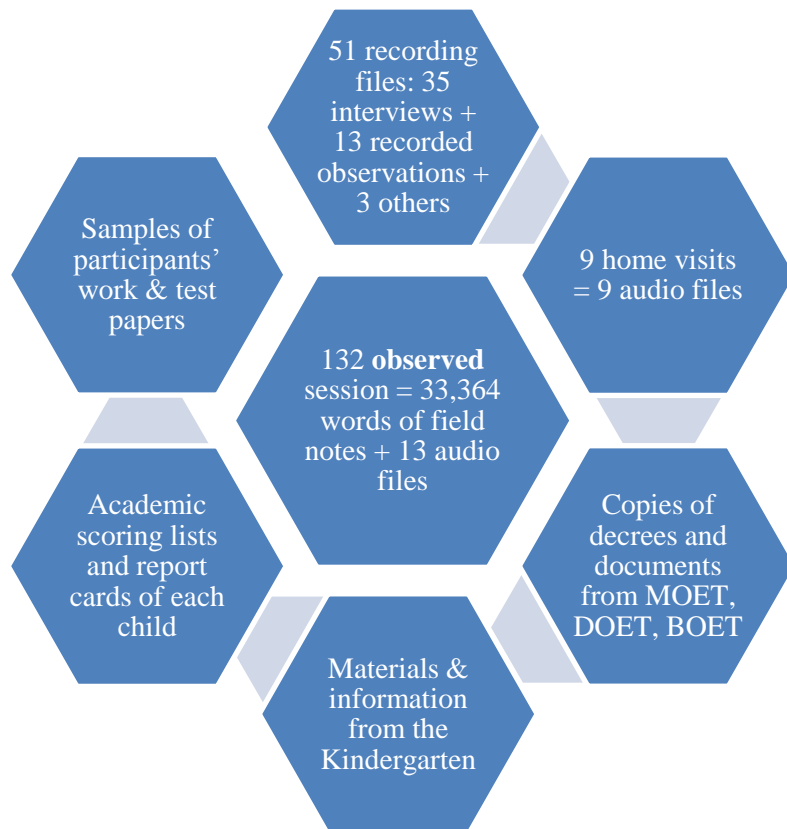


Figure 3: Data types

To further illustrate the richness of the data collected, the section below shows the data being mapped in different categories – timeline, methods, and people/places.

4.4.9 Data mapping and classifications

In this section the process of data collection, as well as the data collected, are mapped in different ways, with the first figure mapping three different phases of data collection over a period of 1.5 years. The first figure clearly specifies the fieldwork periods and the data collected during each phase. By classifying the data based on the method of collection, the nature of the data can be further analysed, thereby differentiating the information collected

using the different research methods, as the second mapping figure below shows.



Figure 4: Three phases of data collection

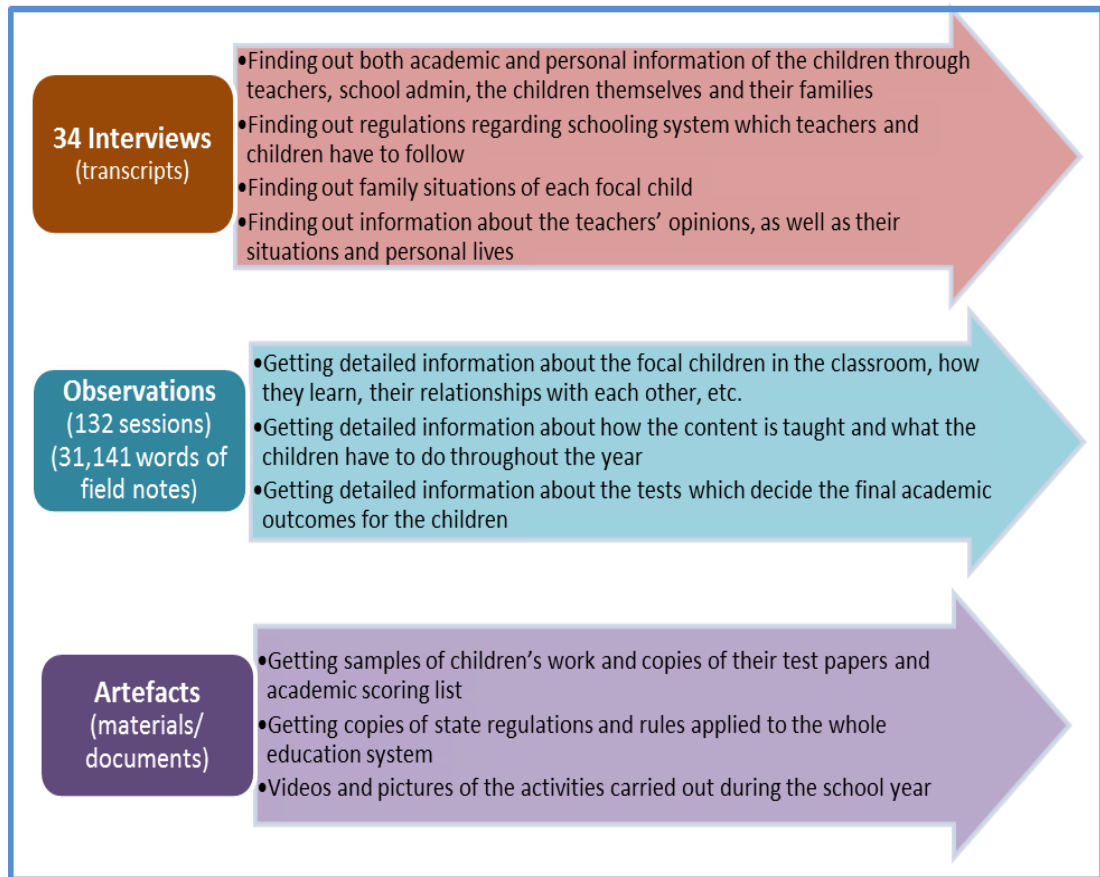


Figure 5: Data classified by methods

The figure below shows the breakdown of data collected from different places and people.

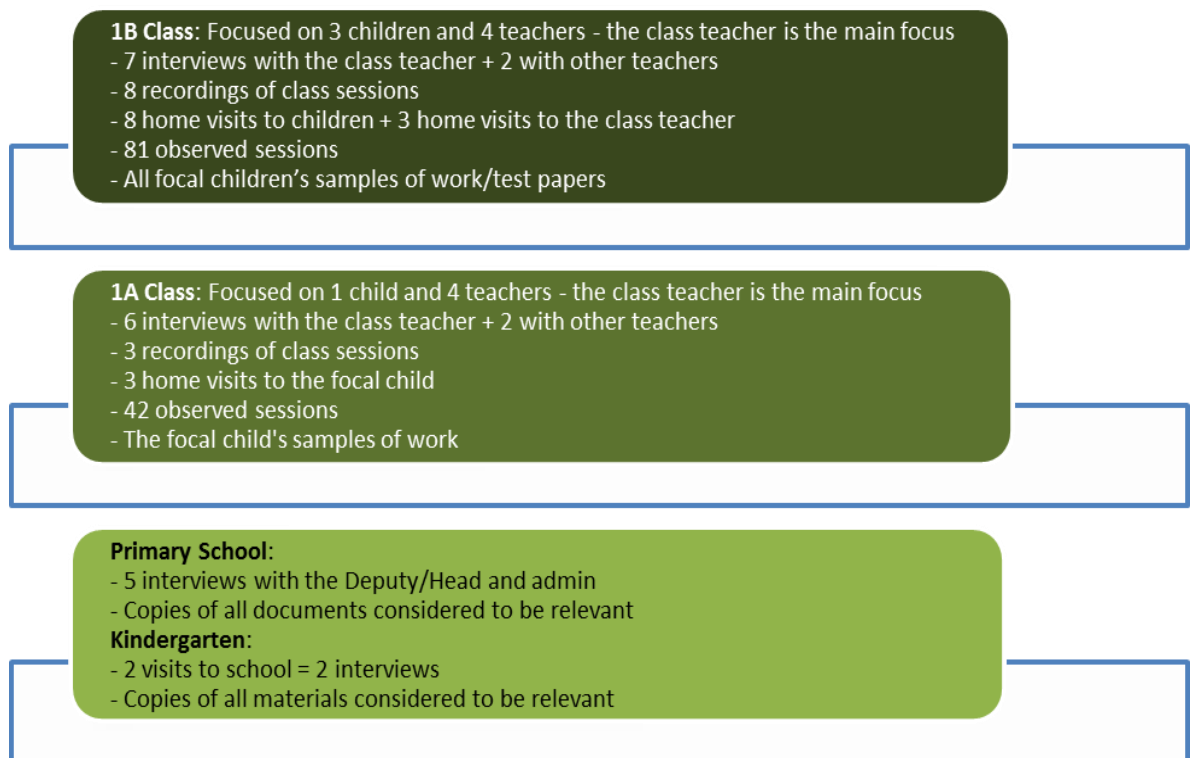


Figure 6: Data breakdown

4.4.10 Data analysis procedure – an illustration

This section is a brief description of data analysis. In particular, I will show how a significant theme is identified and analysed. As my research questions ask:

In which way do some linguistic minority pupils become categorised as 'slow'? and

What may happen to those categorised as 'slow'?

When going through the data collected, consisting of hundreds of pages of field notes, copies of students' test papers, their workbooks, the teachers' comments, etc., I particularly focus on the leading strands that point to the process in which the learners become categorised as 'slow'. In doing so, I employed three periods in timelines, namely past, present and future, where

I would group the data. In each section I would ask a few questions which emerged from the data, and the ways that I noticed the children’s progress in the school system was assessed. In particular, this was an observation of what is written down in the policies and what I actually observed happening. This has been portrayed in the table below.

Table 3: A sample of grouping data in timeline for analysing

| Past | Present | Future |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Q: When did the child first become ‘known’ as slow</p> <p>A: <i>Transition test at the Kindergarten</i></p> <p>Q: How?</p> <p>A: <i>The test score is lower than 50%</i></p> <p>Q: Who was involved?</p> <p>A: <i>Primary teachers</i></p> <p>Q: What was the parent/teacher’s reaction/opinion at the time</p> <p>A: <i>Kindergarten teacher disagreed as she believed the children were ‘normal’ (not slow) in her class, and that the test scared them</i></p> <p><i>Parents aren’t sure about the assessment</i></p> | <p>Q: How do we know they are still ‘slow’?</p> <p>A: <i>The mid-term 1 test and end-of-term 1 test scores are under 50%</i></p> <p>A: <i>The end-of-year test is under 50%</i></p> <p>Q: Is there any way for them to escape that ‘title’?</p> <p>A: <i>Passing the test by scoring 50% minimum</i></p> | <p>Q: What implications are there for their later year/s?</p> <p>A: <i>They need to always pass the test with a minimum 50% score or else they will repeat the year.</i></p> |

In the ‘Past’ column, I tracked back through all the findings from *when* the children were ‘recognised’ as slow and *what* or *who* would formalise such terminology. It did not take too long before identifying that it is the testing system in schools in Vietnam that is used to formalise the title of slow.

In the ‘Present’ column, I am interested in tracking down data that contributes when explaining the current situation the children are in – ‘still

slow’ – and in which case, who validated such categorisation for the children and how. In my research, assessment is indicated as the tool and the process for categorising this and through assessment the children may ‘change’ their fate.

The ‘Future’ column again classifies the data collected and indicates that assessments will continue being the deciding factor when concluding whether the children are successful at school or not.

This research process identified that an in-depth analysis of the assessment process would be essential when answering my research question. I have decided to closely examine the assessment procedure as a whole, to seek a deep understanding, and as such turned the whole data set to focus on this particular theme. With some help from technology, in my research I used NVivo throughout the data handling, from the collection time to the analysis period; I managed to locate all the relevant data about this theme very quickly.

The graphic below forms a summary of the process through which the first major theme emerged.

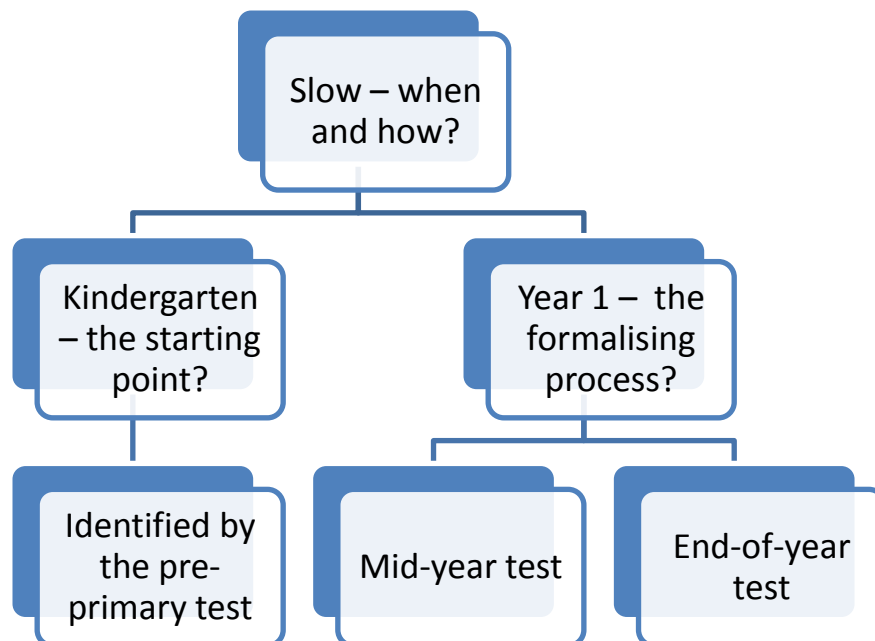


Figure 7: First major theme identification

Now that the test or assessment had been identified as the procedure or the tool for the categorisation, I then went to investigate the testing system in-depth to understand if this process would pose any issues or lend any support in forming such stigmatisation of the children. This is because I would like to identify assessment in both ways, including the 'official' testing and what happens in reality, and what the teachers do and say during this process.

It is during this careful examination that I identified different issues relating to these tests which subsequently affect the children and the way they are labelled. The graphic below shows this process.

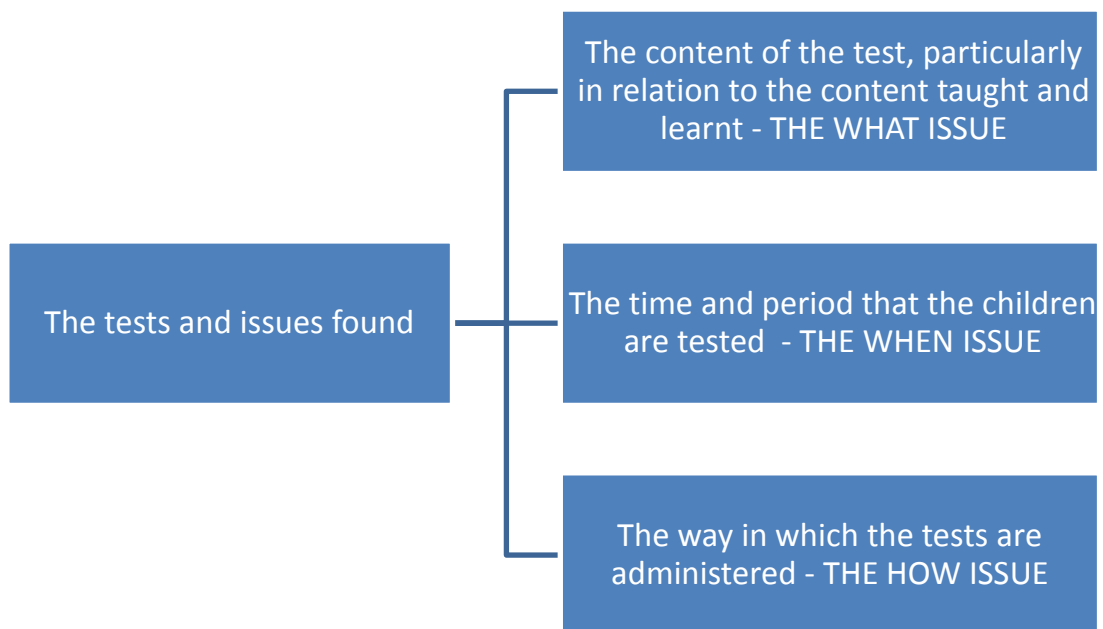


Figure 8: Issues relating to the tests

This appeared to be the major theme that emerged, telling us more about the children's school experiences and offering answers to my research questions. In investigating the main theme in-depth, the subsequent themes were revealed as part of this process, including details of the children's home experiences and how this could possibly impact on their success in education due to this helping to define the relationship between home and school. Other sub-themes emerged, such as the children being disadvantaged by the system; the possibility of their being negatively

affected by socio-economic issues; or that the children being convenient for or corrective to the system will later be summarised in Chapter 7.

This information is then transferred to the descriptions and explanations in Chapter 6. A further sample of data analysis using NVivo in this process can be seen in Appendix B at the end of this thesis.

The following section describes some ethical considerations for my case studies before and after the research was conducted.

4.5 Ethical considerations

In this section I will briefly examine the various ethical considerations taken into account while this study was carried out. The sections below look in turn at ethical considerations in relation to my research participants, for the protection of the data collected, as well as for the researcher conducting this study.

4.5.1 The participants

To ensure transparency and a clear understanding about the research for my participants, an information sheet was given to the school staff – the head, deputy head, and class teachers. This included: details of the research aims; activities to be carried out in their school; estimated numbers of interviews with the deputy head, head teacher, and class teachers; and the estimated number of pupils, teachers and classes that are needed for the research to be carried out. After they read the information sheet, they were asked to sign the informed consent form.

Child participants were selected after three weeks of observation sessions and informal chats with them at the school. With permission from the head teacher and class teachers, the selected children were invited to a small focus group, where I told them about the research and explained what activities I would carry out in their classrooms. They were then asked for their consent and they were rather delighted to grant it. Attaining permission from the school to conduct research within that school and with its pupils constitutes adequate practice in Vietnam, as the head teacher also suggested. In my research, however, I still approached their parents in their

homes and further asked for their consent, as it represented better safeguarding for the children.

The research and the participant involvement was required were clearly explained to all my participants from the beginning. They were also made aware of their absolute right to withdraw at any point of the research, without having to provide any reason. Audio recordings were done only with their permission. Participants were invited to review recorded interviews, to see if the responses provided were what they really meant and whether they would like to add further clarification, make changes, or remove some information. They were also told that they could signal me to pause the recorder at any time they felt that what they were saying, or would be saying, should not be recorded.

All information regarding participants' names, their locations and factors that may reveal their identities were encrypted and coded. A brief version of the research report was presented to them in the form of a poster presentation, and a brief research report will also be translated into Vietnamese to show to my participants after the thesis is submitted.

4.5.2 Safeguarding data

Interviews were reheard within the same day, to check on the quality of the sound and any information that may need to be followed up in coming interviews. To safeguard my data, all the audio files were transferred to the University M-Drive through Citrix within a few days of the interviews. Field notes were also copied into typed documents, which were then transported to the University M-Drive within the same week the notes were written.

Documents collected were scanned into PDF documents and were also transferred to the M-Drive on a frequent basis and the master copies were also brought back to the University with me. This was just a cautious measure to ensure that I would have a copy of the documents in case my luggage got lost when travelling.

4.5.3 Researcher's ethics

I believe the central ethical issue for me as a researcher is about the protection of participants and confidentiality; anonymity and professionalism are essential for ensuring that my participants are well protected. Issues regarding the reliability and validity of data and research findings and those referring to my responsibilities towards the whole community are also vital in this discussion.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that there are issues rooted in research practices which may not always be avoidable. Research situations are very varied, so no rigid set of ethics or list of solutions can always be applicable for a particular research context. Any code of conduct should be applied to the specific situation, together with consideration of the region, its people, and their customs and beliefs. I therefore believe that an ethical researcher is a person who brings the right code of conduct with him or her and flexibly considers the context of the research, and then reflects on the codes that will work, those that need application, and those that require negotiation.

In my particular research, with prior approval from the university, some participants were not required to sign the informed consent form. This is because getting respondents to sign consent forms in Vietnam can be challenging, as people are generally wary of any form of written agreement. Verbal agreements are usually fine but getting someone to sign something is very different. This is especially the case in remote areas, where most linguistic minority groups live, as people are rarely exposed to written documents requiring signatures and so would tend to associate being asked to sign a consent form with signing a legal document. Although most of them can read and write, for many, no amount of reassurance I could give would be enough to get them to sign.

Below are two samples of data collected showing an ethical issue where sensitive information is discovered and where the pupils' fates are purely left in the hands of the teachers and markers.

- Khuong got 100% right but the mathematics teacher consulted the class teacher again and they decided he looked at his peers' work, so some correct calculations should be rubbed out in order to make it wrong. She made it 7 and then decided it was too much so she corrected it to 6 (out of 10). Then she said that if she had just based it on the result he would get 10. The teacher said that Hoanh seems to have got everything wrong – I should lift it up a bit or it's too low. She then realised that she had got quite a few calculations right – she is given a 4, the same as her sister Quyen. (Field notes on 27 December 2011)
- The mathematics teacher showed me Nghieng's mathematics paper and I could see he got exercises 1 and 2 correct while leaving exercises 3 and 4. The class teacher turned to tell the mathematics teacher that she already gave Nghieng a 5/10 for Vietnamese so he should get 5 for mathematics too, thereby promoting him to the next class. (...) The class teacher of 1A insisted that the mathematics teacher change the marking of two papers – making Chan get below 5 and Hau to be moved up to a 5 as she is currently below 5. Nghieng gets 5 instead of 4. But the mathematics teacher actually gave Hau 6. (Field notes, 15 May 2012)

The above data, together with further observation notes, are used in my analysis: for instance, in section 7.1.3. However, I tried my best to present the data in the most objective way and avoided placing any personal judgements or comments on individuals, instead directing the focus onto the system and positing that the consequences resulted from errors in the system. I originally thought of leaving this section of data out of my research report, but after careful consideration I realised this section is essential for answering both research questions in the most informative way. In doing so, I employed an objective story-telling style as well as ensuring the complete anonymity of the school and participants involved. Below is a sample from the analysis.

Secondly, the test issues identified above affected more children than just the research participants, but the system seems to be designed in a way that allows flexibility for the teachers to correct errors that the system creates. This is shown in the marking procedure, where a number of children are marked upwards, to reflect their 'actual learning ability' as observed by the teachers throughout the school year. In this process again, the identity issue becomes pronounced, where the slow children's papers are not only kept as originally completed but may be marked down due to the teachers feeling that their performance was too good for their 'actual learning ability'. (Section 7.2.2, Chapter 7)

Considering the researcher's ethics further, I also believe that discussions with peers and especially supervisors have further helped me to reflect on my research methods, in order to identify potential problems during my research, and this is why I presented my research at various stages of my study. Also, I have done more background reading of work previously conducted by researchers in the same field internationally and of those who carried out research specifically in Vietnam, as this is necessary for a better understanding of the issue.

Finally, I understand that as a result of the methodology used, I have to really consider my position when reporting findings. As an ethnographic approach is used, I must accurately report research findings which can describe the phenomenon and not judge it or draw conclusions from the research conducted. An awareness of truth-telling and being accurate about research observations are essential, as this is when I display commitment and responsibility towards all parties involved, especially fellow researchers, the participants, the public, and the academic community. In all cases, I have ensured compliance with ethical rules, used discussions with peers, and have had work reviewed by peers and supervisors. I have also presented my research at several conferences, both at national and international levels, to receive further feedback from scholars from inside and outside the university.

4.6 Summary of the chapter and preface for the next three chapters

In this chapter, I have explained the different methodological decisions made to carry out this research. As this is an interpretivist case study research following ethnographic principles, the ethnography methodology and case study approach are discussed in detail. The data collection methods, including participant observations and interviews, are also examined. This includes both theoretical and practical discussions on the methods and a summary of how these methods were employed in my research. Piloting the research and the selection of cases and research participants are also revealed, together with the handling of data collected and how major themes

are identified through analysis. Some reflections on the researcher identity, as well as ethical considerations, are also reviewed in this chapter.

My research questions ask:

In which way do some linguistic minority pupils become categorised as 'slow'? and

What may happen to those categorised as 'slow'?

The next three chapters will lead towards answering these questions, as the collected data will be analysed and any significances observed will be discussed. In particular, Chapter 5 introduces the research school, community and the research participants selected, positioning the research participants – the pupils – at the centre of the study. The ecology surrounding these learners, such as their teachers and peers, homes and community, and the education system they are studying in, are carefully conferred. This leads to Chapter 6, which discusses the pupils' learning situations and factors outside of school that may influence their learning. A thorough examination of the learning programme and assessment is then described, to suggest some issues in the testing process which may link to the identity that is constructed for these learners throughout their learning journey. Chapter 7 forms a discussion of issues relating to the education system which appear to be problematic for minority language learners in general, but more so for the learners at the lower end of this group in terms of academic achievement.

Chapter 5: Regional context and the participants

As the main research question focuses on the procedure by which the children become categorised as slow learners, this chapter presents all the layers surrounding these learners. This aims to examine the theory of learning in culturally diverse classrooms, as presented in the literature review chapter, which contends that all factors and layers around a child have a role to play in his/her development and learning (Conteh, 2003). As such, this chapter is solely home focussed, while the following chapter (Chapter 6) is mostly school focussed. This gives a clearer distinction between the home and school contexts, aiming to show some contrast in these children's capabilities at home compared with at school. Therefore, in this chapter, the participants' education and social contexts at a regional level will be examined, including their school, classes, teachers and peers, as well as their families and community. This is to further contextualise the Muong group at the local level, to further relate the local context to the national and educational context discussed in Chapter 2.

After this, each participant is presented one-by-one using a similar format, where their home situations and how they interact in their home environment is observed in detail.

5.1 An introduction to the researched school, community and region

The researched school's district has students from both the majority Kinh ethnicity and minority language children. Each primary school in the area has around 200 pupils of whom roughly 30 percent are Kinh and the remainder are from different ethnicities, mostly Muong and Dao. Generally, the nearer to a town the school is, the higher its percentage of Kinh learners, and the more remote the school, the higher the percentage of linguistic minority pupils. My researched school is considered to be in a rather remote area with

roughly 80 percent of linguistic minority pupils and 20 percent of Kinh learners.

Although school policies could be adapted from the DOET and MOET to make them more relevant to the context of the district and its learners, the main curriculum and textbooks used remain unchanged. This, I referred to in section 2.2 of Chapter 2, where I mentioned the central government allowing 15% of curricular content to be left open to the regional education authorities and teachers to add local culture, language, history and traditions to the learning programmes. This policy, introduced without further guidance, instruction, and follow-up evaluation, resulted in it being largely ignored by the regional authorities. In addition, even if there were changes to aid local learners, this would still be a one-size-fits-all policy for the 24 primary schools and a similar number of pre-schools in the district, which would appear problematic since the number and ratio of ethnicities of children attending schools in this region varies from school to school.

5.1.1 Families and community

This section forms a brief description of the children's community, referring to their locality and the people who live there, particularly those who are part of the Muong community in this area. Before this is discussed, a brief section which extends from Chapter 2, section 2.3.2, summarises the overall situation for Muong communities across the country, which is presented in order to put the local Muong section in perspective.

5.1.1.1 Muong community nationwide

The Muong are the third largest linguistic minority group in Vietnam, with their own language, which has no written script. Most of these people are literate in Vietnamese, the national language and the only language used in education and all other aspects of society. In the past, the government made it compulsory for all people in the country to be literate, so even though there are people who did not have the opportunity to attend formal education, there are evening classes in Vietnamese language in the community and these people are requested to attend. Since 1991, the government made primary education free *and* mandatory in the whole country, aiming for the total

elimination of illiteracy in the Vietnamese language (Government Congress, 1991).

While the majority Vietnamese language dominates the whole system of society, this community is still very much attached to their mother tongue. All of the communications I observed in informal contexts, from home to school, are in their mother tongue only. It is only in the classroom and when with their teachers that Vietnamese is used.

Vietnamese is mono-syllabic and tonal. There are five different tones in Vietnamese, but there are only four tones in the local language. This creates confusion and difficulty for the children and their people when attempting to use the tone that does not exist in their mother tongue. This is why sometimes in the interviews with me, parents mentioned that their child's Vietnamese speaking is still lisping (*ngọng lẩm*), which refers to them being unable to pronounce this particular sound in the right tone – the tone *ngã* (~). The kindergarten teachers that I spoke to mentioned that most of the children in the region, when first arriving at the kindergarten, could not speak or understand any Vietnamese, but over a period of time they started to understand the teachers' Vietnamese instructions (Interviewed on 22 May 2012, file 120522_004).

While this linguistic minority group is mostly spread over two major provinces, where they could be living in mountainous and hillside regions, the focal community is located in a lowland area with rice fields granted to them by the government. Agriculture and breeding livestock form the main foundation of their economy, together with gathering, fishing and hunting in the wild. Although their productivity is low and is often just enough to feed their families, they still trade their products, such as wood and leaves gathered in the wild, in the nearest trading town, in return for consumer goods, which are mainly supplied by the majority Kinh people.

Compared to other members of their linguistic minority group, this community mostly does better economically than those located in highland and hillside areas, but they remain amongst the poorest in the country, with a large

number of people classified in the 135 Scheme – the scheme for the poorest in Vietnam.

5.1.1.2 Muong community in the research location

This community is located in a lowland region and is not too distant from nearby towns and cities, so there are many majority Kinh people living in the area. Nevertheless, the area is quiet and surrounded by mountains and rice fields, which combined with poor infrastructure, makes visitors to the area feel as though they are somewhere very remote.

Before further discussion I would like to list some administrative levels in Vietnam. This is to add some clarification for terms used in this section and hereafter.

Table 4: Vietnamese Administrative system

| Administrative levels | Urban system | Rural system |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Level 1 | Municipality (<i>thành phố trực thuộc trung ương</i>) | Province (<i>tỉnh</i>) |
| Level 2 | Urban district (<i>quận</i>) | - Provincial city (<i>thị xã</i>) - District (<i>huyện</i>) |
| Level 3 | Ward (<i>phường</i>) | - Commune-level town (<i>thị trấn</i>) - Commune (<i>xã</i>) |
| Unofficial level 4 | Population group (<i>tổ dân phố</i>) | Village (<i>thôn</i>) |

In this system, the families and community in my research form part of the third level of the rural system. This particular level comprises two areas, where the first one (commune-level town) refers to a more urban and developed place, and the second one (commune) refers to a completely rural and somewhat remote place. This is where my research location is, so the words *commune* and *village* will be used hereafter to describe the locality of the children and their families.

As mentioned earlier, the school is located in an area that is very leafy and quiet, which feels remote although it is only five kilometres from the main

road where the commune-level town is located. The ratio of Kinh to linguistic minority learners in the school precisely reflects the ratio of majority-minority people living in the area – roughly 80 percent of pupils are from minority groups and the remaining 20 percent are Kinh.

Most families in the commune are low-tech manual farmers who have very limited land for farming, so output from their farm is often just enough to feed the family. Almost no commercial products are produced in this region, so off-farm opportunities for employment are rare. Many families in the commune belong to Scheme 135 – the government poverty aid scheme for the poorest in the country. Of the roughly 200 children enrolled this year, 75 of them are listed as being subsidised by the government, meaning that extra fees incurred in primary schools, such as those for school maintenance and learning materials, are paid for by the government. As mentioned earlier, although no tuition fee is charged for attending primary school, additional fees are still applied.

From further studying the list, it can be seen that 58 children receive support from Scheme 135, whereas the other 17 are classified as being in poverty. I need to stress that Scheme 135 is provided for each commune, or each village, so there are cases of families who are not in such a difficult situation but can still receive support because of where they live geographically. On the other hand, children from poor families who do not live in the Scheme 135 regions are assessed individually based on their family's real situation. This could be biased and subjective as it depends on the views of the local authority. Even when exceptional cases of poverty are considered worthy of support, the funds are limited and can only be allocated to a certain number of applicants, meaning that not all the poor receive support. This is why after observing the children in the school and visiting some families, I firmly believe that there are more than 17 children whose families should be receiving financial poverty aid from the government, such as in the case of two of my research participants who will be introduced later in this chapter in section 5.2.2.1 – Hoanh and Quyen.

The minority children at the school are from lowland minorities, so they live very close, or together with, the majority Kinh group. As such, they come into

contact with the Vietnamese language more often than the highland minorities. Most of their parents can speak Vietnamese fluently, due to previously going to school and having frequent contact with the Kinh group. Also, mass-media such as TV and radio programmes, or newspapers and books, are all in the Vietnamese language. Most of the children can therefore speak Vietnamese by the time they finish kindergarten, IF they attend their kindergarten frequently enough. My observations nevertheless show that at school, without teacher supervision, the children speak to each other in their mother tongue only. This means that at playtime in the playground, mostly the minority language is heard.

During lessons, the children lower their voices or whisper to each other in their mother tongue. This is because of the Vietnamese-only policy, so the children will be reminded or reprimanded if they speak a language other than Vietnamese in class.

Unlike children in the nearby commune-level town, or in any cities in Vietnam where primary school children are dropped-off and picked-up by their parents, almost all children in this school walk to school every day. Some children live two to three kilometres away from the school and this means they would walk roughly 10 kilometres per day for their schooling. This is because they attend both morning and afternoon sessions, and they go home for lunch, making it two return trips to school each day. It is surprising that none of the children here bring a lunchbox and stay at school during lunchtime like the primary children in urban areas. On rainy days, the classes look much quieter because many children are absent for various reasons, such as having no raincoat or umbrella, or being told to stay at home since they cannot cross the streams or flooded dams to go to school. The streams and dams can be dangerous each rainy season, where the lives of locals are claimed every year during this time.

5.1.2 The school

There are five class levels (Year 1 to Year 5) and each level has two classes, making a total number of just over 200 pupils. Like most other schools, this school requires full-day attendance for morning and afternoon classes. There

are two sets of teachers taking turns during the day, as teachers in Vietnam work a half-day in the classroom and are given a half-day for meetings, administrative work, lesson planning and reporting. Unless there is a meeting, teachers are not required to be at the school for lesson planning, so most of the time they only come to school when they have classes. Often the morning sessions are for the major subjects, so the class teachers are present in the morning and other teachers take over in the afternoon.

There is one head teacher and a deputy head in this school, and they do not have any teaching role. Both of them have over 20 years of experience and know very well what their roles are. They are both from the majority Vietnamese and live in a nearby town, like most of the other Kinh teachers. There are approximately 20 teachers; half of them are Muong, the linguistic minority group that forms the majority of residents in the area, and the other half are Kinh teachers. The linguistic minority teachers mostly live in villages around the school, while the Kinh teachers mostly live in a nearby commune-level town and they commute to work each day by motorbike.

Almost all the school's policies are designated by the BOET. These policies are subject to change and revision with or without notice, so sometimes those given to the school at the beginning of the school year are neither adequate nor final.

5.2 The participants

There are two different groups of research participants, namely teacher participants and pupil participants. The former will be presented first, followed by the latter.

The two Year 1 classroom teachers are presented in the teacher participant section below. This is to signify the importance of their roles, as they spend more time with the pupils than other subject teachers and are also the most influential when deciding the learning outcomes of the pupils. The second most important teacher for the pupils is the mathematics teacher, who is presented after the two class teachers, followed by the other subject

teachers, whose subjects do not count in the final academic outcomes of the children, (This will be further explored in Chapter 6).

In the pupil participants section that follows, I will present the participants within their home circumstances and how they are at home. The two girls are presented first and as they are twin sisters from the same family, they share the same home circumstances section. After this, the two male participants are also presented in turn in the same order as that for the girls.

5.2.1 Teacher participants

This school has teachers from both the majority Kinh group and the local linguistic minority Muong group. I observed that, regardless of whether the teacher is Kinh or is ethnic minority, the conversations between teachers and their pupils are in Vietnamese only.

There are two different shifts of teachers, one that comes to school in the morning and the other that comes in the afternoon. As already mentioned, teachers in Vietnam are given half the day for lesson planning, marking papers and reporting. They do this at home instead of being at school all day. The morning sessions are deemed to be more important than the afternoon ones, so important subjects are taught in the morning by the class teachers.

In Year 1 classes this year, Vietnamese lessons are taught in the morning by the class teachers. In the afternoon, there are two sessions for mathematics and the other two sessions are for subjects considered less important, such as art/drawing, craft, PE, songs and singing, and the study of nature and society. There are four teachers in total teaching the Year 1 class: the class teacher covers Vietnamese and ethics, and there is a separate mathematics teacher; a PE teacher who also teaches art and craft; and the music and singing teacher, who also teaches the study of nature and society. Only the class teacher is in charge of one class, the other three teachers are shared between the two Year 1 classes, and they teach the same subjects to both groups.

I need to stress that because the class teachers are in charge of teaching Vietnamese, they have the most influential teaching roles. The class teacher

is also in charge of writing student reports, liaising with families and most importantly, deciding children's final academic outcomes. The other subject teachers, who teach in the afternoon, have little impact on the children's learning outcomes because, other than Vietnamese, only mathematics is tested and contributes towards the children's academic outcomes – the other subjects are almost invisible. This point will be further expanded upon and discussed in the next chapter, Identity and Learning.

The class teachers are firstly presented in turn below, followed by the other subject teachers.

5.2.1.1 Ms Phuong – the class teacher of Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong

Ms Phuong has been teaching the Year 1 class in this school for over 20 years. She is from the Muong linguistic minority group, as are most of her pupils. She is fluent in both Vietnamese and her mother tongue, but I rarely heard her speaking a language other than Vietnamese. This is perhaps because I mostly saw her at school, where using a language other than Vietnamese is not encouraged, so the teachers need to set a good example for their pupils.

Her home is not too far from the school, where she has a large garden in which she grows different agricultural products to feed her family and to sell at the local market. Besides the different fruits and vegetables that they sell, her family also farms some beehives to harvest honey for sale. As such, financially, she does reasonably well when compared with other locals in the region.

She has two grown-up children – both have their own children. She, however, told me that she and her husband are still supporting their children financially most of the time. This is also what was told to me by her colleagues, who seemed to sympathise with her for having grown-up children who are not successful and who are still depending on their parents for so much.

On a few occasions she came to work a bit late and was reminded about punctuality by the heads. One morning she was late and was reprimanded by the head as that was one of the test days. She then told me that she had

gone to the local market at 5am to sell some products harvested from her garden and then had gone home to get changed before coming to school.

Personally, this teacher is very friendly and open-minded. She shared her thoughts with me very freely, from her feelings about how she is perceived by colleagues and in school, to her personal situation at home. I feel that she really trusted me and always treated me as an ally, more so than her colleagues. For instance, she frankly expressed her disagreement to me regarding the test paper given to her children and the way the invigilators appeared to be terrifying to her pupils but she never said anything like that to her colleagues or her managers (the head and deputy head).

Mid-year Vietnamese Test: The class teacher complained that the children are used to copying from the blackboard. Copying from the paper with a different font is tricky for them.... She also disagrees with the teachers being swapped for the test. (field notes on 26 December 2011)

Writing Practice: The 1B teacher complains that the 1A teacher came back to her room earlier to tell her children the answers to the mathematics test. She said the "achievement disease" is always a problem. She also complains about the Vietnamese test yesterday for the fact that: 1) the invigilator confused the children by writing the instructions on the board, which meant that they didn't know whether they should be looking at the blackboard or the test paper; 2) the invigilator didn't give adequate verbal instructions, which are much needed by the Year 1 children because they can't read the instructions; 3) swapping between the Year 1 teachers for invigilating exams is fine but sending a teacher from a different level to Year 1 makes a mismatch – the teacher doesn't simplify her language enough to make herself understood by the children. (Field notes on Tuesday 27th December 2011)

Professionally she is no doubt an experienced and capable teacher. She has been teaching the Year 1 class for over 20 years and could now 'teach with her eyes closed' – as the Vietnamese say. Given her substantial experience teaching this particular age group, she is very familiar with all the textbooks, workbooks and learning kits used in Year 1. During this year, there was one time when Year 1 teachers and school heads from over 20 primary schools in the district came to observe her class. Their focal observation for that day was to learn how an experienced teacher like her makes use of the new literacy kit, and how she gets the children familiar with using this material. This basically means that she was selected out of over 20 primary schools in

the district to give a teaching display, which could be considered a rather honoured task. The lesson went very well, her observers were happy and impressed, and her head teachers and colleagues were proud of her.

Being in charge of 27 children this year, she expressed that the class size is rather big, therefore challenging for her to effectively teach all of them. 'Fifteen to 18 would be an ideal size for this class of 6-year-olds, especially as this is the first year the children have been in primary school, which is more official schooling than in kindergarten', she said. This teacher also stated her concerns about the large number of Vietnamese textbooks and workbooks covered in Year 1 these days. This has resulted in the children having to work much harder than in the past, and sometimes she and the pupils have to race against time to complete the programme (Interviewed on 9 November 2011). To aid understanding of this point, the table below lists all the Vietnamese workbooks that the children have to cover in this school year.

Table 5: List of workbooks

| No | Workbook titles | Description |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | <i>Vietnamese workbook 1 (Vở bài tập – Tiếng Việt 1, tập 1)</i> | Official and is the revision form for lessons taught in the official Vietnamese text book |
| 2 | <i>Vietnamese workbook 2 (Vở bài tập – Tiếng Việt 1, tập 2)</i> | Official and is the revision form for lessons taught in the official Vietnamese text book |
| 3 | <i>Writing practice book 1 (Tập viết 1 – Tập 1)</i> | Official and is the extended version of Vietnamese workbooks |
| 4 | <i>Writing practice book 2 (Tập viết 1 – Tập 2)</i> | Official and is the extended version of Vietnamese workbooks |
| 5 | <i>Handwriting practice book 1 (Vở luyện viết chữ - Quyển 1)</i> | Unofficial and is the extended version of Writing practice |
| 6 | <i>Handwriting practice book 2 (Vở luyện viết chữ - Quyển 2)</i> | Unofficial and is the extended version of Writing practice |
| 7 | <i>Handwriting practice book 3 (Vở luyện viết chữ - Quyển 3)</i> | Unofficial and is the extended version of Writing practice |
| 8 | <i>Grammar writing book (Chính tả)</i> | Unofficial , children copy literature or poems from the learning textbook or write as the teacher verbally dictates |

5.2.1.2 Ms Quang – Nghieng’s class teacher

Ms Quang is another very experienced teacher, who has been teaching in the school for 27 years since she qualified as a teacher. She has taught different age groups in the school and has been teaching Year 1 for the last three years. She is from the majority Kinh group and does not speak the minority Muong language of most of the pupils. In some initial interviews or chat sessions with me, she often watched her language very carefully, as though her head teacher would be listening to the recordings. Much later in the year, she relaxed more and started commenting on her pupils without worrying as she previously had.

Ms Quang’s family situation is similar to those of almost all the other teachers working for this school, as she has to work part-time outside school for extra income. Ms Quang has a small stall selling home-made sweet desserts (the Vietnamese name is *che*) in the afternoon and evening.

While I was in her class, I observed that most of the time, there was very little contact between her and her student Nghieng. Often Nghieng does something completely different or irrelevant to the rest of the class. Ms Quang explained that Nghieng is in the disabled category of ‘mentally slow’ or ‘mentally underdeveloped’, so he is given different and simplified tasks compared with his peers. The field notes cited in Nghieng’s section show that these simplified tasks could be as simple as connecting dots or tracing dots, rather than writing letters and words which children in Year 1 must do.

Ms Quang also appears to be stricter than most other teachers in the school. I observed several times that she had her children work through the morning break, which Ms Phuong believes is not a great idea since the children need to rest between their lessons. The number of workbooks that the children have to complete has perhaps put some pressure on the teachers, as they seem to worry a lot about having to finish the learning programme on time.

5.2.1.3 The mathematics teacher

She is another very experienced teacher who has been teaching in the school for over 20 years, all in Year 1 classes. She only comes to the school in the afternoon to teach both Year 1 classes, each class with two

mathematics sessions. In the morning, she can be seen in the local market working as a butcher as a second job.

While she is in charge of her subject, it appears that she often consults the class teachers, especially during the exam period in regards to the children's marks and rankings. There seems to be a mutual understanding that other subject teachers' assessments should be in agreement with those of the class teachers. This will be discussed in further detail in the Identity and Learning analysis, in the section focusing on assessment issues in the school.

5.2.1.4 The PE, art, and craft teacher

This teacher has over 10 years of teaching experience and joined the school about five years ago. She appears to be in a better financial situation compared with her colleagues and everyone said that her husband was 'doing well'. She lives in a nearby province and commutes to work by motorbike. All teachers come to work by motorbike, but many of them live nearby the school. Walking is not a part of Vietnamese culture, so people would ride their bikes for a very short distance. I need to add that all roads in Vietnam are not built for pedestrians, so walking could mean putting yourself at risk as you share the road with all the vehicles. The children still walk to school on both sides of the road, some using shortcuts or footpaths, but many have no choice other than using the main road. Fortunately, the routes around the school are often much quieter than those in towns and cities.

This teacher often looked disinterested and disengaged in her lessons. Her subjects are considered to have very low status and they mean little, neither in the curriculum nor to the academic achievement of the children. There is no additional preparation from her to make the lessons fun or interesting for the students. Although the children would love colouring in art sessions, there is very little for them to colour, since the textbook has very limited activities and no additional worksheets are prepared for them. The art and craft sessions are therefore often chaotic and the children are disruptive from having nothing to do. Sometimes, especially before exam periods, these

sessions are turned into extra practice for Vietnamese writing and reading, because the class teachers asked her to do so.

Coming from such a poor region, many children do not have coloured pencils or crayons with them and this creates an extra challenge in maintaining a functioning class. Only the books are provided by the school, other learning materials such as pencils, erasers, rulers, scissors and crayons are the parents' responsibility to purchase and send to school in the children's bags. This created problems because the children lose their things frequently and their families do not buy replacements for them, sometimes because of negligence but most of the time because of their financial situations.

The teacher does not seem to be bothered about whether or not the children have enough learning materials or tools to carry out tasks in her sessions. There is neither strict supervision, nor great encouragement, from her to promote student engagement in her sessions (Field notes, pages 9-10, 13, 31, 35, 55, 58, 67).

5.2.1.5 The singing teacher

This teacher is amongst the most junior in the school, as she only joined the school two years ago. She is a very gentle person, who is also from the linguistic minority group. She herself has a young child attending one of the classes I observed. There is only one music and singing session (40 minutes) per week; however, the timetable schedules for each teacher to teach two consecutive sessions together, so the music teacher also teaches one Vietnamese session – writing practice.

Music, once again, is not a major subject but seems to have a little higher status as compared with art, craft and PE. This is because many of the songs the children learn will be performed in school assemblies and big events like Teachers' Day and the End-of-Year Ceremony. So there is a clear outcome, where the children may have the opportunity to perform in front of their teachers, peers and parents if they sing well, and this gives the singing session more credit than the other less important subjects.

The teacher told me that there is a small organ in the school, which she sometimes brings to class for the children to sing along to. Most of the time

though, she does not have access to it, as it is locked away and the person with the keys is not always around during her music sessions.

Nevertheless, the children generally enjoyed her lessons, including those who are perceived as slow learners, such as my participants. This is shown in field note sessions 24-29, 45, 60 and 74 from the first phase of data collection (pages 16-19, 30, 40 and 45 of the field notes file).

5.2.2 The pupil participants and their homes

None of my four participants lives in the region which falls under Scheme 135, which can be as little as one kilometre away from where they live now. Two participants, however, receive subsidised education under the poverty classification. The other two receive no assistance, as their family is perceived as being better off by the authorities and teachers. In reality though, I observed that this family really struggles with their children's education costs, so they have ended up with debts owed to the primary school and the nursery.

The description of the participants will focus individually on their home situations, their relationships at home and at school, and their learning progress. This comes from samples of their work and 87 pages of recorded field notes, together with 35 interviews with parents, teachers, and the children themselves. The section analysing their relationships at home and at school is presented in a table showing two columns for home and school. This aims to show the participant's identity in the two different contexts and by presenting this side-by-side, I wish to identify the differences and sometimes contrasting sides of the character/identity when being observed in different contexts. In short, this section will gradually present the participants' overall identity, which will be further analysed in the next chapter – Identity and Learning.

5.2.2.1 Hoanh and Quyen

These two girls are twin sisters, so the home circumstances section represents both of them. After that there will be separate sections for each of them describing their relationships at home and at school as well as their learning progress.

5.2.2.1.1 Home circumstances

The girls are the elder sisters in a family of three children. Their sibling is a 3-year-old brother attending the nursery class in a nearby kindergarten. Their parents own a little bike repair shop which forms part of their home, where the front part facing the road is the shop and the family shares the only other room which is at the back. The father is the one working in the shop – I will refer to him as a bike fixer because I personally feel that the word mechanic does not accurately describe what he does. This is because when visiting their home and when passing their house each time I visited the school, I could see his main job was putting more air into people's bicycle and motorbike tyres and occasionally changing some parts of a bike when requested. There are no advanced machines in the shop, apart from one electronic air pump and there are not many spare bike parts either. When requested by customers, he would quickly ride his motorbike to the nearby town, about four kilometres away, to buy the part that is needed for replacing. This commune is located in one of the more remote areas, so people are generally poorer than those in the nearby town and significantly poorer than those living in urban and city areas. This was why his bike repair shop was often quiet, unlike mechanic shops in the cities where people often have to queue for their turn. That is why I often saw him nodding off in his chair when I passed their shop.

The girls' mother moves from job to job. The class teacher said she had previously worked for a garment company, but in my first home visit, she told me she was working in the kitchen at a restaurant in the nearby town and that this job was occasional and the restaurant owner would call her from time to time. This means she sometimes stayed at home and sometimes worked until late at the restaurant. In the later stage of my fieldwork, the girls told me their mother was now working as a sugarcane seller for a shop in another town 12 kilometres away. I found out from my latest field visit that she has now returned to work for a local garment company.

Since the father's shop was often quiet, he tried to find some extra work to do and that resulted in both parents being absent from home. When that

happened, the children understood that they needed to go to their grandparents' home for lunch so they could return to school in the afternoon.

First home visit: It was spotting with rain. When the class teacher and I arrived at the house, we saw Hoanh and Quyen sitting outside the house which was locked. We asked why and they replied that their dad must have gone somewhere. We asked where they were going to have their lunch. They said that they would go to their grandparents' house, so the teacher left and I walked back to the school with Hoanh and Quyen because their grandparents' house was in the direction of the school. While we were walking, we saw a middle-aged man walking towards us. Both Hoanh and Quyen told me that he was their grandfather. (7th December 2011, field notes, page. 38)

Conversation with the girls

Me: *so today are you going to your grandparents for lunch?*

Both: *yes*

Me: *what do you do if your grandparents are not at home?*

Quyen: *then we eat with auntie Vinh*

Me: *auntie Vinh?*

Both: *yes*

Me: *where is auntie Vinh's?*

Both: *in my grandma's*

Me: *what will you do if auntie Vinh is not home either?*

Hoanh: *we'll eat with auntie*

Me: *which auntie?*

Both: *auntie Hang and uncle Phan*

Me: *where (are they)?*

Hoanh: *at grandma's - they live together in the same house.*

(Interviewed on 29 May 2013, file Voice0004).

A conversation with the girls' mother later revealed that their grandfather is an alcoholic. They hardly ever have money, and he often takes their rice to exchange for rice wine. She suspected that one day when he told us there was no rice in his home was maybe because the grandma had hidden the rice somewhere before leaving for the mountain. Their grandma often goes to the woods to collect *dong* leaves (for wrapping some local cake) or firewood to sell at the local market (Voice001 – interviewed on 22 December 2011). In my field visit in May 2012, however, the two sisters told me their grandfather had passed away (Voice009.5 – interviewed on 29 May 2012).

From what I was told by the teachers in the school and by the parents during home visits, this family, like most others in the region, does not have a regular source of income as none of the parents has a permanent job. They completely depend on occasional work; hence having three children who are at school seems to have put them in great difficulties. Another home visit revealed that this family still owed tuition fees to the kindergarten where their young son was attending. The class teacher of the girls also told me that this family owed her money for school and class funds, as well as learning material costs. In schools in Vietnam, the class teacher is often in charge of collecting the entire fee from families and the teacher will hand the money over to the school admin department after that. As stated in the above section, although primary education in Vietnam has been made completely free by the government, each mainstream school requests the family to contribute towards learning material costs, and for funds for the school and the class. This amount varies from school to school and can be a significant amount in urban schools. The research location is largely populated by linguistic minority people, and so this school's annual contribution from each child is believed to be the lowest amount, as compared with those specified by schools in other regions of the country. The amount required for each child this year was roughly 700,000 Vietnam dong, equivalent to 23 pounds sterling at that time. To make a comparison, this amount of money is equal to 70 percent of one month's salary of a novice teacher working in this school that year. Having two children attending the school in this case will cost them roughly 1.5 month's salary of a novice teacher in that school year.

The fee for nursery attendance is even greater, as parents need to pay for the cost of the food the children eat at school. From my observations, almost all the kindergartens disallow families from sending their own lunchbox and eating school food is compulsory, which makes it extra challenging for families like Quyen and Hoanh's. This year's cost for the boy's nursery attendance is roughly 2.4 million dong (roughly 79 pounds sterling) and although the family is allowed to pay in 12 instalments of 200,000 dong each month, their irregular income does not ensure that they can fulfil their payments in a timely manner. This has affected the sisters' schooling,

because child-minding has been an additional task for them since their parents have to work and could not afford to send the little brother to school. Below are some excerpts cited from my field notes and interviews, which further tell of this difficult situation.

Art and Craft session: Hoanh is reported for playing truant by peers – Quyen then told the teacher that Hoanh has to stay at home to look after the motorbike and bicycle repair shop and her little brother, as her Dad needs to get some spare parts from the town. (6th December 2011, field notes, p.33)

Mathematics session: Hoanh and Quyen were absent when the class started at 1:30. They then turned up at 3:30 – just 50 minutes before the afternoon classes finish. The class teacher quickly rushed into the classroom to question Hoanh and Quyen as to why they had missed her earlier session. Quyen said her mother made them look after the house/shop/baby and they could not leave until she returned home. The teacher was not happy with the answer and shouted “next time tell your mother you’re not doing that. Ms Phuong said I have to go to school”. The girl said “yes mam” (12th January 2012, field notes, pages 58-59).

It seems to be difficult for the parents to share their problematic situation with outsiders, including myself and the class teacher. The mother would relate the issue differently or avoid providing too many details, as though she were embarrassed about such a situation and was perhaps worried that she may be blamed for her children’s poor attendance, which to me is understandable. This, however, may not help her children since they lose the chance to gain the teachers’ understanding of the whole situation. Teachers in Vietnam do not talk to the pupils in friendly conversations, in order to verify any stories; this is just not in our culture and there is always a certain distance between teachers and pupils. Although this may have been changing lately in urban and private schools, this is not what was observed in my researched school. Below are some examples that show the different points of view a teacher would get, if they could gather information from both the family and the children themselves.

Conversation between teacher and mother:

Teacher: But Hoanh and Quyen often come to class late. I reminded them so many times – morning class particularly

Mother: *In the morning (they) get up then brush their teeth and wash their faces, and then I (always) tell them to hurry or they'll be late for class (Interviewed 22 December 2011, file Voice001).*

Conversation between the mother and me:

Mother: *.. my girl said that today is only meeting and playing, singing and performing, today is meeting... that's all..*

Me: *so they said today is for meeting only and you told them (the girls) that it is okay for them to stay at home?*

Mother: *no, (I) said.. um.. so you go to assembly.. so (they) said but nobody is looking after the brother, so (I) said let me send him to your grandparent's. But there was nobody home there either so both sisters had to stay at home to look after their little brother. (Interviewed May 2013, file Voice009(4))*

Conversation between the sisters and me (with neither parents nor teacher present):

Conversation 1:

Me: *why didn't you go to the school assembly today?*

Hoanh: *today I needed to look after my brother*

Me: *looking after the brother?...*

Hoanh: *yes...my dad got up early and went to Kim Boi and mother went to work early*

Me: *father goes to Kim Boi, mother goes to work?... so why not take your brother to your grandparents' so you can attend the assembly?*

Hoanh: *none of them are home, they went harvesting rice today*

Me: *they went harvesting rice? So why can't your brother go to kindergarten?*

Hoanh: *my parents didn't have 'giay an' (napkin)*

Me: *didn't have what?*

Quyen: *phieu an (lunch voucher)*

Me: *no lunch voucher. Which lunch voucher?*

Both: *lunch voucher at the kindergarten, 10,000 dong each*

Me: *10,000 dong each? Ah so each morning when dropping off your brother your parents need to buy him a lunch voucher?*

Both: *yes*

Me: *so no lunch voucher means no schooling for him?*

Hoanh: *yes, and there is also the tuition fee*

Me: *so how long has your brother been out of school?*

Quyên: *a few days already..* (Interviewed May 2013, file Voice004).

Conversation 2:

Me: *(talking to Quyên) the teacher said that you come to class late sometimes so you need to try your best to not be late anymore, okay?*

Q: *yes.. uhm.. because sometimes I need to look after my brother Hoang for my father to take grandmother to the market to sell bamboo*

Me: *ah.. so father takes grandmother (by bike) to sell bamboo so you have to stay at home to look after your brother Hoang?*

Q: *yes*

Me: *but isn't he going to nursery?*

Q: *no, some days he doesn't go (to nursery). If grandmother goes selling bamboo, Hoang will stay at home with me...* (Interviewed 16 December 2013, file Voice005).

Moving on from the home situation, the section below discusses relationships at home and at school for each sister.

5.2.2.1.2 Hoanh

At home, Hoanh presents herself as a caring big sister who has a very close relationship with her younger sister and younger brother and can be rather protective of them.

Some children reported to me that Hoanh and Quyên had swapped seats without the teacher's consent – while Hoanh and Quyên didn't respond to that, the class monitor said loudly so we could all hear: 'that is because Hoanh is worried about Quyên being hit by Khanh again'... this information moved me a bit because although they are twin sisters, Hoanh is considered the older sister and she appears to be rather protective towards her little sister. If they swapped seats like that, the person who would sit next to Khanh is her and not her little sister Quyên. (9 May 2012, field notes, page 70)

As the oldest child in the family, she presents herself as a responsible child who takes charge when the parents are not present, including cooking for her younger siblings and ensuring their safety around the house.

Conversation with both sisters:

Me *(walking into the kitchen)*: What are you doing?

Hoanh: I'm making fried rice

Me: frying rice?

Hoanh: yes, in the morning I make fried rice and roasted peanuts

Me: but I don't see any rice left so how can you make fried rice?

Hoanh: still a tiny little bit left

Me: so what are you preparing these corn seeds for?

Hoanh: for roasting

Me: so is that your lunch?

Hoanh: smiles...

.....(*further conversation then the rice is done*)

Hoanh: Hoang oi, here is your rice (brought out one small bowl of rice and that is all she's got). (May 2013 – file Voice004)

That moment at home shows a thoughtful, caring sister, who decided to give the best food (the rice) to the smallest family member (her little brother Hoang). The other sister would be eating corn instead. She has been observed in the kitchen quite often during my home visits.

Me (standing by Hoanh in the kitchen – she was preparing lunch for the three of them): what are you making fried rice with?

Hoanh: just by itself

Me: by itself? No vegetables?

Hoanh: yes (16 December 2013, file Voice005)

5.2.2.1.3 Quyen

At home, Quyen has a very close relationship with her big sister Hoanh and little brother Hoang. She plays well with her siblings but does not seem to spend much time with her parents, who are often away for work during the day, so she spends the daytime with her siblings only. She is very playful and somewhat less mature than her sister Hoanh, so she sometimes gets into trouble for doing things that she is not supposed to do.

Conversation from December 2013:

Hoanh: yesterday this one (pointing at Quyen) was hit with a rod

Me: really?

Hoanh: (laughing) yes

Me: why? What did she do?

Hoanh: she played with water with brother Hoang

Me: where did they play with water?

Hoanh: over there! (pointing at the rice field opposite their house)

Me: did the other one (their brother) get hit with a rod too?

Hoanh: he also got two rods

Me: how many did Quyen get?

Hoanh: she got one rod (got hit once).

Nevertheless, Quyen seems to know her responsibilities and always tries to assist her sister Hoanh, sharing the housework with her, such as helping to prepare lunch or looking after the little brother while Hoanh is cooking.

While Hoanh was making fried rice for the little brother, Quyen ran out into the garden and returned with something in her hand and below is our conversation:

Me: what is that?

Quyen: bulbs

Me: which bulb?

Little boy: sweet potato

Me: let me see... Where did you get this?

Quyen: I dug them up in my grandma's (garden)

Me: so what are you doing with them?

Quyen: I put (she meant eat?) it together with corn. These sweet potatoes take a long time to cook so I roast the corn first

Me: put in corn? Sweet potato into corn?

Quyen: no the bulbs (sweet potatoes) will be baked. (Interviewed on May 2013, file Voice004).

5.2.2.2 Khuong

Khuong is the youngest child in his family. His elder sister is also a student at the school, where she is in Year 5. This is a typical extended family, where grandparents, single aunts and uncles (if any), parents and children all live in the same house. Khuong's father told me that although his two sisters (Khuong's aunts) are still living with them, they are both away pursuing higher education in nursing and in education. They only come back at weekends and during holidays. This probably explains why little Khuong produced a drawing in one lesson showing his family with only six people. He counted grandparents, parents, his sister and himself and excluded these two aunts from his calculation.

The family has a rice field which provides a significant amount of rice for the whole family each year. Rice is the major food and is served at every single meal. Both parents were often away in the capital city working on a construction site, so their two children were mainly under the care of the

grandparents. The father said that in the last year there was not as much work in Hanoi, so he and his wife returned home but were still busy working in the rice field or travelling to different villages to be hired for different work available. It is therefore only the grandma who has been the contact person for the school.

Neither of the parents have met Khuong's class teacher this year but the grandma did when she went to the parent-teacher meeting at the beginning of the school year, and another time when she went to pay the school fees for her grandchildren. Unlike the girls' family situation, the school records show that Khuong's family often met the payment deadlines. The official list made by the school to apply for funding for children from poor families, however, listed both Khuong's and his sister's names. This means their fees will be subsidised by the government. When I questioned the head teacher about the criteria for the children to qualify for such support, she said that both the family situation and the region are relevant for this. She also stated that Quyen and Hoanh's family does not qualify, because they do not live in the two specified poor areas in the region.

When asked who would help Khuong with his homework, the father said Khuong's sister or mum are the people to help him. He also acknowledged that Khuong's Vietnamese had really expanded since attending kindergarten a year before primary school, 'but his pronunciation is not yet accurate' the dad said.

The father revealed that during their five intensive years working in the big city, the couple had saved some money and had been investing in education as they are paying for the two sisters studying in higher education at the moment. He said his family is not within the 'poor-zone scheme 135', where people get some financial support from the government. Although both parents never finished school, the father expressed his wish to have the children, Khuong and his sister, study to the end of high school (interviewed on 8 Feb 12, file 120208_003).

At home, Khuong is very close to his older sister who is attending the same primary school this year. His sister often helps him with homework and

practising reading at home. However, he does not come to school or go home with his sister but with his male peers who live nearby and the sister walks home with her female peers.

He does not have to complete as much housework as some other peers (Hoanh and Quyen, for instance) but would be in charge of cleaning and sweeping the floor and yard, while the big sister helps the grandmother in the kitchen. He is extremely close to his grandmother with whom he spends a lot of time, since his parents often travel to other provinces for work and have only really stayed at home since last year. His grandmother is also the only one that has been corresponding with the school and his class teacher (interviewed on 8 Feb 12, file 120208_003).

5.2.2.3 Nghieng

Nghieng is the oldest child in his family. He has a younger sister who was diagnosed with nerve disorders and damage, so she is physically disabled. A few weeks before my first visit to their house, his mother gave birth to a third child by herself at home and the child died at birth. The father is often away from home as he is a live-in worker for a family, and so he visits his wife and children once or twice every month.

Nghieng's disabled sister was given a wheelchair by a charity, but I could see the chair was not being used and had been put in a corner of the room and was covered in dust. This is probably because the infrastructure in the area is bumpy, with hilly dirt roads and no pavements for pedestrians, making it impossible to ride in this wheelchair outside the house. One might think she could use the chair to move around the house, but their house is too small to make any pathways for a wheelchair and that may be why the chair was not used.

Their house has just one room which is used as a bedroom and the common room. There is one bed in the corner of the room, which is shared by mother and the two children when dad is not there and would be shared by all four family members when he is home. In the other corner of the room there is a small television and this is the only valuable item I could see in the house.

Being classified as a poor family under Scheme 135 (the government scheme to help the poorest), the family receives some support from the local community and local government, such as a monthly cash allowance for paying the electricity bill and annual New Year's presents. I need to add that this allowance is still nowhere near the minimum living wage and that the mother stated that it was barely enough to settle the electricity bill. Their house was built by the local government using public funds (interviewed on 14 February 2012, minute 17:00, file 120214_001).

At the back of the house are a few square metres of red-soiled land, which is not fertile enough to grow anything. Right next to the back door is a little shed attached to the house, which is used as the kitchen where the mother cooks food for the family every day. I noticed that she still cooks using a basic woodstove, which most Vietnamese families used before gas and electric cookers appeared.

At home, Nghieng has a very close relationship with his mother with whom he spends most of his time. This is because his dad is away for work and only comes home occasionally. As the oldest child in the family, he appears to be responsible and considerate and would join his dad carrying out physical work in the house while his mother was pregnant with the second child, his younger sister (interviewed on 14 February 2012). After her birth, Nghieng also became a caring brother, who would look after his disabled sister while his mother was cooking or doing housework.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced my research participants and the learning ecology which contains the different layers surrounding them. These layers have more or less certain impacts on the children's learning, which will be illustrated in the following chapter by the data I present. This positions my participants in their particular learning context before their learner identities are further observed and analysed in the following chapter – the children and their learning.

Chapter 6: The children and their learning

As introduced at the end of Chapter 4, this chapter discusses the research participants in their learning contexts. In doing so, I wish to reveal how their learner identities are shaped during their learning journeys, as this would contribute to answering my research questions.

The first part of the chapter is an observation of the children in their classrooms. By observing the participants within their lessons, we can see the process of their being categorised as slow, in terms of their interactions with teachers and peers. The next section forms an analysis of the observations of the learners in their classes, and how their home situations may have contributed to their learning journeys. The final section will explore the learning programme in detail and highlights the importance of the Vietnamese subject in that learning programme. Typical lessons are also analysed, because by observing actual teaching and the children in typical lessons, we can see how the style of teaching identifies them as being slow and also contributes to them having low learning outcomes. Significant attention is paid to the role of assessment, which was identified in section 4.4.10, as it is testing and the process of testing is highly significant in establishing that the participants are slow learners. It is also assessment outcomes that decide whether the learner will repeat the school year or not. Throughout the sections that focus on the classroom and assessments, it must constantly be borne in mind that the focal children are linguistic minority learners, where Vietnamese is not their mother tongue, as this is vitally important when seeking to answer the first research question about how they are categorised as slow.

6.1 In this school year

In this section, each participant's situation in the classroom is observed in detail, starting from an overall observation of the learners' relationship with others. This is followed by a detailed inspection of their learning progress, using samples from their workbooks over the whole school year and their

learning trail inside their classes, as well as their test scores and overall academic results.

6.1.1 Hoanh's learning progress

At school, Hoanh played and interacted well with her classmates but remained mostly close to her twin sister, who is also in the same class. She also formed good relationships with those sitting around her in particular and could join them in being playful and somewhat disruptive during lessons.

Maths: The teacher asked the children to repeat what they had learnt in the previous lesson. While the children were answering the teacher, Hoanh was busy cutting her cloth for her blackboard with scissors.... Quoc and Hoanh are joining together trying to tear Hoanh's cloth and were reported by Hung sitting in front – they were then reprimanded by the teacher. (24 November 2011, field notes, page 24)

She sometimes got into trouble at school due to home-related issues, such as the sample shown above where she came to school really late due to house minding and was scolded by the teacher. At other times, she may be picked on by other children at school, and this happens to her more significantly than with other girls in the class. Here, I need to stress that the teachers seemed to just focus on the consequences, rather than the reasons behind such consequences. The teachers rarely intervened when children were picked on or when bullying happened.

Hoanh was asked to take her book out to complete the additions – a peer sitting in front of her told me “she's very stupid – so like her sister, she won't know how to do it. (8 November 2011, field notes, page 14)

The teacher scolded Hoanh and Quyen for having torn books. Some children shouted that it was because big kids from grades 2 to 5 tore their books – the information isn't noticed or registered by the teacher as she continues scolding the two sisters. (21 December 2011, field notes, page 44)

Hoanh didn't do anything at first because she doesn't have chalk or a chalkboard. When asked why, she said Dang in the 1A class had broken her chalkboard yesterday (...) Hoanh doesn't have a workbook. The teacher asked her about it and she said that someone had already torn her book (12 January 2012, field notes, page 62).

Conversation in May 2013:

Me: this bag? Is this the old or the new one?

Hoanh: old one, my new bag had the straps cut by some peers

Me: who cut them?

Hoanh: Van

Me: Van?

Hoanh: yes

Me: is she in the same class?

Hoanh: yes

Me: did you report it to the teacher?

Hoanh: I didn't

(Voice recording 009_5).

At the beginning of the school year, Hoanh's workbook showed that she worked very carefully and neatly. Looking at her workbooks later revealed that such effort and enthusiasm for learning had somewhat decreased over time and towards the end of the school year, such effort was hardly observed. These workbooks are for Vietnamese writing practice and letter calligraphy. The work from these books is heavily regarded as a learning outcome for all children. Those who can write beautifully, neatly and strictly following the line rules obtain high marks and are highly regarded by the teachers. All the writing workbooks therefore have clear lines and the children are trained to follow the line rules very strictly.

The images shown below are two samples taken from two different workbooks. Each sample shows a piece of her work ranging from stages 1 to 4, with 1 being the beginning of the school year and 4 being the end of the school year.

Sample 1 shows that at the beginning of the school year (stage 1) the letters are so carefully and accurately formed. This is still observed in stage 2's sample. The image of her work from stage 3, however, shows sloppiness in the writing, such as not following the line rules (normal letters are two boxes tall, whereas letters with going up or going down strokes are five boxes tall, etc.). The letters are not all correctly formed – some are missing some strokes. However, one positive point in stage 3 is that she still got the tones correctly written in her writing and this is very commendable. Stage 4 shows

a very low quality piece of writing, where the letters are formed neither correctly nor clearly enough.

Sample 2 is taken from Hoanh's calligraphy practice and again the stage 1 sample shows she followed the lining rules carefully and formed the letters accurately. The sample at stage 2 shows that although the lining rules are violated, most of the letters are correctly formed and all the tones are correct also. Stage 3's samples show the lining rule being more seriously violated, where some letters are wrong and some tones are missing, to which the teacher gave her 4/10. Stage 4's sample contains all the mistakes observed in stage 3 but worse than before, the letters are not as clearly written and she did not complete her page of work either.

Stage 1 (beginning)

c c o o o o o
o o o o o o o
o o o o c c c
5 o o o o o o o
o o o o o o o
o o o o o o o
o o o o o o o
o o o o o o o
o o o o o o o

Stage 2

Bai 18
x x x x x x
x x x x x x
x x x x x x
xe xe xe xe xe xe
6 xe xe xe xe xe xe
ch ch ch ch ch ch
ch ch ch ch ch ch
ch ch ch ch ch ch
cho cho cho cho
cho cho cho cho

Stage 3

Bài 36

ay ay ay ay ay ay
 ay ay ay ay ay ay
 ay ay ay ay ay ay
 máy bay máy bay
 máy bay máy bay
 ay ay ay ay ay ay
 ay ay ay ay ay ay
 ay ay ay ay ay ay
 nhảy dây nhảy dây
 nhảy dây nhảy dây

Stage 4 (end of year)

| | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| oam | oam | oam | oam | oam |
| oam | oam | oam | oam | oam |
| oam | oam | oam | oam | oam |
| oam | oam | oam | oam | oam |
| oam | oam | oam | oam | oam |

Quảng khoa sau hoam.

| | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| ay | ay | ay | ay | ay |
| ay | ay | ay | ay | ay |
| ay | ay | ay | ay | ay |
| ay | ay | ay | ay | ay |

| | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| aem | aem | aem | aem | aem |
| aem | aem | aem | aem | aem |
| aem | aem | aem | aem | aem |
| aem | aem | aem | aem | aem |
| aem | aem | aem | aem | aem |

Bé nhôn miêng cười.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | B | B | B | B |
| B | B | B | B | B |
| B | B | B | B | B |
| B | B | B | B | B |

Image 1: Hoanh's work sample 1

Stage 1 (beginning)

Bài 8

l l l l l l l
 l l l l l l l
 h h h h h h h
 h h h h h h h
 lê lê lê lê lê lê lê
 hè hè hè hè hè hè hè

5

Bài 9

o o o o o o o
 o
 c c c c c c c
 c c c c c c c
 bò bò bò bò bò bò bò

6

Stage 2

im im im im im
 um um um um um
 chim cầu chim cầu chim
 trùm khăn trùm khăn

Bài 65

iêm iêm iêm iêm iêm
 yêm yêm yêm yêm yêm
 đĩa xiêm đĩa xiêm đĩa
 cái yếm cái yếm cái

Bài 66

uôm uôm uôm uôm

Stage 3

bận bênh bộn bênh bên
tôn ca tôn ca tôn ca tôn ca
lợn nhà lợn nhà lợn
4 xinh đẹp xinh đẹp xinh
bếp lửa bếp lửa bếp lửa
giúp đỡ giúp đỡ giúp
uống cá uống cá uống cá



viên gạch viên gạch
kênh rạch kênh rạch

Stage 4 (end of year)

giết giết giết giết giết giết
iết iết iết iết iết
uyết uyết uyết uyết uyết
viết đẹp viết đẹp viết đẹp
duyet binh duyet binh duyet binh
giêu giêu giêu giêu giêu
iêu iêu iêu iêu iêu
yêu yêu yêu yêu yêu
hiếu thảo hiếu thảo hiếu thảo
yêu mến yêu mến yêu mến

Image 2: Hoanh's work sample 2

In my various observations, there are moments and sessions when Hoanh showed impressive progress, such as getting many calculations right when given tasks in mathematics.

Mathematics : General Practice: Hoanh got $7+1$, $2+2$, $10+0$, $9+1$, $8-5$, $4-4$ right, and got $9-2$, $7-6$, $5-1$ wrong, meaning she got six right and three wrong calculations. Khuong got four right by himself and copied two correct calculations from peers, with three wrong. Sister Quyen got only two calculations wrong this time (7 December 2011, field notes, pages 37-38).

Mathematics – Revision of Additions to 10: The whole class reads all the additions to 10. Volunteers are then asked to read. Hoanh is picked and gets it right. Now the mathematics kit is taken out (magnetic boards and numbers). Teacher reads the calculations and the children pick the numbers and signs (+/-, =) and form the calculations on the magnetic board then calculate to give the right answer. The teacher waits then signals by hitting the ruler on her desk and all the children raise their boards to show her the results. Hoanh got ALL of the 10 calculations right, compared to her sister Quyen who got 4/10 right and Khuong got 6/10 right. (30 December 2011, field notes, pages 27-28)

When temporarily placed in a different class for one morning (together with eight other classmates), Hoanh showed she could read and recognise words when asked by the new teacher.

Class 1A – Reading a poem from the board: The children are called to the board to hold a ruler, point to, and read aloud each word of a poem. Hoanh and Quyen are called and they read very well. When asked to identify some words in the poem (selected by the teacher), the sisters found them after a brief struggle. (15 December 2011, field notes, page 42)

After closely observing her, I realise that there are moments signifying high points in her overall learning and development, such as getting correct results for many calculations in mathematics, accurately writing words dictated by the teacher (although this is not recognised by the teacher, as her writing is 'ugly' – the word that the teacher uses), or employing good problem-solving skills. These go unnoticed by any teacher.

Mathematics : Adding three apples and three apples using pictures demonstrated on the board – Hoanh volunteered but wasn't called so she moved to the subtractions page in the workbook instead – when asked to move back to the additions page she was kind of subtracting rather than adding. (8 November 2011, field notes, pages 13-14)

When Nhu had some broken lead stuck in her sharpener, she asked me to help. When I was just about to say something, Hoanh said “use a counting stick as that works really well” – Nhu followed her instructions and got rid of the lead in her sharpener. I was thinking that Hoanh seems to know things that her peers don’t know. (16 December 2011, field notes, pages 17-18)

Towards the end of the school year, any high points in her learning were rarely observed. Her learning enthusiasm decreased rapidly after the mid-year-test, the results for which were released in early January. Her peers continued speaking to her (and her sister) rudely about her being a weak student and she often did not reply to their comments.

Mathematics : Hoanh was asked to take her book out to complete the additions – a peer sitting in front of her told me “she’s very stupid – so like her sister, she won’t know how to do it”. The Mathematics teacher did not reply to that. (8 November 2011, field notes, page 14)

Vietnamese: Hoanh and Quyen are asked, by me, whether they want to try writing with a pen instead of a pencil as all their peers have started writing with a pen from this semester. They both shook their heads – no thanks. Their peers were saying loudly: “they write very ugly and the teacher said that those who write ugly have to use pencil”. (27 December 2011, field notes, page 54)

Mathematics : I notice there is one table in the class that has three children, which is very unusual because the tables are designed for only two seats. If there are three children, they won’t even have enough room for opening their reading/writing books, not to mention that they have to work on their personal chalk board very often. These three children are Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong and the table they are sitting at is on the back row of the class. I asked them why they are sharing one desk while there is one where nobody is sitting. The three children were not able to answer my question but many others tried to speak at the same time, telling me loudly that it was because those three would be repeating the year and that the class teacher had seated them there and in that way. None of the three children said anything. (9 May 2012, field notes, page 66)

The school year ended very quickly, and she was amongst the three pupils repeating the class, while her other peers were promoted to Year 2.

6.1.2 Quyen’s learning progress

At school, while appearing to be sociable and able to play with most of her peers, Quyen remains closest to her sister Hoanh. I observed that at playtime the two of them often play together. She has also developed a close

relationship with Khuong, the boy with whom she shares a desk (the pupil's desks and chairs in this school are designed for them to sit in pairs). The two of them are close friends who can play well with each other, getting playful or disruptive together in class or sharing the results of mathematics calculations with each other.

Music and singing: Khuong and Quyen played fighting... Quyen and Khuong ate a star fruit and each time the teacher wasn't looking they took it out from the drawer and had a bite. (16 November 2011, field notes, page 18)

Mathematics : Khuong has a bag containing a snack (corn pipes), so in the corner where he sits the children are eating that during the lesson. The teacher hasn't noticed yet... The class is reading aloud now. Quyen and Khuong continue eating. (25 November 2011, field notes, page 26)

Music and singing: both Quyen and Khuong playfully sang into their rolled-up books, although the teacher had requested that all children sing without their books. (30 November 2011, field notes, page 30)

Mathematics - Additions to 6: the teacher asked the children to do the calculations in their workbooks. Khuong realised that all calculations led to 6 as the result. He turned to Quyen and said 'all results are 6 okay', to which Quyen followed by completing her page. (8 November 2011, field notes, page 14)

Like most children's relationships, sometimes conflicts also occur between Quyen and Khuong. Often it is just some disagreement where the two would argue loudly in Muong but on rare occasions more violent incidents happened between them. Most of the time they became friends again very quickly afterwards.

Mathematics : Quyen and Khuong had some dispute where Khuong accused Quyen of stealing his tiny piece of rubber, claiming that the piece that Quyen was holding was his. Quyen, on the other hand, argued it was hers. (31 October 2011, field notes, page 10)

Music and Singing: Quyen was crying and Khuong was reported for hitting her and throwing her bag on the floor. The teacher made Khuong apologise and he did. Quyen stopped crying and is now talking to Khuong again. (16 November 2011, field notes, page 18)

Mathematics : Khuong was reported for throwing Quyen's lollipop on the floor and slapping her on the face. The teacher made him go in front of the class to apologise and to promise not to act like that again. (6 December 2011, field notes, page 34)

Just like her sister Hoanh, Quyen is also rather vulnerable to being picked on or bullied by peers and older children.

Weekly Review: Quyen comes back to the classroom to find that her books have been thrown everywhere on the floor (someone must have done it). When she was picking the books up some peers pointed at her laughing. The teacher didn't say anything. (25th November 2011, field notes, page 27)

Quyen also told the teacher that someone had taken her sharpener. (6 December 2011, field notes, page 34)

Mathematics Workbook: the children work in their workbooks. Quyen, Hoanh and Khuong aren't doing anything. Quyen told the teacher her book was torn by a child from the 2A class (Hai Anh) and a child from the 5A class. (21 December 2011, field notes, page 44)

Quyen's relationships with her teachers are not so close. Like her sister, she is late for school sometimes and at other times she comes to school without adequate learning materials such as pencils, crayons, chalk and/or chalkboard and at such times she is criticised by her teachers. She is clearly not the teachers' favourite.

Test: Quyen was scolded by the invigilator for making some mistake on her test paper. (26 December 2011, field notes, page 52)

Vietnamese: after the "van" are introduced, the class writes in their writing books. The class teacher criticised Hoanh and Quyen for coming to school looking grubby and untidy lately (they haven't washed their hair, hands and faces before coming to school and their clothes look dirty, etc.). (12 January 2012, field notes, page 58)

Quyen was one of the pupils identified as a slow learner at a very early stage of Year 1. Studying her workbooks, I could see that like most of her peers she showed careful effort in the first few lessons. The difference is that such effort does not persist in the later stages of her workbooks, as she mostly worked unsupervised with no support provided by the teachers. The samples of her work taken from two different and major workbooks are shown below on pages 152-155. Each sample contains four different images of her work, progressing from the beginning to the end of the school year.

In sample 1, stage 1 shows that her writing was rather neat, following the straight line and lining rules. Also, she got all the tones right, and this is very important in Vietnamese. Stage 2 in sample 1 shows she is still on track with

the writing rules, although there was not enough time for her to complete all the lines on the page.

Stage 3 clearly shows an unsupervised piece of work as she got the letters wrong, the tones wrong, and she also failed to follow the lining rules. However, she did try to complete the two words '*mùa dưa*' as well as '*ngựa tía*'.

Stage 4 shows a piece of work where she had been abandoned and did not even try to complete the writing of both words (*tuổi thọ*), but tried to write the first word only (*tuổi*). In the second example, '*mây bay*', she did try to write both words *mây* and *bay*, but most of the words written have the wrong tones and the lining rules are seriously omitted from this piece of writing.

Stage 1 (beginning)

Bài 3

be be be be be be b

be be be be be be b

be be be be be be b

bé bé bé bé bé b b

bé bé bé bé bé bé bé

Bài 4

bé bé bé bé bé bé bé

bé bé bé bé bé bé bé

bé bé bé bé b bé bé bé

be be be be be be b

be be be be be be b

Stage 2

ng ng ng ng ng ng n

cá ngưi cá ngưi cá ngưi

cá ngưi cá ngưi cá ngưi

ng h ng h ng h ng h

ng h ng h ng h ng h

ng h ng h ng h ng h

củ nghê củ nghê củ

củ nghê củ nghê củ

Stage 1 (beginning)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |
| e | ê | u | ư | i | n | m |

5

Stage 2

Tập chép

Tặng cháu

Tớ này ta tặng cháu yêu ta
 Có chút lòng yêu cháu gọi là
 Mong cháu ra công mà học tập
 Mai sau cháu giúp nước non nhà

Đặng cháu
 Tô này ta tặng cháu
 yêu ta có chút lòng
 yêu cháu gọi là
 Mong cháu ra công
 mà học tập
 Mai sau cháu giúp nước
 non nhà

4

Stage 3

Handwritten practice for Stage 3 on a grid background. The first section shows the word "oam" written in various orientations and combinations of letters. Below this, the phrase "Giếng khoan sâu hoắm" is written in red ink. This is followed by a vertical column of the letter "o" and another vertical column of the letter "a". The second section shows the word "oem" written in various orientations and combinations of letters. Below this, the phrase "Bé nhón miệng cười" is written in red ink. This is followed by a vertical column of the letter "o" and another vertical column of the letter "e".

Stage 4 (end of year)

Handwritten practice for Stage 4 on a grid background. The first section shows the word "uênh" written in various orientations and combinations of letters. Below this, the phrase "Chó nòi huênh hoang" is written in red ink. This is followed by a vertical column of the letter "h" and another vertical column of the letter "u". The second section shows the word "uêch" written in various orientations and combinations of letters. Below this, the phrase "Chú viết ngược ngược" is written in red ink. This is followed by a vertical column of the letter "h" and another vertical column of the letter "u".

Image 4: Quyên's work sample 2

In the second sample of her writing progress, taken from the calligraphy workbook, we can see that Quyen did well at the early stage – stage 1. She completed the whole page of letters and most of the work is accurately copied from the standard samples provided (the red letters). Stage 2 shows that although struggling with copying one verse of a poem neatly and accurately in terms of tones and letters, she still tried her best to write the whole verse and we can see all the words in this poem are written. Stage 3, however, shows a serious level of decrease, because even though the sample provided contains less words than that in stage 2, she did not do a great job of copying the writing here. The words are not correctly formed as she missed out letters within a word and the lining rules are not followed either. This is also seen in stage 4, and it can also be observed that stage 4 is even a slightly worse version of stage 3.

Experiencing a similar situation to her sister Hoanh, Quyen's learning is clearly affected by her lack of learning materials. The classroom and teachers have no spare materials for the children, so often those who do not have learning materials with them sit without doing any work. Sometimes their peers show some generosity by letting them borrow their spare materials but such offers do not always happen, especially without the teachers' intervention.

Mathematics : Quyen wanted to borrow crayons from Khuong but wasn't successful and the teacher had to intervene so she could finally borrow some. The teacher did the same thing with her sister Hoanh and she also got some crayons from a peer.....now she does not have crayons and Quyen told the teacher that their mother doesn't have any money to buy them crayons yet. Khuong who sits next to Quyen then had a go at her in Muong, probably about parents buying crayons and Quyen argued that they don't have money, perhaps because I could only hear the word money (...) Now the teacher asked the pupils to open their books at an exercise page and Quyen got the right page. Her practise book looks worn out. The front covers are all gone and some of the first and last pages are also missing – the other pages look torn. She took a pencil which is about 2cm long and a piece of rubber which is as small as the top of her little finger. The teacher said she can't write with that pencil as it's not good for her fingers and requested a friend to let her borrow a pencil. The teacher then told Quyen to ask her parents to buy her a pencil – Quyen said yes. (31 October 2010, field notes, page 10)

Mathematics : calculating using counting sticks: Khuong couldn't do the picture addition correctly – neither could Quyên, who doesn't have counting sticks – Khuong let her borrow them. (8 November 2010, field notes, page 10)

From time to time, Quyên also had her good moments, when she displayed her learning effort by getting many mathematics calculations right, or focusing and working hard during Vietnamese sessions.

Hoc Van: The teacher dictates and the children write the words on their boards. Hoanh and Quyên write well – the letters are not evenly formed and are not in a straight line but the teacher praised them for doing better than previously. The teacher also asked who had noticed some friends who are weak in literacy but who had tried hard today. A girl shouted out Quyên and Hoanh. The teacher agreed and said these two could form words using the right letters today, although the written appearance was not as beautiful. (17 November 2011, field notes, page 21)

Luyen viet: Quyên spent some of her break time for writing. She was complemented by the 1A teacher who came to visit. (1 December 2011, field notes, page 32)

Mathematics : Quyên has 8/10 calculations correct here, but perhaps only me as the observer registered such an effort, as this did not seem to be acknowledged by her teacher or peers. (7 December 2011, field notes, page 39)

Writing: *Cái vọt* – Quyên got the writing correct and was praised by the teacher who is always confused between Hoanh and Quyên. (7 December 2011, field notes, page 37)

Towards the end of the school year, such good moments seemed to disappear gradually. She got into trouble more than in the first half of the year, such as for being late for school, coming to class without adequate learning materials or for not doing much during the class. She was criticised and scolded by teachers and peers more often, but she never replied to any of those criticisms as though she had got used to it. Her low motivation clearly showed during the end-of-year test when she submitted her unfinished paper. When the paper was returned by the invigilator so she could continue working on it, as there was still time for her to do so, she did not make any additional changes to the paper and just waited for the time to end so she could submit the paper again without it being returned to her (10 May 2012, field notes, pages 68-70).

The school year ended with her on the list for repeating Year 1.

6.1.3 Khuong's learning progress

At school Khuong had built good relationships with his peers and was particularly close to Quyen, who sat next to him throughout almost all the year. Although there are conflicts between him and Quyen (as demonstrated with some excerpts from the field notes in Quyen's section on pages 146-147 above), they always became friends again very quickly. Khuong could be a very generous friend, who offered support to Quyen from time-to-time, including letting her borrow his learning materials and sharing learning information and results with her. He also is an active boy who could be playful while at times ignoring the class rules.

Khuong is very busy with his cards under the table. Group 3 was called. Quyen sings alright. Khuong is busy chewing some gum. Khuong was called – still chewing and singing at the same time. Was asked to go and spit out the gum before coming back. (9 Nov 11, field notes, page 17)

Hoanh was called – Khuong and Quyen played fighting. (9 Nov 11, field notes, page 16)

Quyen and Khuong ate a star fruit and each time the teacher wasn't looking they took it out from the drawer and had a bite. (16 Nov 11, field notes, page 18)

As he is perceived by the teachers as a slow learner, he does not have a close relationship with any of them. He hardly ever received any praise or compliments from the teachers for good effort but would be reprimanded and disciplined when he was unable to complete the task at hand or for being playful and disruptive in the class. Different excerpts from the field notes cited later in this section on pages 160-161 will further support this point.

Although I was told in advance that Khuong is among the slow learners in the class, my observations reflect that Khuong's learning was rather normal at the beginning of the school year with his work rated quite highly in the samples provided on pages 157-158 below. When looking through his workbooks I could see that his work was consistently good. Although the last stage, at the end of the year, shows that he did not work as carefully and neatly, which means the appearance of the work had slightly declined, the accuracy was still ensured. Below are two samples of his work taken from two workbooks.

The first sample contains three images of his work as the year progressed and we can see clearly that the quality of his work was very good. The second sample contains four images of his work from the timeline starting at the beginning and moving through to the end of the year. The mark that the teacher gave him shows how good he was at the start, where he got 8/10 for his work. Stage 2 shows the mark had declined to 6/10 and 5/10 for Stage 3. There was no mark given for the last image of his work but based on the way the work is marked, I think he would get no more than 5/10. This shows how important the appearance of Vietnamese written work is in our system. The sample shows complete accuracy of the writing, but he would get only 50 percent because the appearance of the work is regarded as highly as the accuracy.

| Stage 1 (beginning) | Stage 2 (midyear) | Stage 3 (end of year) |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Bài 5</p> <p>bè bè bè be be be be be be be be be bê bê bê bê be bê be be be be be</p> | <p>ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua cua bê cua bê cua bê cua bê cua bê cua bê</p> | <p>on on on on on on an on on on on on on on on on on on mẹ con mẹ con mẹ mẹ con mẹ con mẹ</p> |
| <p>Bài 6</p> <p>be bè bé bê bẽ be be bè bê bê bẽ be be bê bé bê be be</p> | <p>ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ua ngựa gỗ ngựa gỗ ngựa ngựa gỗ ngựa gỗ ngựa</p> | <p>an an an an an an an an an an an an an an nhà sàn nhà sàn nhà sàn nhà sàn</p> |

Image 5: Khuong's work sample 1

Stage 1 (beginning)

l l l l l l l
 l l l l l l l
 8 h h h h h h h
 h h h h h h h
 lê lê lê lê lê lê lê
 hê hê hê hê hê hê hê

Bài 9

o o o o o o o
 o o o o o o o
 c c c c c c c
 c c c c c c c
 8 bô bô bô bô bô bô

Stage 2

trống chiêng trống chiêng

Bài 56

uông uông uông uông
 6 uông uông uông uông
 quả chuông quả chuông
 con đường con đường

Bài 57

ang ang ang ang an
 anh anh anh anh
 cây bàng cây bàng
 cánh chanh cánh chanh

Stage 3

ao ao ao ao ao ao ao
au au au au au au au

sao sáng sao sáng sáng sao sáng sao sáng
mai sau mai sau mai sau mai sau mai sau

an an an an an an an
at at at at at at at

5 bàn tay bàn tay bàn tay bàn tay bàn tay

hạt thóc hạt thóc hạt thóc hạt thóc hạt thóc

D D D D D D D D D D

Stage 4 (end of year)

khăn đỏ khăn đỏ khăn đỏ khăn đỏ

mãng non măng non măng non măng non

inh inh inh inh inh inh inh
uynh uynh uynh uynh uynh uynh

binh minh binh minh binh minh binh minh

phụ huynh phụ huynh phụ huynh phụ huynh

y y y y y y y y y y

Image 6: Khuong's work sample 2

The written work provides little evidence of Khuong being a slow learner, the teacher regarded him as slow because he was unable to read the Vietnamese text in the textbook fluently enough. My observations show that Khuong could learn well at times. He could be quick to learn and would cope well when supervised and motivated.

Mathematics – additions to 6: the teacher asked the children to do many calculations. Khuong found out that all the additions led to 6 so he told Quyen about that “6 *het nhe*” (all are 6). (8 November 2011, field notes page 14)

Mathematics: Khuong and Quoc got most of the subtractions right and weren't checked by the teacher. (24 November 2011, field notes page 24)

Mathematics: the table below records how the children completed dictated calculations on their chalkboards. The ticks show that they got the answer correct when asked to show their results to the teacher; the question marks denote that the children were not ready when signalled to show the result; a question mark and a tick next to each other shows the children got accurate results but slightly later and could not raise their boards to show the teacher at the same time as the other children.

| | 2+8 | 7+3 | 3+7 | 4+6 | 6+4 | 5+5 | 10+0 |
|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Hoanh | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Quyen | √ | ?√ | √ | ?√ | ?√ | | 10+5=10 |
| Khuong | √ | √ | √ | ?√ | √ | √ | ? |
| Quoc | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

(30 November 2011, field notes page 28).

Writing dictated words on their personal blackboards: although appearing to be looking at his peers' work, Khuong could actually identify their mistakes sometimes (for example: *đút dây* – Hoang wrote *đút dâi* and Khuong pointed out the mistake and said to Hoang: it's ending with 'y' not 'i'). (14 December 2011, field notes page 44)

Moving away from literacy and numeracy learning, Khuong could be a curious and enthusiastic learner, as well as being good at observing and problem-solving as my observations show.

Study of Nature and Society – Unit 11 – Family: Khuong and Quyen show real interest in the pictures in their books. They discussed them with each other loudly in Muong with an enthusiasm and happiness which I rarely observed. (17 November 2011, field notes page 19)

Mathematics : the mathematics teacher tried to turn the light on as the classroom was rather dark due to the rainy, cloudy day. The power did not come on after she had pressed the switch, so she said to herself 'no electricity today'. Khuong, sitting at the table near the door, said loudly to the teacher: 'turn the trip-switch on first teacher'. The teacher followed his instruction and the light came on. (30 November 2011, field notes page 28)

Art and Craft – making a paper fan: the teacher asked the children to get a piece of paper to fold into a fan. She showed them briefly how to fold it but there were 27 children and the teacher only sat by her desk to fold it and every now and then raised the sample up for the whole class to see, so many children could not see how to make it from step 1. When it was their turn to make their own fans, the class got a bit chaotic as many didn't have spare paper for this task and they were not asked to bring paper prior to the lesson either. The teacher also did not have any spare paper for the children, so many of them ended up tearing their workbooks and some just sat there not doing anything as they didn't have paper and perhaps didn't want to tear their books either. Khuong had tiny pieces of paper from someone but he managed to fold his paper to make a small fan just like the sample the teacher had made which was rather impressive. (6 December 2011, field notes page 33)

These positive observations of Khuong are mostly from the first semester and before the mid-year test. The second half of the school year does not show Khuong being enthusiastic and focusing well in learning like he did in the first half of the year. Khuong's mid-year test result in Vietnamese was 4/10 (fail) and mathematics was 6/10 (pass at average) and these were made public to his family and the class which perhaps did not help. I observed that he was a little quieter and did not try as hard as he had. I always wondered if he expected his mathematics result to be 'excellent', as his original mathematics paper showed that he got 100 percent of the calculations correct, but the result was changed to better match his mark on the Vietnamese paper.

Marking process in the teachers' common room: Khuong got 100% right but the mathematics teacher consulted the class teacher again and they decided that he must have looked at his peers' work, so some answers should be rubbed out in order to make it wrong. She made it 7 and then decided it was too much so she corrected it to 6. Then she said that if she had just based it on the result (blind/anonymous marking) he would get 10/10. (27 December 2011, field notes, page 56-57)

The second semester passed very quickly and Khuong was one of three students ranked as Provisional Fail. This means that they would take a retest and that

would be their final chance. He was finally classified as fail and had to repeat the year.

6.1.4 Nghieng's learning progress

Nghieng has a very peaceful relationship with all his peers at school. My observations throughout the year reveal only one time when he got into a conflict with a classmate sitting near him.

Nghieng is reported for hitting Manh (who sits behind him) and I came and asked why – he said Manh insulted him in Muong, so I asked both of them to apologise to each other and then shake hands. They did and when they shook hands, both them and their peers giggled together. (1 February 2012, field notes page 63)

Nghieng seems to have a neutral relationship with all the teachers, as they hardly ever reprimand or discipline him like they do the other children. That also means he is never praised for good work or criticised for producing poor work. There seems to be sympathy from the teachers for him as a learning disabled child.

Nghieng is also quite shy and would not be open to any new teacher, especially those who come to substitute for his teachers.

The music and singing teacher was absent. The substitute teacher complained that Nghieng didn't do anything and that he completely ignored her and never replied to her at all. (1 February 2012, field notes page 63)

This is his second year in Year 1, as he is repeating the year due to failing the tests the previous year. This means he is one year older than most of the children in his class, but physically he looks smaller than the majority of them.

Nghieng is the only participant from whom I did not collect any work samples apart from his test papers. This is because Nghieng often sits in his classes doing absolutely nothing. Unlike his peers, he is not supervised, prompted or requested to do any tasks. He has literacy and numeracy learning kits like most of the children as he is under Scheme 135. This means these learning materials are paid for by the government, so he has better materials compared with some of the other children. However, his learning kits and writing booklets and workbooks were later passed on to another student who joined the class a little late, after the school year had already started. This meant that Nghieng did not have any workbooks or learning kits but the teacher explained that he would not be doing

anything and would not know how to do any of the work, since he is a special needs child who falls under the learning disabled category. The excerpts below, taken directly from my observational field notes, show Nghieng's passive image in the classroom.

Writing Practice: the students are writing in their booklets and Nghieng was given a different booklet to trace along the dots rather than to write. He didn't concentrate on writing but played with the notebook. The teacher was very busy with the class so Nghieng got away with not doing anything. The teacher said loudly that he is disabled and will need a personal/simplified test paper. (1 November 2011, field notes pages 11-12)

Music and singing – the little chicks: Nghieng didn't do anything. (9 November 2011, field notes page 17)

Vietnamese: Nghieng is given a book to trace the letters and words; others write and copy the sample written for them by the teacher. While others focus on writing, Nghieng is very dreamy – he keeps doing something else and then found it impossible to concentrate – he didn't do much at all. (7 December 2011, field notes page 38)

Mathematics : Nghieng isn't doing anything as he doesn't have his notebook to work in like the other children. But he has the new, second mathematics book – the teacher doesn't seem to be bothered about whether he does anything. He is now playing with his crayons. He has adequate learning materials and books – more than many others, but he is rarely asked to do any work or if he does anything, his work is never checked by the teacher. Khanh is using Nghieng's book as he isn't doing anything, so the class teacher decided to give all his workbooks and his literacy/mathematics kit to Khanh instead, meaning that Nghieng no longer has these, as 'he would not use them anyway' the teacher said. (21 December 2011, field notes, page 46)

Personal chalk boards: Nghieng doesn't seem to have a chalk board as he just sat there not doing the tasks that the other children were doing. Moving to *Handwriting books with pencils*: the teacher writes on the blackboard while the children copy that into their books. Nghieng does not need to do this and is given a book to trace but he isn't doing it either. (22 December 2011, field notes, pages 48-49)

Giai toan co loi van (solving mathematics using literature/words): The children have to read aloud as the teacher points the ruler at each word on the blackboard. Those who aren't reading are criticised severely. Nghieng never gets reminded, no matter whether he reads or not.... All the children have nothing on the table as they have to focus on the blackboard and no personal books or materials are allowed. Nghieng, however, takes out his box all the time to play with some rubber or pencil – the teacher didn't notice or remind him to focus at all. (2 February 2012, field notes, page 64)

Test days are serious times for the children, when they all have to try their best to complete the test papers, as their fates depend on their results. With Nghieng, test days do not seem to be different from any other day, as though he knew he would not have to do the test and in case he did, the test papers would be really easy for him anyway.

Practice test: Nghieng didn't do much but when I asked him some questions, I realised he understands and knows the letters and can read a little. At first he didn't touch the test paper because the teacher said he wouldn't know how to do it – he has now made some effort and has a few things correct – the mathematics teacher then said that he may not be disabled like the other teachers believe he is (23 December 2011, field notes, page 51).

Semester 1 Test day: in the morning is the Vietnamese test. Nghieng isn't doing the test. He does not even have a test paper in front of him as he is tracing in his writing book again. In the afternoon, the mathematics teacher prepares the children for the mathematics test tomorrow. Nghieng just sits there and isn't doing anything. (26 December 2011, field notes, pages 52-53)

End-of-year Vietnamese Test: I noticed that some children in the 1A class are really struggling. Nghieng is given a handwriting sheet which the class teacher later told me she wrote for him. This basically requested him to copy the given words provided on the paper. This is far below the level of the test that his peers are doing. (10 May 2012, field notes, page 74)

Mathematics test: Nghieng is given a separate sheet to do the test. (11 May 2012, field notes, page 76)

While the teachers all agree with each other that Nghieng is a learning disabled child, my observations show that Nghieng has his good moments in learning and is capable of giving accurate answers, if he is focused and asked to do so. Those good moments, nevertheless, are not recognised by the teachers, as though whether he does some good work or does nothing, it means little in his case.

Mathematics : subtractions that lead to 10:

16-6: Nghieng got the answer very quickly without looking at his peers' work. He's very proud of his result but the teacher didn't even notice.

17-7: Nghieng got the answer quickly – by himself too. A peer behind (Manh) looked at Nghieng's answer and said something; Nghieng erased his work. The teacher didn't know. Tinh got the answer in the same time as Nghieng and before B. Hoa.

18-8: Nghieng, B. Hoa and Tinh all got the correct result.

19-9: Nghieng \surd ; B. Hoa \surd ; Tinh ?

Nghieng knows that he needs to present the calculation vertically and followed the rules of this calculation very accurately.

He got all the calculations right but the teacher never glanced at his work or gave any comment but she didn't make any comments for any other children anyway. She only sometimes points out the mistakes the children make or when they don't write their vertical calculations in a straight line.

When an odd question is used to test whether the children know that the result is not 10 (for example, $13-2=11$), Nghieng knows this and he even shouted out loudly together with his mates when asked by the teacher.

Working with the workbooks: Nghieng got most of the calculations in the workbook wrong, which wasn't the case when he worked with his chalkboard. But he got the counting exercises correct. Now the teacher came to check and gave some prompts. He started getting things right and started fixing his mistakes. Nghieng is also waiting there in the queue (with his workbook waiting to be marked by the teacher). Tinh finished her work very late and is now queuing for marking also. Huong has a peer standing next to her to tell her the answers and she is making the most of it. Tinh and Nghieng returned to their seats – too busy to queue? (12 January 2012, field notes, page 60)

Vietnamese lesson: the class was reading aloud, following the teacher's ruler pointing at the words on the blackboard. Nghieng also reads aloud enthusiastically. Overall, his speed is slightly slower than some children but he reads along all the way to the end, shows good concentration and shows that he knows all the letters and words and can also sound them before reading too. When asked to read alone he becomes quiet – is this because the teacher doesn't have enough time to wait and prompt him for a response, or is he too shy to be standing out alone reading aloud?

When moving to the personal chalkboard task, Nghieng sits there with his board and no chalk, while the other children are writing as the teacher dictates. After a while, I asked Nghieng where his chalk was. He got one piece out of his bag but still did not start writing. The teacher didn't say anything and didn't seem to acknowledge his good effort in reading earlier or his passive behaviour now in the writing task – he seems to be invisible most of the time.

Now is handwriting in their books: all the children use a pen. Nghieng used a pencil but today he has a black pen brought from home. All the other children use purple pens given to them by the teacher. He sits there again doing nothing – when asked by me, he started copying some words in his book – the teacher never noticed anything. (2 February 2012, field notes, page 63)

When I visited his home one evening, I saw that Nghieng was holding a torch in his hand while doing his homework. I offered to hold the torch for him as he was

reading a textbook. While doing so, I took the opportunity to check on his knowledge of phonics and sounds, diphthongs and word sounding. Unlike what the teachers believe, he did well and could answer most of my questions, some without prompts (minute 9:00, file 120214_001).

Despite doing very little in the class during the school year, Nghieng is among those being promoted to Year 2, and he is my only participant being moved up to the next class level. His promotion is approved under the Special Needs category – he is classified as ‘learning disabled’.

6.2 What their learning tells us

Having extensively and closely observed each child participant in the classroom context, this section forms an analysis of their learning situation, followed by an analysis of the economic issues that affect their learner identities and which may impact upon their academic achievement. This aims to examine how their identities are constructed in school, which is where they become categorised as slow learners. The analysis is carried out in this way in order to ultimately uncover the different layers of experience that impact on the child participants’ learning.

6.2.1 An analysis of their learning situation

There are two Year 1 classes in this school year, the same as for other years. Each class has roughly 25 to 27 children, mostly of the same age – six years old at the start of the school year. Each class, however, has some seven-year-old children and these are children from the previous year who are repeating the school year due to low academic achievement.

At five years of age, these children are expected to attend a kindergarten class for one year before commencing primary school, which means that when entering primary school they must be six years old. The cut-off for the date of birth is very strict in the system, and all schools must follow this. Lately though, most families are asked to send their children to nursery when they are three years old and so depending on the financial situation of each family, most of them try to follow this advice to prepare their children for primary education.

In kindergarten, the children are introduced to the Vietnamese language in the spoken form. They are also introduced to the Vietnamese alphabet letters and counting numbers in Vietnamese language. For many Muong children, this kindergarten year is the first time they have been formally introduced to the Vietnamese language.

As this school largely enrolls linguistic minority children, they are the majority in school and in classrooms. I observed that their informal conversations with each other are only in their mother tongue language. However, I must stress again that this particular linguistic minority group are largely lowland people, so they normally live amongst the majority Vietnamese, or are not too distant from Vietnamese communities; therefore, their Vietnamese language is much more fluent than those of highland minorities who often live on hillsides or further up in the mountains.

At the end of kindergarten, there is a formal assessment where kindergarten teachers join the primary Year 1 teachers to test the children on some basic knowledge and understanding, as well as overall development. The test score is not used to decide whether or not the children are allowed to enter the primary, but it is used by the primary teachers to identify the 'quick' or 'slow' learners. Some primary teachers use this as the basis for appointing influential positions in the classroom, such as class monitor (leader) and singing leader. These leaders are often considered as 'elite learners' and they are generally the teachers' favourites. Most teachers pay more attention and give more encouragement to them, as well as being gentler towards them when they make mistakes, than they would to the other children in the class.

At the time this research started, the focal children had been in their class for roughly six weeks of the academic year. Although it had not been very long, the children were already well-known by all the teachers and their peers for being 'slow learners'. This is why the final test in kindergarten matters so much, because Year 1 teachers are among the testers who assess the children together with the kindergarten teachers.

Similar to the 'elite learners' these children attract rather a large amount of attention from the teachers but rarely for encouragement or compliments. Rather, they often receive harsh reprimands from all teachers for the low quality of work

that they produce. For example, they can be criticised for not being able to read a certain word aloud or for writing a word with uneven letters. Additionally, they could also be reprimanded for 'lacking personal responsibility' (the words the teachers use), such as failing to keep their workbooks clean, coming to school late, or coming to class with untidy clothing or hair, etc.

Examples

- Class teacher (shouting loudly): "Quyen why is the O connecting to T a capital T – look at the board and see! Write it again!" (minute 21:30 file 111207_001)... "Khuong, Quyen, Hoanh, Quuynh and Hung, I only swapped seats like that for now but be careful or I'll send you outside the class!" (minute 7:15 file 111207_001)
- The teacher is now looking at Quyen's writing and criticising her for not writing beautifully. She said "next year, when you stay with the little ones, they'll write better than you" (field notes, 12 January 2012).
- The class teacher criticised Hoanh and Quyen for recently coming to school looking grubby and untidy (they haven't washed their hair or hands and faces before coming to school and their clothes look dirty, etc.). (12 January 2012, field notes, page 58).

As they get a lot of attention from teachers, they are also 'popular' amongst their peers. This is a negative side of this aspect, as their actions are closely supervised by peers, who will then report them to the teachers. This would be fine if they could do something outstanding so the teachers could then offer them compliments. However, most of what is reported is inappropriate or outside of the acceptable norms mutually set by the school and class culture. Therefore, the children often receive reprimands, scolding and criticism from the teachers after being reported. If they get the teachers on a good day, they will get a reminder or nothing at all. One may think that children of this age often like reporting each other to teachers but from my observations those who are less favoured by teachers – the 'slow' children – are in the spotlight more often than the rest of the class.

- Art and Craft: Hoanh is reported for playing truant – Quyen told the teacher that Hoanh has to stay at home to look after the bike repair shop as her dad needs to go and get some spare parts from town... Khuong is reported for tearing the paper from Hoanh and for throwing Quyen's lollipop on the floor and slapping her on the face. He is made to go to the blackboard to face the whole class to apologise and promise not to do it again. (6 December 2011, field notes, page 33)

- Mathematics: Quyen did her work prior to the lesson but she was spotted and reported by a peer saying that she had copied it from Hang – but the additions were mostly wrong. (8 November 2011, field notes, page 14)
- Singing: While Hoanh is sleeping and being reported by others, Quyen and Khuong had a little disagreement about something. (16 November 2011, field notes, page 18)
- Vietnamese: Khuong tried to rub something out and was reported by peers. (22 December 2011, field notes, page 50).
- Vietnamese: Hoanh is now falling asleep. She got away with it for about 10 minutes until her peers reported it to the teacher and the teacher shouted for her to go out to wash her face... Khuong is reported for eating some star fruit and was scolded and told to throw it away. (26 December 2011, field notes, page 54)
- Singing: Some children reported to me that Hoanh and Quyen had swapped seats without the teacher's consent. (9 May 2012, field notes, page 70)

When I was in the classroom, I observed that Hoanh and Quyen were frequently reprimanded by different teachers for various reasons, including: coming to school late; coming to school looking unkempt; failing to bring adequate learning equipment and materials; letting their books get dirty and torn or having pages missing; and falling asleep in class. Replying to the teachers' criticisms, the girls sometimes told the teachers that they came late because their parents did not come back in time, so they had to tend to the bike repair shop, or that their books got torn by some older children in other classes who came to bully them. Most of the time though, they just silently listened to the criticism. I observed that none of their replies or explanations seemed to satisfy their teachers, and that any information given as explanation was never used to further understanding of the children's situation; neither did it lead to further actions, such as tackling the bullying matter.

Also known as a 'slow' learner in the class, Khuong was in the spotlight as often as the two girls. However, he seemed to receive less criticism from his teachers than the girls. I believe that things have not changed in the system since I was at school, where undesirable acts are more expected from boys than from girls, and where teachers and adults would react more negatively to girls than to boys in such cases. This reflects an old 'tradition' of the country, where males are generally viewed more favourably than females. Adults and teachers, when reprimanding a girl who is being disruptive for example, would start the sentence with: 'Why are you so disruptive/naughty for a girl?', or 'You are not even a boy, so

why are you...?'. This sort of sexist attitude towards females, concerning how a proper female should act, comes from Confucian ideology and perhaps explains the way that adults accept disruption from boys more than from girls. Marr (1976) outlines some significances of such Confucian traditions in Vietnam dating back to the 1920s in order to observe the changes or development in Vietnamese society concerning this matter. The author is able to mention a number of textbooks which define the rubrics for 'proper females'. While the country has moved beyond the old traditions, which no longer fit easily with modern society, such ideology does not simply disappear; therefore, the 'proper female' notion is still widespread and may sometimes be used without conscious recognition.

In the other class, Nghieng has a much easier life than all the other 'slow' children. I never observed a situation in which he was criticised or shouted at by the teachers. Some may think this is great, but this in fact is a case of a student appearing to be almost invisible in the classroom. None of his teachers request him to do any work at all, so while other pupils have to follow the teachers' instructions to complete tasks, he would be working on a simplified task which is often much easier than what his peers were doing, or he would be doing nothing at all. Some collective field notes below provide evidence of this:

Vietnamese: The children were given writing booklets where the teacher had already written a word on each page and the children would copy the word very neatly. The teacher is very strict about how children sit when they do their writing. Nghieng was given his own booklet to trace on dotted letters rather than writing words like his peers. He didn't concentrate on writing but played with a notebook. The teacher is very busy with the class, so Nghieng has got away without doing anything so far. (1 November 2011, field notes, page 12)

Mathematics : Nghieng isn't doing anything as he doesn't have his notebook to work in like the other children. But he has the new, second mathematics book – the teacher doesn't seem to be bothered about whether he does anything. He is now playing with his crayons. He seems to have adequate learning materials and books – more than many others.... Huong, for example, does not have adequate learning materials and she's using Nghieng's books. As he isn't doing anything, the class teacher decided to give his notebook and literacy/mathematics kit to Huong instead, meaning that Nghieng no longer has these – he wouldn't use them anyway, according to the teacher. (21 December 2011, field notes, page 44)

Practice Test: Nghieng didn't do much – when I asked him some questions, I realised he understands and knows the letters and can read a little. He firstly didn't touch the test paper (perhaps because the teacher said publicly and loudly he wouldn't know how to do it?). He has now made some effort and has a few calculations correct – the mathematics teacher then turned to me and said that Nghieng may not be disabled like the other teachers believe he is. (23rd December 2011, field notes, page 51)

The common situation observed for Nghieng is that he is ignored and excluded from the learning environment most of the time because he is considered disabled. Many teachers believe that with this (unverified) 'disability' he would not know anything anyway. Quite often he sat in the class without doing anything, while this would not be the case for his peers, as they would be reprimanded immediately for that. In Vietnamese lessons, each child has a learning kit with all the letters and tone signs and a magnetic board for them to build up words using the letters. When I saw that Nghieng was not doing anything during the first session I observed his class, I asked where his learning kit was and the teacher told me she asked Nghieng to let a friend in the class use it. The reason given was because that student joined the class after the school year had started. There was no spare learning kit for her as the school had only purchased the exact number of learning kits based on the number of students registered at the beginning of the school year. The class teacher explained that since Nghieng would not need it and would not be using it anyway (because he does not know anything), so it makes sense to give his learning kit to the other student instead.

6.2.2 The home-school link

Economic issues: Most families in the studied region are not financially well-off since most of their incomes are from low-tech farming, which mostly is just enough to provide food for the family. Those families who are not farm owners struggle more since they rely heavily on their wages from the casual work in which they may be employed, such as Nghieng's father or Hoanh and Quyen's parents. Such employment can be seasonal or occasional, putting them in further difficulty during times when they are not employed. Such difficulty results in these children missing schooling for various reasons, such as failing to pay tuition fees; failing to purchase a lunch voucher; or house/child minding when their parents go to work.

These issues are further linked to others, such as a lack of home support for their learning. The home situations of each participant presented in the previous chapter show that these children's parents are not in a position to offer educational support to their children. This is partially because the parents are not very well-educated themselves, but the main reason relates to the fact that these parents are just too busy working to support their families. Khuong's parents, for example, have travelled to other provinces for work and only see him from time-to-time, leaving him under the care of his grandmother. This is similar to Nghieng's father, whom he only sees once or twice per month. Even when parents stay in the region for work, they hardly ever see their children during the daylight hours and may see them at night before or after the children go to sleep, such as in Hoanh and Quyen's case.

Economic issues further result in these children frequently coming to school without adequate learning materials. In the Vietnamese education system, children bring their learning materials to school and take them home with them. None of the children would leave their materials in the classroom as it is not the practice and the rooms are often unlocked, so they may lose their materials if they choose to leave them there. While most families would purchase adequate materials for their children at the beginning of the school year, these are lost throughout the year and my observations show that none of the families replaced the missing or lost materials for their children.

Coming to class without adequate learning materials somewhat poses an inferior image in comparison with classmates, as they would then be scolded by teachers and laughed at by peers. Poor attendance and lateness exacerbates the negative image, such as in the cases of Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong, when they were publicly taunted by peers who called them 'stupid' or told them that they would have to repeat the year.

Other than facing such severe criticism from peers and teachers, the children could be made invisible, such as in Nghieng's case. Repeating the class under the disabled classification, he was free from any learning pressure, was never asked to do any work, and therefore was never criticised for failing to complete any work. Even when he motivated himself to learn and could complete several learning tasks (see field notes cited in Chapter 5), such effort went completely unnoticed. It

seemed that whether he did any work or not, it was of no interest or concern to his teachers and peers. He also seemed to know very well that whether he learned anything or not, he would be promoted to Year 2 this year, under his 'disabled' status. Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong also seemed to know very well, that regardless of the effort they put into the tests, they would be repeating the class, as they were reminded every day by peers and by the seating map observed at the end of the school year.

So what do their identities mean in the learning system? Let us examine what they learn and how their identities are constructed through such a process.

6.3 What and how do they learn? Programme and assessment

The children attend five mornings and four afternoons per week, as they have Friday afternoon off. The class teacher teaches only in the morning and morning sessions are all about Vietnamese. Mathematics and the other subjects are taught in the afternoon, with mathematics being taught for two sessions every day. The other five subjects are taught in turn, with an allocation of one session per subject per week. While the children learn Vietnamese all morning (four learning sessions), Vietnamese is also covered in three afternoons.

The image below shows the weekly timetable for the two Year 1 classes this school year.

| Thứ | IA | | IB | |
|-------|------------|----------|------------|----------|
| | Sáng | Chiều | Sáng | Chiều |
| Thứ 2 | Chào cờ | Toán | Chào cờ | Mỹ Thuật |
| | Học văn | Rèn Toán | Học văn | Rèn đọc |
| | Học văn | Mỹ Thuật | Học văn | Toán |
| | Đạo đức | Rèn đọc | Đạo đức | Rèn Toán |
| Thứ 3 | Học văn | Thủ công | Học văn | Toán |
| | Học văn | Thể dục | Học văn | TN&XH |
| | Rèn đọc | Toán | Rèn đọc | Thủ công |
| | Luyện viết | TN&XH | Luyện viết | Thể dục |
| Thứ 4 | Học văn | Toán | Học văn | Nhạc |
| | Học văn | Rèn Toán | Học văn | Rèn viết |
| | HDNG | Nhạc | HDNG | Toán |
| | Luyện viết | Rèn viết | Rèn viết | Rèn Toán |
| Thứ 5 | Học văn | Rèn đọc | Học văn | Toán |
| | Học văn | Rèn viết | Học văn | Rèn Toán |
| | Rèn đọc | Toán | Rèn đọc | Rèn đọc |
| | Luyện viết | Rèn Toán | Luyện viết | Rèn viết |
| Thứ 6 | Tập viết | | Tập viết | |
| | Tập viết | | Tập viết | |
| | Rèn đọc | | Rèn đọc | |
| | Sinh hoạt | | Sinh hoạt | |

Image 7: Weekly timetable

According to this, there are no classes on Friday afternoons so the children have one afternoon off per week. The teachers are still required to come to school in order to complete administrative tasks or some physical work at the school, such as gardening.

6.3.1 Curriculum

From the first grade in primary school, Year 1 children will learn and be assessed in eight different subjects which are Vietnamese, mathematics, study of nature and society, singing and music, art, craft, ethics and physical education (PE). All of the learning and assessments are in the Vietnamese language only.

The learning of the Vietnamese subject for Year 1 children is text-based and focused heavily on writing and reading. This entails the learning of reading and writing Vietnamese characters – consonants and vowels, the sounds and

diphthongs, words, sentences and grammar by employing repetitive learning tasks.

The curriculum and learning programme is developed centrally by the government, so there is no difference in learning programmes for those children from different linguistic minority groups whose mother tongue is not Vietnamese. There is also no support or additional programme designed to assist Vietnamese as an Additional Language (VAL) learners. There is a government policy, however, that allows minority learners to pass with a lower test score in important exams, such as the high school graduation exams or entrance exams for higher education at university and college levels.

When providing instruction, guidance and regulations to all higher education institutes in the country regarding the 2014 higher education entrance examinations, the MOET listed two groups of pupils who are to receive priority, meaning that their results will have some extra points added. The first priority group comprises three subgroups – linguistic minority pupils living in poor mountainous/remote areas are the first subgroup listed. According to this, linguistic minority pupils who are resident in poor communes and in mountainous areas will get 3.5 points added to their exam results, meaning a passing result will be 3.5 points lower than the standard passing score announced by an institute (Bo Giao Duc Va Dao Tao, 2014). Higher education institutes in Vietnam select their students based on entrance exam results (often comprised of three subjects), and they pick from the top down. For instance, if they want to recruit 2,000 students in 2014, they will pick the top 2,000 who have scored the most, so often there is no predetermined test score before the exam showing the score needed to secure a seat at a university.

Although there are a number of subjects taught, the Vietnamese language and mathematics are the two major subjects, which occupy a large proportion of the learning time of the children. Below is a chart showing the proportion of time spent each week for each subject taught in the Year 1 class of the researched school. This timetable is standard and can also be found in any primary school in Vietnam.

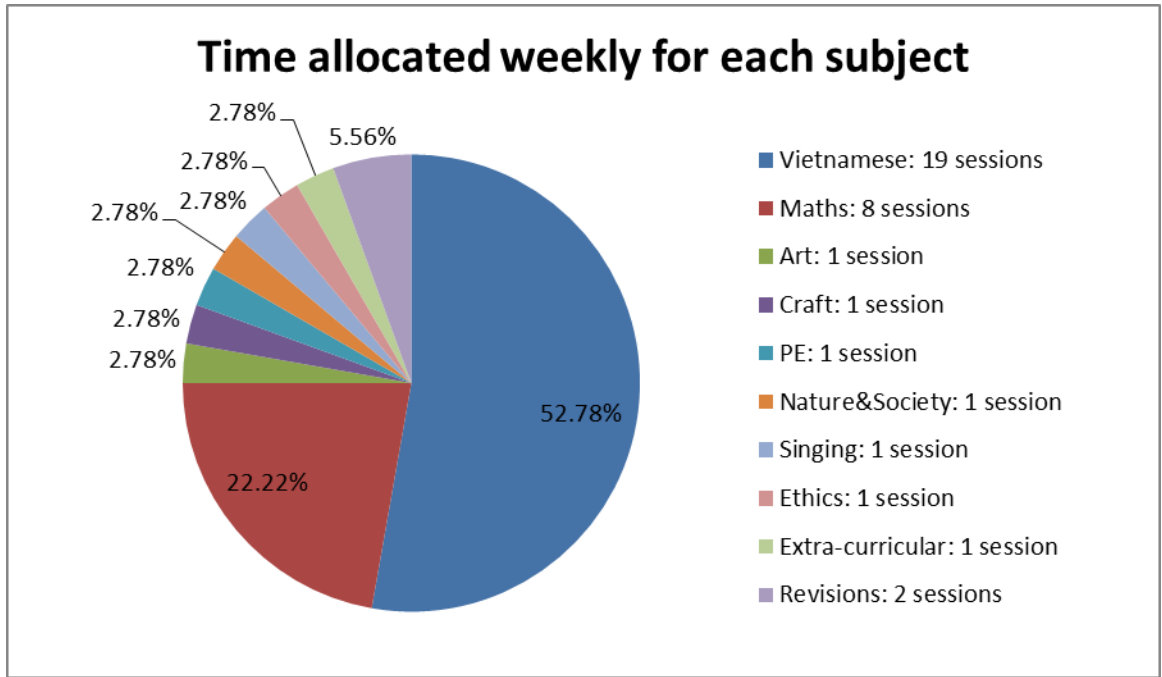


Figure 9: Weekly sessions scheduled for each subject

As shown in the diagram, the subject of the Vietnamese language occupies the majority of time spent learning in children's early years. The subject requires a number of workbooks for the children to use along with their textbooks, and these workbooks can be official or non-official books. This was presented in Table 8 in Chapter 5, which portrays the workbook titles and their usage.

So what content is there in the Vietnamese subject? Figure 9 above shows that the children have Vietnamese every day, with a minimum of four and a maximum of six sessions out of their eight sessions of schooling per day. This allows for very little time spent on subjects other than Vietnamese.

Within the Vietnamese subject, three major areas are targeted: the learning of letters, sounds and diphthongs; the learning of reading words phonetically and tonally; and writing practice. Reading and writing are very important and these tasks will be officially tested at least twice per year. The breakdown of the weekly Vietnamese language lessons is provided in the figure below.

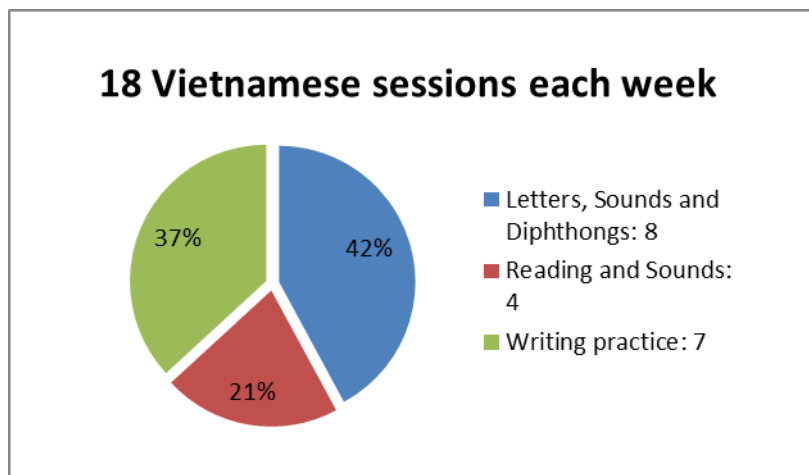


Figure 10: Breakdown of the Vietnamese subject

Since Vietnamese and mathematics occupy a large proportion of the children's learning, I will briefly discuss how the two subjects are taught below.

6.3.1.1 Teaching Vietnamese

The above diagram clearly shows an emphasis on teaching Vietnamese literacy. For quite some time, one primary government goal has been the elimination of illiteracy for all Vietnamese citizens, including ethnic-minorities. This policy is reflected in the national curriculum for the early years.

Lessons in Vietnamese primary schools still reflects the traditional way of teaching, where a teacher will be lecturing to a class, often a rather busy class, of 25 to 30 children. There are no teaching assistants in any class, so the teacher will not receive any assistance in managing the class or facilitating activities. Often, the teacher will sit by her desk, facing the class when the lecturing is taking place. When tasks are given for the children to practise, the teacher may walk around the classroom to monitor some individual's work, but she will not have enough time for checking each child's work due to the large number of students and time restrictions for the length of lessons. The children are often passively and quietly following the teacher's instructions or loudly repeating after her when they do reading aloud or pronunciation exercises. The children rarely ask the teacher any questions because that is not the Vietnamese learning culture for young children, who are supposed to listen and carry out the tasks required rather than questioning the teacher. This also means that if a child does not understand what the teacher is saying, or does not understand the task required by the teacher,

then that child often sits quietly or looks over their shoulder at their peers' work and copies as much as they can. Also, due to time constraints, the teacher often moves from task-to-task very quickly and the children need to really focus to follow the teacher and to keep up with the classroom's general speed. Occasionally, I observed some children asking some questions, and they were either reprimanded or ignored by the teacher and that further discourages them from asking any questions.

The teaching method in general is very teacher-centred and curriculum focused. The learners are requested to carry out endless synchronised tasks during lessons. The procedure for teaching a new diphthong, for instance, is summarised below:

Typical Lesson Executing Procedure

(From 47 Vietnamese sessions observed between Oct 11 to Jun 12)

Task 1: Following the textbook

Teacher:

- Introduces the new 'van' to the class verbally
- Writes the new 'van' on the blackboard with chalk

Children:

- Open their textbooks and listen quietly

Teacher: Explains what letters make up that 'van' and how the 'van' is sounded phonetically and tonally

Children: Listen carefully

Teacher: Tells the children to repeat after her and she starts reading the 'van' aloud phonetically and tonally (example: Ô-TÔ-ÔT = ÔT)

Children: All together: Ô-TÔ-ÔT = ÔT

Teacher: Repeats the reading a few times as the children repeat after her

Teacher: Asks the children to point at the 'van'/word in their textbooks, to read after her.

Task 2: Practice

Teacher: Asks the children to close their textbooks and get their learning kits out

Children: Put their magnetic boards on the table and listen to the dictation

Teacher: Dictates a 'van' or a word that has that 'van'

Children: Quickly pick the letters and tones from their kits to form the 'van' or word on their magnetic boards

Teacher: Hits the ruler on her table to signal time is finished for the task

Children: All hold their magnetic boards up for the teacher to look at

Teacher: Does one, two or all three of the following:

- spots some mistake and tells the child/ren about that
- picks some good examples and asks the children to bring their magnetic boards to stand in front of the class, facing their peers to show them the good work
- picks some bad examples for the other children to all see the mistakes.

Task 2 Alternative

Teacher: Asks the children to prepare for a personal chalkboard task

Children: Each lays out their personal chalkboard + chalk + rubbing cloth

Teacher: Dictates a 'van' or a word that has that 'van'

Children: Write the 'van' neatly on their boards, following the gridlines, to form the words of the right size, with the right space between words and in a straight line

Teacher: Hits her ruler on the table to signal time has finished for the task

Children: All hold their chalkboards up for the teacher to look at

Teacher: Goes through one, two or all three of the following:

- spots some mistake and tells the child/ren about that
- picks some good examples and asks the children to bring their chalkboards to stand in front of the class, facing their peers to show them the good work
- picks some bad examples for the other children to all see the mistakes.

Task 3: Writing practice in official writing books

Teacher:

- Asks the children to pack the learning kit or chalkboard way
- Delivers a writing book to each child (the books are kept in her desk and the children are not allowed to take them home)

Children:

- Get their pencils out and open the page of the official writing book that has the 'van' for learning today
- Follow the sample written for them on that page and copy by writing the same 'van' or words numerous times, often to the end of the page.

Task 4: writing practice in unofficial writing books

Exactly the same 'van'/word written in the official writing practice is now written again in this task. This writing book is not a compulsory material required by the MOET but most schools are using it. The book provides extra space for writing, so the 'van' or word will be written again and again a number of times.

This procedure of teaching results in synchronised tasks for the children. They must do the same thing, at the same time, within the same amount of time given. Not all the children are able to keep up with the common speed provided for each task and these children are considered to be 'slow' children, with my participants among these. Slow in this sense has two meanings: one referring to them taking

too long to complete the task at hand, and the other referring to the children being slow in understanding the teacher's instructions.

These slow children often move from one task to another without fully completing any task at all. For instance, when forming a word, these children may have completed half of the word by the time the teacher requests them to stop working and to show her what they have produced – these children then show their part-completed work. For this they may be criticised or ignored by the teacher before moving on to the next task. The same result happens in the next task and the task after that, so that by the end of the session they have hardly ever had any task completely finished. They are not waited for by the teacher or their peers, as the time factor is critical, and they have to make sure they have done or learnt the lesson within the defined timeframe.

Vietnamese lesson sample 1

(24 November 2011, field notes, page 22)

Example 1:

Field notes 24 November 2011: the teacher dictates and the children have to write on their personal chalk boards:

1. Teacher: **inh – êng**:
Hoanh: **inh – eng** (missing ^ above e)
Quyên: **in** (unfinished when requested to show work)
Khuông: **inh** (unfinished when requested to show work)
2. Teacher moves to the next words: **thông minh**
Hoanh: **thong** (missing ^ in the first word and missing second word)
Quyên: **thong** (missing second word)
Khuông: **thô minh** (missing ng from the first word)
3. Teacher moves to the next words: **dòng kênh**
Hoanh: **dong** (T spotted: 1-letters are not in a straight line, 2-missing the tone huyen above letter o, 3-missing the second word > was scolded by the teacher)
Quyên: still trying to write the previous word **thông minh** but not knowing how
Khuông: **dòng kênh**
4. Teacher moves to the next words: **đình làng**
Hoanh: **dinh hag** (unfinished: mistakenly wrote d and no huyen tone above i, and got the second word completely wrong)
Quyên: **đinh l** (unfinished: missed the huyen tone above i, and only got the first letter in the second word)
Khuông: just sat without writing (uninterested and had given up? He took a risk here and if the teacher spots that, he will definitely be scolded and punished)

Vietnamese lesson example 2

(22 December 2011, field notes, page 47)

Example 2:

Field notes 22 December 2011: the teacher dictates and the children have to write on their personal chalk boards:

1. Teacher: **ang – anh**:

Hoanh: ??? (still looking for chalk)

Quyen: **ong - anh** (first letter of first word wrong)

Khuong: ??? (could not keep up – showed blank board)

2. Teacher moves to the next words: **đinh làng**

Hoanh: ??? (still looking for chalk)

Quyen: ??? (could not keep up – showed blank board)

Khuong: **đinh lang** (missing tone huyen on both sounds)

3. Teacher moves to the next words: **túi lưới**

Hoanh: ??? (still looking for chalk)

Quyen: **túi** (completes the first sound only)

Khuong: **túi l** (got the first sound and first letter of the second sound)

4. Teacher moves to the next words: **mùa hạ**

Hoanh: **mùa ha** (missed tone 'nang' in second sound)

Quyen: **mu** (unfinished)

Khuong: **múa** (got the first sound but tone is wrong)

5. Teacher moves to the next words: **nương rẫy**

Hoanh: **nương** (completes the first sound only)

Quyen: **nương** (completes the first sound only)

Khuong: **nương** (completes the first sound only)

6. Teacher moves to the next words: **tựa bông**

Hoanh: **tựa bông** (teacher is standing next to her and spells it for her to write, so she got it all)

Quyen: **tựa h** (missed tone nang in first sound and did not start the second sound correctly either)

Khuong: **tựa bông** (he got it right – note that this time the teacher paused to give Hoanh instructions instead of moving on to new words)

This is among several examples recorded in the field notes that show the teacher and children have to follow a certain speed when completing the lessons, as dictated by the amount of books allocated for each term. From my observations,

the standard speed appears to be alright for 50 to 60 percent of children in the class, so not just those labelled as 'slow' struggle to keep up, but many of their peers too. I also observed that there are a small number of children, about two or three out of 27, who often had to wait for their peers, since they could complete the task at hand a bit quicker. In other words, these children are slowed down slightly by the synchronised pace of the class.

In this process, the teacher sometimes spots mistakes or criticises the children for not completing the task, but most of the time she is too busy moving on to the next task, so checking the individual work of 27 children in a few seconds seems unrealistic. A similar situation is observed in mathematics classes, which is the second most important subject. This, however, is not the case for the remaining subjects because subjects other than mathematics and Vietnamese do not have a large amount of textbooks and workbooks, and also these subjects are not formally assessed and are disregarded when presenting the children's learning performance.

6.3.1.2 Teaching mathematics

Mathematics teaching and learning also needs to follow the timeframe scheduled for the level. A similar situation to that observed in Vietnamese lessons is evident in mathematics sessions, where not all learners are able to keep up with the lesson speed. This results in them being unable to complete their tasks most of the time, so they could not get to the right result. Again, the teacher-pupil ratio adds extra difficulty to the situation and so the teacher does not always have time for 'slow' learners.

Example 1: Mathematics kit tasks – teacher dictates the calculations and the children pick the numbers and signs (subtraction, addition and equals) to form the formula and then calculate the right result.

Teacher: $9+1$

Hoanh: $9+1=10$

Quyên: still sorting numbers and signs

Khuong: still sorting numbers and signs

Teacher: $1+9$

Hoanh: $1+9=10$

Quyên: still sorting numbers and signs

| | |
|---|--|
| | Khuong: $1+9$ |
| Teacher: $8+2$ | |
| | Hoanh: $8+2=10$ |
| | Quyên: $8+2=$ |
| | Khuong: $8+2$ |
| Teacher: $2+8$ | |
| | Hoanh: $2+8=10$ |
| | Quyên: $2+8= 10$ |
| | Khuong: $2+8=10$ |
| Teacher: $7+3$ | |
| | Hoanh: $7+3=10$ |
| | Quyên: $7+3=$ still looking for numbers |
| | Khuong: $7+3=10$ |
| Teacher: $7+3$ | |
| | Hoanh: $2+8=10$ |
| | Quyên: $2+8= 10$ |
| | Khuong: $2+8=10$ |
| Teacher: $4+6$ | |
| | Hoanh: $4+6=10$ |
| | Quyên: $4+6=$ |
| | Khuong: $4+6=$ |
| Teacher: $10+0$ | |
| | Hoanh: $10+5=10$ (understood that all calculations led to 10, but got the wrong number due to mishearing the teacher, or being in a hurry, or being careless?) |
| | Quyên: $10+0= 10$ |
| | Khuong: $10+0=$ (not enough time to complete) |
| | <i>(Field notes, 30 November 2011).</i> |
| Example 2: Mathematics on chalkboard tasks – teacher dictates the calculations and the children write the formula and then calculate the result using their personal chalkboards. | |
| Teacher: $5+4$ | |
| | Hoanh: $5+4=10$ |
| | Quyên: $5+4=$ |
| | Khuong: $5+4=$ |
| Teacher: $5+5$ | |
| | Hoanh: $5+5=10$ |
| | Quyên: $5+4=$ |

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| | Khuong: $5+4=10$ |
| Teacher: $8+2$ | |
| | Hoanh: $8+2=10$ |
| | Quyên: $8+2=$ |
| | Khuong: $8+2=$ |
| Teacher: $3+7$ | |
| | Hoanh: $3+7=10$ |
| | Quyên: $3+7=$ |
| | Khuong: $3+7=$ |
| Teacher: $6+2$ | |
| | Hoanh: $6+2=$ |
| | Quyên: $6+2=$ |
| | Khuong: $6+2=$ |

(Field notes 6 December 2011).

In the two examples shown above, on all occasions where the result was left blank, it was because the teacher had signalled with her ruler and the children needed to raise their boards for her to see, regardless of whether or not they had completed their calculations. After showing the teacher, the children who had not completed the calculation often still tried to complete it while the teacher was already reading the next task. This resulted in them rushing to rub out the unfinished calculations and to write the new one, thereby creating continuous problems where they were constantly struggling to catch up. Also, while the examples listed feature only the focal children, they were not the only ones who failed to keep up with the teacher's speed, several others were in a similar situation when asked to show their work.

Another aspect of teaching mathematics in Vietnamese is that the curriculum focuses heavily on numbers and text. In recent years, more pictures have been used in textbooks but my observations reveal that understanding the written instructions for each exercise is where the children struggle the most. In their day-to-day learning, their mathematics teacher often reads aloud the instructions and further explains what they need to do, but in assessments there is no such verbal instruction provided for them.

In these three exercises, while 1a) looks clear since it has the arrow pointing right and some numbers, so the children could predict the requirements without reading it, the rest of the tasks look challenging for those who cannot read the Vietnamese instructions. In Chapter 3, I discussed BICS and CALP issues (Cummins, 1981a) and how García (2009) related the discussions of BICS and CALP to the assessment of minority language learners. The test exercises presented here do not follow García's advice at all, where the author stressed the importance of minority language learners being at a level where they do not need any extralinguistic support in order to fulfil their learning and assessment. This type of assessment, both in timing and in content, seems to be used in a way that puts these minority language learners at a disadvantage.

Comments

When discussing the content and appearance of the learning programme, I would like to further refer back to Table 4 in section 5.2.1.1 which lists all the textbooks and workbooks for this year. In the current system, these extra textbooks, when used at the researched school, take up a disproportionate amount of time due to the low level of the children's Vietnamese language. The timeframe needed for the amount of books that have to be covered should be revised in the case of the focal children. Currently the teachers and children have to complete the main curriculum more quickly just so they can finish the extra books suggested by the authorities. These additional materials should only be recommended for those schools where the children are mostly elite majority learners who can complete the main programme quickly, so have time available. This should not apply to schools that enrol linguistic minority children who are still familiarising themselves with the Vietnamese language. The teacher from one class clearly stated her concerns about too many textbooks being used in a school year, and she believes the programme content is just too heavy for these children.

6.3.2 Assessment

Assessment in my research is particularly important because in the Vietnamese system tests act as the first and final factor in deciding learning outcomes. This is also the main theme previously identified and discussed in chapter 4, section 4.4.10. The learning outcome is then used for deciding pass or fail factors, so

whether a student is promoted to the next class level or has to repeat the same year relies on test results. Before showing what this means for my participants, I will briefly summarise assessment practices in Vietnamese primary schools. Prior to that, however, I want to add a small section to briefly discuss the end-of-kindergarten assessment before the children move to the primary school, as this is the process that my research participants went through.

6.3.2.1 End-of-kindergarten assessment

At the end of their time in kindergarten, the children are assessed by the primary school teachers, usually those from Year 1. The excerpt below is taken from an interview with the kindergarten teacher interviewed at the last stage of the first data collection phase, which further portrays this procedure.

Interview Voice 008 (Minutes 21 to 23)

Researcher: oh, so each child is assessed in turn?

Teacher: yes, each is tested in turn but is tested by the primary teachers who come here on the day.

Researcher: so how can that be done? Do the teachers sit in the class to observe the children or do they call each child to them?

Teacher: the primary school informs us of the date then we will test the children in this class or in another classroom. They will sit and wait until they are called to see the testers who sit at different tables in front of them. For example if there are 24 questions/areas to be tested then there will be a teacher sitting at this table testing some skills and one sitting over there who will test the children's knowledge etc., so they divide it into sections.

Researcher: oh really, so that is when the teachers identify quick or slow learners?

Teacher: ah, slow or quick starts from here; therefore, there are children who are very good in our class but when asked by the (primary) teachers, they become paralysed... (with a funny face) so they are assessed as slow or weak learners or something like that... but when learning in the class with us, these children are actually not bad at all... It must be teachers that they are familiar with then they'll feel at ease... This happens even though we prepare them psychologically and practically a lot prior to the test...

It is in this test that the Year 1 teachers, who are also the examiners, come to conclusions regarding the cases of slow or quick learners.

6.3.2.2 Primary school assessment overview

There are two semesters per academic year, and there are two formal tests and two informal tests each year. Only Vietnamese and mathematics are tested formally; other subjects are personally assessed by the teachers based on their observations during teaching. This consequently means that only the mathematics and Vietnamese test scores are relevant for the calculation of overall academic

achievement of the children. Assessment results of other subjects are not included in this process.

The informal Vietnamese and mathematics tests are conducted mid-term and the formal ones are held at the end of each semester. The informal tests vary from school-to-school or region-to-region. Some locations/schools may prepare the tests themselves, but tests in other areas may be prepared by local (district level) Education and Training departments. Most schools use the informal test scores as part of the academic record of the children, but this is not a decisive factor which affects the overall academic outcome. The results from the formal end-of-semester tests, on the other hand, will appear in the official calculation of the overall academic achievement of the students. These tests are therefore conducted much more formally, with the test content designed by the DOET or BOET. If produced by the former, this means the whole province will have the same test, and if by the latter, this means that over 20 primary schools in this region will have this same assessment.

In my research period, the first informal test was administered three days before the formal end-of-semester-1 test. The school used the semester 1 test from the previous year for this informal test. There was no informal test carried out before the end-of-year test by the school this year.

Both formal end-of-semester tests were designed by the BOET. A couple of days before the test day, the deputy head went to the district education department to get the test papers, which are sealed in envelopes. They are instructed about confidentiality, so the envelopes are not allowed to be opened until the morning of the test day.

From my observations, in the early morning on the day of the tests, the deputy head and the head read out the names of the teachers, instructing them each to go to a particular class for invigilation. They swapped the teachers around so the class teacher would not be watching their own class. The deputy head then handed an envelope to each invigilator with a class list. The invigilators opened the envelope and counted the number of papers immediately, to make sure that they had adequate papers for the number of students they were invigilating. Before leaving the common room for each test room, the invigilators were also

reminded as to when the time would be counted. The process looks very organised and professional, but when observing the actual tests, I realised the practice in each classroom varied from invigilator to invigilator. This will be further described in the section of the next chapter that discusses school systems and their implications for children's learning.

There is a specified marking day after the tests, so the children have a holiday while the teachers are marking their papers. The scores of these two tests are used to decide the grades of the students. There are five different grades, but in reality there are only four that are used: *Gioi* (*Distinction*, minimum test score = 90%); *Kha* (*Credit*, minimum test score = 70%); *Trung Binh* (*Pass*, minimum test score = 50%); and *Yeu* (*Provisional Fail*, minimum test score = 30%). Ranking *Kem* (*Fail*, test score is lower than 30%) is no longer used by schools because the teachers and head teachers said there had been an instruction not to use this ranking anymore. The table below further depicts the grades and scores.

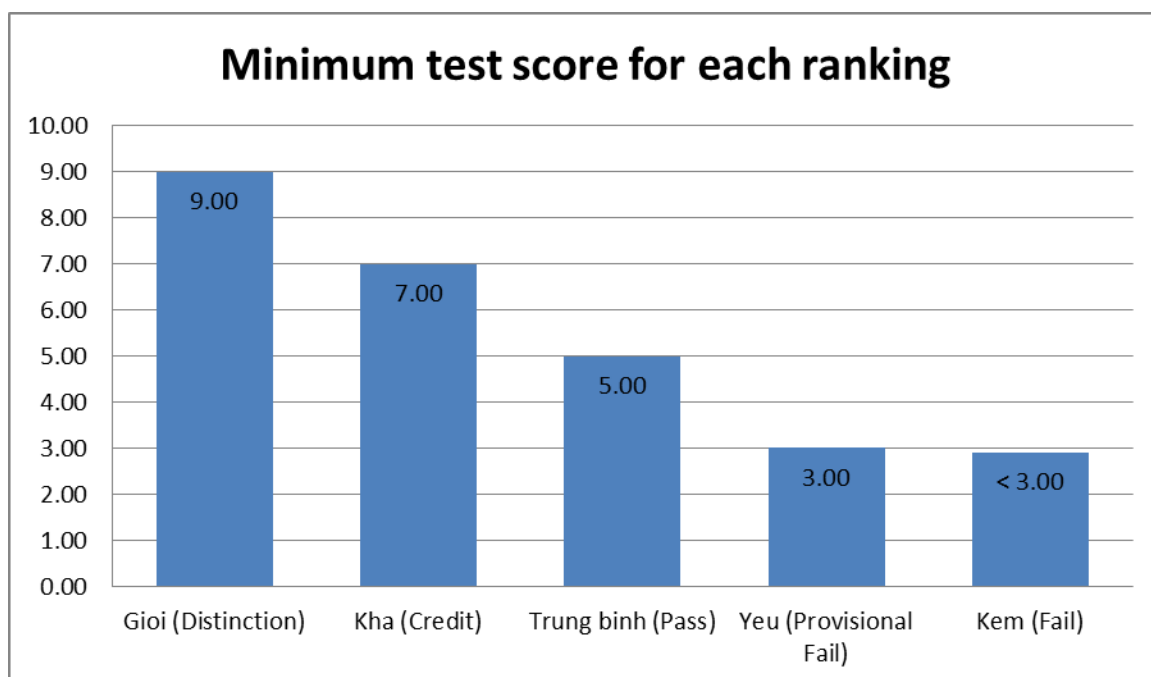


Figure 11: Test scores and rankings

When falling into the *Provisional Fail* category, the students are often allowed to retake the test twice before the new school year starts. If they score 50 percent or more on the first retest, they will be promoted to the next class level. If obtaining less than 50 percent on the first retest, they may be retested a second time, although this may not always be the case. If the class teacher feels the second

retest is not needed due to her perceiving the ability of the pupil as being too weak to be able to complete the test, the school may not administer the test for the child. If the second retest is organised, the pupil needs to obtain at least 50 percent, as scoring less than 50 percent will result in him/her having to repeat the same class level. This means the pupil will be learning with children who are a year younger, while peers are promoted to the class above.

How is the test result communicated to parents? There are three parent-teacher meetings per school year. The first one is at the beginning of the year, during which parents are introduced to the class teacher and are informed about payments which they can pay on the spot if they have enough money with them. The second meeting is the mid-year meeting, and this is for the teacher to announce the semester 1 test results and to follow up with payments. The last meeting is for parents to be informed about their child's final result, and whether s/he will be promoted to the next class or will be retaking the test with the possibility of repeating the year.

6.3.2.3 The participants and the Year 1 tests

My participants' identity and learning have been discussed above, so this section examines the link between their identities and the assessment process in identifying how these key aspects are interrelated.

First of all, in the cases of Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong, their images from the classroom as poor learners seemed to transfer to the test environment. This means that they are not expected (by teachers and peers) to successfully complete the tests; therefore, no additional support should be provided for them. The invigilators and the class teachers did not check their papers to see how they were doing in the test, but they would do so with other children, such as returning unfinished papers for them to continue working on, or giving them some prompts and assistance so they could improve on their accuracy.

The children seemed to understand their situation very well and so they would not show much effort during the test and appeared to be giving up while there was still time for them to work on their unfinished papers. Hoanh did not look at her paper, and it is uncertain whether this was because she did not know how to answer it, or

because she knew she would be repeating the year anyway so there was no point even trying. Nghieng did not do anything at all as he knew he would pass anyway.

The excerpts taken from my observations and recordings during test days illustrate this.

Mid-year Vietnamese Test: The invigilator continues shouting at Hoanh and Quyen who keep making mistakes. She said loudly that the class teacher needs to classify these children as special needs or disabled.

The class teacher came back to the classroom to check. The invigilator said to the teacher that these two children need to be put in the disabled category – the teacher agreed.

Whilst the children are working hard on their test papers, Hoanh and Quyen are not – they are doing something else and have stopped working on their papers. Hoanh is looking at a textbook and Quyen is searching for something in her bag.

The 1B teacher came back to her class again to check on her children but she seems not to be bothered with Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong...Those who are not 'slow' are asked to complete their paper when they submit incomplete papers, but this does not apply to those labelled 'slow'.

Nghieng is not doing the test, he is tracing in his writing book again. (27 December 2011, field notes page 55)

Mid-year mathematics Test

After less than 10 minutes: Khuong was among those submitting their papers early.

In the 23rd minute, the last three children (Hoanh, Quyen and Mung) submitted their papers (although they have not finished all the exercises and there is still time for them to complete them). (26 December 2011, field notes page 53)

End-of-year Vietnamese Test

When walking round to hand out the papers, the invigilator noticed there were three children sitting at a table at the end of the class. She said, 'These are...?' (*Cac ban nay la...?*). The other children shouted '*dup a!*' (repeating the year!).

The head teacher came and stood at the door, where she spotted three children at one table, so she asked why there were three sharing one desk. The invigilator replied: 'well, those three don't know anything'. The head said: 'we have a spare table and sitting like that doesn't allow enough space for them to do their work, so please move one to this empty table'. Hoanh was moved to the other table to sit by herself.

10 minutes into the test and many children are still sitting without doing anything. The invigilator said:

'It is not true that there are three slow (she used '*ngo ngo*' which means dumb) children, there are many more: those who are sitting there not knowing what to do yet'.

While one child is reading to her, others started running around looking at their peers' work – perhaps they want to check the result and/or copy... but Quyen and Khuong seem to just sit there not caring too much about what to do.

60 minutes into the exam, the invigilator asked the children to submit their completed papers – many brought them to her but she identified a few of them that were incomplete so she said 'only if you have finished'. Some children took their papers back with them. A peer took Quyen's paper to give to the teacher and said something to her. I assume he said she needs to complete it before handing it in. I observed her for a while and noticed that she didn't seem to be bothered about working on the paper any more. Khuong is also turning around playing again while his test paper is on the floor – blown by the ceiling fan presumably.

8.40: 70 minutes into the test and most of the children have submitted their papers and some have completed the reading to the invigilator task, whereas others are awaiting their turn. Some children are still working on their papers but Hoanh and Quyen already submitted their papers some minutes ago.

The invigilator went through each submitted paper to call the children's names, so that they could come and read to her as she fills out the reading section on that test paper. When she reached Hoanh and Quyen's papers, she put them aside and told me: 'I don't need to test these two'.

8.57: the class teacher walked into the classroom and told the invigilator that she doesn't need to test Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong. She then walked to Quoc and looked at his paper and then gave him lots of prompts and suggestions to push him to finish the test. She also said: 'write like this... come on, you need to move to Year 2'. She then told him what to do to fill in any spaces in the last exercise. She read word-by-word, sound-by-sound for him to finish the copy writing section.

In the other room: Nghieng is given a handwriting sheet which the class teacher later told me she had written for him. This basically requested him to copy the given words. (10 May 2012, field notes page 71)

End-of-year mathematics test

7.20: the invigilator is delivering the test papers. When she finished, she found out she needed one more paper so Quyen is still waiting for a paper. The invigilator of 1A came and said: 'I thought it's a 7.30 start?' The 1B invigilator replied: 'By the time they finish writing their names on the paper it'll be 7.30'.

7.30: Quyen's got her test paper now.

Hoanh sat alone at a table in the back row of the class – this seat can be seen as rather disadvantaged because all the others sit with a classmate and they tend to look at each other's work from time to time. Physically and psychologically I think Hoanh is rather isolated in this case.

7.55: Hoanh finished her test paper.

8.10: time's up: there are still 14 out of 27 children working on the test paper, including Quyen and Khuong

In the other class: Nghieng is given a separate sheet to do the test and the invigilator stood by his side giving him lots of prompts for him to make the calculations. (10 May 2012, field notes page 76)

The field notes cited above are not to argue for additional support during the test for these children but to highlight situations where they are treated unfavourably and differently from their peers. The positive treatment seems to consistently go to other students but not to the participants, as though their fates have already been decided. For instance, when there were not enough test papers, the one having to wait for the paper, which arrived 10 minutes later, was one of the participants and she did not receive any extra time at the end of the test to compensate for the time lost when she had to wait for her paper.

The treatment after the test for these children is consistent with that during the assessment. No changes were made to their papers, while a number of their classmates' papers were corrected or changed by the markers. Their effort, or lack of effort in the test, seemed to be irrelevant, as though a decision about them had already been made and the assessment becomes a mechanism for supporting this decision: Khuong's score on his mathematics paper, for instance, was reduced markedly, while despite Nghieng not doing much during the test, it was enough for him to pass.

Marking in the teachers' common room

The mathematics teacher sits next to the 1B teacher – when Quyen's paper is marked, the mathematics teacher said she would get 5/10 for her work – “don't know how she managed that”, so the class teacher said – “you can reduce it or rub some out”. She can get 4. The mathematics teacher gave her 4.

Khuong got 100% right, but the mathematics teacher consulted with the class teacher again and they decided he had copied from someone else, so some should be rubbed out in order to make it wrong. She made it 7 and then decided it was too much so she corrected it to 6. Then she said that if she had just based it on the result he would get 10. The teacher said that Hoanh seemed to have got everything wrong – it should be increased a bit or it's too low. She then realised that she had got quite a few calculations right – she is given a 4, the same as her sister Quyen.

I could see the mathematics teacher looking at a list while marking and this was a list of the excellent and 'slow' children in classes 1B and 1A – the mathematics teacher had this in

front of her when she marked their papers. I asked her and then I copied it. When asked, the mathematics teacher said that the list was given to her by the class teachers and that they need to match the mathematics and literacy results. (10 May 2012, field notes page 57)

With their unfavourable identities following them around, these participants did not seem to have a chance. The results of their tests do not surprise me, and these are shown in the table below which lists the two test results: mid-year and end-of-year tests. Only Year 1's test scores are recorded in this table, which shows the test scores of Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong over the two years they studied in Year 1. Nghieng's results are only for one year and when he moved to Year 2 I decided not to follow up with his test scores, as once he is in the official disabled category test scores have little meaning.

Table 6: Summary of children’s test scores in Year 1 – Marked out of 10

| | | School year 2011-2012 | | | | | | | | | School year 2012-2013 | | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------|-------|-------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|----------------|------------|-----------------------|--------|-------------|-------|--------|-----------------------|--|
| Name/ Subject | Status | Vietnamese | | | Mathematics | | | Final outcome | Status | Vietnamese | | | Mathematics | | | Final outcome | |
| | | Term 1 | Term 2 | Final | Term 1 | Term 2 | Final | Term 1 | | Term 2 | Final | Term 1 | Term 2 | Final | | | |
| Hoanh | First Year | 4 | 3 | Fail | 4 | 3 | Fail | Repeating year | Repeating year | 5 | 6 | Pass | 4 | 6 | Pass | Promoted to Y2 | |
| Quyên | | 4 | 1 | Fail | 3 | 3 | Fail | Repeating year | | 4 | 5 | Pass | 6 | 6 | Pass | Promoted to Y2 SEN | |
| Khuông | | 4 | 3 | Fail | 6 | 4 | Fail | Repeating year | | 7 | 8 | Credit | 9 | 8 | Credit | Promoted to Y2 | |
| Nghiêng | Repeating Year | 3 | 5 | Pass | 3 | 5 | Pass | Promoted to Y2 SEN | Y2 | | | | | | | Promoted to Y3 | |

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the participants' learning situations in relation to their classroom contexts and the learning programme, to further investigate the issues where their identities as 'slow learners' have somewhat disadvantaged their learning in the system. In doing so, I have also shown from my data what actually happened during the tests that were carried out in their classrooms.

The next chapter forms an in-depth discussion of the issues pertaining to the system, which diminish the nurturing of learning for these children – my research participants. In doing so, I will analyse the assessment process and procedures in detail, to reveal how my research participants' identities were constructed and what really happened to them during and after that. Some policy analysis will be presented, to show the full circle of learning ecology around these children and to further answer my research questions.

1. *In which ways do some linguistic minority pupils become categorised as slow learners? and*
2. *What may happen to those being categorised as 'slow'?*

Chapter 7: Key themes synthesis and discussion

The previous two chapters of data analysis identify some issues in mainstream education in Vietnam, including the way in which pupils gradually become categorised as slow learners. In this chapter I will first synthesise the key themes before forming the discussion which is the second part of the chapter.

The key themes that emerged in the two prior chapters are synthesised using assessment as a case study, to show that it is this process that visibly exposes and reinforces the identity construction of my learners. In other words, the assessment process in my study is a case study of how the children's identities are constructed in their relationships with their teachers. Thus, it is the assessment process that finally decides the outcomes of the learners and this process affects most of the issues discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The key themes that emerged from the study will then be summarised before moving on to examine a number of discussions.

The discussion section further examines these themes both theoretically and practically, considering the global context as well as Vietnamese national trends, in order to put my case study into perspective. In particular, the discussions will focus on language issues and the role which the Vietnamese language plays in the processes, the issues of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and Vietnamese as an additional language (VAL), and the way in which second language learners could be titled 'learning disabled'. All this will finally lead back to the discussion of identity matters, as this is a central part of my argument, which is supported by my data. This is arguably the central factor that could lead to success or failure in education in Vietnam, as shown by my research context.

The discussion also captures the main points covered in the chapter, while also stressing the vital role that identity plays in my research context and for my research participants in particular. The chapter then ends with an introduction to the following chapter.

7.1 Key themes synthesis – Assessment as a case study

In the assessment section of the literature review chapter, I discussed and reviewed the *when*, *what* and *how* questions that are relevant when assessing young minority language learners. This aims to emphasise the importance of incorporating and balancing these three factors, to create valid and reliable assessments and to make such a process useful to both learners and teachers. Below is a discussion of these factors when examining the data analysed in Chapters 5 and 6.

7.1.1 The WHEN issues

As previously stated, there are two tests per school year called the semester 1 test and the semester 2/end-of-year test, with the first held four months after the children start schooling and the second following after another four months. The question of *when* to assess, especially for second language learners in Vietnam, is what is being questioned here.

In the literature review section 3.3.3.2, one of the main points discussed was the BICS and CALP domains of language posited by Cummins (2000). García (2009) then applies BICS and CALP to learning and assessment, where it is imperative that the student has built up enough ability in the language to be able to understand the requirements of questions and have the capacity to provide complete and accurate responses to questioning before assessments can be undertaken. Therefore, the timing of assessments is especially important. If, for example, an assessment were carried out when the children were not yet fully capable of producing in that language, the results of that testing may not accurately represent the true ability of the individuals assessed. This is why education administrators in Toronto, when introducing a policy for testing minority language children, stated that these children should not be tested for at least two years after they start schooling (Cummins, 2000).

Vietnam does not differentiate education practices for minority language learners, as compared with Vietnamese majority learners; therefore, there exists an identical testing system throughout the country, for all groups of children. Formal testing is carried out four months after the children enter

primary school, followed by the end-of-year test, which is eight months after starting, creating a rather threatening learning environment for these children. This is completely opposite to the educational philosophy of Conteh and Brock (2010), who suggest that a non-threatening learning environment would encourage and motivate minority language learners. In addition to that, the efficacy of formal testing in this case appears to be questionable, in terms of its aims, content and the way in which the tests are administered. These are summed up in the *what* and the *how* issues discussed below.

7.1.2 The WHAT issues

The second issue of assessing second language learners discussed in the literature review is the *I* issue. With regard to this, I will quickly review areas of child development and learning and will then describe the areas selected for testing in the Vietnamese system to identify what could be problematic. This will be followed by a discussion of issues relating to the test content that is used for assessing the learners.

When reflecting on the areas of child development and learning, and what is assessed, I feel that the system is purely Vietnamese-language-centric, which is not the strength of many minority language learners, since this is not their mother tongue. My diagram in Figure 7 of Chapter 6 identifies the nine subjects taught in Year 1, and assessing only two subjects (mathematics and Vietnamese) does not fully reflect the overall development of children in their early years. At this point, I would like to draw some comparison using the UK Early Years curriculum as an example: this focuses on seven areas of development for children which are:

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding of the world
- Expressive arts and design

The nine subjects scheduled for Year 1 classes in Vietnam could be grouped into these seven areas of development, so that:

- Personal, social and emotional development = *Ethics + study of society and nature*
- Communication and language = *Muong language and verbal Vietnamese language*
- Literacy = *Vietnamese sessions*
- Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy = *mathematics sessions*
- Knowledge and understanding of the world = *Study of society and nature + extra-curricular activities*
- Physical development = *PE*
- Creative development = *Art + craft + Music/singing*

Although in reality the Muong language is not yet included in the learning programme, there is the potential for doing, so using the 15% curriculum window specified by the central government (discussed in Chapter 2).

In the previous year, 2010, in the kindergarten class in Vietnam, assessment for the children was divided into four areas of development:

- Physical development
- Social and emotional development
- Communication and language development (in Vietnamese)
- Knowledge and awareness development

Such areas are still present in the curriculum for primary education, but formal assessment for Year 1 only focuses on two areas of development which are mathematics and Vietnamese language and literacy. One could argue that these are the two main and most important subjects, but I still stress that these two subjects are in no way sufficient to represent the overall development of six-year-old learners. For the early years, there are important learning and development areas other than knowing numbers, calculations, and language and literacy, as discussed in section 3.3.3.1.

The second issue derived from **what** to test is the content of the tests. Of the four official tests in one school year, the end-of-year tests are the most important as they weigh roughly 70 percent of the annual GPA of each

learner. I will therefore analyse two end-of-year test papers in Vietnamese and mathematics to show what could be problematic in the content of these papers.

Vietnamese tests

The Term 1 test, although there are still some concerns, particularly in relation to the marking process, seemed better organised when compared with the Term 2 test. For example, in the second assessment there were sufficient test papers for all the children in the class, and the texts for the reading task were provided in the test paper rather than asking the invigilator to choose texts from a textbook. Term 2's test content was problematic in relation to several issues, which are discussed below.

The following is a direct translation of the ***end-of-year Vietnamese test for Year 1 for the school year 2011-2012.***

A – Reading Test (10 points)

1. **Quietly read ‘*Qua cua bo*’** (Vietnamese textbook, 2nd book, page 85) and based on the content place an X in the box to denote the right answer

a. *Where is the girl's soldier-father based?*

- Nha Trang A remote island Tuy Hoa

b. *Which presents did the father send his little child?*

- Sweets, teddy bear, telling her of his homesickness and affection
- A kiss, best wishes, clothes, affection
- His best wishes, a kiss, telling her of his homesickness and affection

2. Reading aloud

- a. Pupil (each) reads aloud 30-40 words from a text or a poem taken from Vietnamese textbook 1 or textbook 2 (teacher/ invigilator selects).
- b. Answering a few simple questions or identifying a few sounds

(âm) and diphthongs (vần) from that reading selected by the teacher/invigilator.

B – Writing Test (10 points)

1. **Spelling and handwriting** (8 points) – 15 minutes

Writing the text: ‘*Cây bàng*’ (Vietnamese textbook 2, page 127). Write from ‘*Xuan sang...*’ to end of text’

2. **Fill in the blank** with **ân** or **uân**:

Kh.....vác

h.....hoan

T.....lẽ

h.....luyện

The first issue relates to both the first exercise of the reading section and the first exercise in the writing section. This is a failure to provide the children with adequate reading materials needed for the test. The materials were not provided and the children were requested to look for these texts/readings in their own textbooks – in this particular case, the test writer assumed that all the children must have their Vietnamese textbooks with them when sitting the test. In reality, however, I observed that many children did not even bring a bag with them because this is a test day, so the textbooks were in their bags at home. Also, some children have already lost their textbooks during the school year. In my observations, I noted that it was rather chaotic in the test rooms after the invigilators had given the instructions. When realising that some children did not have their textbooks with them, the invigilator asked their peers to share the textbooks. This, however, did not eliminate the chaos when the textbook was needed.

Such an issue could be eliminated if a) the text was provided within the test paper, or b) the class teacher knew the textbook was needed during the test, so she could better prepare her children. I believe the former is a better solution, compared with the latter, because even if the teacher could prepare the children in advance, she still would not have had spare copies of the textbook for those children who had lost theirs. I noticed that those who had lost their books during the school year or before the exam were mostly from poor families with busy working parents, and so perhaps replacing a lost

textbook for their children presents a bigger problem than for better-off parents. Personally, I doubt that these parents would have acted differently, even if the teacher had informed them before the test about the need to replace their children's textbooks.

The second issue of this test lies with **Reading task 2** that did not provide reading content to be tested but requested instead that the invigilators select a text from the Vietnamese textbook with which to test the children. Will all invigilators in the different rooms choose the same level of reading for their children? My observations showed that the 1B class's invigilator selected a paragraph of text for the children to read while the 1A invigilator selected a verse from a poem. This tester input creates inconsistency in the testing process and could affect the assessment outcomes, even where the levels of reading in the two classes are the same. During the school year, almost all poems in the textbook were learnt by heart, where the children repetitively chant the poems and can repeat them with their eyes closed. This means that the children may not know the text but after reading the first line of a poem, they are likely to remember the whole poem/verse and can read fluently without showing much difficulty when reading to the invigilator. This perhaps explains why the reading task in 1A was completed rapidly by each child and within a short period of time, with almost all the children tested reading smoothly and speedily. On the other hand, this reading task could not be finished in time in the 1B class, and so not all the children were called to read to the invigilator (field notes, 10 May 2011).

Similarly, **Exercise 2a** could include an example of how the numbers should be presented and calculated to assist with the written instructions. **Exercises 4 and 5** could be designed in a different way, perhaps accompanied by images/pictures to help the children understand the requirements of the tasks. With children who are six-years-old, where most of them only experienced the Vietnamese language for the first time in the kindergarten class, asking purely text-based mathematics questions creates a high chance of the children not knowing what they are supposed to do. The mathematics test would be more helpful for young learners, who learn in a second language, if there were pictures to demonstrate the questions. My field notes from the test day showed that when the allocated time was over, more than half of the children in the class were still working on their papers, as they had not finished, including the class monitor who is expected to be one of the best learners. The focal children left **Exercise 5** blank because they did not understand what they had to do, even though the invigilator loudly read out the instructions at the beginning of the test. This exercise was the last one on the test paper, so by then the children could probably not remember what they had been told by the invigilator earlier.

This assessment is evidence of *double testing* the minority language children. I call it double testing because the test does not only assess mathematical skills, numbers and calculations, but also tests Vietnamese language proficiency. This test was sat by all Year 1 children in this district and those who are Vietnamese clearly had an advantage by being tested in their mother tongue. It is therefore not too difficult to explain such a steep difference in the test results from schools in towns, as compared with those in remote areas where pupils may be mostly minority language learners. Further examination of the language issues will be presented, extended and challenged in the discussions section of this chapter, both in the language and identity sections.

7.1.3 The HOW issues

The last question regarding testing issues is **how** to test. This refers to the administration of the assessment, including test procedures, invigilation and

marking. I will analyse this by examining three separate time periods to carefully examine how the tests were administered.

Before the test

These assessments are carried out very formally, so one day before the official test date, the deputy head of the school goes to the BOET to collect all the test papers for her school. All papers are sealed in envelopes, and these envelopes are opened only 15 minutes before the test, when the head teacher gives the papers to the invigilator of each class. This means that the content of the tests remains confidential until the last minutes before the exam. While this practice ensures professionalism and consistency between schools regarding content, this posed some problems in the year I observed.

First of all, when considering the Vietnamese test, for instance, there was no communication between the local BOET and any schools or teachers regarding how they should prepare their children. As such, the teachers and children did not know in advance that they would need their Vietnamese textbooks during the test. In the previous section, I mentioned the chaos created in the test rooms after the children found out that they needed their textbooks to complete the test.

Additionally, while sealing the test papers until the final minutes should ensure confidentiality of the test content, any mistake made by the local BOET will cause difficulty with amendments, since there is almost no available time for any necessary updates. Below are my field notes from two different test days.

Monday 26th December 2011: ...now the teachers are queuing to get the envelope for their class. They are allowed to open and check the papers in front of the head to ensure they have an adequate number of papers. The mathematics and Vietnamese tests are prepared by the local BOET. One Year 5 teacher has spotted a mistake regarding an instruction which says 'read the ... from Year 3' which confused them, but the teachers then figured out it is supposed to say '...from Year 5'.

Friday 11th May 2012: ... 7.20: the invigilator is delivering the test papers. When she had finished, she found out she needed one more paper so Quyen is still waiting for her paper.....7.30: Quyen's got her test paper now.

In the above examples, the first mistake made by the local BOET was fortunately spotted by a teacher at the time she received the papers. It was fortunate that the teacher actually read through the paper after counting them and spotted the mistake. This would have been confusing for the children, if the mistake had not been promptly identified by the teacher. Of course, it was only a few minutes before the test, so no amendment could be made on the papers, but the invigilators for both rooms were aware of the mistake and could tell the children verbally before the test, which somewhat solved the problem.

The second example shows a more serious issue which created an unfair situation for a child who is one of my participants and who subsequently received her test paper 10 minutes later than her peers and was granted no extra time at the end of the test. Perhaps the invigilator did not have enough time to count the test papers before going to her room and that was why she only found out there were insufficient papers after distributing them.

During the test

Test invigilation further created inconsistencies in both the Vietnamese and mathematics tests. Two Year 2 teachers are appointed to be the invigilators for the two Year 1 groups because it is understood that the children they invigilate will be moving to their classes in the following school year.

Friday 11th May 2012: ... She (the invigilator) also told the class that they are slow and that they will need more discipline from her next year. I then asked her if she is teaching these children next year. She said that if she is invigilating this class now, it is likely that she will be given the class later when they move to Year 2.

The two invigilators have completely different styles of invigilating, with one appearing to be more lenient and somewhat encouraging and accommodating, whereas the other was very strict and intimidating towards the children. The more lenient one patiently read the instructions of each test exercise slowly and loudly to the children. She also paused and explained repeatedly what each requirement meant and then demonstrated with prompts and examples. In providing prompts for Part B – Writing – exercise 2, she said:

Friday 11th May 2012: ... 1A invigilator: 'Will you say *khuan vac* or *khan vac*?' (the children replied, '*khuan vac*'). She then said: 'In that case, should we put *uan* or *an* behind the *kh*?' (the children replied, '*uan*')....

When choosing a text for the children to read aloud to her, she chose a verse from a poem which most children appeared to read rather easily. I believe that the examiner's manner (her appearing to be accommodating and encouraging) and the level of reading (a poem instead of a paragraph of text) helped the children in this case.

Such support and encouragement was not observed in the other classroom, where the invigilator could be considered rather intimidating towards the children, such as by calling them dumb; telling them that they were slow learners who needed more discipline from her; and that they would get a 1/10 mark immediately, if they were to look at their peers' paper (field notes on 10, 11 May 2012). When testing the reading section, this invigilator also chose a piece of literature full of text to ask the students to read. This poses a serious problem regarding consistency in the level of difficulty used to assess the children, because during the year most poems taught were learnt by heart, while this was not the case with literature. So in this instance, the children in one class got such an easy task in reading a poem which they had most likely learnt by heart, so they could rote-read it without much difficulty. However, the children in the other class had to read a piece of literature which was certainly more difficult. This difference is further amplified by the tester effect, as the children got nervous when being assessed by a teacher who had never taught them before and who also appeared to be so threatening to them.

Furthermore, while the reading task clearly stated a requirement for the speed at which the children needed to read, there was no equipment such as a recording device or timer for the examiner to carry out the task. As such, the reliability of the task can be questioned because it relies too much on the testers' professionalism and an ability to estimate the timing.

At this point, I would like to revisit the interview with the kindergarten teacher regarding the end-of-kindergarten assessment to add some comments on the **how** issues. Looking back at the assessment carried out at the end of

the kindergarten class, briefly presented in section 6.6.6.1 of Chapter 6, one could question the tester effect here. Baker (2007) warned that the assessors' effect is not neutral and everything embedded in their identity influences the children's responses to the test, which directly influences the assessment outcome.

Interview Voice 008 (Minutes 20 to 21): the children mentioned joined in all activities here in my Kindergarten class. On a normal basis they learn really well but when being tested it was the teachers from the primary school who came here and psychologically, even when we swap teachers within the kindergarten, the children become very scared... being tested like that doesn't appropriately reflect the actual ability of the children...

This expresses the teacher's concern about the testers' effect and the fact that the children are tested by the teachers from the primary school produces assessment outcomes that fail to accurately reflect the children's true abilities.

In addition to the tester effect, the way the assessment is organised appears to be rather intimidating, as the children queue up waiting for their turn to go and see different examiners, most of whom they had never met before the test. It is not just the testers from the Primary school that are intimidating figures; the teacher mentioned that any strangers coming to the class will make the children and the teachers themselves nervous.

Interview Voice 008 (Minutes 24 to 25): ... or sometimes we have teachers coming to observe us, or exchanging experience between schools - the children also stay paralysed, 5-years-old but wet themselves. To be honest with you, we as teachers teaching the class, when seeing many other teachers observing us, we are also very nervous and shaky, so it's not just the children (with strangers)...

When observing an assessment process like that, I clearly see that the test is set up against, rather than to support, the young minority learners in my study. Not only are there problems with the test content but also with the administration of the test, as well as with the outcomes which follow the children later as they enter the primary school. Some of them may be able to change the labels created by the test but some may be tagged for all time, which is not positive and encouraging for these learners.

After the test

Following the test, the papers were returned to the class teachers for marking. Although the requirement was that the markers should exchange papers, so the 1B teacher marks 1A's papers and the 1A teacher marks 1B's papers, the markers actually swapped back, so they could mark their own pupils' papers. The teachers explained that they needed to swap back because they know their children better, so they could mark more accurately. There could be some justification for this, but I also believe that students may behave differently in tests, as compared with when learning in the classroom, so that those who appear to learn slowly in class may perform better in exams, for instance. If the marker is also the teacher and the papers are not anonymised, as in this case, then the teacher may mark the children based on her perception of the student's performance and not based on what the student has done in their test paper – this was exactly what was observed during the marking day.

One would question why the teachers were so wary about 'weak' children getting high scores on the test. My findings suggest that it is an inconsistent and somewhat confusing system that creates such fear. In the school year 2010-2011, a child, who was promoted to Year 2 and had studied in that class for only a few weeks, was then returned to the Year 1 class. The rationale for this was that the Year 2 teacher felt that the child's learning was too slow and that he had been wrongly promoted, so must be returned to his 'correct' learning level, which was Year 1. In this process, the Year 2 teacher won the debate and was supported by the school management, which resulted in negative feelings for both the Year 1 teacher, who felt her ability and reputation were diminished, and the child who felt upset and angry towards this decision (Interview with both Year 1 teachers on 9 February 2012, Voice recording, File 120209_001).

To add some information, this child completed the semester 1 mathematics test paper within 5 minutes and scored 10/10. My observations, on normal schooldays, recorded that he was too advanced for studying in this class for a second year and that this resulted in his working slower, as most of the time he had to wait for others to complete the task at hand. Therefore, while it would be rewarding for the teachers to have all their children promoted to

the next year level, they are also conscious about getting into disagreements with their Year 2 colleagues and especially the school management.

The class teacher said she observed Hoang being initially depressed in her class when the year to be retaken started and that now he is still quiet and appeared to not cooperate as he may still have anger inside him. My observations of this boy also noted that he sometimes displayed a withdrawn attitude by not doing the tasks requested by the teacher, although I feel he knew exactly what to do. He is always quiet and doesn't seem to have any friends in this class. At recess time, I often saw him coming to play with the Year 2 boys who had been his classmates the previous year, as I was told by the children and teachers. (27 December 2011, field notes page 57)

7.1.4 Summary of the themes

From Chapters 5 and 6 and the detailed case regarding assessment analysed above, the main themes found in this investigation are concerned with the children's school and home experiences, and the home-school connection in child learning. Assessment is very important in this context, as it is the means of formalising the learning outcomes of the children, including the labelling of them as being 'slow'.

The sub-themes could be summarised and listed as follows:

- The first theme shows how the child participants are disadvantaged by the system and/or socio-economic factors.
- The second theme points to a theory of 'blaming the victim' – how the children are corrective to the system, so the system does not need to change because there is always someone to blame – in this case the lowest end of the learner spectrum.
- The third theme relates to the self-fulfilling prophecy, which means the children stopped trying once they felt their fates had been decided. The situation ensures that everyone sticks to their established and concreted roles, where the children are unable to extricate themselves from their disadvantaged positions. The teachers teach and assess the children in the way they do and the children respond to what others expect of them.
- The fourth theme is concerned with an imbalance of power that exists between families and the system, by which I mean the educators and

the school. This refers to elements of Confucian culture discussed briefly in section 6.1.2 and below in 7.2.4. In this cultural context, parents, particularly those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds (linguistic minority communities, the poor, those with a low level of education, etc.) feel that they do not have the right to complain about or to challenge any decision made by the school or by the child's teacher. It appears to be a significant cultural force within the country.

- The fifth theme pertains to other pressures created by the system, where the socioeconomic status of this linguistic minority group is particularly low and the research participants are financially disadvantaged, even within this group. This means that teachers are unable to contribute more, for example, by providing private lessons for which they are paid, which is a common practice in schools where the parents are financially better off. This results in the researched children being unable to use the school and the teachers in a way that other children use these resources in other parts of the country. As a result, this aspect of the system is closed off from these children due to the low socioeconomic conditions into which they were born.

While the main themes and subthemes may not directly relate to language, they do point to an understanding that there are other factors underpinning the way assessment is labelling the children. The actual recognition that has come through my data is that language is not the only factor in understanding how assessment turns children into being labelled as 'slow' learners. It is quite clear that these themes and sub-themes relate not just to language but also to the context and the issues surrounding the children's experiences. In understanding how to assess the learners fairly, these themes need to be taken into account to understand the teachers' position in this context and to then acknowledge that there is very little space in the education system in Vietnam for the teachers to recognise or to alter their children's learning experiences and their struggles, as the teachers themselves are also caught in such a system. The themes therefore illustrate that how the children are perceived is not a result of particular teachers being insensitive but instead an outcome of a wider system which

teachers have little or no power to change. In other words, teachers are simply a feature of the wider system within which they work.

In conclusion, it is not just the education system that must change, but there needs to be greater awareness of the consequences of socioeconomic factors. I do, however, wish to acknowledge that the education system in Vietnam may work well in other locations which I have not researched.

7.2 Discussions

Having looked at the assessment procedures in detail, I will now select some central aspects for further discussion. As I have shown that assessment in this research is a key part of how my participants' identities are constructed, this discussion will focus around the interrelated nature of assessment and identity, and the consequences of this for my participants. The way that being a second language learner impacts on assessment outcomes and how their identities affect the participants are also explored, as well as the impact of the participants upon the focal school. The theoretical principles of this are discussed in the literature review, section 3.3.3, but will also be referred to extensively in this discussion. I will start the discussion with a question from Hall *et al.* (2001,p.44): 'How can any assessment be fair and accurate if conducted in a language that is not familiar to the child?'

7.2.1 Language issues

Bilingualism has been emphatically shown to be an advantage, but can become a disadvantage in an unfavourable system, as discussed in section 3.4. When reviewing the categorisation from Hall *et al.* (2001), these bilingual learners start at a disadvantage because they fit into the fourth category, *linguistic minorities*, which means language is the first obstacle they will encounter when learning in mainstream education.

While these minority children are required to succeed academically, there is a question of how much proficiency in the Vietnamese language is needed for such success. For the educational system, this has never appeared to be an issue, since the curriculum designed for this group of learners is exactly the same as that provided for the majority Kinh students, as are the times that these children sit the tests each year. Elsewhere, in the United States or

in Canada, there is an understanding from research, although this is yet to be incorporated into policy, that there may be a prospect for delaying the time for testing children learning in a language other than their mother tongue by between two to five years (Cummins, 2000; Cummins, 1985), as discussed in section 3.3.3.2. In Vietnam, the process remains unchanged, with the first test being administered four months after the children enter Year 1 and the second test carried out five months after the first. This means that after eight months of attending primary school, the children are expected to prove their ability in the Vietnamese language through these tests, with the threat of retaking the tests or repeating the year if they are unsuccessful.

One may then question whether or not BICS and CALP and the linguistic issues discussed are relevant in a context where the majority of students are from the same linguistic minority group, in this case Muong. My argument would be that these linguistic concepts are indeed relevant and can be related to my participants and their learning journey; such as learning in Vietnamese, which is not their mother tongue, and being assessed very early in their learning journey. While several of their peers are also Muong who learn in Vietnamese like them, their personal circumstances were different, and they perhaps have a greater attendance record in reception class than these children who were not able to go to school due to their parents being unable to purchase a lunch voucher for instance. However, I wish to stress that linguistic factors and BICS and CALP alone could not adequately explain these learners' struggles and how they became who they are. The data in my study have also pointed to other factors that are significant in influencing my participants' learning journey, and such factors are listed as themes above in section 7.1.5. These factors point to an understanding of learning in a much broader way than just thinking about BICS and CALP, where we need to also understand the cultural aspects and the 'ecology of learning' (Cole, 1998), in order to fully explain the categorisation of these learners.

Furthermore, while in theory the school is supposed to be a Vietnamese-only environment, this was not the case in reality, as shown in section 5.2.2. All informal conversations between the children of the researched school are in

their mother tongue, and they only speak Vietnamese during their lessons and to their teachers. Has the continuous use of their mother tongue, whilst learning in Vietnamese, ever been considered as multicompetence (Wei, 2011) or translanguaging (García, 2009) because of their ability to understand multilingual practices and to switch between two languages, or do such notions not exist in the system? The latter seems to be the case for these children in Vietnam.

In section 3.5.1, I reviewed the global situation regarding language policy in education by analysing policies for bilingual or multilingual education in different countries. The review shows that resistance towards the inclusion of minority languages into mainstream education has been a common trend and practice in several countries. Mohanty *et al.* (2009), for instance, claim that as language shift has occurred in some parts of India, a number of minority languages have been weakened and pushed to the margins of societal domains, which has restricted the development of these ethnic minority communities as a whole. This appears to be even more the case in the Vietnam context, with all significant domains in the country governed by the language of the majority, from the monolingual education system to the political and economic worlds.

I use the example of India in particular because the submersion education system described by Mohanty *et al.* (2009) is very similar to what has been happening in Vietnam, where the exclusion of minority languages has created different layers of cumulative disadvantage. Of this, perhaps the most apparent is poor classroom performance, leading to high dropout rates as learning progresses to higher levels, followed by subsequent exclusion from the main societal domains.

In section 3.5.3, I discussed some different models of bilingual education that are being tried out in Vietnam by NGOs aiming to create a smooth transition for minority children to learning in Vietnamese language. Such piloting shows an awareness of learning issues for language minority children in mainstream schools and this has attracted certain attention from the government who granted permission for these schemes. However, it can be assumed that the final aim of these piloted bilingual programmes in the

country is to produce monolinguals in Vietnamese as they are just different forms of the transitional model of bilingualism (see section 3.5.3). I would argue that until such programmes are introduced officially into the system on a mass scale, that minority language learners, especially those at the very low end, will continue to struggle. Although not all minority language learners fail in mainstream education, the high level of failure experienced by these children is often linked to a mismatch between their home language and that used in the education system (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988; Cummins, 2000).

7.2.2 Why are struggling learners affected more so than other learners?

It could be suggested that if the assessment issues identified here were commonplace in primary education in Vietnam, there could potentially be undesirable consequences for *all* learners, so WHY are my findings suggesting such a disadvantage for 'slow' learners – in this case, the research participants?

Firstly, children who are at the lower end of the class are more affected because their learner identities have gradually been constructed through the learning process. In particular, when many children have only been exposed to the new language since their time in kindergarten, using the same curriculum with the same timeframes and workload as that given to the majority Vietnamese children, especially those who live in urban areas and big cities, clearly creates problems. My observations witnessed that children who were unable to keep up with the pace of teaching were left behind and slowly became paralysed in the class, not knowing what to do when their peers, who could follow the teachers' instructions, were already much further ahead. This resulted in these children missing the opportunity to practise the new words, letters and aspects of mathematics being taught, thereby losing the opportunity to have their work checked and to be given feedback by the teachers.

That 'perceived identity', when brought into the test room, becomes a burden for them, as they are not encouraged to perform as well as they could, and they are fully aware that their fates have been decided before the final tests. They are further discouraged by not being given equal space when sitting

the test like their peers (such as three of them being expected to share one small desk until the head teacher came to inspect and intervene) and they were sat isolated from their peers, so had little opportunity to share the materials which the test required. Also, during the test, the invigilators never went anywhere near these children, while they constantly walked around the classroom to supervise the other children working on their papers and sometimes pointed out mistakes they had made, so they could rub them out and correct themselves. All three children in my research were not called to read to the invigilator because there was not enough time for each child to read to her. This means this reading section will be marked by the teacher based on her experience of these children in the classroom and not from what they may be able to do during the test. When there were not enough test papers, it was one of the participants who had to wait while her peers started answering the questions. Her paper came 10 minutes later but she was not given any extra time at the end of the test to compensate for the time lost at the beginning.

This shows that my research participants are disproportionately affected by their 'perceived identity' and it is through the process of learning and assessment in schools where the perceptions of their identity that disadvantages them has been constructed. Although their peers could also be affected to some extent, they have not been positioned at the very low end, where failure is awaiting them. Such identity factors followed the participants throughout the school year into the test room, where their fates were finally and officially decided and where repeating the year would inevitably be the outcome (refer back to sections 6.2.1 and 6.3.2.3 for further evidence).

Secondly, the test issues identified above affected more children than just the research participants, but the system seems to be designed in a way that allows flexibility for the teachers to correct errors that the system creates. This is shown in the marking procedure, where a number of children are marked upwards, to reflect their 'actual learning ability', as observed by the teachers throughout the school year. In this process again, the identity issue becomes pronounced, where the slow children's papers are not only kept as originally completed but may even be marked down due to the teachers

feeling that their performance was too good for their 'actual learning ability' (field notes on 15 May 2012).

Not scoring 50 percent on these tests means that the children are highly likely to have to repeat the year. What then happens if these children fail to pass the tests in the following year, or even the year after next? That question will be addressed in the section below which discusses another issue derived from the system – the matter of special educational needs (SEN) as compared with second language learners in Vietnamese (VAL).

7.2.3 The two likely outcomes: SEN or repeating the year

In the literature review chapter section 3.4, the term EAL is used on several occasions to describe children from diverse cultures in the UK, whose mother tongue is not English. Such a term has yet to be employed in the Vietnam context, so equivalent terms such as *Vietnamese as an Additional Language* (VAL) are yet to be developed or used in the government system.

With the procedure for repeating tests and repeating the year, children who are identified as having special educational needs, or those with disabilities, receive special arrangements. According to this, either the local education department, or the school and teachers of these children, will need to provide a different learning programme as the current programme for mainstream children may be too challenging for them (Nguyen Van Trung, 2005). Together with that, the school or teachers will need to design special test papers or tasks to better suit the 'ability' of children with special needs. This has given freedom in designing exam tasks for these children, resulting in greatly simplified versions of assessments, as observed in my research. Furthermore, the test outcome and whether or not the children are able to complete such simplified tasks are not so important. The national standard requiring a minimum of a 50 percent score does not apply to the SEN category, so the children may still be passed without obtaining any score (Interviews file Voice004).

From my observations, clear guidance has not been given for the whole procedure of SEN and/or disabled classifications, and what has been introduced was done rather casually, mostly without input from SEN

professionals. This has resulted in cases where the children are classified in the SEN category without an assessment ever having been completed and also without agreement from an SEN practitioner.

While not all the children who repeat the year are classified as 'learning disabled', those who still show little learning progress in the repeat year are unquestionably labelled thus. The lack of resources in the field of SEN in Vietnam is part of the problem, but the lack of awareness of VAL and how to deal with difficulties faced by VAL learners (presented in section 6.2.1) suddenly creates a 'positive slant' on the situation. This is because normally, children who obtain less than 50 percent in their overall test scores, will need to repeat the year and if they continue scoring less than 50 percent in their repeat year/s, then theoretically they could remain at the same year level until they score more than 50 percent. However, the government has unofficially requested, by giving verbal instructions in regional meetings, that schools should not have children repeating the year too many times. The vague awareness of SEN further creates an agreement between educators that if a child cannot pass the test, even after repeating the year, then there is something fundamentally wrong with him/her. As a result, the flexible application of SEN rules means that any child who is unlikely, for whatever reason, to pass the test in the next year can be moved into the SEN category, allowing them to be promoted to the next class without them having to score 50% in the tests.

However, moving away from the positive side (of avoiding making children sit the same class for several years), the negative effects as discussed in the literature review chapter are evident from my research. Such a lack of guidance in the field results in the categorised children losing the opportunity to learn like their 'normal' peers because they are perceived as 'learning disabled' and are thought to be incapable of coping with the regular learning programme. That is the common belief held by all the teachers and managers. My observations reveal that no specialised materials are designed for these children either, so the teachers simply take the workbook from the kindergarten class for them to use. For instance, Nghieng was given a workbook to trace or joint dotted alphabet letters, rather than writing the letters, words, sentences or the whole poem or paragraph like his peers

were doing. His test papers were also rigorously simplified and during the test the invigilator stood by him to provide prompts just so he could have some calculations right. Such learning practices do not enhance or stretch his learning skills but hold any learning potential back, further widening the gap between him and his peers, giving him no chance to catch up. The child knows very well that it is irrelevant whether or not he does any work, so there is no real effort from him in completing any learning task or the test paper. During the tests, he just sat playing with his paper and only did the work when reminded and prompted by the invigilator, an effort which did not last long before he stopped to play again (field notes 10, 11 May 2012). Given the 'entitlement' of being labelled learning disabled, even if he did not work on his test paper, he could still be marked to the minimum score of 50 percent, just so he could be passed – from my observations, he clearly acknowledged this.

Numerous researchers confirm that students, including those with special needs who are from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, learn more effectively when the content studied is sufficiently challenging and well-structured (Smith and Sanders, 1981; Schunk, 1983; Brophy, 1986; Cummins, 2001). In Nghieng's case, labelled as special needs without his being checked and assessed by any specialist, we can see he was given the freedom of not having to learn at all and his presence in the classroom did not seem to be acknowledged by most teachers. Not only were the learning materials that were given to him not at all challenging but nobody seemed to show any interest in his education. This explains why he appeared to give up trying to do anything, since there was nothing to compel him to try. In short, he did not get full access to the curriculum like his peers and was bored with the simplified tasks given to him – he was not motivated to learn, as those tasks were not at all challenging at his level.

Similar to Nghieng's situation, Quyen was also classified as 'learning disabled' when she was repeating the Year 1 class and because of that she was then promoted to Year 2 for the following school year.

My very first observation was that none of the girls in my research were present. When I asked the class teacher if she knew where the girls were, she first thought they were sitting amongst the other students but after checking carefully, she

agreed with me that the girls were absent today. She laughed and stated '*maybe because they knew they'd be promoted to Year 2 this year, they don't feel the need for being here today*'... She then told me that both sisters are also promoted to the next class level with the younger sister (Quyen) being categorised at 'disabled' as she can't learn. '*She needs to be promoted because we can't let her repeat the same year for too long*', the teacher said. (29 May 2013, field notes, page 78)

The lack of guidance in this field, as well as an absence of differentiation between VAL and SEN in Vietnam, has created a 'grey area', in which minority language learners can be mistaken for 'learning disabled'. The practice of keeping the children in the same year level is already challengeable, but classifying the children as 'learning disabled' because too little improvement in learning has been observed in their repeat year appears problematic, as it is against the educational philosophy for young second language learners discussed in the literature review chapter.

VAL and SEND?

In the Vietnamese education system, linguistic minority children can be classified into the special needs category if their academic scores are still low in the repeating year. Cummins (1985) stresses that when underachievement occurs, educators must first assess their own pedagogical methods as well as the learning programmes, followed by trying out other alternative approaches before considering cognitive processing deficits as another explanation. In line with this, Hall *et al.* (2001) remind us that EAL should not be confused with SEN and, therefore, learning difficulties that mainly result from learning in another language must not be considered as special educational needs. While the concepts of 'special needs' or 'learning disabled' appear to be familiar to teachers in Vietnam, the problems associated with learning in a second language seem less well acknowledged. Without an existing concept or acceptance of 'Vietnamese as an additional language', it seems that teachers have little choice other than to classify some linguistic minority children as SEN in order to promote them to the next school level.

Hall *et al.* (2001) advise teachers to follow different steps to assess why such children learn more slowly than, and differently from, their peers. The first step is to consider their language development, both in mother tongue

and in the language of instruction. The second step is to consider the children's background such as their home and family environments outside of school. The third step refers to any specific language disorder the child may be experiencing, and the fourth step involves considering the possibility of special educational needs. In the Vietnam context, the first three steps are not apparent in school procedures, but the fourth step is, which could lead to SEN classifications, as witnessed in my case study, where linguistic minority children were classified as having low intelligence or being learning disabled.

In UK schools, by contrast, even for children registered as SEN due to a specific language disorder (step 3 above), there is further assessment to decide whether the same problem or delay is observed in the first language too. In Vietnam there is little training, guidance or equipment relating to these issues and the children, schools and families, receive no support from the authorities or any specialist agency.

The consequences of all this are both negative and positive. While the children may be wrongly categorised into the SEN group, which can result in them being ignored in class, it is the only way that the teachers can actually promote the children to the next class level. So, in some sense, this inaccurate categorization leads to linguistic minority pupils being able to 'swim against the current' of teachers and children, in terms of moving up the levels of the education system. This is because the standard set by the system requires that children attain a minimum test score of 50 percent in the Vietnamese language subject, in order to be promoted to the next level, regardless of their mother tongue. However, an exception applies to children with special needs, so instead of making children repeat too many years, it seems a compromise agreement is reached between the school and the family. This may explain why, in the research school's history of children being classified as 'disabled' or 'special needs', there has only ever been one family which expressed an objection to such a decision – all other families accepted the school's decision without question (Interview with two teachers, 9 February 2012, Voice recording, File 120209_001, p.119 transcription).

The system – programme and teaching

All the significances discussed above ultimately point towards the system, including: what learning programme is designed; how managers and educators are trained and at what; and what guidance and assistance are provided to them during their teaching. Rodriguez (2005) claims that minority language students work more effectively when they are in small groups and when they work on individual tasks. The typically crowded classrooms in Vietnam, with a teacher-to-pupil ratio observed of 1:27, for children as young as six years old, exacerbates the disadvantaged learning situation facing these children (and their teachers). I rarely observed individual tasks being set; rather, the children were often requested to synchronize their tasks all together and at once. Reflecting on Rodriguez's findings, there was no opportunity for these children to work effectively and to prove themselves to be good learners, because individual tasks and small group learning activities were not provided.

When underachievement occurs in a context like this, both teachers and their pupils are in the spotlight and blame seems to be directed at them – either the teachers who are unable to teach or the pupils who are too slow to learn. The common beliefs held against linguistic minority learners are discussed throughout the previous chapters and earlier in this chapter, so I would like to add a few points in response to the blame directed at the teachers. Avis (1994) recognises the importance of teacher professionalism, and this must start during the initial teacher training process. The author acknowledges that issues such as diversity need to be addressed during training, so teachers are able to conquer any challenges derived from their diverse classrooms, to enhance the learning experience and achievement of all their students.

As a teacher who completed formal teacher training at a university in Vietnam, I never experienced such training on my courses. The teachers from the focal school were trained roughly 20 years before my time, and I would doubt whether the training back then was of a better quality than what I experienced. All teachers were trained to teach a regular class – issues regarding minorities, and/or the fact that these children do not speak the language of instruction, never seemed to be taken into consideration. A single curriculum is used for the whole country and the large amount of

textbooks required to be covered by the teachers and children each school year makes the problem worse.

The assessments pose a problem because they are designed in a way that allows inconsistencies in the process, but also because the two tests that decided the fate of the children were not adequate to assess their real abilities. This is not to mention other disadvantages such as the timing of the test and the way it was administered, which were discussed earlier in section 7.1 of this chapter. Baker (2007) recommends that testing bilingual children be done over a longer period of time and must rely on a wide range of measurement and observation mechanisms and tools which are used in different contexts (at school and home). This allows the children to display their different roles and abilities in both natural and formal settings. All these variables cannot be ignored when discussing the test results of these children.

Reviewing the situation worldwide, there are definitely important issues regarding linguistic minority learners in mainstream education. Not all countries around the world recognise such issues and some would do so only if the problem appeared to be too significant for it to be hidden. Even in the UK, which scholars identify as being one of the leading countries in applying bilingual programmes or supporting minority languages (García, 2009), unless the problem is perceived as significant, these minorities will be neglected, as Wei (2011) observed when studying minority Chinese learners in mainstream schools in the UK. Nevertheless, an even less promising situation could be described for the minority children in my studied school, because although there is a clear issue being observed here, these children are still being neglected.

7.2.4 Back to identity matters

In the literature review chapter, I placed identity as the first section to be discussed, as I posited that identity is a powerful matter in Vietnam that can open or close the doors to success. Similarly, identity is highly significant in the context of education where, in comparison with the majority Vietnamese learners, minority language learners have significantly lower academic achievement as well as a lower rate of completing primary education (GSO,

2006). The journey of my research in observing and studying my minority language participants throughout their first school year of primary education offers much understanding and explanation. Identity issues appear to be significant for these participants, whose identities may not be so desirable for themselves and their families. Why?

Firstly, ***what identity means to these children.***

When reviewing identity as described by Norton (2000), Katzenstein (1996), and Hall (1991) as the self-perception and understanding of these children and their relationship to the school's domain and vice-versa, how has such a relationship evolved and been constructed over one school year? How did these children identify themselves and how were they identified by their teachers and peers?

When discussing identity in education, Cummins (2001) calls for a removal of barriers that could hinder learning and achievement – such barriers created by identities or cultural connections brought to school by minority language learners. The learners in my research, for instance, with their language minority background and by coming from poor families, immediately created some form of learning identity, which is not regarded very highly by their teachers and peers, something which is also understood by them. This indicates that their learning identity is formed at the initial stage of joining the group; therefore, their actual learning ability is not pronounced but their background, as who they are, contributed largely to this process of identity forming at the beginning of the school year.

Such an identity is undesirable also, because the education system does not assist their home language development. These children's language is 'excess baggage', which is neither needed nor favourably regarded by the school. Their teachers are all trained to teach in regular classrooms, where Vietnamese is supposed to be spoken and understood by everybody, so they were never trained to teach children learning in a second language. While these children's mother tongue is not given any place in mainstream education, their poor educational performance is often attributed to low intelligence. Many people, including teachers in the country, believe linguistic minority children have a lower level of intelligence when compared

to children from the majority Vietnamese group, and this is a commonly held belief in society.

By being perceived by their teachers and their peers as slow learners, or learning disabled, how did these children perceive themselves in this case?

In Hoanh, Quyen and Khuong's cases, these children seemed to accept the way that they were perceived without protest. The samples of observation notes, presented in sections 5.2.2 and 6.1.2, show that the children take everything in silence: when labelled as 'stupid' or 'slow' or as 'not knowing anything' or 'failures' by their peers or teachers, these children just put their heads down, or looked away to avoid eye contact with their challengers. As part of Confucianism's order, as stated in sections 4.4.8 and 6.1.2, where the voice of the smaller or smallest is always unimportant, the issue of identity is significant here because these children somewhat 'agree' with what others think of them. By reflecting on the influence of Confucianism, I can understand why the children listen to and always obey their teachers, but in this case these children also listen to what their peers have to say. Identity is responsible for the divisions that exist between the children in this case and my participants' identity is the smallest amongst the class.

The children from better-off families have parents who were able to invest more in their education, such as always getting them adequate learning materials, paying all the fees on time and coming to parent-teacher meetings as required. These children possess a different identity; a more desirable one, which was supported by the teachers who rarely directed criticism at them, allowing them to somewhat position themselves above the poorer and 'slow' children at the lowest end of the classes – my participants. This is why the better-off pupils publicly looked down on their poor peers and yet they received no reprimands from the teachers for doing so. Those poorer peers seemed to understand this hierarchical order very well by keeping quiet rather than saying anything back to their more 'powerful' peers.

To my participants, their identity either means failure in education or being someone else – *learning disabled* in this case. Identity in this case is a burden which weighs the children down over their learning journey, exactly like in the case discussed by Cummins (2001) in sections 3.2 and 3.4.1.

Secondly, ***what these children's identity means to the system.***

To the system, these children's identity is undesirable because: a) they are too slow to learn; and b) by making late payments, being absent from meetings, not preparing their children well before classes, not getting adequate learning materials for their children and not sending the children to school as regularly as expected, etc., their parents are perceived as not prioritising education.

In a system where the teachers compete with each other to be titled 'Initiative Contender' (*Chiến sĩ thi đua*) or 'Advanced worker' (*Lao động tiên tiến*), at the end of the school year, as presented in section 2.1, having too many slow learners in their class will result in them being excluded from receiving these titles. This is why, for the teachers, these children could be seen as 'burdens' for them. Since school year 2011-2012, the local BOET has shown some leniency towards the teachers, by allowing them five percent of Provisional Fail pupils while still being considered for the title Advanced Worker (Interview files 120208_001 & 120208_005). In previous years these teachers would have been excluded from being awarded such titles (BOET, 2010). This has changed the situation slightly for some teachers but not for all, and that is why a teacher participant was not considered for this title in my research year, as she had three out of 27 children falling into this category at the end of the school year.

In a similar way to teachers, schools can also apply for different titles, including 'Collective Advanced Workers', 'Collective Excellent Workers' (*Tập thể lao động tiên tiến, Tập thể lao động xuất sắc*) and 'Competition Flag' granted by the Provincial People's Committee, or MOET, or the Central Government Office (*Cờ thi đua của UBND Tỉnh/ Bộ GD & ĐT/ Chính phủ*). In order to obtain such awards, it is imperative that individual teachers are awarded titles, for instance, to qualify for the 'Collective Advanced Workers' title, the school must have at least 50% of its teachers awarded the 'Advanced Worker' title and so on.

Moving on from all these competitions and titles and back to my research participants, we can now see that they may be considered undesirable, not only by their teachers but by the whole school community too. Why?

Because it is their fault that their teachers are excluded from achieving these titles and when less than half of the teachers are eligible for the titles, the school is also excluded from getting the title awarded to them by the governing bodies. This is why these pupils' names are well-known by all teachers and they do not often receive positive comments or treatment from most of them. The evidence presented and analysed in Chapters 5 and 6 and from earlier in this chapter clearly shows this.

In addition to a mismatch with the language, the learning programme, the methods of teaching and learning, and the assessment procedure, there is also a mismatch of identities between the learners and their educators who represent the education system.

The analysis of my data presents a particular picture of my child participants and their families which would challenge the categorisation of the so-called 'slow' learner. As the second theme in section 7.1.1 described, these learners are corrective to the system, thus a challenge to the convenient Vietnamese construct, as they are not genuinely 'slow'. This view is further confirmed by their first teacher, the kindergarten teacher, who stated that the children were 'normal' (not slow) in her class (section 6.2.2.1). This poses a fundamental issue in Vietnamese society, as described in Chapter 2, section 2.3.2, namely the belief that linguistic minority learners are less capable at studying than the Kinh majority learners. This negative belief is formed regardless of the learners and their learning context and is a view that still prevails in today's educational practices across the country.

The following two questions can now be posed:

Would these children be slow learners if they learnt in their mother tongue language which is Muong, OR, if they were given verbal instructions in Muong language when they are in the first few years of primary school?

If these children were not classified as slow learners at an early stage of their time in mainstream schools, would they be able to learn any better?

7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented and analysed in detail how my research participants' identities have been constructed on their learning journey and I

used the assessment process as a case study of such identity construction. It matters that we study the identity of these learners and the way that such an identity is constructed in the learning process. This is because their identities clearly have a negative impact on the teaching and learning they experience. In particular, it impacts on the teachers' expectations of these children when learning, which then influences the teachers' interactions and behaviour towards them. I need to stress, however, that the teachers in my case study are also caught up in the system as they are just a feature of the wider system within which they work.

Therefore, the children unfortunately continued to struggle and then fall into one of the two outcomes 'pre-prescribed' for them – *repeating the year* or being classified as *learning disabled*. The teachers', and more precisely, the system's expectations seem to transfer to the children themselves and their peers, making them believe that they are not good enough to learn and that they are either 'slow' or 'learning disabled'. As discussed in section 3.3.3, such expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy that may not equate to, but could well be associated with, learner failure (Jussim *et al.*, 1996).

Other factors that come through the data include those listed in the summary of the themes in section 7.1.4. Such factors or themes found in this study confirm Bronfenbrenner's (1979) and Cole's (1998) sociocultural approach, as well as the funds of knowledge ideas from González *et al.* (2006), which point to the importance of recognising the ecology of learning that Conteh and Brock (2010) deem difficult if disagreement between home and school exists. The relationship between the system and the pupils in my study also affirms the dissimilar cultural frames of reference that Ogbu (1994) analysed, and this can be crucial in understanding the struggles experienced by these pupils. How could their potential be recognised, if they are expected to learn from a pedagogy that is neither built on nor relevant to their linguistic and cultural assets (McCarty, 1993)?

In the next chapter, I will conclude by discussing the implications of the study, and some recommendations for future research, as well as an acknowledgement of the limitations of my work.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and implications of the study

In this chapter I will discuss some possible implications of my research, followed by an acknowledgement of the research's limitations. The chapter will end with a conclusion for the whole thesis.

In the implications of the study section I will focus on three areas, which are research, policy and practice. In particular, the discussions are concerned with areas for further research as more understanding is needed, but also the possible implications for policy and what changes may be needed to make the system more equitable for the people who are in it. The second section will discuss the limitations of the study. With this, I hope to help my readers better appreciate the realities of the research context, so that they are able to understand and appropriately interpret the study findings. The final section forms the conclusion for the whole study, where I further express my observations and opinions of the pressures and constraints that the education system faces and how making changes appears to be challenging given the realities of the situation.

8.1 Implications of the study

In addition to the BICS and CALP issue, in Chapter 7 I identified more factors that have influenced my participants' learning, including: the self-fulfilling prophecy; children being corrective to the system; the imbalance of power between families and the system; and particularly the socioeconomic situation of these focal pupils' families. We need to understand more about these factors in order to fully see the implications of the study. It is important that we consider the issue of learning Vietnamese as an additional language (VAL), in a wider perspective and across different linguistic minority groups, to help us understand the socioeconomic, cultural and historical factors that impact upon the children's learning. As part of this process, the importance of Conteh's 'funds of knowledge' in teaching, learning and assessment, constructed? by schools and communities (Brock and Conteh, 2011), needs to be acknowledged in order to create a sociocultural model of learning that would benefit all learners and not just some.

Having come to better understand how some linguistic minority children become categorised as slow learners and what happens to them after that, there are implications for future research, educational policy and practice in Vietnam as well as a contribution to current theory. These will be discussed in turn below.

8.1.1 Suggestions for future research

- Future research in Vietnam could focus more on SEND and VAL matters. Issues relating to learning in Vietnamese as an Additional Language should be studied from a wider perspective and across different linguistic minority groups to understand more about the difficulties, if any, that they face. Issues related to SEND and how this could be differentiated from VAL should also be a focus for further study. The findings of such studies would definitely contribute collectively as a force for raising awareness and for better education quality for children from diverse cultures.
- Further research into classroom practices and how these affect those children at the lowest end of the learner spectrum is also recommended, to identify what works well and what does not. This would hopefully provide further insight into teaching and learning, as well as teacher training and programme development.
- Future research could also focus on the socioeconomic issues that put pressure on the system and which even close it to some of the poorest children in some cases. Researching on how changes work in which system and how macro and micro changes work or may not work in different situations could contribute to some collective struggle towards changes in policy and practice to better include all types of learners within the education system.
- To contribute to a fuller picture of how learners at the lowest end of the spectrum cope throughout their schooling, it would be useful if further research could be conducted that forms a longer analysis that follows these learners as they progress to higher grades. This would further explore what and how the negative experiences from their

early years of schooling could impact upon their future learning journeys.

- Finally, future research could benefit from using ethnographic approaches when researching similar issues. This is because the methodology and approaches offer a special gateway to search for a 'thick description' of the issues, hence providing comprehensive findings and understanding of the issues being researched.

8.1.2 Suggestions for the development of policy

What implications for education policy might the study create? The implications for policy makers include:

- Whilst creating some room for regional adaptation of the curriculum, to make learning more relevant to the pupil's culturally specific context is a positive step, this must be accompanied by clear guidance, close supervision and correction where necessary. Changes should not be created merely to improve the appearance of written policy, as this may just widen the disparity between better-off schools that have much better resources and which can take advantage of the change to develop further. Poor schools, on the other hand, might continue to struggle as they lack the resources to benefit from this opportunity.
- With a particular focus on mathematics teaching and learning in the early years, I would recommend the use of a more visual and numeral approach, including using pictures and numbers to demonstrate calculations. This is to avoid the double testing issue, where children's mathematical development and learning relies heavily on a proficiency in Vietnamese language. The '*Giai Toan co loi Van*' (solving mathematics using literature) policy could be delayed until later years for instance.
- The testing system appears to be problematic, particularly with children from linguistic minority groups and especially those who are at the lowest end – it is set up against, rather than to support, the young minority learners in my study. This has been acknowledged by the government, hence the proposal to abandon testing primary children across the country. The proposal looks at piloting this in some schools for the 2014-2015 school year and then for the whole country in the year after (MOET,

2014). This is plausible but again needs clear guidance on how this can be done and how children at the lowest end of the system, such as the poor children from minorities and remote areas, could be helped. This is because there is a potential for these children to be abandoned and left alone to continue struggling, so that they become even more invisible until they reach Year 6 where the testing system starts, and where their problems, by this time significant and concrete, would be finally identified. So this may just be a case of their period of struggle being extended and where they may miss a learning opportunity in their early years.

- Consideration should also be given to the competition that the teachers experience because some aspects of this appear to be rather artificial and this places unnecessary pressure on them. To base teacher achievement on the grades or ranking that children achieve in the class forms a self-fulfilling prophecy. Making the teachers register their goals at the beginning of the school year and identifying how many excellent students they should have at the end of the school year is not learner-focussed, rather more adult-oriented. How could a teacher, who knows nothing about their pupils, predict the final learning outcomes that they will attain?
- The learning programme for the early years in primary education needs to be adapted to incorporate other areas of development, rather than the current imbalance between the one side which just includes mathematics and Vietnamese, and the other in which all the remaining subjects are placed (arts and crafts, PE, study of nature and society, music and singing, and extra-curricular activities). In doing this, the amount of extra textbooks for the Vietnamese language subject would be reduced and the main learning programme could focus on the official workbooks and textbooks only. Further reasons for this can be seen in the comments at the end of section 6.2.1.
- Clear guidance and training on SEND is required plus additional training on VAL for all teachers. In the event of training being restricted due to funding issues, those who teach linguistic minority learners should be given priority by receiving training first. Further training is needed on the

distinction between VAL and SEND, which addresses the situation where children who qualify as VAL are thought to have SEND.

- The way that the education system functions needs to be adapted to include more parental involvement in children's learning. In particular, the system should recognise the rights of families and children on their learning journey and the acknowledgement that serious decisions need to be jointly made by both parties – therefore, collaboration between families and schools is vital. There should also be a mechanism for receiving feedback and processing complaints. A confidential and anonymous approach would work better, since Confucian culture makes parents feel less encouraged to come forward in cases of perceived injustice. Nevertheless, this must be done with caution and with careful assessment of each case to avoid the system being abused, where schools and teaching staff could be inappropriately reported.
- Finally, I would recommend that human resource policies be revised to give schools and head teachers direct involvement in the selection and recruitment of their teachers. As reported in section 2.1, the current recruitment policy means teachers are selected for schools by different governing bodies (the BOIs and DOIs) that are outside of the education sector. This does not give the schools an opportunity to find suitable teachers who could be from the local area or have a special interest and expertise in teaching children from diverse cultures; or teachers who could make a special contribution to the learning programme that is currently lacking, such as being able to effectively run extra-curricular activities.

8.1.3 Possible implications for practice

There is a need for change, in order to make the system more equitable for the people who are part of it. At the moment, the disparity between the better-off urban schools and those in remote, rural areas is extensive. Well-resourced schools in the big cities employ expatriate teachers for their foreign language lessons to try and give their pupils native English/French accents, which can happen due to the 15% window open to schools. Schools like the focal school, however, struggle to cover the main

programme and very little, if anything, is done with the 15% curriculum window that was set aside for them to add extracurricular activities relevant to their context.

In particular, possible implications for practice could be to start exploring how to close or narrow down the discrepancy between poor rural and well-off urban schools. As part of this, the government could selectively target funding at schools where that funding is most needed, thereby making resources more readily available to remote struggling schools and communities. Well-off schools in urban areas can afford to employ foreign teachers for their extracurricular sessions (foreign languages in this case), due to well-off parents who are willing to contribute to such high costs, whereas parents from remote schools like the focal school are not in the fortunate position to be able to do so. This, for instance, leaves extracurricular sessions to be run using home-grown resources – their own teachers who are not at all trained or guided as to what they should do during these sessions. If this would be looked into by the authorities, struggling schools would have a better chance to strive for improved teaching and learning quality, rather than focusing and struggling on covering the curriculum and keeping a competitive attendance record of their pupils. The possible implications for practice are significant, as it would impact on all the different layers of education, in this case including the learners and their families, their teachers and their schools, and ultimately overall teaching and learning practice.

8.1.4 Contribution to theory

Language underpins this study but understanding language is part of the sociocultural approach, and so language and sociocultural factors should be seen as parts of a whole. As discussed earlier in Chapter 7 (sections 7.1.4 and 7.2), I would conclude that if we think about language as being separated or isolated from other factors that have emerged from my study (summarised in 7.1.4), we may then decide to assess the children in the way observed in the focal school. However, such purely language-based assessment (assessing how good their Vietnamese language is) may

undermine learners' potential rather than allowing us to understand and assist these children.

My study does not establish any new theory, but it does contribute to the existing theory of learning by understanding that we cannot simply look at learning from a narrow theoretical perspective but have to consider other factors that impact on and contribute to learning. In particular, the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (Brock and Conteh, 2011; González et al., 2006; Conteh and Brock, 2010), discussed in the literature review chapter and again in the introduction paragraph of section 8.1, has now been shown to be valid in a different educational setting. Such a contribution affirms the importance of fully considering the whole ecology of learning, associated with a sociocultural approach in education. When developing policy and practice in the country, or in the event of further, related study, then perhaps researchers may see how I have taken into account the factors surrounding learners rather than employing a narrow model of assessing young children through language alone.

8.2 Limitations of the study

This section consists of my personal acknowledgement of the study's major limitations. In doing so, I will also enclose some explanation of the nature of such limitations and what I have done to try to minimise them over the duration of my research. The first aspect is about how the answer to my research questions could be extended if there were more time available. The second part focuses on the methodology and research design, particularly how such a design may be challenging when it comes down to the findings. The third identifies some possible concerns regarding data collection methods, and the fourth recognition relates to technology and how that was used or was not used in my research.

The study is time constrained, so does not allow for a longer period over which to follow the children, particularly by observing the impact that their early experience of education may have on their subsequent learning journeys. This is especially significant given that these children are at the lowest end of the spectrum and are learning in a context where the system may be 'closed' to them, as stated in the discussion in the previous chapter. Observing further impacts on their learning journeys in later years may

provide further understanding and clearer affirmation of the influence caused by their having been placed in a system in which they were disadvantaged at such an early stage. This would extend the answer for the second research question which focuses on the consequences for these learner participants. Nevertheless, I made an amendment to the research plan, as described in section 4.4.7 of the methodology chapter, by extending the data collection period to a full academic year and by making more follow-up visits when the participants were in their second year of schooling. Through this, I believe that significant effort has been made to ensure that the ethnographic side of this case study has been fulfilled and that the significant amount of time spent in the research environment and with the participants enabled the desired 'thick description' for the data collected.

As the case study uses an ethnographic approach, I acknowledge that there may be concerns regarding potential researcher bias, with the first concern being that the data could be subjectively reported and interpreted. Firstly, I need to stress that there are significant benefits from having an insider's perspective when employing such a research methodology and seeking to establish the 'native point of view' (Malinowski, 1922) to satisfactorily answer my questions in the way that I did. With regard to potential bias, this was constantly acknowledged throughout the time I was conducting the research. I can also say that through the professional training provided by the research ethics team at the University of Leeds, constant consultations with my supervisors and research colleagues, and by feedback from several presentations to various audiences in conferences and seminars, I have followed a number of paths when perceiving the issues found in my research from different angles.

I have endeavoured to collect various types of data, including many pages of carefully taken field notes from observations, numerous audio files from interviews and all the participants' samples of work and their portfolio-related papers, as well as government documents relating to my topic. The variety of the data collected helps to validate the findings, not to mention providing a fuller picture of the researched participants and their environment and by producing a thick contextualised description of the topic (Conteh, 2005). Another concern directed at case study research relates to a lack of

generalisability. I would argue that my research is not designed to claim any generalisation but to look for some understanding in a particular learning context and to understand why children at the lowest end of that context struggle and continue struggling. While this is not about generalisation, I still believe the findings of the study do contribute to raising awareness and creating a better understanding of learners in similar contexts and similar situations.

Furthermore, I acknowledge concerns regarding the methods used to collect data, particularly by using observations, where data collected from this could be personally interpretive and where the participants could act differently when being observed, so situations recorded may not be natural. While there is some ground for such concerns, in my particular research the extensive amount of time spent in the classrooms with the teachers and the children made me very much of an insider. Towards the end of the first phase of data collection, the school and their teachers and children seemed to forget that I was not a member of staff there. As a result, strictly confidential information was divulged to me by various participants, but for the protection of my participants such stories are not shared or included in the study findings.

In the observation sessions, I acknowledge that video recording or filming the class in action may have given a more precise and descriptive sample of lessons provided, rather than taking notes or making audio recordings. However, coming from Vietnam and understanding the culture, especially that of remote and rural areas, I believe the employment of high-tech devices such as video cameras in the classroom could only create concern, worry or even panic to my participants. Some interview sessions were noted by pen and paper for precisely this reason and by request from the interviewees, who admitted to being too nervous after seeing the recorder. To compensate for any data being lost by not using modern technology, I always made sure the field notes and interview notes were taken during the sessions and were reviewed during the evening of the same day, to further complete them before transferring the data back to the university system.

In discussing the data collection processes and research methodology, I am confident that the benefits offered by this methodology outweigh any potential issues derived from using it. In particular, this methodological approach has shown to be appropriate for my study in the sense that significant amounts of invaluable data were collected, and this is much needed when answering my research questions. It is the lengthy fieldwork period spent in the school and the researched area that has allowed me to immerse myself into the research environment, allowing me to carefully observe and then identify the significances of my case. Such significances are also my findings, which were later grouped as themes that emerged during data analysis. In conclusion, my research has largely benefited from this approach in revealing the thick, contextualised kinds of data perceived from both an insider's and researcher's point of view. This methodology was essential in allowing me to collect such data and to answer the research questions in the way that I did.

There are perhaps more limitations, including that derived from my being a junior or novice researcher but I have tried to list and focus on the main issues which may have had some influence on my data, as well as the interpretation of the findings. The following section will summarise and conclude the whole thesis with an expression of future hope for learners who are struggling in any learning system.

8.3 Summary and Conclusions

This study is designed to try to understand ways in which some children become categorised as slow learners and what may happen to them after being thus categorised. There have been several themes that have emerged in answer to these questions, including: the children's school and home experiences and the relationship between home and school in this context; how learners at the lowest end of the spectrum are being disadvantaged by the system; aspects of the self-fulfilling prophecy (the influence of the system on the teachers, the teachers on the learners, etc.); the power struggle and imbalance between the system and the learners and their families; and how socioeconomic background or identity matters become prominent and problematic which closes the system in this particular context.

These themes form answers to the research questions proposed in Chapter 3.

These themes point to the fact that current practices in teaching and testing in Vietnamese mainstream primary schools do not properly represent children from linguistic minority communities and that this particularly affects those at the lowest end of the scale. This means that any effort to encourage these children to go to school, to remain in education and to heighten their academic achievement, will always encounter difficulty. There needs to be effective and prompt change in the system, to enhance *system performance* as a whole, including the programme, schools, and the teachers and their practices, and not just a focus on the children's performance. Learners' academic performance cannot be separated from the whole layers surrounding them and the system's effectiveness.

Despite this need for change, I fear that there are difficulties that would arise when attempting to improve the system, that any changes made may not work, and that learners such as the participants will continue to struggle. Changes in the Vietnamese context need to be top-down in nature, but there is little desire at the top to drive such change. Pressure for change coming from lower down is unlikely to be effective or relevant due to the vital role that socio-economic background plays in such situations. Once again, I would like to give credit to the methodology used in this research, for allowing me to see such situations from an insider's perspective. This leads me to conclude that changes in the education system or education programme in this particular scenario, do not mean much to these learners, because an excellent learning programme means little when the pupils cannot have access to it. When people are still struggling to find enough to eat and to get by each day, education is not the main priority – so when choosing between making sure the children have something to eat or having an excellent school attendance record, would any responsible parent pick the latter over the former?

The study has further added to the existing understanding about linguistic minority learners who struggle in a mainstream education system, where it would be more beneficial if the learning programme were adapted to include

them in the system. In the context of Muong learners in Vietnam, however, any change of the education programme would not be very effective or helpful to these learners, because as stated earlier, an excellent learning programme does not mean much if the children in need do not have access to it.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the government has proposed changes involving the abolition of assessment and testing in primary education, which sound positive, but would this change provide a more equitable opportunity for children at the lowest level, such as those in my study? Or would this merely result in a case where these children would become even more invisible in the learning system and where failure would just be postponed until they entered Year 6 when the testing system would commence? In this case, it must also be noted that these children may lose the opportunity to learn and/or be motivated to learn in their early years of education.

At the time of this thesis being written, this question has remained unanswered. The proposed change has not been implemented, so further observation and research into this is much needed, to find out how these children, who struggle the most in the current system, would cope in the new learning structure, in which they would not be tested until much later. While this seems similar to the delayed testing theory reported in Canada, discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3.3, this carries a completely different significance in Vietnam, where the policy is proposed for all learners, while the Canadian example only concerns delayed testing for minority language learners. The focus is completely different, as the Canadian situation clearly intends to create a better initial stage of the learning journey for those learners, whereas the Vietnamese version still does not differentiate between different groups of learners, including those from linguistic minority groups. The Vietnamese policy, on the other hand, focuses on child development, where the inclusion of children from diverse cultures appears to be but a minor consideration in the proposed change. While native Vietnamese speakers make up the majority of the population and have control and power over all social domains including education, this does not justify the fact that minority language learners from the different minority groups stay invisible in any decisions about change. After all, a successful

and powerful education system is one that includes learners from all different backgrounds, where the diversity of their identities is celebrated and appreciated.

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Appendix A: Detailed data mapping

A.1 Phase 1: 18 Oct 11 – 8 Mar 12

A.1.1 Interviews and observation recordings

| No. | Date | Types: interviews or lesson recording | | File |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| | | Interviewee | Lesson/class/home | |
| 1 | 25 Oct 11 | 1B Teacher – Ms Phuong | | 111025_001 |
| 2 | 26 Oct 11 | Head teacher – Ms Quynh | | 111026_001 |
| 3 | | 1A Teacher – Ms Quang | | 111026_002 |
| 4 | | 1A Teacher – Ms Quang | | 111026_003 |
| 5 | | 2 B Teacher – Ms Vuong | | 111026_004 |
| 6 | | 2 A Teacher – Ms Hoat | | 111026_005 |
| 7 | 1 Nov 11 | | PE - 1B | 111101_001 |
| 8 | 9 Nov 11 | | Singing - 1A | 111109_001 |
| 9 | | | Singing - 1A | 111109_002 |
| 10 | 16 Nov 11 | | Self-talk re H.Q's Mathematics | 111116_001 |
| 11 | | | Self-talk re T's Day | 111116_001 |
| 12 | 6 Dec 11 | | PE – 1B | 111206_001 |
| 13 | | | Mathematics using words – 1B | 111206_002 |
| 14 | 7 Dec 11 | | Preparing for observation | 111207_001 |

| No. | Date | Types: interviews or lesson recording | File |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------------|--|
| | | | 1B |
| 15 | | 1B Teacher – Ms Phuong | 111207_002 |
| 16 | | | Vietnamese – 1B 111207_003 |
| 17 | 16 Dec 11 | | Seminar with other schools 111216_001 |
| 18 | 22 Dec 11 | HnQ's mother | Voice001 |
| 19 | 23 Dec 11 | | 1B name n shame Voice002 |
| 20 | 26 Dec | | VNM test invigilation 111226_001 |
| 21 | 11 | 1B T re after observation | 111226_002 |
| 22 | 2 Feb 12 | Math Teacher – Ms Luyen re ranking | Voice003 |
| 23 | 3 Feb 12 | 1A Teacher re slow C | Voice004 |
| 24 | | 1A Teacher T re Nghieng | Voice005 |
| 25 | | 1B Teacher re slow C | Voice007 |
| 26 | 8 Feb 12 | Deputy Head – Ms Hai Yen (re ranking) | 120208_001 |
| 27 | | Khuong's dad | 120208_003 |
| 28 | | HnQ's mother | 120208_004 |
| 29 | | Head teacher – Ms Quynh (re ranking) | 120208_005 |
| 30 | 9 Feb 12 | Both Teachers 1B+1A | 120209_001 |
| 31 | | Nghieng's mother | 120209_002 |
| 32 | | Quyen's mother | 120209_003 |
| 33 | | Doan doi ranking | 120209_004 |
| 34 | 14 Feb | Nghieng's mother | 120214_001 |

| No. | Date | Types: interviews or lesson recording | File |
|-----|--------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 35 | 12 | HnQ's parents | 120214_002 |
| 36 | 15 Feb | BY's mother | 120215_001 |
| 37 | 12 | Kindergarten teachers | Voice008 |

Summary:

- Interviews = 25
- Observation recordings = 10
- Others = 2

A.1.2 Observation and field notes

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------------|----------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | 24 Oct 11 | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics | 6 |
| | | Head and deputy head | Meeting notes | 6 |
| 2 | 25 Oct 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | Vietnamese: sound AU | 7 |
| 3 | | 1A Ms Quang | Vietnamese: handwriting | 7 |
| 4 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Practising Addition/Subtraction to 4 | 7 |
| 5 | | 2B Ms Vuong | Vietnamese: treble vowel IEU | 8 |
| 6 | | 2A Ms Hoat | Mathematics : Practising Addition and Subtraction to 11 | 8 |
| 7 | 26 Oct 11 | 2A Ms Hoat | Mathematics : 31-5 | 8 |
| 8 | 31 Oct 11 | 1B Ms Kieu | Art: colouring patterns | 9 |
| 9 | | 1B Ms Kieu | Vietnamese: reading lesson 43 | 10 |
| 10 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : number 0 in subtractions | 10 |
| 11 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : exercise and practice | 10 |
| 12 | 1 Nov 11 | 1A Ms Quang | Vietnamese: word dictations – personal magnetic boards | 11 |
| 13 | | 1A Ms Quang | Vietnamese: writing in booklet | 12 |
| 14 | | 1A Ms Quang | Vietnamese: reading practice | 12 |
| 15 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : calculation | 13 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| | | | on personal chalkboard | |
| 16 | | 1B Ms Kieu | PE: Cat chasing mouse | 13 |
| 17 | 8 Nov 11 | 1A Ms Kieu | Art: cutting the chicken shape | 13 |
| 18 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Additions to 6 | 14 |
| 19 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Additions to 6 | 14 |
| 20 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Additions to 6 | 14 |
| 21 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Additions to 6 | 14 |
| | | Head teacher | Meeting notes | 15 |
| 22 | | 9 Nov 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | Vietnamese: G, Gh |
| 23 | 1A Ms Quang | | Vietnamese: chalkboard dictation | 16 |
| 24 | 1A Ms Tram Anh | | Singing: The little chicks | 17 |
| 25 | 1A Ms Tram Anh | | Practising singing: The little chicks | 17 |
| 26 | 1B Ms Tram Anh | | Singing: The little chicks | 17 |
| 27 | 1B Ms Tram Anh | | Practising singing: The little chicks | 17 |
| 28 | 16 Nov 11 | 1B Ms Tram Anh | Singing: Tet is coming | 18 |
| 29 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | Vietnamese: chalkboard dictation | 19 |
| 30 | 17 Nov 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | Nature & Society study: Family | 19 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------------|-------------------|---|---------------------|
| 31 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: writing practice UNG/U'NG | 20 |
| 32 | | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: writing on worksheet | 20 |
| 33 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 21 |
| 34 | 24 Nov 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 21 |
| 35 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: writing booklet | 22 |
| 36 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Subtractions to 9 | 22 |
| 37 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Subtractions to 9 | 25 |
| 38 | 25 Nov 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: vowels and diphthongs | 26 |
| 39 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: spotting names using diphthongs learnt | 26 |
| 40 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 26 |
| 41 | | 1B Ms Phuong | Weekly Review: name and shame | 27 |
| 42 | 30 Nov 11 | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Addition/Subtraction to 10 revision | 28 |
| 43 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : exercise booklet | 29 |
| 44 | | 1A Ms Tram Anh | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 30 |
| 45 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | Singing: Little chicks + Tet's coming | 30 |
| 46 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 31 |
| 47 | 1 Dec | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: magnetic literacy | 31 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------|------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| | 11 | | kits + chalkboard | |
| 48 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: handwriting booklet | 32 |
| 49 | 6 Dec | 1B Ms Kieu | Craft: folding a paper fan | 33 |
| 50 | 11 | 1B Ms Kieu | PE: audio recorded | 111206_001 |
| 51 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Addition/Subtraction to 10 revision | 34 |
| 52 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Addition/Subtraction to 10 using words | 111206_002 |
| 53 | | 1A Ms Kieu | PE | 35 |
| 54 | 7 Dec | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: lesson 68 ÔT, ÓT | 36 |
| 55 | 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Textbook reading | 37 |
| 56 | | 1B+1A Youth Union teacher | Outdoor activity or extracurricular activities (15% curriculum window given to local schools) | 38 |
| 57 | | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: Handwriting booklet | 38 |
| | | 1B children | H&Q home visit | 38 |
| 58 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : General practice | 39 |
| 59 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : exercise booklet | 39 |
| 60 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | Singing: My country home | 40 |
| 61 | 14 Dec | 1A Ms Phuong | VNM: the Heads are observing | 40 |
| 62 | 11 | 1B Ms Phuong | Preparation for observation | 41 |
| 63 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: practising for the | 41 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------|----------------|--|---------------------|
| | | | children for tomorrow's observation | |
| 64 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: copying from chalkboard | 42 |
| 65 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : length of lines | |
| 66 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : length of lines | 42 |
| 67 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Supposed to be Nature& Society but Mathematics teacher came back | 43 |
| 68 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Learning in textbook | 43 |
| 69 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: more practising | 43 |
| 70 | 15 Dec | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: Sounds ÚT ÚT | 44 |
| 71 | 11 | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: blackboard dictation & writing booklet | 42 |
| 72 | 21 Dec | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : 11s and 12s workbook | 44 |
| 73 | 11 | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : 11s and 12s workbook | 44 |
| 74 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | Singing: unit 18 practising performing while singing | 45 |
| 75 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 46 |
| 76 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Lesson 4 writing the calculations vertically | 46 |
| 77 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : adding 3 numbers | 46 |
| 78 | 22 Dec | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Sounds revision | 47 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 79 | 11 | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: Reading on blackboard | 48 |
| 80 | | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: chalkboard dictation | 49 |
| 81 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Handwriting booklet 2 | 49 |
| 82 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : 13, 14, 15 | 50 |
| 83 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : 13, 14, 15 | 50 |
| 84 | | 23 Dec 11 | 1A+ 1B | Practice test |
| 85 | 1B Ms Phuong | | Weekly review | Voice002 |
| 86 | 26 Dec 11 | School | Test day | 51 |
| 87 | | 1A | VNM test | 52-53 |
| 88 | | 1B | VNM test | 52-53 |
| 89 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: writing practice | 54 |
| 90 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Practice for the test | 54 |
| 91 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Practice for the test | 54 |
| 92 | | 1A Ms Kieu | Mathematics : Practice for the test | 55 |
| 93 | | 1A Ms Kieu | Mathematics : Practice for the test | 55 |
| 94 | 27 Dec 11 | School | Second test day | 55 |
| 95 | | 1B | Mathematics test | 55 |
| 96 | | 1A | Mathematics test | 56 |
| 97 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Writing practice | 56 |
| 98 | | All teachers | Marking in common room | 56-57 |
| 99 | 12 Jan 12 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Sounds ĂP, ÂP | 58 |
| 100 | | 1B Ms Kieu | VNM: Writing practice | 58 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 101 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : subtractions all results 10 | 58 |
| 102 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : subtractions all results 10 | 60 |
| 103 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : form suitable calculations | 60 |
| 104 | | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : workbook | 61 |
| 105 | 1 Feb 12 | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Solve mathematics with words | 62 |
| 106 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Solve mathematics with words | 63 |
| 107 | 2 Feb 12 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Sounds OA, OE | 63 |
| 108 | | 1A Ms Quang | VNM: Sounds OA, OE | 63 |
| 109 | | 1A Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Solve mathematics with words | 64 |
| 110 | | 1A Ms Tram Anh | Nature & Society being replaced by VNM writing practice as T is absent | 65 |
| 111 | 3 Feb 12 | 1B Ms Phuong | Weekly review | 65 |
| 112 | | 1A Ms Quang | Weekly review | 65 |
| 113 | 8 Feb 12 | 1A + 1B Ms Tram Anh | Singing: <i>Tap tam vong</i> | 66 |
| 114 | 14 Feb 12 | 1B Ms Phuong (substituted) | Mathematics : general practising | 67 |
| 115 | | 1A Ms Kieu | VNM: general practising | 67 |
| 116 | | 1B Ms Phuong | Mathematics : continue practising | 67 |
| 117 | | 1A+1B Ms Kieu | PE: 8 stretching exercises | 67 |
| 118 | 15 Feb 12 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM: Sounds UY, UÊ | 68 |
| 119 | | 1B, 2B teacher | Mathematics : General | 68 |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | | substituted | practice | |

Summary:

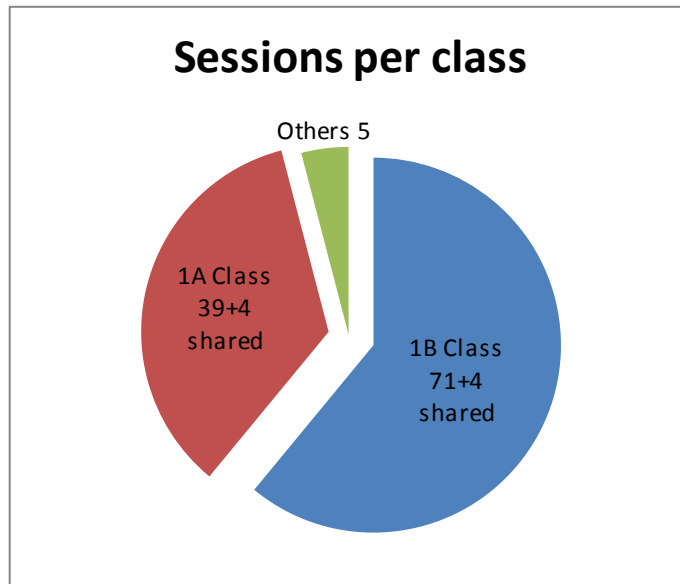


Figure 12: Summary of sessions per class

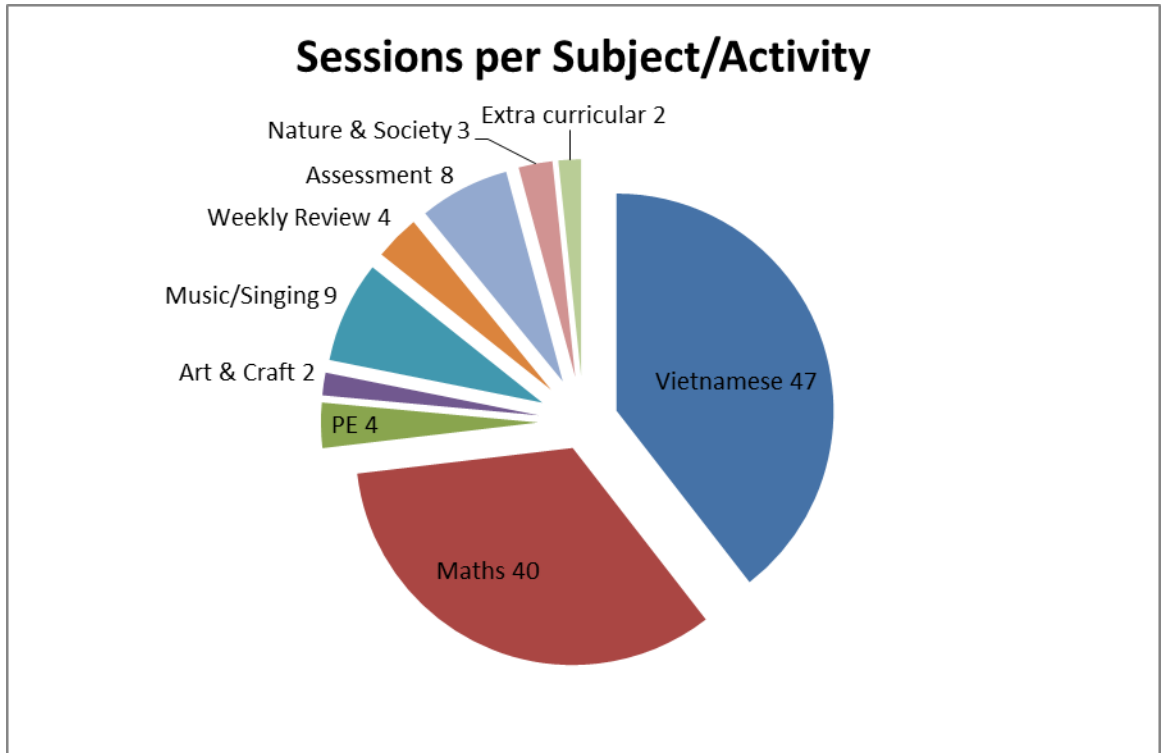


Figure 2: Sessions per subject

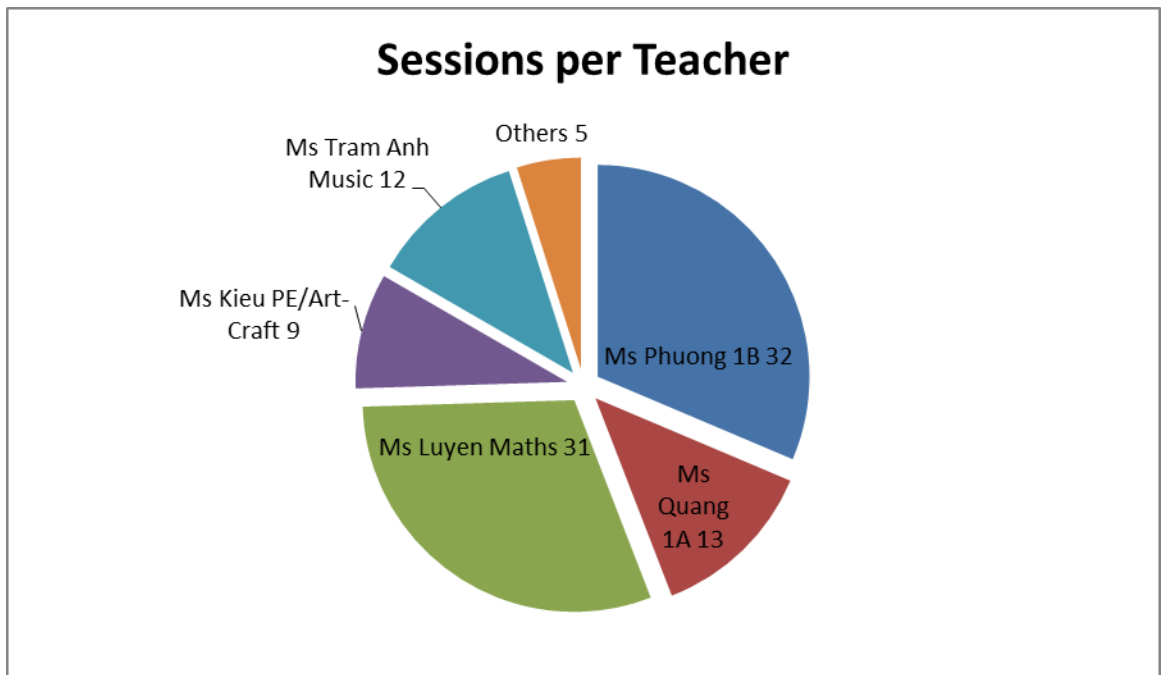


Figure 3: Sessions per teacher 1

A.1.3 Documents

- All Semester 1 test papers of the focal children and some other children from both Year 1 classes

A.2 Phase 2: 9-29 May 2012

A.2.1 Interviews and recordings

| No. | Date | Types: interviews or lesson recording | | File |
|-----|--------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | | Interviewee | Lesson/class/home | |
| 1 | 10 May | | Vietnamese test 1B | 120510_001 |
| 2 | 12 | 1B Teacher – Ms Phuong | | 120510_002 |
| 3 | 11 May 12 | | Mathematics test 1A | 120511_001 |
| 4 | 15 May 12 | | Marking end of year | Voice000 |
| 5 | 22 May 12 | 1B Teacher – Ms Phuong (end of year) | | 120522_001 |
| 6 | | 1A Teacher Ms Quang (end of year) | | 120522_002 |
| 7 | | Art-craft-PE Teacher - Ms Kieu | | 120522_003 |
| 8 | | Revisit kindergarten Ts | | 120522_004 |
| 9 | | HnQ's mother | | 120522_005 |
| 10 | 31 Oct 12 | Phone con Head T | | Voice010 (2) |

Summary:

- Interviews = 6
- Observation recordings = 3
- Others = 1

A.2.2 Observations and field notes

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | | | | |

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|-----------|----------------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | 9 May 12 | 1B Ms Luyen | Mathematics : Revision and test preparation | 69 |
| 2 | | 1B Ms Tram Anh | Singing: was replaced by mathematics to prepare for the test | 70 |
| 3 | 10 May 12 | School | VNM Test | 70 |
| 4 | | 1B | VNM Test | 71-74 |
| 5 | | 1A | VNM Test | 74 |
| 6 | 11 May 12 | 1B | Mathematics test | 75 |
| 7 | | 1A | Mathematics Test | 76 |
| 8 | 15 May 12 | Test Markers | Marking process | 77 |
| 9 | 22 May 12 | School | Filing test scores and preparing report cards for the pupils | 78 |
| 10 | 29 May 12 | School | End of Year ceremony | 79-81 |

Summary:

- Sessions per class: 1B = 4, 1A = 2
- Sessions per subject/activity: Mathematics – 1, Singing = 1, Assessment = 7
- Sessions per teacher: Ms Luyen Mathematics = 1, Ms Tram Anh Music = 1

A.2.3 Documents

- All end-of-year test papers of child participants
- The participants' workbooks and samples of work
- Copies of participants' report cards
- Class lists and final whole class test scores
- Relevant policies and guidelines from BOET
- Both Year 1 Class Teachers' official notebooks

- Pictures

A.3 Phase 3 Dec 2012 – Jan 2013 and May, Dec 2013

A.3.1 Interviews and recordings

| No. | Date | Types: interviews or lesson recording | | File |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | Interviewee | Lesson/class/home | |
| 1 | 9 Jan 13 | HQ mum on the phone | | Voice009 (3) |
| 2 | 29 May 13 | HQ mum phone call | | Voice009 (4) |
| 3 | | 2 sisters at home | | Voice004 |
| 4 | 16 Dec 13 | 2 sisters at home | | Voice005 |

Summary: Interviews = 4

A.3.2 Observation and field notes

| Session | Date | Class/Teacher | Lesson observed | Field note page no. |
|---------|--------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Jan 13 | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM | 81 |
| 2 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM : chalkboard dictation | 81 |
| 3 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM : writing booklet | 82 |
| 4 | | 1B Ms Phuong | VNM : writing booklet | 82 |

A.3.3 Documents

- Pictures
- Test score table of the participants who were repeating the year

Appendix B: Some samples demonstrating data analysis in NVIVO

Below are some pictures of data analysis in NVIVO software.

- The first picture shows all the nodes which are themes being coded for analysis
- The second picture zooms in on one theme/node
- The third picture shows how audio recording is transcribed in NVIVO

Research on Muong children_version 2014 (2).nvp - NVivo

File Home Create External Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Look for: Search In: Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

| Name | Sources | References | Created On | Created By | Modified On | Modified By |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| family and community | 2 | 42 | 01/03/2013 12:13 | CG | 13/08/2014 17:50 | CG |
| Khuong Test | 6 | 615 | 13/02/2014 15:18 | CG | 13/02/2014 15:18 | CG |
| mainstream education and ethnic minority learners | 1 | 17 | 08/03/2013 17:55 | CG | 11/01/2014 18:59 | CG |
| participants | 0 | 0 | 01/03/2013 12:10 | CG | 04/03/2013 17:57 | CG |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hoanh Khuong Nghiem Nghieng Quoc Quyen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 3 3 3 4 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 126 131 249 66 220 289 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28/02/2013 16:42 28/02/2013 16:45 28/02/2013 16:50 28/02/2013 16:47 28/02/2013 16:49 28/02/2013 16:44 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG CG CG CG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13/08/2014 17:50 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 13/08/2014 17:50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG CG CG CG |
| Quyen | 2 | 288 | 23/11/2013 18:03 | CG | 23/11/2013 18:03 | CG |
| system and school | 1 | 12 | 01/03/2013 12:12 | CG | 16/11/2013 16:38 | CG |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic outcome prediction classroom situation created for slow learners system's regulations Teachers' situations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 1 1 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 1 4 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 01/03/2013 11:51 01/03/2013 12:05 01/03/2013 11:52 01/03/2013 12:14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG CG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 15/11/2013 13:02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG CG |
| testing | 3 | 14 | 08/03/2013 14:37 | CG | 13/02/2014 15:35 | CG |
| The test | 1 | 19 | 01/03/2013 12:11 | CG | 24/09/2014 13:30 | CG |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> test administering (beginning to end) The Math test content The Vietnamese test content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 1 0 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 2 0 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 01/03/2013 11:56 01/03/2013 11:51 01/03/2013 11:55 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 11/01/2014 18:37 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG |
| theme 1 - slow learners | 2 | 232 | 28/02/2013 17:39 | CG | 16/11/2013 16:20 | CG |
| Themes in data | 0 | 0 | 04/11/2013 16:42 | CG | 04/11/2013 16:42 | CG |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home-school link issues Kindergarten - primary transition issues Language issues SEN vs VAL slow vs quick learner issues System guidelines deficits Testing issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 1 2 2 2 2 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43 10 14 34 26 12 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 04/11/2013 16:44 04/11/2013 16:43 14/11/2013 12:47 14/11/2013 13:06 14/11/2013 15:05 04/11/2013 16:44 04/11/2013 16:44 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG CG CG CG CG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13/08/2014 17:50 14/11/2013 19:36 15/11/2013 18:09 16/11/2013 16:30 16/11/2013 16:30 16/11/2013 15:54 16/11/2013 16:33 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG CG CG CG CG CG CG |

CG 47 Items

EN 18:40 18/12/2014

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. The top menu bar includes File, Home, Create, External Data, Analyze, Query, Explore, Layout, and View. Below the menu is a ribbon with various toolbars for workspace, item, clipboard, format, paragraph, styles, editing, and proofing. The left sidebar contains a 'Nodes' tree with categories like Sources, Nodes, Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Models, and Folders. The main workspace is divided into a 'Nodes' pane on the left and a 'Text' pane on the right. The 'Nodes' pane shows a hierarchical tree of nodes, with 'Themes in data' selected. The 'Text' pane displays a reference titled '<Internals\Observation\fieldwork diary_final code 3>' with a coverage of 78.33%. Below this, a section titled 'B1 Math session - afternoon' is shown, containing text about a math teacher and a class session. The bottom status bar indicates 'CG 3 Items Sources: 4 References: 126 Unfiltered' and shows system icons for EN, 19:27, and 18/12/2014.

Themes in data | Hoanh

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| fieldwork diary_final co... (23) | Tong hop_code2 (42) | Transcription Tong hop_cod... (21) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|

<Internals\Observation\fieldwork diary_final code 3> - § 23 references coded [78.33% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 7.00% Coverage

B1 Math session - afternoon

Class B1.

Teacher: Mrs 2210119

I then chatted with the Year One math teacher whom I met and observed in the last visit in May 11. She was very accommodating and welcoming me to the class. As we met and chatted before and she understood that my research has nothing to do with assessment or reporting to the authorities, she appeared to be very relaxed in her classroom. She verbally stated that she wouldn't interact with her pupils that way if I was member of DE&T or MOET.

The Math session was 40 mins long in 18 class. There are 26 pupils in the class and one of those is a pupil from the previous year, repeating the class. Most of the children are still at their early stage of properly learning so they all seem to have difficulty to follow the classroom's rules and regulations. The teacher stated that this will change at the end of the school year. The class is divided into 3 groups/To 1-2-3.

The math session went well. Many children are responsive to the teacher and there are some who are not. It was 'addition to 4'. The teacher demonstrated by drawing a picture of 4 fruits with 1 is falling off the branch and then asked the pupils to count what left, the teacher then wrote 4-1=3. Another picture was demonstrated using birds with one/two flying away. The teacher then asked a student to go to the blackboard to write down. The children were asked to do some other examples before being asked to take their math kit out to use numbers and stick on their personal magnetic board to demonstrate some additions to 4. They were given 5 mins to do and then when the teacher asked, they all raised their board to show the teacher. While the pupils were putting their

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project titled "Research on Muong children_version 2014 (2).nvp". The "Media Tools" tab is active, showing a toolbar with various playback and selection controls. The main workspace is divided into three sections:

- Sources:** A tree view on the left shows the project's structure, including "Internals", "Electronic resources", "Interviews", "Observation", "Externals", "Memos", and "Framework Matrices".
- recording files:** A list of files is shown, with "Voice007 1B T regarding slow" selected. The list includes various session and interview files.
- Transcript:** A large text area displays the transcript for the selected file. It includes a header "Voice007 1B T regarding slow" and a "Click to edit" link. The transcript content is as follows:

1 0:00.0 - 4:57.0 C: The ah?
T: uhm, khi co giao hoi thi noi dau ra day.
C: Luc dau vao thi chi thay the nao?
T: Chau doc cham hon cac ban khac.
C: The nhung hom truooc minh noi chuyen voi me thi me noi o mau giao cac co giao cu khen la chau hoc gioi?
T: Em ah co cai nhu the nay. O mau giao cai ky nang no danh gia hoan toan khac o tieu hoc.
Chi cung da xuong de kiem tra roi. Ho chi co cho di dung hat ho thoi. Khi ma ho thay no noi nhau nhau thi ho thay la phat trine nhung ho ko dah gia duoc toan dien .
Vao tieu hoc nay no lai danh gia o 1 kieu khac chinh vi the thi no moi bi bat cap.
Co khi o trong danh sach cac co gui len la kha gioi. Nhung chi danh gia theo muc do cua ho thoi.
Nhung ma sau 1 thoi ky minh giang day no minh moi thay no boc lo. Ma 2 chau nay thi thuong den rat la muon. Khi ma nguoi ta hoc on gan het thang he roi thi ba moi dua den.
C: Ah thang he la phai hoc on 1 thang ah?
T: Uhm boi vi sau khi vao hoc lop 1 nay thi co con phai cho cac chau lam quen voi nhau va ban be chu ko phai bop 1 cai ma vao day luon duoc.
C: The sang nam bon nay no co phai hoc cai 1 thang day nua ko?
T: Co chu. No lai tiep tục on của lop 1.
C: Thang may a?

At the bottom, the status bar shows "CG 61 Items", "Nodes: 0", "References: 0", "Read-Only", "Unfiltered", and a progress indicator "0.00.0/4:57.3". The system tray at the very bottom shows the date and time as "19:34 18/12/2014".