Teachers’ perceptions of child-centred education and its potential in supporting Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai, Viet Nam

Hieu Thi Nhan Huynh
Southern Cross University
Teachers’ perceptions of child-centred education and its potential in supporting Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai, Viet Nam

HIEU THI NHAN HUYNH

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of
Doctor of Philosophy
School of Education – Centre for Children & Young People
Southern Cross University, Australia

August 2015
DECLARATION

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis.

I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Print Name: ...........................................................................

Signature: ...........................................................................

Date: ..............................................................................
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following people who have offered support and encouragement in all their different ways throughout this study.

Firstly, I am particularly thankful to my supervisors Professor Anne Graham and Dr Renata Phelps, for their excellent and invaluable advice, support and encouragement not only in my research but also in my daily life while living in Australia. Thank you for believing in me and guiding me through the most stressful times while I was conducting the research.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Martin Hayden and Associate Professor Sharon Parry for their support throughout my candidature.

I would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, for providing sponsorship through Project 322. I would also like to thank the Gia Lai Teacher Training College for giving me the opportunity to fulfil this course.

Thank you to the teachers participating in this research for their invaluable time and willingness to share their experiences and feelings with me; otherwise, this study would not have been possible.

I also wish to thank my peer review group for their invaluable time and support throughout this research. Also to my good friends both in Australia and in Vietnam who provided both practical and moral support.

Finally, I would like to express my deeply felt thanks and appreciation to my family, especially to my beloved children Quan and Nhi for bearing me while I completed this work. They provided me with the inspiration I needed to complete this research.

My appreciation is extended to my two families in Vietnam for their support and encouragement.
ABSTRACT

Vietnam is a country of 54 ethnic groups, each with its own language, lifestyle and culture. Due to their geographical distribution, the ethnic minorities have inadequate access to infrastructure and services, and are amongst the poorest and least educated sections of Vietnamese society.

Education is considered a top national policy in Vietnam and is viewed as a critical means of meeting the social and economic challenges facing the country. Having achieved high levels of enrolment and participation in primary schooling, recent reforms have focused on improving educational quality. In 2000 the Vietnamese government introduced a nation-wide policy and a new curriculum promoting what has come to be referred to as ‘child-centred’ teaching and learning. However, what specifically is understood as ‘child-centred’ education (CCE), not only in Vietnam but also in international contexts, is not clear.

To be effectively implemented, teachers need to understand, value and perceive benefits to any policy. Implementing such change is particularly difficult in rural and remote areas, where recruitment of appropriate teachers is problematic, teacher quality and motivation is low and in-service training and professional development is difficult to provide. There is a paucity of empirical research on the child-centred approach and how it is being applied at a primary education level in Vietnam. Yet this innovative teaching method has the potential to create a safe and friendly learning environment which encourages students to collaborate and engage actively in the learning process.

This research aimed to better understand primary school teachers’ experiences and perceptions of child-centred education, focusing especially on teachers working with Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai Province, Vietnam. The research employed hermeneutic phenomenology to develop rich descriptions of teachers’ understandings and interpretations of CCE and their “lived experience” of the policy in this remote rural area of Vietnam. Individual and group interviews were conducted with 27 primary school teachers from three schools, and with three principals and a lecturer from the Teacher Training College in Gia Lai, Vietnam. Data were analysed through an inductive thematic approach using NVivo.

The study concludes that a child-centred approach has the potential to be more affirming of ethnic minority children’s identities and more sensitive to their circumstances, including their cultural,
linguistic and social backgrounds. It also has potential to deliver more authentic, personally relevant and practical learning for these children, with immediate benefits for their families and broader communities. However, even though all participant teachers do have such personal understandings and beliefs about CCE and its value in the Vietnamese context, only a small number are committed to implementing it. Most participating teachers had not embraced CCE as an educational philosophy that places children at the centre of their teaching practice. Rather, they viewed CCE as a policy directive with an emphasis on specific teaching methods. In addition, there is incongruence in understandings of CCE at the systemic level and there remains inconsistencies and tensions in resourcing, curriculum and assessment which hinders the implementation of CCE.

The study contributes to our understanding of teachers’ perceptions of CCE in the Vietnamese context. The findings highlight inconsistencies in understanding of the nature, value and practice of CCE amongst interviewed primary teachers. The research shows how definitions of CCE can vary considerably between contexts and that there can be a disjunction between understandings embodied in policy and understandings implemented in practice.

The findings, therefore, suggest that in order to achieve a closer alignment between policy and practice and to support school teachers to implement CCE effectively at the classroom level, MOET and other educational policy makers need to revisit fundamental understandings of CCE, taking account of those understandings which are situated in the local Vietnamese context.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1:  INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1
  1.1  Background to the research .................................................................................................... 1
      1.1.1  Education in Vietnam ................................................................................................. 2
      1.1.2  Ethnic Minority Education in Vietnam ....................................................................... 5
  1.2  Justification for the study .................................................................................................... 6
  1.3  The research context: Gia Lai Province .............................................................................. 8
  1.4  Situating myself as a researcher ........................................................................................ 9
  1.5  Research aims and questions ............................................................................................ 12
  1.6  Delimitations ..................................................................................................................... 13
  1.7  Summary ............................................................................................................................ 13

CHAPTER 2:  LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................................. 15
  2.1  Child-centred education .................................................................................................... 15
      2.1.1  Contemporary definitions of child-centred education .............................................. 15
      2.1.2  Historical foundations of child-centred education .................................................. 17
      2.1.3  Theories informing child-centred education ............................................................. 18
      2.1.4  Elements of child-centred education ........................................................................ 26
      2.1.5  Child-centred education in practice .......................................................................... 34
      2.1.6  Issues with child-centred education in developing country contexts .................... 41
  2.2  Education in Vietnam ........................................................................................................ 46
      2.2.1  The historical/cultural context of education in Vietnam .......................................... 46
      2.2.2  Education governance in Vietnam .......................................................................... 50
      2.2.3  Education in contemporary Vietnam ....................................................................... 50
      2.2.4  Indicators of educational quality .............................................................................. 52
  2.3  Ethnic minority education in Vietnam ............................................................................. 57
      2.3.1  Ethnic groups in Vietnam ........................................................................................ 57
      2.3.2  Educational status of ethnic minority children ........................................................ 58
      2.3.3  Policy context of ethnic minority education .............................................................. 60
      2.3.4  Issues affecting education of ethnic minority children ............................................ 61
  2.4  Child-centred education in Vietnam ................................................................................ 67
      2.4.1  Child-centred educational policy in Vietnam ............................................................. 67
      2.4.2  The potential of child-centred education for ethnic minority children ................... 70
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 When and how teachers learnt about CCE ................................................................. 97
4.2 Teachers’ understandings of CCE ................................................................................. 99
   4.2.1 CCE is about teachers being facilitators ............................................................. 99
   4.2.2 CCE is about active engagement of students ...................................................... 100
   4.2.3 CCE is about using group work ......................................................................... 101
   4.2.4 CCE is about catering for students’ individual differences ............................... 103
   4.2.5 CCE is about use of teaching aids .................................................................. 104
   4.2.6 CCE is about creating a friendly and caring learning environment .............. 105
4.3 Issues impacting on the learning of Jrai primary school students ....................... 106
   4.3.1 Language barriers ............................................................................................ 106
   4.3.2 Socio-economic disadvantage ....................................................................... 108
   4.3.3 Families’ attitudes toward their children’s schooling ...................................... 109
4.4 Ways CCE enhances Jrai students’ learning experience ......................................... 111
   4.4.1 Use of students’ ethnic language ...................................................................... 112
   4.4.2 Use of visual teaching resources to overcome the language barrier ............ 113
4.5 What hinders and enables implementation of CCE with Jrai students ................ 115
   4.5.1 Professional training and culture of support .................................................... 115
   4.5.2 Teachers’ commitment to implementing CCE ................................................. 116
   4.5.3 Teachers’ skills and confidence ....................................................................... 118
   4.5.4 School facilities and resources ...................................................................... 119
   4.5.5 Curriculum and textbooks .............................................................................. 121
4.5.6 Student assessment and its correlation to teacher appraisal .................................................. 123
4.5.7 Establishing close relationships with Jrai students and their families .................................. 125
4.5.8 Providing additional support for the students ............................................................................ 126
4.5.9 Focusing on individual Jrai students’ learning needs ............................................................... 126
4.5.10 Giving students positive encouragement and feedback ......................................................... 127
4.6 Summary .................................................................................................................................. 128

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .................................................................................. 130
5.1 CCE as a policy directive .............................................................................................................. 130
5.2 CCE as a teaching method ............................................................................................................ 132
5.3 CCE means individualisation of learning ................................................................................... 135
5.4 CCE means understanding and valuing each child .................................................................... 137
5.5 CCE means providing a comfortable learning environment ..................................................... 141
5.6 CCE means collaboration and connection .................................................................................. 143
5.7 Incongruence in understandings of CCE at the systemic level ................................................. 146
5.8 An under-emphasis on values, attitudes and beliefs ................................................................. 148

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...................................................... 152
6.1 Summary .................................................................................................................................. 152
6.2 Limitations ................................................................................................................................. 155
6.3 Implications ............................................................................................................................... 156
6.4 Recommendations ..................................................................................................................... 157
6.5 Reflections .................................................................................................................................. 164
6.6 Final words ................................................................................................................................ 167

REFERENCES 169

APPENDICES 189
Appendix 1a: Informed Consent Letter (English Version) ................................................................. 189
Appendix 1b: Informed Consent Letter (Vietnamese Version) ............................................................ 191
Appendix 2a: Consent Form (English Version) ............................................................................... 193
Appendix 2b: Consent Form (Vietnamese Version) ......................................................................... 195
Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview guide .................................................................................. 197
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the research

Child-centred education (CCE), as a Western-originating pedagogy, has been increasingly influencing policy and practice in many developing countries over the last two decades. CCE refers to a shift away from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching and learning opportunities and an emphasis on the learner as the centre of the education process (Schweisfurth, 2011). Teachers in developing countries have been encouraged to move away from ‘chalk and talk’ teaching strategies toward more discovery-based learning experiences, with an emphasis on children’s learning outcomes (Hardman, Kadira, & Smith, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2004; UNESCO, 2007; Vavrus, 2009).

While CCE has, in general, attracted international support, its extension to developing country contexts and the means by which it has been implemented, has been the subject of some controversy. Proponents of CCE have emphasised its many benefits including making children active and confident in their learning process, developing their interpersonal relationships and interactions through group work activities, and improving their learning outcomes. Analysis of instances in which CCE has been introduced in developing countries suggests its impact is highly contingent on the interplay of national and local actors and institutions (Mizrachi, Padilla, & Banda, 2010; Mtika & Gates, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2011; Wang, 2011). As Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008, p.196) note, “Sociology has shown that policy and curriculum implementation does not follow the predictable path of formulation–adoption–implementation–reformulation…” As a result, implementation of CCE in some countries, including Vietnam, has been sporadic and inconsistent.

The means by which educational innovations and policies diffuse across developing countries is highly influenced by both national and local actors and institutions. Broad-scale educational reforms, which are implemented through top-down policy directives, imply unrealistic expectations of the ease of implementing educational initiatives, particularly when these are not communicated clearly and consistently (Schweisfurth, 2011). New educational practices such as CCE, when conveyed through policy directives, can be difficult for teachers to understand and are thus often inconsistently implemented in daily teaching activities. At the same time, what it means to implement CCE may not be consistently communicated by different parts of system such as teacher education and inspection (Schweisfurth, 2011).
Thus, though advocated by international education experts and often championed by developing country education agencies and donor organisations, existing literature suggests the transmission and outcomes of policies such as CCE in local contexts depends critically on the manner in which teachers in diverse contexts perceive, encounter, adopt, interpret, and put into practice CCE methods. Local cultural practices, teachers’ attitudes, inadequate teaching resources, large class sizes, overloaded and centralized curriculum and learner background place constraints on the effective adoption of CCE in classroom practices (Alexander, Roux, Hlalele, & Daries, 2010; Chipiko & Shawa, 2014; Chisholma & Leyendecker, 2008; Mizrachi et al., 2010; Mtahabwa, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2004; Yandila, Komane, & Moganane, 2007; Yilmaz, 2008).

The history of Vietnam’s education system foregrounds many of the issues faced within the contemporary context of schooling in this developing country, particularly as it affects ethnic minority students. Such background provides a context for understanding the issues surrounding the adoption of CCE in this country. To date, there has been no empirical research on the child-centred approach and how it is being applied at a primary education level in Vietnam. This research sets out to explore what teachers think about CCE, and how they implement it at a local school level in Vietnam.

1.1.1 Education in Vietnam

The history of education provision in Vietnam can be traced back over a thousand years (London, 2011). In comparison to other similar countries, Vietnam has a very high rate of literacy (Dang Hai Anh, 2006; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). Education is highly valued in Vietnam. Politically, it is viewed as the top national priority (MOET, UNICEF, & UNESCO, 2008; UNICEF, 2007) and this commitment is emphasised in article 9 and 13 in the Education Law (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, 2005, 2009). Furthermore, the importance of education is also reflected in the Vietnamese people's tradition of showing respect for teachers and for education (Nguyen Van Phu, 2009; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005; World Bank, 2006). Education is also viewed as important in terms of individuals’ economic situation, that is, as a pathway to a better life, and as an opportunity for social mobility (London, 2011).

With nearly 1000 years under the colonization of Chinese imperial rule prior to its independence in 938, Vietnam was strongly influenced by Confucian ideas and philosophy (Nguyen Van Ha, 2002). In the field of education, the culture of Confucian ideology has continued to exert a strong influence on approaches to learning and teaching in Vietnamese schools (Nguyen Thu Hien & Fraser, 2007;
Passingham, Nguyen Nguyet Nga, & Shaw, 2002). Confucianism emphasises the vital role of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge to his or her students.

During the last decade, Vietnam has seen considerable achievement in terms of universal primary education (MOET et al., 2008; Nguyen Van Phu, 2009; World Bank, 2006). Figures for net enrolment in primary school for 2005 have been varyingly identified as 94.6 percent (Nguyen Van Phu, 2009) and 88 percent (MOET et al., 2008). As of 2011, UNESCO cited enrolment/participation figures of 98.3 percent however, as will be discussed in the literature review, these figures are somewhat controversial.

While participation rates are now ostensibly quite high, there have been a number of identified weaknesses in the Vietnamese education system, particularly relating to low educational quality and efficiency (World Bank, 2006). A joint study conducted in 1991 by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO pointed to some major gaps and weaknesses inherent in Vietnam’s educational system, including the inadequacy of education and training in the changing society of Vietnam (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1995, cited in Duggan, 2001 p.196). The Vietnamese government subsequently recognised numerous challenges in the teaching and learning processes in Vietnam (Saito, Tsukui, & Tanaka, 2008) with MOET (2001, cited in Saito et al., 2008) acknowledging that Vietnamese education is inclined towards mechanical approaches with students with less attention paid to developing real-life practical abilities (Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). While progress has been made over the last 20 years, such progress is slow, particularly in rural and remote areas, and Vietnam’s current education system still does not meet the aspirations of the Vietnamese government (London, 2011).

In Vietnam, most children across the country in the same grade complete the same lesson at the same time and generally in the same way (London, 2011; Phelps, Ha Thi Tuyet Nhung, Geeves, & Graham, Unpublished paper). There is very little adaptation or tailoring of content, method or even time spent covering curriculum material in response to the needs of individual students. As a result, the materials/textbooks (and consequently the curriculum) are often irrelevant to students in local regions because they do not reflect the backgrounds and experiences of students, nor do they reflect the differences arising from regional and geographical locality (Truong Tra Son Luu, 2008; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001). It is often difficult for students to learn deeply in this situation.
Many researchers have also expressed concern regarding the quality of general education, with its emphasis on an overly academic delivery of content, a focus on memorisation of text-book content and a heavy emphasis on testing of factual recall (Duggan, 2001; London, 2011; Nguyen Van Phu, 2009; Saito & Tsukui, 2008). Great importance is placed on summative examinations which cover all knowledge students have learnt in the textbooks. The results of the examinations (grades/marks) can be used to evaluate both students’ and teachers’ achievement. Teachers are thus put under significant pressure to cover the entire scope of the prescribed textbooks and students must learn by rote to prepare for tests and examinations.

Teachers rely heavily on textbooks which can make learning and teaching monotonous for students, privileging a lecture style approach with little emphasis on encouraging students to engage in creative thinking (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Duggan, 2001; Molyneux, 1999; Pellini, 2008). Consequently, learning outcomes are impacted (Nguyen Hung Phong & Nguyen Phuong Hoa, 2006; Phelps & Graham, 2010). Traditionally, the learning environment in many Vietnamese schools is formal and students sit passively in rows, listening to the teacher’s explanation and trying to memorise what the teacher has taught without asking any questions or engaging in discussions. The teacher, who is considered to have ‘mastered’ knowledge, uses their (adult) authority and power to exert control over the students and the teaching and learning processes (Biggs, 1996; Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Saito & Tsukui, 2008; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). Students are not involved in decision making within classrooms which diminishes their creative ability. At the same time, there are very few opportunities for students to collaborate with one another, with competition generally being fostered rather than collaboration. Furthermore, students are not taught life skills, self-learning or self-study capacity (Ha Thi Tuyet Nhung, 2009).

Another issue impacting on education relates to teaching staff. Teachers are in short supply and are generally under-qualified (Chapman & Adams, 2002; Glewe & Jacoby, 1998; London, 2011; Phelps & Graham, 2010; Ushiogi & Hamano, 2007). In 1998, Vietnam lacked 58,000 teachers (Giacchino-Baker, 2007) and this led to a situation where under-prepared teachers with poor instructional skills were appointed – many of whom are still teaching in remote classrooms. Saito and Tsukui (2008) note that teachers are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop their own professional capabilities, and this issue is particularly compounded in remote areas.

With regard to facilities and infrastructure, many schools are not well-equipped with resources (Chapman & Adams, 2002). In remote or mountainous areas especially, many schools do not have
adequate classrooms, they lack toilets and sanitary water, and many playgrounds are unsafe for children (Phelps & Graham, 2010).

While education is always highly valued and viewed as the top national priority in Vietnam, in the global context, the Vietnam educational system has faced considerable challenges in improving the quality of education. The next section examines the education of Vietnam ethnic minority groups.

1.1.2 Ethnic Minority Education in Vietnam

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 different ethnic groups. The Kinh (“lowland Vietnamese”) represent the vast majority of people, accounting for 87 percent of the population. Despite the small size of population, the Hoa (ethnic Chinese) are grouped with the Kinh because of their high cultural assimilation with the Kinh (Dang Hai Anh, 2010). The 52 remaining cultures are called the ethnic minority groups because of their small population size, most of whom reside mainly in the mountainous areas (Asian Development Bank, 2001, 2002; Baulch, Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, Haughton, & Haughton, 2002; Dang Hai Anh, 2010). These ethnic minority groups are the poorest and least educated sections of Vietnamese society (Vietnam Poverty Working Group, 1999 cited in Baulch et al., 2002).

Ethnic minority children face particular difficulties in mainstream education. In comparison with the majority Kinh, ethnic children of the same levels and ages do not perform as well as their peers in school (Dang Hai Anh, 2006). This is partly because they tend to live in isolated, remote areas and have lower standards of living than the ethnic majority group (Baulch et al., 2002; Giacchino-Baker, 2007; Nguyen Van Phu, 2009; Truong Tra Son Luu, 2008; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001; Vu Tuan Anh, 2005). However, there are a number of systemic issues impacting on their schooling.

One of the biggest hurdles facing ethnic minority students is their language background, since most children’s first language is that of their ethnic group. When they are in class, children are instructed in the official language - Vietnamese (Kinh) – which for many ethnic minority students is a new and second language, and hence quite challenging for them. In addition, all students in Vietnam have to study a foreign language (generally English), which means these students are required to learn two separate languages. This can hamper their capacity to achieve more practical knowledge or living experience (Baulch et al., 2002; Ministry of Education and Training, 2008; Nguyen Van Phu, 2009).
Furthermore, in Vietnam, well-qualified and high performing teachers are often unwilling to work with ethnic minority groups. Most teachers are not trained to teach students with different language and ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, teachers in these remote and ethnically diverse areas are not provided with sufficient resources, materials or school facilities, and their living conditions are quite poor, compared with those in urban areas (Ushiogi & Hamano, 2007). As a result, the tenure of teachers in these harder-to-staff schools is quite short, since they tend to leave as soon as they find employment in ‘better’ schools. The teachers who remain are generally beginning teachers or those who lack teaching experience, knowledge or ongoing professional development, which adversely influences students’ learning outcomes.

Stereotype perceptions of ethnic minority groups within broader Vietnamese society, which depict them as slow learners or socially and educationally inferior, further impact on the potential learning outcomes of these students. Without empathy or understanding about students’ backgrounds and living conditions, teachers’ negative expectations and “deficit thinking” regarding these students widens the gap between them and the rest of their peer group (Baulch et al., 2002; Giacchino-Baker, 2007; Lunenburg, 2003; MOET et al., 2008; Truong Huyen Chi, 2009). Therefore, even though education is seen as a basic human right for all children of school age, this right might not be manifested in some remote or mountainous areas where the minority ethnic groups live.

1.2 Justification for the study

Vietnam’s education and training system went through an era of radical reform following adoption of the strategic Education For All (EFA) goal signalling a shift in emphasis from quantity to quality of education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2003). In order to improve educational quality and ensure Vietnam’s population can meet the requirements of the global context, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced a new curriculum for primary education in 2002 which placed an emphasis on a child-centred educational approach (Hamano, 2008; Phelps et al., Unpublished paper; Saito et al., 2008). This new approach to teaching and learning has been explicitly prioritised in the Vietnam Education Law, 2005, Article 5:

Methods of education must bring into full play the activeness, the consciousness, the self-motivation and the creative thinking of learners; foster the self-study ability, the learning eagerness and the will to advance forward.

In theory, a child-centred educational approach encourages students to engage actively in the learning process. Children are positioned at the centre of the learning process and are encouraged to engage in
critical thinking, participate in activities, problem-solve and relate knowledge to authentic contexts (Dang Van Hung, 2006; Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Hamano, 2008; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003). A child-centred approach is characterised by a safe and friendly learning environment where children have a chance to collaborate and share ideas with their groups, thereby gaining knowledge, building mutual friendships and enhancing interpersonal communicative skills. In this way, children become more confident (Dao Hong Thu, 1996).

Unlike the more traditional Vietnamese teaching and learning context, the role of a teacher in a child-centred classroom is considered as a guide or a counsellor who supports learners rather than teaching them in more direct and didactic ways (Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003; Weimer, 2002). This requires that teachers understand their students and modify their teaching practices to meet individual developmental needs and differences (McCombs, Daniels & Perry, 2008, cited in Phelps, NhUNG, Graham, & Geeves, 2012).

In order to move toward this approach, a range of voluntary workshops and summer training courses were offered to teachers to enable them to upgrade their teaching skills in line with the new curriculum (Tran Kieu, 2002 cited in Hamano, 2008; Saito et al., 2008; Watkins, 2000). This training occurred through a series of phases, initially focusing on year 1 teachers in 2002, followed by year 2 teachers in 2003 and so on.

Consistent with the child-centred approach, MOET et al., (2008) is seeking to address issues related to improved pedagogical methods to enhance student performance. In relation to ethnic minority education, in particular, it aims to train teaching staff who can speak the minority language and understand and sympathise with the minorities’ backgrounds (Hoang Thanh, 2009). In this way, it is hoped that ethnic minority children will be more confident to engage actively in learning activities.

However, in practice, what is understood as ‘child-centred learning’ is not clear and there may not be shared understandings between government departments, teacher educators, teachers, students or parents. Furthermore, implementing policy and curriculum change is particularly difficult in rural and remote areas (MOET et al., 2008) where recruitment of appropriate teachers is problematic, teacher quality and motivation is low and in-service training and professional development are difficult to provide.

There is a paucity of empirical research on the child-centred approach in Vietnam and on how it is being applied at a primary education level. Yet for ethnic minority children, in particular, a child-
centred approach is potentially more inclusive, recognising individual as well as cultural and social difference. It is thus potentially more affirming of children’s identities and more sensitive to their circumstances, including their linguistic backgrounds. Child-centred approaches also potentially deliver more authentic and personally relevant and practical learning for these children, with immediate benefits for their families and broader communities (Doddington & Hilton, 2007).

As such, a child-centred approach, when understood and systematically applied, has the potential to improve learning outcomes and enhance the quality of education for all children, but particularly ethnic minority children, thus enabling Vietnam to fulfil its first Education for All goal 1, that is, moving from quantity to quality by 2015.

1.3 The research context: Gia Lai Province

Gia Lai is a mountainous province located in the Central Highland. It has a population of about 1.1 million people in which the ethnic majority, the Kinh, accounts for 58 percent of the population residing in the centre of the city or districts. The remaining 42 percent are mainly from two other ethnic minorities - the Jrai and the Bahnar. The Jrai ethnic group accounts for about 30 percent of the population and this group mainly reside in rural areas such as Đức Cơ, Chư Păh and Iа Grai. The Bahnar makes up 12 percent (Gia Lai Statistics Department, 2013; MOET et al., 2008).

According to the Gia Lai Statistics Department (2009), Gia Lai has achieved universal primary school completion levels of about 98.2 percent. According to Gia Lai Statistic Department (2014), during the period between 2010 and 2014, the net enrolment rates were stable. Enrolment of primary education was reported as 100 per cent, lower-secondary was 61.09 per cent and high school enrolment rate was 45.29 per cent. In practice, however, primary school enrolment rates, particularly in more remote areas, may not necessarily be 100% and tend to be low in the central highland minorities (Baulch et al., 2002; Poverty Task Force, 2002) where the completion rate is 56 percent (Watkins, 2000). According to the Statistics of the Ministry of Education and Training in 2005 (cited in Truong Huyen Chi, 2011b), the percentage of general education of ethnic minority students from Gia Lai was 39.53 percent, in which the primary level accounted for 50.22 percent; the lower-secondary level was 30.25 percent and upper-secondary level was 16.65 percent. This group, in particular, has experienced significant barriers to the achievement of government targets.
1.4 Situating myself as a researcher

Being a Vietnamese student who grew up and studied in Vietnam during the 1980s, I had come to accept teacher-centred approaches to education as the norm. In my own schooling I was quite comfortable with this learning context, where teachers played a vital role in transmitting knowledge. Teachers were considered the source of infinite knowledge and my role as a student was to learn what the teachers taught me. My learning outcomes were dependent on my ability to memorize or learn by rote the content transmitted by the teachers. In other words, I got used to the way teachers delivered knowledge and I accepted unquestioningly both the content that I was being taught and the process by which it was taught. I, and my fellow students, felt discouraged from asking any questions, since to do so may have been interpreted as a direct challenge to the authority, knowledge and/or teaching skills of the teacher. Unintentionally, I became passive and dependent on my teachers at school.

Additionally, I was brought up in a family where both my parents were teachers. This influenced me considerably because my parents have always taught me carefully. In my mind, they are qualified teachers who are always admired by students and their parents. For that reason, I acknowledged them not only as good parents but also good teachers who would transmit knowledge to me at home. In that manner, I always relied on them and was not in a position of needing to make any decisions myself.

In this way, I came to believe that a good teacher was one who was able to deliver knowledge and answer all the questions being asked by students. Similarly, a good student was one who could get good marks by memorising or learning by rote what was taught. Later, when I became a college teacher, I replicated these teaching approaches and tried my best to teach my students what they had to learn without much attention to how they should learn. I did not create learning situations or activities to actively engage them in more independent learning and I did not recognise that my students were “spoon-fed”.

In 2005, I travelled to Melbourne, Australia to study a Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree. This experience would radically change my own values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Going back to university ten years after completing my undergraduate degree and, in particular, studying abroad was both disconcerting and stimulating for me. The way I both learnt and taught at university in Vietnam was quite different from the approaches being employed in this Australian university context. Unlike in Vietnam, I myself had to choose which subjects (units) I would study. I found this challenging because I was used to such decisions being made by my teachers.
and I always depended on them to make the right decision on my behalf. My first few lessons in an Australian university class worried and embarrassed me. However, I had no other option except to become familiar with this “new” learning style – a student-centred approach. Such an approach assumed that I was responsible for choosing as well as planning my learning goals.

In tutorials I was allocated randomly to a small group of 4-6 students where we discussed the content of materials handed out by the teachers, and I was considered as an equal with my peers. At first, I just listened to them without expressing my opinions or viewpoints. This was partly because of my language limitation as well as the feeling of losing face if my ideas were not right (something influenced by my cultural background). However, by working with different students in such groups, I gradually became more confident and was encouraged to express my viewpoint and share my ideas and experiences. I understood that there was no right or wrong answer but that responses depended on individuals’ social and cultural backgrounds and life experiences. In this way, I recognised that I was fully involved in the learning process through group work. This collaborative learning style benefited me because if I did not understand or know something, I could learn from my peers and, similarly, they could learn from me.

Based on such experience I strongly agree with Neill (1962, p.4) when he states that “learning in itself is not as important as personality and character”. A student-centred approach forms students’ personal characteristics because they are active in participating in their learning and they are more likely to engage at a deeper and more personally meaningful level with ideas and concepts. They can become more self-directed, self-confident and independent. In this way, a student-centred approach fosters students’ total development, not only their cognitive processing of knowledge but also their personal character. I myself felt more confident when choosing the subjects for the following terms because I better understood how I could tailor my learning to my own personal interests and goals. Having been directed into a career in education by parental expectations and having had all my study choices made for me within these courses, for the first time in my study career I felt I had some control over my learning. At the same time, I recognised that I learnt a lot of life skills in a multicultural context. Through assignments, I acknowledged the value of problem-solving skills; something that was quite challenging as it required me to think critically to make a decision.

After finishing my course in 2007, I came home and continued working at Gia Lai Teachers’ Training College teaching English for both specialised and non-specialised students. For the students who major in English, I was in charge of units such as American Civilisation and Intercultural Studies.
non-specialised students, I taught a class of general English focusing on integrated skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Having experienced first-hand a learner-centred approach my attitude toward my students changed. The teachers I worked with in Australia had been so friendly and enthusiastic in their guidance of students, encouraging them to actively participate in learning activities. I was aware of my “new” role in teaching my own class back in Vietnam and tried to emulate the friendly learning atmosphere I’d experienced. I encouraged the students to keep a journal, writing about their learning experiences each day, and I collected their journals every week to give feedback. By doing so, I was able to understand their feelings, difficulties and needs, through which we could build trust and mutual relationships. The students felt comfortable to share their experiences with me.

Driven by the motto “learn to know, not learn to pass”, I encouraged my students to search and collect material related to the given topics and themes from a range of other sources. After that, they discussed the information in groups and then did presentations in front of the class. Such activities enabled my students to be more active, engaged and interested in the material. They were able to obtain knowledge independently, while still under my assistance and guidance. I felt satisfied when most of my students appeared comfortable and relaxed in class. They were gradually able to adapt to this new educational environment and adjust their learning process accordingly. I also felt proud when graduates sometimes praised the way I organised learning activities.

My perspectives and my personal positioning in relation to my PhD research have also been influenced by my role as a mother of two children aged 10 years and 2 years (at the commencement of my current studies). As a parent I would like my own children to be brought up in a favourable environment where they have opportunities to take part in active learning activities and share their point of views, thereby resulting in not only academic development but also valuable social and emotional development. I believe that providing them with opportunities for active participation and a voice on matters that affect them can help to develop their agency, which is considered as a positive factor in helping them cope, adapt and make contributions in their daily lives.

Being a teacher at Gia Lai Teacher Training College, I have for many years been concerned about the educational outcomes and educational barriers for the Jrai ethnic minority students in Gia Lai Province. Obstacles such as the language barrier and poor teaching and learning quality hamper their experience and outcomes from schooling. I have attended professional development workshops delivered to teachers during summer vacations and observed some ethnic minority teachers attending
the course. From this I learnt that although the Jrai ethnic minority students are aware of the importance of going to school to have a better life in the future, they face difficulties in their learning because they are not able to keep pace with their Kinh peers. I have spoken extensively to practicing teachers about the issues they face in the classroom, most of whom associate dropout rates with the language of instruction. When the village patriarch and parents see that their children are not able to read or to do simple maths problems they often agree to let their children drop out of school.

When schools are relevant to the lives of children and communities, and when they meet the needs of children well, the impact becomes evident quite quickly in terms of influencing productivity and the socio-economic circumstances of families and communities (Shore, 2008). Therefore, improvement must begin at the primary school level where children’s attitudes and approaches to learning are formed and where they become inducted into the values and norms of education.

I sought to undertake this research because my experiences in a student-centred classroom prompted me to reflect more critically on how such an approach might enhance the experience and outcomes of schooling for ethnic minority students. I could see the potential of new teaching methods in helping them experience a more friendly and democratic learning environment where teachers understand and empathise with students’ backgrounds and create incentives and learning opportunities consistent with students’ abilities. I wanted to conduct research to better understand whether such approaches could ensure more positive educational outcomes for Jrai students and subsequently improve their socio-economic circumstances.

1.5 Research aims and questions

In light of the context described above, this research aims to better understand primary school teachers’ perceptions and experiences of the child-centred approach to education, especially teachers who are working in schools with Jrai ethnic minority primary students, in Gia Lai Province. The study addresses the four following questions:

1. What understandings do primary teachers in Gia Lai have of child-centred education?

2. What issues impact on the learning of Jrai primary students?

3. In what ways might a child-centred approach to teaching and learning enhance Jrai students’ learning experience?
4. What hinders or enables teachers to implement child-centred educational strategies?

The research will contribute insights and recommendations to further inform the implementation of child-centred education in remote areas in Vietnam. The research will have implications for individuals, schools, communities and the government, as well as pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators.

1.6 Delimitations

This research is focusing on the issue of teaching and learning for the Jrai ethnic minority groups, who account for 30% of the population of Gia Lai. The focus will be on primary schools since educational outcomes in the primary context directly impact on whether students progress to, and remain in, secondary and further education. Classroom teachers working directly with students, were chosen as the focus for the interviews since it is the everyday decisions that they make which influence whether, and how, the policy of CCE transpires into action for students. Privileging an understanding of the beliefs and knowledge of these teachers was a key priority for this study, which set out to expose how innovation of CCE did, or did not, diffuse to change the classroom experiences of Jrai ethnic minority children. At the same time, principals of these schools, and a lecturer at the Teacher Training College of Gia Lai are also invited to participate in the research to take account of their view on child-centred education. The research will not attempt to generalise findings to other ethnic minorities or geographical areas in Vietnam, although it is likely that the research will be relevant to other remote areas which experience similar issues with education provision.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has outlined the background to the research as well as the impetus and justification for the study. A reflexive piece presented my personal story and how my experiences studying in a learner-centred environment in Australia influenced my decision to conduct this research. This chapter included the research aims and questions, and delimitations of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to this study. It will firstly explore what is meant by ‘child-centred education’ from Western perspectives. The chapter then examines education in Vietnam in general, before focusing on the education of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, in particular. Some background is provided on how child-centred education has been introduced and implemented in
Vietnam. The final section of this chapter reviews teachers’ views about child-centred education in the Vietnamese education context.

Chapter 3 discusses hermeneutic phenomenology as a theoretical basis for the study and outlines the research methodology. The study employs a qualitative, interpretivist research approach as it is concerned with the meanings that teachers themselves attach to their experiences and circumstances in their day-to-day teaching. Procedures of sample selection, methods of gathering data, initial analysis and coding of the data are described. The ethical considerations applied to this research are discussed, and the methodological soundness is addressed.

Chapter 4 reports on the findings from data gathered during the interview process. It begins by considering when and how teachers were initially introduced to CCE and their general understandings of CCE. Data related to the problems Jrai students face and the views of teachers as to whether these problems can be overcome or addressed through implementation of CCE is presented. The data also uncovers factors assisting and/or hindering teachers during their implementing CCE with Jrai students.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings described in chapter 4, and relates the findings to the literature review.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the key findings of the research, including consideration of some limitations of the study. Recommendations are presented for educational officers and for class teachers working with ethnic minority groups in general, and Jrai students in particular. Several possibilities for further research are presented. The chapter concludes with reflections on my experiences during the four-years conducting this research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will critically review the literature informing this study. It will firstly examine the theoretical literature regarding the concept of CCE, including its contemporary application, historical foundations, theoretical framing, and key components. Having established the conceptual basis for the study, the second section of the chapter will then consider the nature of education in Vietnam, including the historical/cultural context, education governance, contemporary practice and indications of educational quality. Given the focus of this research is on education in a high ethnic minority area of Vietnam, the third section of this chapter will examine similar issues related to ethnic groups, including their educational status, policies supporting their schooling and problems they face in education. This is followed by a discussion of the reasons why the philosophy of child-centred education has been introduced in Vietnam, with consideration given to whether this is likely to address learning issues within education for ethnic minority children. The last section of the chapter will examine beliefs, understandings and values of Vietnamese teachers regarding an approach to education based on a child-centred philosophy.

2.1 Child-centred education

The first section of this literature review examines theoretical definitions of CCE, both historical and contemporary. As will be demonstrated, the majority of this literature is from Western perspectives. Elements constituting CCE will be considered. The literature review then examines the current state of research surrounding CCE in developing country contexts, and whether CCE is being perceived and implemented in similar/consistent ways in developing and developed countries.

2.1.1 Contemporary definitions of child-centred education

The child centred approach to education has been known by a variety of terms including: child-centred pedagogy; child-centred education; child-centred teaching; child-centred learning; student-centred teaching; student-centred learning; learner-centred approach; learner-centredness; or student-centred. These terms have all been used interchangeably (Harmelen, 1998; Lall, 2010; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005). Chung and Walsh (2000) state that there have been more than 40 different meanings of the term in contemporary usage. Because these concepts are applied across all spectrums/levels of education, ‘learner-centred’ and ‘student-centred’ tend to be the preferred terms for older learners, whereas ‘child-centred’ might be used in early-childhood or primary school contexts.
O’Neil and McMahon (2005), in their discussion of the term student-centred learning, link the concept with other terms such as flexible learning, experiential learning and self-directed learning. They also emphasise that the term has been overused and can mean different things to different people. Similarly, Tabulawa (2003) states that ‘learner-centredness’ has “often been used interchangeably with ‘participatory’, ‘democratic’, ‘inquiry-based’, and ‘discovery’ methods… These strands differ from each other only in so far as they emphasise different degrees of learner autonomy” (p.9). According to Attard, Iorio, Geven and Santa (2010) there is not a universally agreed definition about student-centred learning, even though the term is being used by a range of educational policy-makers. In the same vein, Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) state that there may be a variety of potential definitions of what student-centred learning is and that different dimensions of the learning and teaching process are highlighted by different researchers and practitioners.

Student-centred learning can be seen as a reaction to criticisms of methods of teaching that emphasise transmission of information from teacher to students. Rogers (1983, p.25) describes the shift in power as driven by a need for a change in the traditional educational atmosphere where “students become passive, apathetic and bored”. Instead, learner-centred education “gives learners, and demands from them, a relatively high level of active control over the contents and processes of learning. What is learnt, and how, are therefore shaped by learners’ needs, capacities and interests” (Schweisfurth, 2013a, p.2). Furthermore, Mtika and Gates (2010) state that learner-centred education echoes the idea of effectively equipping pupils with competencies in creative intelligence, critical thinking and problem solving skills. However, despite widespread use of the term, Lea et al., (2003, p. 322) note that Biggs’ (1999) observation may still be relevant in that “many institutions or educators claim to be putting student-centred learning into practice, but in reality they are not”.

While traditional ways of teaching and learning focus on teachers and teaching, child-centred education places a focus on students and their learning process. The latter emphasises the needs of the learners and their capacity to initiate their own learning by choosing activities that interest them and then working independently to discover their own potential. Furthermore, learners are allowed to work in ways that are compatible with their own learning styles and in a child-centred classroom, there will be a lot of learning through play (Lall, 2010).

In order to further understand the concept of ‘child-centred’ education, it is important to consider how CCE was historically founded and the theories that have informed its development and implementation. This literature will be discussed in the following two subsections.
2.1.2 Historical foundations of child-centred education

The history of child-centred education can be traced back more than 2000 years. The concept was embodied in the strategic questioning of Plato (Brodie, Lelliotta, & Davis, 2002; Entwistle, 2012; Mtika & Gates, 2010). John Locke’s books *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) both, for example, argue for a liberal education of children.

Rousseau’s 1762 book, *Emile*, caught many people’s interest, arguing for an approach to education that was child-centred and experienced-based (Henson, 2003). *Emile* sought to replace the conventional and formal education of the day with a training that should be natural and spontaneous. Education in this era, however, was limited to the education of boys and did not promote the equal treatment of girls (Lall, 2010).

*Practical Education*, published in 1798 by Richard Lowell Edgeworth and his daughter, Maria, was the most outstanding text on child-centred education. It provided a comprehensive theory of education that combines the ideas of John Locke and Rousseau, as well other educational writers. It was the first educational work to place more emphasis on experimental and holistic teaching methods, emphasising the notion that children should be encouraged to discover for themselves and that “children’s attention, interest and understanding should be awakened by sympathy” (Doddington & Hilton, 2007, p.7).

However, in contrast to these child-centred approach movements, the industrial revolution was also developing schools catering to children from poor areas and slums. In these schools, children were educated through rote memorisation and a system based on a rewards and punishments. The child-centred approach became the system for the more privileged through charity schools catering to the children of the artisans and shopkeepers (Lall, 2010).

The term “child-centred” appeared in Froebel’s 1826 book *The Education of Man* (1885) and steadily gained greater prominence in the educational literature from the late 1800s (Chung & Walsh, 2000). Froebel pioneered his child-centred ideas in kindergartens, thus developing his philosophy of education which combines child-centred theory and method. Froebel confirmed that “only by the extension and enrichment of the child’s instinct to involve itself in active play could sympathetic adult educators help the child in his or her full development as an “acting, feeling, and thinking human being” (p.14). Using these methods, kindergartens provided a child-centred curriculum, focusing on play and experimentation, gardening and singing. Froebel’s work promoted the idea that child-centred
education implied that the teacher should not “interfere with this process of maturation, but act as a guide” (Simon, 1999). Simon highlighted that this was associated with the process of development or ‘readiness’, i.e. the child will learn when he/she is ready.

In the nineteenth century in Britain, the ideas of Froebelianism gradually spread and were no longer confined to the kindergarten but challenged the methods of teaching children in elementary (primary) schools. Learner-centred education was promoted in North America and the UK in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by continental philosophers, who questioned the nature of childhood and how children should be educated (Schweisfurth, 2013a). However, there still existed in parallel another educational ideology where schools continued to emphasise rote learning and authoritarian methods.

In the 1920s and 1930s there were major changes in the structure of primary education in Britain and the more didactic and syllabus-centred approach was then replaced by an educational style which focused on a more child-centred approach. The Plowden Report, which was published by the UK government in 1967, built a primary system focusing on pedagogy and on the needs of deprived children in poorer areas, with the aim of “producing a creative, autonomous, yet responsible and moral young citizenry across the nation” (pp. 40-41). This report focused intensively on more informal, flexible teaching methods, and group work. The Plowden Report made learner-centred approaches widespread in the UK in the 1960s, and these approaches to teaching and learning now dominate in the UK and in most of the Western world (O'Sullivan, 2004). Learner-centred approaches are also endorsed and promoted in many developing countries (Altinyelken, 2011; Black, Govinda, Kiragu, & Devini, 1993; Lall, 2010), as will be further explored in section 2.1.6.

2.1.3 Theories informing child-centred education

As outlined in the previous section, child-centred education has a very long tradition (Dearden, 2012; Henson, 2003). It has been influenced by, and built upon, a broad range of theories from different disciplines. The relationships between these theories and the development of contemporary understandings of CCE are not, however straightforward, and as yet little literature exists which explores these theoretical foundations.

Key theorists of child-centred education

The philosophy of CCE has been influenced by a range of key theorists. According to Dearden (2012), Bennet et al. (1997 cited in Wood, 2007), Altinyelken (2011), Attard et al., (2010), and Darling (1994),
some of the classical exponents of CCE included Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky. This section will briefly discuss these theorists and their ideas.

John Locke (1632-1704) introduced the concept of *tabula rasa* or blank slate, proposing that at birth the mind is a blank slate, and the only way to fill it is through having experiences, feeling these experiences, and reflecting on them (Locke, 1693). Locke's experience-based educational philosophy gave birth to a concept called experiential education (Garforth, 1964).

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of history's greatest contributors to a philosophy of learner-centred learning. In *Emile*, written in 1762, Rousseau declared that ‘Nature provides for the child’s growth in her own fashion, and this should never be thwarted’ (p. 187). In this way, Rousseau introduced to educational thought a completely new emphasis, presenting ideas that were clearly learner-centred, such as arguing that children are naturally active, both physically and mentally; and that learner-centred education requires a focus on individual differences and levels of learning (Entwistle, 2012; Mtika & Gates, 2010).

Pestalozzi, Froebel, and John Dewey extended this approach to thinking about children and their education, developing and revising existing ideas and ensuring that the application of these new approaches to education was sound (Darling, 1994). Pestalozzi (1746-1827), for instance, transferred some of the central themes in Rousseau's account of learning and teaching into his own educational writing (Darling, 1994). Pestalozzi believed that the whole child should be educated (physically, mentally, and emotionally), and that children should be nourished like a plant while they learn by doing. Children, according to Pestalozzi, should learn through activities and they should be free to pursue their own interests and draw their own conclusions. They should not be anxious or put under stress, and their development should not be forced (Darling, 1994). Teachers, according to Pestalozzi, must respect children and base their discipline on love - the school should be like a good home and the teacher should be like a good parent (Darling, 1994; Henson, 2003).

Pestalozzi’s work, which was founded on the conception of education as development based on the nature of the child, advocated such ideas as nature walks, and the use of games and songs was much admired by Friedrich Froebel. As a result, Froebel used the philosophies of learner-centered, child-centered, and experience-based learning to develop the world's first kindergarten - a school for young children (Henson, 2003). Froebel viewed play as something important to the development of the child’s awareness, with an emphasis that play is not only a form of creative activity but also the means
through which a child grows increasingly aware of the world and his place in it (Froebel, 1885). Froebel’s view is consistent with Rousseau’s, namely that the best learning occurs when learners are manipulating objects and solving problems.

In the 20th century, Russian sociologist Lev Vygotsky, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, and American philosopher and educator John Dewey, shaped the existing learner-centered education into a program called constructivism (Henson, 2003).

Based on ideas related to children’s development, Vygotsky believed that human learning and development occurred as an outcome of the social process of constructing knowledge and skills from experiential activities (Tarnopolsky, 2012). As such, he highlighted the social aspect of learning, incorporating this into his theories of constructivism (Henson, 2003). His work encouraged teachers to have children work cooperatively in small groups to solve problems.

In the same vein, Piaget focused his attention on the learner as an individual. His work consisted of giving his students problems to solve - not written problems but problems that encouraged them to manipulate concrete objects. He watched the ways they manipulated the objects and saw that each learner made assumptions and drew right or wrong conclusions about the objects (Darling, 1994).

Consistent with Rousseau, Froebel, Vygotsky, and Piaget’s view that education should be experience-based, John Dewey developed the first pedagogical constructivist approach to teaching and learning, named ‘learning by doing’ (Henson, 2003; Tarnopolsky, 2012). Dewey's (1938) view of learner-centered education was that each child has both a psychological dimension and a social dimension. Education should be both problem-based and fun and founded on an understanding of how each child's capacities, interests, and habits can be directed to help the child succeed in the community.

In opposition to Rousseau, who wanted to protect children from society, Dewey (1897) believed that the only way a child would develop to its potential was in a social setting. While the child was seen by Rousseau as an individual interacting with the natural environment, Dewey shared Vygotsky’s view that the child learns through interacting within a social environment, including either an informal one such as in a family or, in the case of school, with teachers and peers. Dewey (1938) believed that involving students in “life experiences” motivates their learning and connects them to the world outside the classroom.
Dewey’s distinctive contribution was his emphasis on shared activity in which he stressed the importance of children interacting with each other through learning activities to ensure fruitful growth. As such, Dewey’s work promoted the idea that the school should be a microcosm of its community and that education is living, not just a preparation for life (Henson, 2003).

Despite differences amongst these theorists, Dearden (2012) asserts that there are also many common broad themes and principles which characterise their work and gesture to the idea of CCE. These will be discussed in section 2.1.4.

**CCE and its connection to constructivist theory**

In the educational context, ideas and concepts of constructivism inform understandings of student-centered learning. Much research related to CCE notes that learner-centredness is founded on social constructivist epistemology (de la Sablonniere, Taylor, & Sadykova, 2009; Gijbels, Coertjens, Vanthournout, Struyf, & Petegem, 2009; Hannafin, Hill, & Land, 1997; Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012; Milbrandt, Felts, Richards, & Abghari, 2004; O’Neill, Moore, & McMullin, 2005; Schweisfurth, 2013a; Tabulawa, 2003). This literature emphasises the important contribution made by theorists such as Dewey (1938), Bruner (1966), Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), which connects learner-centred education (LCE) to constructivist theory. Hannafin et al., (1997, p. 94) notes that:

> Student centred approaches…are rooted in constructivist epistemology: knowledge and context are inextricably connected, meaning is uniquely determined by individuals and is experiential in nature, and the solving of authentic problems provides evidence of understanding.

The literature related to constructivist theory is very broad in nature, but at the heart of the constructivist approach to education is the understanding that students take control of their own learning. Constructivist theory states that learning is an active process of creating meaning from different experiences and knowledge grows as a direct result of individual construction. Based on past experiences and cultural factors influencing a situation, each person interprets and constructs knowledge in different ways (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Therefore, children will learn best when they are able to make sense of something on their own with the teacher as a guide to help them along the way (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

According to constructivist learning theory, children take control of their own learning. They are encouraged to take the initiative, to construct knowledge related to their personal interests, to estimate their own level, and to plan and adjust their own learning processes accordingly (Kohn, 1993;
Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005). This implies that they are given the chance to become actively involved in deciding what kind of learning activities they want to have (Arends, Winitzky, & Tannenbaum, 2001). Children are able to discuss themes within prescribed curriculum. The concept of children taking control of their own learning therefore implies that they are empowered and encouraged to do this (Glasersfeld, 1989) and hence become more self-directed learners (Kohn, 1993). Students are therefore described as active learners, social learners and creative learners (Phillips, 1995, cited in Milbrandt et al., 2004). Accordingly, the constructivist view of learning places emphasis on activity, discovery and independent learning (Carlile & Jordan, 2005). This is consistent with Piagetian theory:

Constructivism is a basic principle - one that holds that individuals of whatever age acquire understandings of the world about them primarily through an analysis of their own actions upon the world, not by passive ‘growth’, or by imitation or memorisation, although these factors make contributions (Piaget, 1970b, cited in Ammon & Allen, 1998, p.413).

Thus, for learning to be effective, instead of knowledge being transferred from an expert or authority, learners themselves must actively construct and reconstruct knowledge based on their previously constructed and interpreted knowledge, experience and ideas (Attard et al., 2010; Bodner, 1986; de la Sablonniere et al., 2009; Lunenburg, 2003; Marshall, 1998b; Milbrandt et al., 2004; Yilmaz, 2008). Further, Resnick (1989, cited in Mayer, 1998, p. 359) states that “learning occurs not by recording information but by interpreting it”. This echoes Piaget’s (1970) viewpoint that, “people are not recorders of information, but builders of knowledge structures”.

Piaget (1970) also proposes that the ways children make sense of their world are different from adults and that authentic learning occurs when children try to manipulate their environment. Similarly, children are likely to understand the importance of the learning process when they have a right to voice their views and make choices (Daniel & Bizar, 1998, cited in Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Milbrandt et al., 2004). In such a learning environment, they have the responsibility to adapt the learning process to their own unique learning style (Burbules & Linn, 1991, cited in de la Sablonniere et al., 2009). They are encouraged to reflect on their own learning, share their insights with their peers, and apply new learning to real-life, authentic experiences (McCombs & Miller, 2007). Children take responsibility for their learning in an atmosphere where teachers appreciate student thinking, initiate lessons that promote cooperative learning, organise learning around primary concepts (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Wood, 2007). When knowledge is recognised to be both socially constructed and a social endeavour, the learner’s needs are determined by the collective needs of the particular society at a particular time (Harmelen, 1998).
Social constructivism also holds that “knowledge is a product of social processes and not solely an individual construction” (William, 1999, p.205, cited in Tabulawa, 2003). In this manner, schools are viewed as just one of the social settings where knowledge is built (Harmelen, 1998). Learning is continuously and markedly shaped by the social context in which it occurs (Rogoff, 1990, cited in Alexander & Murphy, 1998; Marshall, 1998b). According to Biggs (1989), such social interactions involve children in discussing, debating, investigating, and exploring multiple viewpoints, which bring about opportunities for active learning and connect them to the real world beyond the classroom.

Constructivism holds that learning is deeper and more meaningful when active and specific learning opportunities are provided (as opposed to simply observation) so that children have a chance to interact with problems relevant to their own goals and discuss these with others (Marshall, 1998a; Mayer, 1998). In addition, when children have an opportunity to interact with the tools and symbol systems of their cultures, and with more (or differently) knowledgeable others, their personal characteristics will develop. Specifically, these interactions “help children to develop a repertoire of metacognitive capabilities – knowing how to learn, knowing that they know, and being able to articulate their knowledge to others” (Wood, 2007, p.129).

CCE, therefore, has been significantly influenced by constructivist theory, which places emphasis on the role of children in structuring and constructing their own knowledge.

**CCE and Childhood Studies**

Ideas of child-centredness are built, in part, on theories concerning childhood development (Chung & Walsh, 2000). In educational policies, children are understood as learners with a main focus on their educational outcomes (Morrow, 2010) and education is believed to be necessary for children’s development (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2008). Childhood studies theory, however, challenges us to examine the implications of these constructions and diversifies understandings of children and young people by drawing on different disciplinary interests. Such ideas have wider implications in terms of the ideas and philosophies underpinning child-centred education.

Conceptions of childhood have changed over the centuries and the images attributed to children shift according to social influences (Johnny, 2006). James & Prout (1997) state that the twentieth century was the century of the child and that children need to be placed as a top priority in social agendas. Indeed, over the past 25 years there has been much change in Western understandings of children’s status and capacity to participate in social and political life.
The publication “Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood” by Allison James and Alan Prout provided a catalyst in the UK for a new sociology of childhood (Ellis, 2010; Mills, 1999; Morrow, 2010). This new approach to understanding children and childhood represents an interdisciplinary approach with a number of key principles, namely:

- childhood is understood as a social construction;
- childhood is a variable of social analysis;
- children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concern of adults; and
- children are, and must be seen as, active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live - they are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8).

Together with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and in particular Articles 4 and 12 which focus on children’s rights, the Childhood Studies theorists have contributed to a shift in thinking about children and childhood, acknowledging that children are persons in their own right and worthy of recognition, respect and voice (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Inherent in this has been an explicit focus on children’s capabilities to actively contribute to, and shape, their everyday lives (James & Prout, 1997). As an interdisciplinary approach, Childhood Studies represents a drawing together of diverse theories and ideas from areas of study such as “anthropology, art, computing, education, history, literature, medicine, philosophy, physiology, psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, sociology, statistics or theology” (Mills, 1999, p.8).

Childhood studies has been influential in shaping our understanding of children, not least because it challenges the view that children are passive recipients of childhood experiences since “children’s agency can help them in coping with their daily lives” (Phelps & Graham, 2010, p.7). Mills (1999) also notes that “children can and do act as perfectly competent social beings in contexts which are familiar and acceptable to them” (p.21). For Mayall (2002, cited in James, 2009), to study children as social actors is to see them as capable of actively constructing their own childhood and lives. In this way, the notion of children’s agency is emphasized, with the idea that children experience their childhood differently in terms of historical periods and culture (Morrow, 2010).

Fleer, Hedegaard and Tudge (2009) draw on Childhood Studies theory in drawing attention to the way globalized discourses constitute instruments (which they define as practices of policy and
marketization) which disrupt, re-shape or contextualise family practices. They critique notions of universalisation and globalization of childhoods and argue that culture is so heavily implicated in children’s development that one has to take account of local considerations about what should be viewed as optimal in children’s development. Such a view cautions about un-problematically applying economics or educational ideas from one society to another or from a dominant group within a society to others that have been marginalised, whether this be through active colonization or by creating conditions under which local or marginalised groups come to value the “modern” world.

Childhood Studies, therefore, challenges notions of a single universal phenomenon of childhood and calls for the recognition of diverse childhoods and an acknowledgement that childhood is socially constructed and must be contextually understood (Jenks, 2009; Morrow, 2010). Experiences of childhood are hence different, according to class, gender, ethnicity, religious and cultural background. “Children, as active individuals, are thus constrained by various institutions, structures and cultures in which they find themselves - whether schools, families, or physical geographies. These, in turn, shape their experiences of childhood” (Morrow, 2010, p.9).

The idea that children are social actors, actively engaged in the construction of their own lives, the lives of their families, communities and broader societies is consistent with the notion of child-centred education, which reinforces understandings that children are active participants in constructing knowledge (Morrow, 2010, p.23). Childhood Studies acknowledges that “children do not exist in a vacuum, or merely within families, but in social worlds that are affected by broader social processes” (James, Jenk & Prout, 1998 cited in Morrow, 2010, p.14). This has implications in terms of child-centred education. Childhood Studies would suggest the need to respect the dignity and self-worth of all children and attempt to understand their lives from their own viewpoints, without judgement (Morrow, 2010), values which are also underlying elements in child-centred education (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

Promoting children’s participation positions children as active in constructing their own lives. From such a perspective, schooling is not just about accumulating knowledge but is also about developing a sense of belonging, acquiring new skills and experiences, meeting new people and friends and building a sense of their own agency (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Children’s participation, therefore, has significant implication for their wellbeing (Graham, 2004). When children are understood as participants, this implies they have the agency, capacity, voice and status to take part in social, cultural and political life. From a cultural-historical perspective, children’s development is contingent upon
their participation in social practices. Education is one such social practice, thereby playing a vital role in children’s development (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2008) and has considerable potential to support their active participation and agency. As expressed by Smith and Bjerke (2009, p.18 cited in Phelps & Graham, 2010), for children to “learn to speak up and voice their opinions, it is important for adults to create participatory spaces and to provide support and guidance in partnership with children, in order to help them to formulate their views”.

The literature thus illustrates that CCE has a strong theoretical foundation that can be traced back to the work of Rousseau, Frobel, Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky; and is closely associated with the ideas of constructivism arising from these early educational theorists’ work. Most recently CCE draws theoretical strength from Childhood Studies theory, which places an even greater emphasis on the child as the centre of educational endeavours.

2.1.4 Elements of child-centred education

While the literature does not provide any single, clear or agreed-upon definition of child-centred education, there are a number of key elements which are consistently referred to when CCE is discussed. This section will discuss elements that constitute child-centred education from a Western perspective. Such factors include a focus on the ‘whole child’, recognition of existing knowledge and experience, authentic leaning, independence, autonomy and choice, relationships, interdependence and community and the role of the teacher.

**Focus on the ‘whole child’**

Doddington and Hilton (2007) state that child-centred education places a focus on the ‘whole child’, meaning that the child, conceived as a person in his/her own right, develops physicality, cognition and emotions. This is consistent with the idea that learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account (Lambert & McCombs, 1998).

In relation to cognitive development, Doddington and Hilton (2007) state that an individual becomes a person, implying a more complete or whole person, when he/she can think for himself/herself. This implies that the child is able to make decisions and choices and to engage in critical thinking. In this way, child centred education places an emphasis on children becoming independent thinkers. Doddington and Hilton (2007) also state that without the body and feelings, the mind does not function
and that the aim of education is to educate “a child not just a mind, not just to think in certain ways but also to act in particular ways” (p.61). All these aspects are considered to interact with one another (Welton, 1999). In terms of education, then, it is “not only the extent and quality of children’s concrete experiences” that are counted “but the attitudes and dispositions that can be developed so that children can make the fullest use and sense from those experiences” (Welton, 1999 cited in Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Schools taking a whole child approach would ensure that the educational experiences that children gain reflect the richness and primacy of sense, perception and embodied mind (Doddington & Hilton, 2007) and these are viewed as fundamental in the process of learning.

**Recognition of existing knowledge and experiences of the child**

Learning in a child-centred environment emphasises that teachers should recognise and value each individual’s existing knowledge and experience (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009; Doddington & Hilton, 2007) from which new knowledge or understanding can be built up (Wang, Wang, Tai, & Chen, 2010). As discussed in section 2.1.3, constructivism holds that learning happens when individuals construct their own meaning. Consistent with Vygotsky’s educational theories, each individual comes to the learning situation with prior experiences and prior knowledge (Barnes, 1999; Gillespie, 2002; Schrenko, 1996) and then he/she builds up knowledge through his/her personal experiences (Vygotsky, 1996 cited in Schrenko, 1996). Therefore, experience is considered as the source of learners’ prior knowledge and prior knowledge is viewed as a bridge which helps learners to construct meaning and retain new knowledge (Schrenko, 1996). As such, prior knowledge and experience impacts on the capacity of the child (Harmelen, 1998). Bruner (1996, cited in Harmelen, 1998, p.7) claims that “we can teach anything to anyone when we are able to access and take into account their prior knowledge and experience” and learning is meaningful when learners can create meaning by linking new knowledge to what they already know (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009; Good & Brophy, 1997). Knowledge is authentically gained both in the classroom and beyond, so there is a need for students to build structures of recognition that accommodate and assimilate fragmented knowledge into previous acquired understanding (Efland, 2002). If new knowledge does not become integrated with their existing knowledge and understanding, learning will not occur because the new knowledge learners have acquired is fragmented and isolated.

From such a perspective, teachers thereby seek to understand students’ existing conceptions and design instruction that changes those conceptions in a way to achieve deep learning rather than surface learning (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009; Weimer, 2002). This requires teachers not only to focus on
children’s prior experiences but also to relate to how children encounter ideas, things and other people through their experience (Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Shore, 2008).

For child-centred educationalists, both rich and real experiences become essential for children, not only in the present but also in the future (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). In effect, they are the outcome of a learning process where a child’s interests and experiences are taken into account. These factors encourage the child to engage in learning experiences which he/she is interested in exploring. Such approaches can also enhance authenticity in learning, as discussed in the following section.

**Authenticity in learning activities**

A child-centred approach requires teaching and learning to be as authentic as possible (Schrenko, 1996). One of the premises of learner-centred models is that:

> Learning is a constructive process that occurs best when what is being acquired is relevant and meaningful to the learner and when the learner is actively engaged in creating his or her own knowledge and understanding by connecting what is being learned with existing knowledge and experience (Lambert & McCombs, 1998, p.10).

This echoes Piaget’s (1970) notion that authentic learning occurs when children try to manipulate their environment and that children may take responsibility for their learning in an atmosphere when teachers appreciate student thinking, initiate lessons that promote cooperative learning, organise learning around primary concepts. Authentic learning, therefore, is an approach that supports students to explore, discuss, and meaningfully construct concepts and build relationships in contexts that involve real-world problems and projects relevant to learners (Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999).

Given that CCE is based on constructivist and social constructivist theories of learning and development, this approach places emphasis on the importance of providing an appropriate fit between children’s ability and backgrounds and learning tasks as well as authentic connections to their daily lives (Daniels & Perry, 2003).

Constructivist teaching begins with problems that are authentic and relevant to students. When coming up with the solutions of the problems, students use their prior knowledge to build up new knowledge with the help of the teacher’s guidance and students’ collaboration (Yuen & Hau, 2006). Therefore, when learning and context do not integrate, knowledge that learners acquire is viewed as the final product of education rather than a tool for them to solve problems (Herrington & Oliver, 2000).
Herrington and Oliver (2000) outline a number of principles of authentic learning experiences as following:

- provide authentic contexts that reflect the way the knowledge will be used in real life;
- provide opportunities for exploration; they will be complex and ill defined, as they occur in real life;
- provide access to expert performances and the modelling of processes;
- provide multiple roles and perspectives;
- support collaborative construction of knowledge;
- promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed;
- promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit;
- provide coaching by the teacher at critical times, and scaffolding and fading of teacher support, and
- provide for authentic, integrated assessment of learning within the tasks.

(Herrington & Oliver, 2000, p.26)

These authentic learning principles can be viewed as a framework to encourage teachers to bring the outside world into the classroom. The role of teachers, according to this framework, is to provide knowledge, modelling, coaching and scaffolding through guided, whole class and independent activities. Children’s understandings are developed as they combine new experiences with prior knowledge. This will empower them to transfer their knowledge and skills learned at school into their everyday lives outside of school, thus making learning much more valuable and relevant to them.

Herrington and Oliver’s principles highlight the potential for children to explore problems from different perspectives. When children gather a variety of viewpoints, it promotes a greater understanding of problems within their contexts and allows them to explore solutions in specific settings and for specific purposes. Skills and strategies are then more likely to be developed so that children are able to engage with the real-world demands of their individual community.

Learning experiences that integrate these principles can be viewed as authentic when they aim to demonstrate the knowledge and skill in a real context and allow learners to make connections between school and the demands of their broader communities (Mantei & Kervin, 2009). These authors also state that authentic learning principles help to establish classroom experiences through which deep and flexible knowledge can be acquired and applied to suit a range of community practices.
Some research has shown that, in child-centred classrooms where teachers use practices that are in line with learner-centred principles, young children may feel more confident in their academic abilities, less anxious, develop pro-social skills develop highly; they feel like school more, and receive better grades than those in non-child-centred settings (McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, 2008). Similarly, in a child-centred learning environment, children’s emotional states, needs, beliefs, interests, capacities and goals are considered to be important factors within education as well as life (Alexander & Murphy, 1998; Doddington & Hilton, 2007; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Given that children come to school with a variety of learning styles, cultural and language backgrounds and have a wide range of emotional states, interests, preferences, belief, learning strengths and needs (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993; McCombs & Barton, 1998) teachers should acknowledge these individual differences in children, value the contributing factors and respond sensitively to children. In other words, teachers need to consider the range of children’s learning styles, social interactions and personalities in order to best support and nurture children.

Emotions are infused in classroom life, playing central roles in social interactions (both peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student), cognitive processing, and student engagement (Meyer & Turner, 2002; Pekrun, 2014). In a classroom atmosphere with warm, respectful, and emotionally supportive relationships, when the needs for relatedness, belief, capability, and autonomy are met, children may perform better academically because they are more emotionally engaged in the learning process (Patrick & Ryan, 2007; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Wentzel, 1998). Further, children are keen on expressing these desires, and both their interest in classroom learning and how positively they come to view their abilities as learners have been shown to be related to their perceptions of how much their teacher cares for and validates them as individuals (Daniels & Perry, 2003).

Teachers should thus use their knowledge of how children develop to structure learning experiences that facilitate children’s learning and meet diverse learning needs with differentiated instruction (Ryan, 2005). Authentic instruction cannot take place unless teachers attend to the social and emotional aspects of learning (Brackett et al., 2009; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Teachers, therefore, should build close relationship with children, taking every opportunity to have individual conversations with them as well as the group as a whole, listening attentively to what they want to express, sharing feelings and perspectives with them and/or spending time just watching children interact with others and engage with materials (Pekrun, 2014).
At the same time, it is also important to talk informally to the child’s family, from which the teacher will gain further insights about the child (Pekrun, 2014). In this way, teachers’ interactions and behaviors help to enhance students’ potential, to foster their self-esteem, to value their opinions, and to respect them.

By adapting and adjusting the curricula, designing age-appropriate learning materials and activities and/or providing tasks related to students’ everyday life learning opportunities are more likely to suit the diverse range of needs found among children in any class (Bansberg, 2003; Goetz, Freanzel, Pekrun, Hall, & Lüdtke, 2007; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). In this way, teachers may respond to children emotional states, needs and beliefs, supporting them to build their capacities and achieve their goals.

When teachers acknowledge deeper concerns of children, understanding that learning is a process of personally structuring meaning, and they allow the children to focus on what they themselves feel is significant and relevant to their current view of the world, children are more likely to have a positive attitude toward school and take responsibility for their own learning (Marshall, 1998b; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Schrenko, 1996). In this way, teachers who embody CCE teaching and learning principles will arguably provide a more authentic learning environment for children.

When learners are able to connect their learning with experience, their understandings and quality of thought are deeper (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). As such, learning is richer when children care about what they eventually know and understand. Ramsden (1998, cited in Weimer, 2002, p.271) notes that “learning should be seen as a qualitative change in a person’s way of feeling, experiencing, understanding, conceptualizing something in the real world - rather than as a quantitative change in the amount of knowledge someone possesses”.

Therefore, from a child-centred perspective, the educational setting should reflect a learning environment that fosters and promotes relevance. Relevance is a key element to intrinsically motivate children’s learning (Kember, Ho, & Hong, 2008). It provides a learning context within which children can construct their own understanding. Establishing both personal and real-world relevance involves providing children with intentional and explicit opportunities to discuss ideas about each topic covered, exploring why this topic is worth learning, how it operates in the real world, why it makes sense, and how it connects and assimilates to their previously held assumptions and beliefs (Weiman, 2007). In other words, teachers should discuss with children how theory can be applied in practice,
establishing relevance to local cases, relating material to everyday application, and/or finding applications for the ideas in relation to current newsworthy issues (Kember et al., 2008). By providing children with such relevant learning opportunities, teachers tap into each student’s cognitive need to make sense of the world. It is not sufficient, however, to simply provide suitable examples from real-world situations to illustrate the concept or issue being taught (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). Children need to perceive and experience how the knowledge they acquire becomes powerful as well as informative, since this is what is generally best understood and remembered (Alexander & Murphy, 1998). It is this kind of learning environment that enables children to be active in discovering and exploring the personal significance of what they learn.

**Independence, autonomy and choice**

A child-centred approach to education also focuses on a child’s independence, autonomy and making a choice which implies a developmental sense of self (Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Weimer, 2002). In contrast to traditional didactic pedagogy, a child-centred approach emphasises the child’s autonomy and ability to construct knowledge (Tzuo, Yang & Wrigh, 2011). When a child is supported to make a choice or a decision about what to learn and how to learn, he/she experiences a sense of independence. This fosters the ability to engage in critical thinking and use reasoning. “Critical thinking” is viewed as being key to personhood (Bailin and Seigel, 2003, cited in Doddington & Hilton, 2007) since it aims at creating autonomous persons.

According to Heidegger (1962, cited in Doddington & Hilton, 2007), children’s learning will make sense when an education helps them to think critically about the world and provides them with access to knowledge of how the world is constituted. Child-centred education encourages children to become independent thinkers and more autonomous when they are given opportunities to make choices and take the initiative concerning their lives (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Choice is one of the central principles behind the notion of child-centredness (Burman, 1994). Children’s choice implies that they have a chance to make decisions about their learning. The way a child learns how to make decisions is by making decisions, not by following directions. If learning is a matter of following directions, students will not develop the confidence and skills to make decisions and choices in their lives.

Children’s capacity for choice is compromised by adult-created learning and development objectives aimed to encourage children to pursue a particular activity for the sake of their developmental progress (Jordan, Cailile, & Stack, 2008). Providing them with choice enables them to become actively involved in deciding what kind of people they want to be and what kind of classroom or school they
want to have. When teachers maximize children’s experiences with choice and negotiation, children can obtain skills of decision making and the possibility to use them (D'Amico, 1980).

Teachers, therefore, have to listen to the voices of children and empower them to express their views and make sense of their experiences. Schooling, ideally, is about working collaboratively with children through a partnership. Ideas for learning activities can be derived from a combination of teacher observations of an individual child’s development and learning needs, while also allowing children to initiate their own learning experiences (Fleer, 1995).

While these concepts are not new, and were discussed by D’Amico in the 1980s, such ideas about students exercising choice in educational contexts are challenging to traditional ways of teaching in Vietnamese society. In many traditional Asian contexts, including Vietnam, the Confucian legacy has been deeply rooted in the nation’s guiding philosophy, influencing governmental structure, the educational system, and individual life. In such societal contexts, hierarchical human relationships are based on obedience and teachers exercise strong leadership and control rather than children being encouraged to make choices or decisions.

In addition, when children are afforded a right to make a choice or take the lead in their learning, this gives them more power (Brenda, 2006, cited in Emenyeonu, 2012) and they learn to be responsible for their learning (Lambert & McCombs, 1998; Weimer, 2002). Zimmerman (1990 cited in Weimer, 2002 p.103) describes the attributes of such learners as follows:

...they approach educational tasks with confidence, diligence, and resourcefulness... Self-regulated learners are aware when they know a fact or possess a skill and when they do not... Self-regulated students proactively seek out information when needed and take steps to master it. When they encounter obstacles such as poor study conditions, confusing teachers, or abstruse text books, they find a way to succeed.

Therefore, child-centred approaches to education create and maintain conditions which move students toward autonomy (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). In other words, teachers are required to establish an environment that creates the conditions for students to develop into responsible and autonomous learners (Weimer, 2002).

**Relationships, interdependence and community**

Social interactions, interpersonal relations and communication with others impact on student learning (Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Lambert & McCombs, 1998). This implies that learning happens in
social interactions in which students discuss, debate, investigate, and explore multiple viewpoints and connect to the real world beyond the classroom (Biggs, 1989; Chung & Walsh, 2000).

As such, learning is meaningful when children are offered an environment with positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, comfort and order, and in which they feel appreciated, acknowledged, respected and validated (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). Schools, then, should be seen as communities (Doddington & Hilton, 2007) or social institutions (Alexander & Murphy, 1998) for learning and enquiry, where children develop shared ways of living through learning experience. Learning or enquiry should be seen as a “way of living” throughout a child’s life and this would be able to extend beyond the school and into later life (Doddington & Hilton, 2007).

CCE necessitates a change in power relations between teachers and students (Altinyelken, 2011), including an interdependence between teachers and learners and mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship (Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Lea et al., 2003). This implies that learners and teachers engage in open, natural relationships and that teachers are not viewed as “experts” (Darling, 1994, cited in de la Sablonniere et al., 2009). On the issue of power relationships, Doddington & Hilton (2007) state that the relationship between teachers and learners has to be both professional and personal and that relations need to be democratic and responsive. In such a “democratic dialogue between kindly teacher and autonomous learner” a relationship of mutual respect, reason and justice would be built up (Doddington & Hilton, 2007).

Heidegger (1978, cited in Doddington & Hilton, 2007) also points out that, if education is to respect and enhance a child’s awareness of their personal values, interests and goals, teachers will need to nurture relationships where children feel safe to express and explore personal directives with others. Creating spaces where children are able to express and explore new things thus aims at supporting children to develop understandings in collaboration with others and, through frequent interaction with others, helps them become confident that they can know and understand the world (Doddington & Hilton, 2007).

2.1.5 Child-centred education in practice

Thus far this literature review has considered both historical and contemporary understandings of CCE and the theories that underpin and inform this approach. In practice, CCE has a number of important implications for classroom teachers and teacher educators. These include implications for the role of
teachers (who), for the curriculum content that is taught (what), and for the methods teachers use (how). These three issues will be considered in turn.

**Role of a teacher**

In a learner-centred environment, the role of a teacher changes, particularly regarding traditionally held notions of power and authority. As Black (1993, p.142, cited in Weimer, 2002) explains: “My role… is as a guide and resource to the students while they work to master the material in their text. I help by directing their work with the text, by helping them to learn how to solve problems, and by helping them develop their own understanding of the concepts.”

Much literature on CCE also states that the role of the teacher should be a supporter (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). In this manner, the teacher is viewed as a facilitator who helps students develop their individual thinking and problem-solving potential (Black, 1993, cited in de la Sablonniere et al., 2009; Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012; Schrenko, 1996; Weimer, 2002). In such a learning environment, the teacher provides students with learning activities and presents challenges to ensure that children operate within their zone of proximal development (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009). The teacher also gives assistance that will encourage student’s cognitive construction. As such, teachers model behaviour – for example they might involve students in meaningful discussions about subject matter in small groups (Lunenburg, 2003). These approaches contribute to the capacity of students to retain knowledge over time (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009). Simultaneously, teachers need to show students how to become responsible for their learning by giving them opportunities to frame questions effectively on their own, to see how problems can be represented, and to determine how to gather information relevant to these problems (Burbules & Linn, 1991, cited in de la Sablonniere et al., 2009).

Rogers (1951) elaborates that the three qualities of the teacher in a learner-centred approach are congruence, empathy and respect. This means that the teacher has to trust and show respect towards his or her students and students will trust and show respect in return. In order to do this, the teacher becomes a participant who is willing to listen to students and acknowledge their voice, sharing their views with the group and also showing openness to learn from students, thus building mutual relationships and respect in the classroom environment (Doddington & Hilton, 2007; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Students are then motivated to take part in discussions, express their opinions and understandings with their peers and the teacher. Rogers (1951, p.392) notes:
If teachers accept students as they are, allow them to express their feelings and attitudes freely without condemnation or judgment, plan learning activities with them rather than for them, create a classroom atmosphere relatively free from emotional strains and tensions, consequences follow which are different when these conditions do not exist.

Weimer (2002) states that teachers should balance the power-dynamic in their classroom so that students feel comfortable and confident in participating in learning activities. Similarly, Massouleh and Jooneghani (2012) assert that it is necessary to share the power in the class between the teacher and students so that students can get actively involved in the process of learning. This will impact on student motivation and positive learning outcomes. With less didactic teaching, learners will more likely work cooperatively and flexibly with each other.

**Methods/pedagogy**

In a child-centred approach, learners are encouraged to engage actively in the learning process. When teachers can distinguish between teaching as “a process of facilitation and guidance or a process of directing and controlling” (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p.27) they will provide learning opportunities and activities in which students learn by discovering knowledge and solving problems (Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Mantei & Kervin, 2009; Weimer, 2002; Wood, 2007). The teacher, should therefore, create and maintain a meaningful learning environment (Putnam & Burke, 1992 cited in Evertson & Neal, 2006; Weimer, 2002).

Consistent with a child centred approach, teachers would be aware of, and committed to, “the ideas and values that inform why a teacher should teach something and why they should then choose to teach in a particular way, rather than simply the what they should teach or the how”(Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Therefore, it might be beneficial for teachers and students if the teachers know about students’ background and base their teaching approach on students’ individual differences, learning needs, beliefs, and the like to construct a context that maximises learning opportunities.

According to Schrenko (1996), when teachers are able to identify what children need to know and how they learn best, they are better positioned to set instructional goals and design activities to reach these goals. Weimer (2002) states that, firstly, learning activities and assignments should be designed and built in a process which is based on prior learning experiences. Secondly, activities and assignments are best when they motivate student involvement and participation. Thirdly, learning activities and assignments must be relevant and meaningful so that students are really engaged. Finally, content knowledge and learning skills and awareness need to be taken into account when designing learning activities and assignments.
Instead of providing a learning atmosphere involving more direct and didactic methods, teachers use inductive teaching methods including discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning and project-based learning to challenge students’ thinking ability (Prince & Felder, 2007). Schrenko (1996) discusses effective instructional strategies such as brain-compatible learning strategies, graphic organisers, Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, co-operative learning, thematic instruction, and whole language.

The educational value of play is often discussed as a component of child-centred education, and it is argued that children may reflect and deepen their understandings through playful and hand-on activities. Learning activities in pairs or groups (discussion, doing experiments or observing) (Schrenko, 1996; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003) may enable students to feel safe and get engaged in investigating things for themselves and obtaining new knowledge from prior experience. Consistent with Piagetian and Vygotskian theory, “cooperative learning can produce powerful social and academic results” (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p.265) because each student comes to class with a variety of experiences and when they have a chance to work together, they are more motivated to share their experiences in class, which deepens their understandings and broadens their knowledge (Lambert & McCombs, 1998; Schrenko, 1996). At the same time, through discussions in groups, students can learn to better understand their peers, develop strong relationships and build respect for each other (Gadamer, 1979, cited in Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Furthermore, by working collaboratively, they can support each other, develop positive interdependence and achieve goals more easily. Finally, collaborative learning tends to diminish the possibility of a competitive atmosphere (Schrenko, 1996). Through a collaborative learning environment, students can learn and practice interpersonal and life skills which are a necessary and fundamental requirement in contemporary society (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 1991).

Marshall (1998a, p. 468) lists a number of criteria considered as contributing to effective instruction, namely that it:

• involves students in their own learning, with opportunities for teacher and peer interactions that engage students’ natural curiosity and opportunities for personal reflection and self-study;
• encourages students to link prior knowledge with new information by providing multiple ways of presenting information (e.g., auditory, visual, kinaesthetic);
• provides stimulating, guiding questions to help students and groups of students rethink their understandings, and come closer to more powerful concepts and ways of thinking;
• includes constructive and informative feedback regarding the learners’ instructional approach and products, as well as sufficient opportunities to practice and apply new knowledge and skills to developmentally appropriate levels of mastery;
• offers opportunities for acquiring and practicing various learning strategies in different content domains to help students develop and effectively use their minds while learning;
• encourages problem solving, planning, complex decision making, debates, group discussions, and other strategies that enhance the development of higher-order thinking and use of metacognitive strategies;
• helps students understand and respect individual difference by learning principles of thinking and psychological functioning and how these operate in building attitudes and belief systems about others;
• maintains fair, consistent, and caring policies that respect the individual student by focusing on individual mastery and cooperative teamwork rather than competitive performance goals;
• provides opportunities for learners to construct their own knowledge and shared understandings through group work and dialogue with others; and
• ensures that all students have experience with (a) teachers interested in their area of instruction, (b) teachers who respect and value them as individuals, (c) positive role modelling and mentoring, (d) constructive and regular student evaluations, (e) optimistic teacher expectations, and (f) use of questioning skills to actively involve them in the learning process.

These criteria might therefore, be considered as comprising CCE and may contribute to optimum levels of learning and engagement. This can help teachers to design meaningful learning activities and provide a safe learning environment. Stimulated by positive learning conditions, learners are more likely to participate in that process and accumulate their own knowledge effectively.

Curriculum/content

An early definition of CCE can be found in the 1931 UK-based Hadow Report, the report made by the Hadow Committee in which it took consideration of the distinctive features of education in primary schools in the UK at that time. This report defines CCE as:

...the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored. Its aim should be to develop in a child the fundamental human powers and to awaken him to the fundamental interests of civilized life so far as these powers and interests lie within the compass of childhood, to encourage him to attain gradually to that control and orderly management of his energies, impulses and emotions, which is the essence of moral and intellectual discipline, to help him to discover the idea of duty and, to ensue it, and to open out his imagination and
his sympathies in such a way that he may be prepared to understand and to follow in late years the highest examples of excellence in life and conduct.


Curriculum content is therefore a very powerful influence on student achievement (Westwood, 2006). According to Lambert and McCombs (1998), in order to facilitate students’ involvement in learning and meet basic needs, the curriculum should address individual differences in which their needs, experiences, capacities and perspectives should be focused on first. Wood (2007) also notes that curriculum content should focus on four domains of development- physical, intellectual, social and emotional and that the curriculum should be based on experience and discovery (Harmelen, 1998).

Marshall (1998a, p.468) believes that effective curricula:

• attends to affect and mood as well as cognition and thinking in all learning activities and experiences, thereby engaging the learner;
• includes assessments from students, peers, and teachers to check for student understanding of the subject matter, including implication and application of knowledge;
• has an affective and cognitive richness that helps students generate positive thoughts and feelings of excitement, interest, and stimulation;
• helps students engage in higher-order thinking and practice metacognitive strategies, including reflective self-awareness and goal setting;
• helps students to be more aware of their own psychological functioning and how it relates to their own learning;
• includes authentic tasks (relevant to the real world) and assessment that help students integrate information and performance across subject matter disciplines, while allowing students to choose levels of difficulty for challenge or novelty;
• is developmentally appropriate to the unique intellectually emotional, physical and social characteristics of the individual;
• incorporates meaningful materials and activities relevant to different cultural groups;
• helps students increase awareness and understanding of how thought process operate to produce separate, self-confirming realities so that they can better understand different individuals, as well as different social, cultural, and religious groups;
• encourages students to see positive qualities in all groups of learners, regardless of race, sex, culture, language, physical ability, or other individual differences; and
• includes activities that promote empathy and understanding, respect for individual difference, and valuing of different perspectives, including materials from a multi-cultural perspective.

Marshall’s (1998a) list of curriculum criteria provides a framework through which teachers can introduce students to subject matter. This framework acknowledges that student identities, family and community knowledge, language and culture should be represented in teaching and learning materials. Authentic tasks in the curriculum help to develop connections to learners' lives, prior understandings, experiences out of school and real world contexts. Learning opportunities respond to students' identified strengths, needs and prior learning. The framework promotes teaching practices that are, therefore, culturally appropriate and responsive to learners’ needs, identities and wellbeing.

According to Marshall’s (1998a) curriculum framework, teaching and learning activities should involve learners in interacting with peers and/or teachers so that learners have a chance to discuss together, to assume different roles, to observe other perspectives, and thereby develop understanding of each other. Further, teachers and students have a chance to participate in ongoing, reciprocal communication with parents and family, enabling them to actively participate in, and contribute to, the student’s learning process.

Teachers working with the curriculum are required to have an insight into children’s development from which differentiation and the use of multiple teaching strategies engage students and ensure a balance of surface, deep and conceptual learning. Learners, therefore, have the opportunity to express themselves in an environment that is open and responsive to their needs. They have a chance to engage in cognitively challenging and purposeful learning opportunities that relate to real-life contexts, issues and experiences in every learning area.

In Marshall’s (1998b) effective curricula, assessment/evaluation plays a vital part in the teaching and learning process. It provides relevant and meaningful evidence to evaluate the learners’ achievements and progress and develop next steps. Assessment and evaluation of students’ learning should be a shared, ongoing process conducted by both teachers and students, with specific, descriptive and constructive feedback related to students’ learning progress.
These aspects of the curriculum are consistent with principles of CCE. As Darling (1994) states, if the school is to be made to fit the child rather than the other way round, the curriculum should be determined by the child’s needs and interests.

Analysing such criteria highlights the important role that appropriate curriculum plays in contributing to a child-centred environment and to experiencing deep and meaningful learning. However, while there is a body of literature concerning the role of child-centred curriculum in early childhood, it appears that very little has been specifically and/or explicitly discussed child-centred curriculum at a primary school level.

2.1.6 Issues with child-centred education in developing country contexts

Issues related to the implementation of CCE in developing countries have been the focus of discussion since the 1990s. This section explores why CCE has been introduced in many developing countries and identifies issues related to its implementation in developing regions of the world.

A recent literature review conducted by Schweisfurth (2011) revealed 72 relevant articles concerning learner-centred and child-centred education available on-line from 1981 to 2010 in the *International Journal of Educational Development* alone. Schweisfurth also notes that the topic of CCE has been a regular focus within other journals such as *Journal of Education and Practice, International Journal of Learning and Development, Comparative Education, Innovations in Education and Teaching International, Compare*, and *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*. These research articles focus on pedagogy, assessment, and/or the curriculum implications of shifting away from teacher-centred or didactic teacher-led approaches. This implies that learner-centred education has had an influence on both educational policy and practice in many developing country contexts (Schweisfurth, 2011). Schweisfurth notes that learner-centred pedagogical practices have been introduced into learning environments in developing countries from preschool to university level and is most frequently employed in teaching languages and science.

Learner-centred education in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and other developing countries has been supported by international aid organisations such as UN agencies, UNESCO and UNICEF. Often this assistance is provided under the rationale of enhancing participation in schooling in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) (Mtika & Gates, 2010; Serbessa, 2006). Schweisfurth (2011, p. 427) emphasises that some aid agencies view learner-centred pedagogy as “a policy panacea… to address a myriad of social problems in the developing world”.

41
According to Tabulawa (2003), aid agencies justify their promotion of such pedagogy in “benign and apolitical terms” (p.9), emphasising the efficacy of learner-centred pedagogy in cognitive/educational terms. In the same vein, child-centred ideas have been introduced in teacher-training programs and school reforms in many parts of Africa and Asia with the intention of creating more child-friendly, democratic learning environments (Sriprakash, 2010). As such, learner-centred education has been described as a “travelling policy, transferred from country to country in the developing world to hopefully solve such historically intractable issues as poverty and political authoritarianism, to increase levels of foreign investment or to extend democratisation” (Schweisfurth, 2011, p.427).

However, Tabulawa (2003) presents an alternative view of the widespread implementation of student-centred pedagogy in developing countries. International aid agencies and institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, he claims, have prescribed the introduction of CCE through educational projects in developing countries, showing their preference and support for Western liberal democracy. Nykiel-Herbert (2004) notes that student-centred pedagogy has spread in developing countries making a transition to democracy, perhaps because it promises intellectual liberation and emancipates from traditional approaches that are considered oppressive. Learner-centred pedagogy might also be considered as democratic in that it calls for a more equal relationship between teachers and students.

Nykiel-Herbert (2004) critiques the role that aid agencies play in promoting CCE as a one-size fits all pedagogical approach, which works effectively in any settings. Similarly, Tabulawa (2003, cited in Altinyelken, 2011) argues that “if pedagogical practices are converging around the world (at least in the official curriculum), it is because a certain pedagogical approach is in the interests of powerful states or international organisations” (p.140). Guthrie (1990, cited in Tabulawa, 2003) similarly suggests that student-centred pedagogy represents a process of westernisation with its political and economic meanings. Such discussions emphasise the interconnected nature of pedagogy, politics and ideology.

Whatever the reasons for the implementation of such approaches in developing country contexts, “the history of the implementation of LCE in different contexts is riddled with stories of failures grand and small” Schweisfurth (2011, p.425). The challenges in implementing CCE in developing countries are many and include: policy issues; cultural factors; professional capacity; teachers’ beliefs, and parents’ and students’ attitudes towards CCE. These issues are discusses in the following sections.
Policy issues

The introduction of CCE at a national policy level can hinder effective implementation of CCE in developing countries (Schweisfurth, 2013a). “Policy messages can be difficult for teachers to understand, can be contradictory, or the process may not be supported in different parts of the system (teacher education and inspection, for example, can work against LCE if they are not ‘on message’)” (Schweisfurth, 2013a, p.4). This supports the assertion of Carney (2008, p.53) that “This is precisely because the policy script of learner-centredness is vague and loosely articulated”. A Malawi study of the use of learner-centred education among secondary trainee teachers revealed that, while policy makers blame teachers for not implementing CCE in class, teachers blame policy makers and administration for unsuitable policy and lack of support and claim that the policy makers and administrators fail to acknowledge the underlying issues which impact on teachers’ application of learner-centred education in real classrooms (Mtika & Gates, 2010).

In addition, in many developing nations, policy makers and practitioners, facing pressure to reform their educational systems, too often presume that what has been done successfully in one context can be simply transferred to their own with similar results (Walker & Dimmock, 2000, cited in Nguyen Phuong Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006). However, this application has brought about challenges; amongst which is the cultural context of learners and teachers. In addition, very practical matters related to the physical environment, including a large class size, limited teaching and learning resources, curriculum and examination/assessment system can all hinder implementation of child-centred policy (Altinyelken, 2011; Schweisfurth, 2013a).

Cultural factors

As discussed in section 2.1.4, CCE emphasises a change in teachers’ and students’ power relations. However, local cultural factors can influence the capacity and readiness of teachers, students and wider communities themselves to understand and embrace such changes to school relationships. As Schweisfurth (2013a, p.4) has observed, “Some cultures have greater ‘power distance’ between those with less and more power in a society, such as teachers and students: it is alien in such countries to have a close and familiar relationship with a teacher or to question his or her wisdom”. Research indicates that, on the one hand, teachers who are used to teaching in an authoritative manner face challenges transferring some of their authority and responsibilities to students and hesitate to compromise their privileged position (Altinyelken, 2011; de la Sablonniere et al., 2009); while, on the
other hand, students find it more difficult to claim and exercise such authority because they are not allowed to participate in discussions at home or challenge parental decisions (Altinyelken, 2011). In her study into culture in Oman, Emereonu (2012) found that because of customary practices, male and female students could not be grouped to work together. This account provides an illustration of an important consideration, raised by Witty, Power and Halpin (1998, cited in Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2006, p. 4) that “adopting policies, theories and practices across cultures without recognising their distinctive historical and cultural dimensions risks false universalism”.

**Professional capacity**

Teachers’ limited professional and pedagogical capacity also impacts on the implementation of CCE in developing nations. As indicated in Schweisfurth’s (2013a) study, teachers who work in the poorest countries are often untrained or undereducated. Chapman et al., (2005, cited in Schweisfurth, 2011, p.428) indicate that there is “…a lack of preparation in teacher education for the specific challenges of learner-centred education teaching methodology”. Additionally, Hase and Star (2009, cited in Schweisfurth, 2011, p.428) assert that “teacher education is itself rarely learner-centred, and so does not provide suitable models upon which fledging teachers can base their practice”. Another factor affecting the teachers’ professional and pedagogical capacity is the question of who becomes a teacher (Schweisfurth, 2011). Schweisfurth notes that “in many developing country contexts, teaching is not a first-choice occupation and large numbers of candidates enter teacher training because their academic credentials do not qualify them for other more desirable programmes” (p.428). Further emphasising this issue, Thamaksa’s (n.d) Thai study revealed that “…much worse, teachers are uncertain of how and what they should do to implement the approach”. Additionally, Altinyelken (2011) revealed that the lack of a sound and thorough understanding of the pedagogical approach resulted in wide variations in interpretation and practice of CCE. This is consistent with Lall (2010) as she states:

...In all cases it was dependent on how confident the teacher felt in using the methodology. Many teachers said that they were still finding their feet and that they needed practice in using the new method. They understood that the method would improve their teaching but were outside their comfort zone in using it (p.19).

**Teachers’ beliefs**

Teachers’ negatives attitudes and commitment to such new methods of teaching are also viewed as challenges to the implementation of CCE in the developing world, as documented in a study of senior teachers in primary schools in Turkey (Altinyelken, 2011). A study in Kyrgyzstan, for example, identified that only a minority of teachers (20%) had tried to implement CCE (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009). Other research also demonstrates that traditional teacher-centered lecture-style education is still
dominant in Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the developing world (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012; Hardman et al. 2009, cited in Schweisfurth, 2013a; Sriprakash, 2009). Moreover, “a majority of courses in universities within Kyrgyzstan are still taught in the same way as in the early years of the 1990s, and educational programs have not been greatly modified according to new approaches” (de la Sablonniere et al., 2009, p.5). In practice, according to Thamraksa (n.d), some teachers in Thailand view CCE as a threat to their long-time teacher-centered approach. As a result, most teachers in Thailand lack commitment to the new method of teaching and learning as they wonder whether it would improve students’ learning quality (Thamraksa, n.d).

**Parents’ and students’ attitudes**

A number of publications claim that some parents in developing countries do not provide support for teachers to implement CCE, especially parents in poor regions. Research by Altinyelken (2011) reveals that parents seem to be concerned with the new curriculum which places a focus on competencies and pays inadequate attention to knowledge acquisition. Altinyelken further explains that these parents believe that their children did not learn as much in the new system, compared to the previous system. Additionally, these parents were concerned that too much classroom time was enjoyable for children but that they were not improving their knowledge. Furthermore, parents were increasingly annoyed when they were encouraged to provide additional materials, including desks, seats, curtains and ICT hardware, which strained family budgets.

From this discussion of issues related to the adoption of CCE in developing countries, it might be argued that CCE has not been effectively implemented in many such contexts due to factors such as the policy system, teachers’ professional and pedagogical capacity and attitudes, parents and students’ attitudes, material resources and cultural factors. These issues may need to be critically reviewed. However, it may take considerable time for teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, parents and students to deeply understand and experience this educational philosophy. Class teachers, being at the “coal face” in the classroom, may be the first ones to adapt and adjust the teaching and learning process. They, therefore, may be the focus of support in order to adopt and implement CCE in their real local context. According to Thompson (2012), “its specific forms will be more effective when introduced through small-scale institutional relationships than through large-scale contracts with nation governments”.

45
2.2 Education in Vietnam

This section reviews the literature on education in Vietnam. It commences with the historical and cultural context of education to highlight how education has been valued and developed historically. The education governance will be examined alongside related educational administration and management, and educational policies. Literature on the current context within Vietnamese education and the quality of teaching and learning will be reviewed.

2.2.1 The historical/cultural context of education in Vietnam

Vietnam has a long history of respect and dedication to education (MOET et al., 2008). Formal education is well over a thousand years old and has been deeply influenced by Confucian heritage since Vietnam suffered from the domination of the feudal system of the Chinese state (Nguyen Van Ha, 2002). Before the mid-19th century, education in Vietnam was largely run in villages, mainly private schools (London, 2011). Classes were held by Confucian scholars and were for boys and men only. Apart from village schools, there were state-sponsored prefectural schools, provincial schools and the imperial academy. The imperial academy was directly supervised by the King and located in Vietnam’s capital. The purpose of education at that time was primarily to prepare feudal mandarins at various levels. Educational opportunities for the poor and the ethnic groups were far less common and were more likely to occur within familial or religious settings. However, as London (2011, p.8) explains:

Despite the limited accessibility of education, the use of classical education as an instrument of local and extra-local power imbued much of the country population with respect for intellectual tradition and certain methods of learning.

The traditional way of teaching in Vietnam, then, has originated from, and been influenced by, Confucian philosophy. Teaching is considered to be a noble calling and the teacher’s position is always deeply admired and respected. In practice, not only children but also parents absolutely respected teachers and a teacher’s position was considered higher than that of parents and lower only than that of the king (World Bank, 2006). Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) assert that with Confucian moral lessons, teachers in the classroom play a role like the father of learners both morally and academically, who treat the learners as their children in a family, guiding them along the right path of life. The teacher was thus considered responsible for students’ improvement, not only in the subject matter but also in moral values. At many schools, slogans hang in the classroom to praise the teachers, for example:
From the mid-19th century to 1945, Vietnam was ruled by the French colonials and the education system strongly changed and followed the French education model (Nguyen Loc, 2006). While there was regional differentiation in education in the nineteenth century, early twentieth century reforms effectively ended the old education system, replacing it with a new arrangement that included a separate French and Franco-Vietnamese school system in Cochin China and traditional academies in Tonkin and Annam. The French “Office of Public Instruction” controlled three types of schools, and was responsible for overseeing public schools, approving or rejecting the operation of village and prefectural “traditional” schools. In addition, the Office also controlled curricular and human resource management. However, by the 1920s, only about three percent of the population had completed primary school (London, 2011) and up to 1938, about 10 percent of all students would complete the third grade.

Outside the established school system, education played a key role in the struggle for independence. In the 1940s, the Viet Minh launched literacy campaigns and made schooling compulsory at the primary level (Nguyen Loc, 2006; Woodside, 1983). The campaign especially reached out to ethnic minorities with the notion of achieving “unity” among the great Vietnamese family of peoples (Woodside, 1983, p.407).

Vietnam became independent in 1945 and the Viet Minh continued to focus on compulsory literacy training (World Bank, 2006). In the 1940s and 1950s, Vietnam consisted of two separate education systems of the two new states - the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and the Republic of Vietnam in the south. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam copied the Soviet model, viewing education as an “instrument of state power for the achievement of progress and socialist revolution” (Nguyen Loc, 2006, p.14). However, the development of education during this period proved difficult.

Between 1945 and 1986, there were three educational reforms with the purpose of changing from the colonial education approach to a national, socialist-oriented education (Nguyen Loc, 2006). The first Education Reform occurred in 1945 in liberated provinces/regions with the purpose of removing the French colonial education and establishing a new national education of the independent Vietnam (Woodside, 1983). This new national education was of the people, by the people and for the people. The second Education Reform in 1956 continued to extend the first Education Reform into the newly liberated provinces/regions of Vietnam. The third Education Reform in 1979 was closely related to the liberation of South Vietnam and the unification of the country in 1975. Its purpose was to unify the education system over the country and deal with shortcomings of the existing education in terms of quality and quantity (Nguyen Loc, 2006).

After liberation and independence in 1975, Vietnam’s education system was unified and reorganised according to the model of the Soviet Union. From 1975 to 1986, the country developed into a centralised planned economy. Vietnam had to cope with the border wars in the North with China and in the South West with Khmer Rouge while reconstructing the country after the American war. As a result, the country fell into a socioeconomic crisis. Life became hard for people when the economy was faltering and inflation increased. According to Pham Lan Huong and Fry (2002, p.128), education became stagnant during this time.

Đổi mới (the Renovation) in 1986 had a great impact on all aspects of the social-economic development of Vietnam, including the field of education (London, 2011; Nguyen Loc, 2006; Phelps et al., Unpublished paper; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). The policy of Đổi mới brought change in the economic structure with an emphasis on the use of a market oriented economy and private incentives (Nguyen Loc, 2006; Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011).

In the field of education, Đổi mới aimed at reforming the educational system in the direction of modernization, standardization, democratization and diversification. Such changes were premised on the need for Vietnam’s education system to keep pace with global trends by training and developing high-quality human resources able to be dynamic, creative and adapt to the new requirements of workplaces in the 21st century.
Đôi mới thus placed much emphasis on analysing the major social adjustments which were, and are, occurring by the promotion of democratisation of education and the rise of more diverse educational options, which (it was argued) provided everyone with more opportunities for schooling (Nguyen Thi Minh Tam, et al., 1998 cited in Nguyen Loc, 2006; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005; World Bank, 2006).

Learning activities were classified by the education sector according to levels of student ability. At a primary education level, various syllabus programs were developed for ethnic minority children and disadvantaged children to introduce more flexible classes. Specialised schools at lower and upper secondary levels were established for gifted students; selective classes were formed, in some schools, for students with excellent performance.

These reforms all focused on streaming the upper secondary curriculum and classifying learning activities according to students’ abilities and expectations, and provide different pathways for learners. Further, work and vocational skills were provided through linkages between general and vocational education.

There were also significant changes in the regulations governing the establishment of new schools. Semi-public and non-public institutions, at all levels from kindergarten to university, were allowed to open and operate like the public school system to meet the requirements of learners.

The informal education system was officially approved. It included training programs to eradicate illiteracy and short courses updating professional knowledge and skills. Further, it covered other programs delivered by self-directed distance education enabling learners to have degrees/qualifications accredited by the national education system (Nguyen Loc, 2006; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005; World Bank, 2006). However, in changing the education system, Vietnam had to face a number of major challenges relating to attendance, completion rates and general education quality.

A review of education and human resources conducted by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam in the early nineties (Nguyen Loc, 2006) pointed out weaknesses in Vietnam’s education during the Đổi mới namely, decreased quantity and quality of education at all levels, weaknesses in teaching and learning and teaching staff, shortages and ineffective utilisation of resources for education and training, irrelevance of the structure, management and legislation of education and training and irrelevance of education and training in the transition period. Statistics from 1989-1990 showed that education declined significantly with terms such as ‘degradation’ and
'deterioration’ being used (Nguyen Loc, 2006). The educational disparities in different regions became considerable in terms of both quantity and quality (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1998).

2.2.2 Education governance in Vietnam

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is a national agency of government, with the role of managing education and training across the Vietnamese national education system (London, 2011; Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011; UNESCO, 2011). MOET is responsible for setting goals and objectives, launching laws and policies, developing curriculum and content, planning, establishing and maintaining quality of provision; setting standards for teachers and educational administrators; setting rules for examinations and enrolments; maintaining the system for certification; and managing universities directly including areas such as school buildings, staffing, and distribution of financial resources (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, 2005, 2009).

At the local level, provincial departments of education and district offices of education are in charge of educational matters but are doubly accountable to both MOET and to the People’s Committees (the local government) at their respective levels of government (London, 2011). The departments of education at the provincial level manage upper secondary education schools and professional secondary schools, whose responsibility is to implement national policies and manage resources. Similarly, the district-level offices of education manage lower secondary and primary schools and are accountable both to their local People’s Committee and to provincial departments of education.

In recent years, decentralisation is increasing in the education sector and more autonomy is being granted to local levels. Provinces and cities are playing a greater role in managing pre-school and primary education (London, 2011; UNESCO, 2009). However, the formal organisation of the education system is quite centralised because MOET has not distributed power to local governments (London, 2011; Mai Dien, 2008) and there exists tensions between local and central government regarding to curriculum and quality controls, personnel and finance.

2.2.3 Education in contemporary Vietnam

Education and training plays an important role in the preservation, development, and continuation of human civilization. In the context of globalization and in the era of scientific and technological development, the education and training system is a major driving force for accelerated development in Vietnam. Education is regarded as a pivotal influence for the success or failure of the country in
international competition and also in the success for each individual in life. Such values are manifested in Viet Nam Education Law, which states that “Education is the first priority of the national policy” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, p. 3, Article 9) and that “investment in education is the investment in development” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, p. 4, Article 13).

The education system has been diversified in terms of type of schools, with an increase in public, semi-public and private schools at general education levels. At the higher education level, there are public and private universities. Modes of study include full-time and part-time, distance learning method and joint training with foreign educational institutions (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001).

However, during the last few decades, issues regarding Vietnam’s education system have been publically debated both nationally and internationally (Trương Vũ, 2005; World Bank, 2006) and serious criticisms have been made, particularly regarding the low efficiency and quality of education, the amount of schooling young people undertake, the adequacy of school, infrastructure, teachers’ qualifications, relevance of curriculum and the like (London, 2011; Mai Dien, 2008; Saito et al., 2008; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005).

According to London (2011), at a general level, completion of primary and lower secondary education is deemed the state norm but educational achievement levels are significantly different between regions. At a higher education level, London further states that Vietnam’s education system has not adapted to changing social needs and the higher education system has not been able to meet the demanding requirements for skilled labour. Additionally, the current school management capacities and teacher qualifications cannot yet meet with the requirements of the renovated curricula (World Bank, 2006).

Therefore, students and graduates are perceived to have restricted capacity for creative thinking, practical skills, self-direction, the ability to adapt to occupation, labour discipline, mutual cooperation and healthy competition (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001; Tran Nam Binh, 2005; Tran Thi Tam Dan, 2004). This situation occurs partly because the outcomes of education and training have not been linked with practice. At the same time, there are other factors influencing the poor quality and efficiency of Vietnam education such as poorly qualified teaching staff, shortage of school facilities, and heavy education curricula. These issues will be examined in detail in section 2.2.4 below.
2.2.4 Indicators of educational quality

In Vietnam, increases in school enrolment are taken as indicators of progress (London, 2011). In 2005, the primary net enrolment rate was 88 percent (MOET et al., 2008). According to the Vietnam Educational Development Strategies 2009-2012, all provinces and cities in Vietnam have attained national standards of literacy and universal primary education (considered to be 98.3 percent). However, data on enrolment rates in Vietnam have been identified as problematic (London, 2011). Most cited enrolment data come from the Vietnam Living Standards Survey and the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey and “these surveys may miss large numbers of migrant households as well as non-official residents. Many of the missing households are poor and their children’s educational status go unreported” (Pincus & Sender, 2008 cited in London, 2011, p.29).

Further, using enrolment and completion rates as indicators of progress has created strong incentives for Vietnamese state agencies, official and teachers to exaggerate enrolment and graduation figures in reports. This has created a situation where students are progressed through the system, regardless of learning outcomes (Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). As described by London (2011), the “achievement syndrome” (teachers exaggeration of enrolment and graduation successes) in Vietnamese education and training has been widespread. When children are not able to pass the exams at the end of a year of schooling, it is generally accepted that they should repeat that year so that they can master the required work. However, in some schools, teachers allow such students to progress to the next grade, especially in primary schools in rural or remote areas. This practice has been justified to ensure that students do not drop out of school, however it is also a mechanism for ensuring that schools’ enrolment rates are maintained, since attrition reflects poorly on the school itself (Thành Bach, 2011). Thus, while the official position is that students should be achieving the expected standards for each year, in reality students fall behind, the quality of their learning is low, and they have minimal opportunity to catch up. This leads to a prevailing situation of students being “in a wrong class” (i.e. in a grade inappropriate for their level of achievement) almost everywhere in Vietnam, especially in remote areas. Examination fraud has been identified as a problem and criticised (Hà Tây, 2006) and there remain criticisms about the quality of education generally (Hamano, 2008; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005).
**Teacher education, recruitment, retention and skills**

Teachers of primary and lower secondary school levels are usually trained at local teacher training colleges. Teachers of upper secondary level are trained at a university or university of pedagogy. According to the Education Law 2005 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005), primary teachers are required to have a minimum completion of 12 years of schooling and another two years at a local teacher training college. However, due to teacher shortages prior to 1980, many older teachers were employed with fairly low levels of educational background and teachers who are currently employed in primary schools in Vietnam have varying levels of qualifications, including:

- **9+1 year**: those who graduate from secondary school and have completed one year training at local teacher training colleges.
- **9+3 years**: those who graduate from secondary school and have completed 3 years at local teacher training colleges.
- **12+1 year**: those who graduate from high school and have completed one year training at local teacher training colleges.
- **12+3**: those who graduate from high school and have completed 3 years of training at local teacher training colleges.
- **12+4**: those who graduate from high school and have completed 4 years of training at one of the universities of pedagogy.

In terms of national policy, those in the groups 9+1, 9+3 and 12+1 are now considered unqualified but there are still many practising teachers, now in their 40s or 50s, who still have this background (Ushiogi & Hamano, 2007). Teacher qualification therefore is significantly different across regions and areas. As the World Bank (2001) states, 20 percent of teachers are unqualified according to current MOET requirements and a further 20 percent are below the current training standard. The level of unqualified teachers or teachers who do not meet educational standards for Vietnam in disadvantaged or mountainous areas is about 50 percent (Asian Development Bank, 2001; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). Shortages of teachers in these areas mean that there is little choice but to employ underqualified staff. Figures concerning the academic background of primary teachers in Gia Lai province in 2005 indicates that 48.5 percent of teachers fall into the 9+1 year, and 9+3 years groups (Hamano, 2008).
Teacher salary levels exacerbate these issues. As in many Asian countries, Vietnamese teachers are poorly paid (Chapman & Adams, 2002). Although teachers are highly valued in Vietnamese society on account of Confucian tradition (as mentioned in 2.2.1), following Vietnam’s long period of war, resultant stagnant economy, and limited national budget in general, education budgetary allocations have been extremely low. According to a report by a national society of former teachers, educators in Ho Chi Minh City received an average monthly income of VND3 million (US $144) to VND3.5 million ($168), while novices are paid only VND2 million ($96). Teachers with 13 years of experience can only earn as much as VND5 million ($240) (Harris, 2012).

London (2011) documents that, in a town located in Central of Highlands - Dak Nong, around 300 well-qualified teachers gave up their teaching career in the school year 1988-1989 because their salary was insufficient to support their family. One former teacher recalled that he received 30 kilogram of rice per month, which was so low that he gave up the teaching job (Teerawichitchainan, Hac Van Vinh, & Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan, 2007). In order to fill this gap, the local government was forced to recruit a large number of new teaching staff with qualification standards as low as 5+3, 9+1, 9+3 and 12+1 (see above). The quality of education in provinces with many such teachers has been a big problem because such teachers do not possess subject knowledge and teaching skills needed to deliver the new curriculum (ChildFund in Vietnam, 2008; Hamano, 2008; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005; World Bank, 2001). Le Bach Duong (2000, cited in Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005) notes that, due to the lack of incentives, teacher training colleges have received most students with low learning capacities in comparison with those enrolled in other courses at colleges or universities.

Teachers with 9+1 and 9+3 backgrounds have been required to upgrade their teaching qualifications and profession and there has been a focus on providing training and workshops to improve and upgrade professional teaching for in-service training teachers every year, such as summer training programs, qualification improvement training, demonstration lessons, and in-school training to provide teachers with updated content and method (Hamano, 2008; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). However, some teachers remain unaware of newer methods of teaching.

Issues also exist in terms of the quality of such training, with considerable differences between the various teacher training institutions in terms of relevance, facilities, equipment and materials (World Bank, 2001). The World Bank also notes that staff at teacher training institutions may themselves have low levels of qualifications, and many lack familiarity with the everyday needs and demands of
primary schools. Furthermore, staff may not be well placed themselves to model teaching methods envisioned by the new curriculum (World Bank, 2001).

**School facilities**

It appears that very little has been written and/or discussed specifically about infrastructure, classrooms, physical facilities and equipment, and teaching resources in Vietnam’s education system generally. However, these issues have been explored in a number of publications focused on disadvantaged, remote areas of Vietnam, and will be examined in detail in section 2.3.4.

According to some research, Vietnamese schools of all levels from pre-school to higher education are not standardised and that they are poorly furnished and equipped (Chapman & Adams, 2002; Tran Thi Tam Dan, 2004; World Bank, 2001). There are not enough classrooms for students and the student teacher ratio is high (30:1). At the same time, as presented in 1.2.2, schools lack toilets, sanitary water, and safe playgrounds for children, especially schools in remote mountainous areas (Phelps & Graham, 2010; UNICEF Vietnam, 2010). In many such rural areas, schools are in poor condition with leaky roofs and shortage of tables and chairs and there is much over-crowding (Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). There is an insufficient supply of teaching materials and resources. Many schools, are not equipped with libraries to support teaching and learning.

**Teaching methods, curriculum and assessment**

Teaching methods have a direct influence on the quality of teaching and learning. Traditionally, teachers have employed teacher-centred approaches which led students to be passive and uncreative (Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). According to Mai Dien (2008), this kind of education and training system tends to ‘cram’ knowledge and encourage rote learning, requiring that students copy into their notebooks what teachers read out. Students are then examined on their accuracy in recalling this information. The majority of teachers still use such traditional ways of teaching and learning where teachers focus heavily on imparting knowledge. For students, this kind of teaching encourages them to focus more on mastery of theory and the acquisition of memorized knowledge than on the development of analytical, problem-solving and communication skills or the development of positive attitudes towards learning and life (Nguyen Thi Phuong Hoa, 2007; UNESCO, 2011).

It is compulsory for most children in the same grade to complete the same lesson at the same time and generally in the same way (London, 2011; Phelps et al., Unpublished paper). The prescribed
curriculum requires students and teachers to work with a large number of textbooks in a lock-sequenced series of lessons. In this manner, the structure, sequence and content of a textbook provide the content and flow of the syllabus for each subject. Hence, students in Teacher Training Colleges are trained to deliver instructional programmes based on the content of textbooks. In effect, students are trained in both the academic (content) aspects of a subject and also the particular methodology for delivering the textbook material. It is compulsory for teachers to follow the textbooks, which reduces flexibility in teaching and restricts student exposure to such activities as problem solving and integrated learning (Duggan, 2001).

The syllabus or curriculum has also been criticised because of its emphasis on academic and theoretical engagement with content (Duggan, 2001; Ministry of Education and Training, 2001; Nguyen Thi Phuong Hoa, 2007) with very little application of knowledge or development of practical skill. According to Mai Dien (2008), the curriculum and textbooks are overloaded while Chapman et al. (2002) and Vo Tri Thanh and Trinh Quang Long (2005) state that the curriculum is irrelevant and inadequate to contemporary needs. Other writers have noted that there have been mistakes in textbooks (Mai Dien, 2008).

According to Chapman and Adams, (2002), assessment systems are poor and evaluation is mainly used for the purpose of steering learners through mechanical memorisation, rather than focusing on fostering independent and creative thinking abilities or the capacity to apply knowledge and skills to real life. Examinations still dominate education in all levels in Vietnam, which in turn places students under pressure to pass and gain qualifications (Hoang Tuy, 2008). As a consequence of the heavy emphasis on examinations, learners have to take extra lessons inside and outside schools which cost a lot in terms of time, energy and money without bringing tangible benefit. Although the government placed a ban on running home-based classes in 1993, there has been widespread extra tuition and learning which are not for the learners' benefits but teachers' incomes (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001; Tran Thu Ha & Harpam, 2005).

The literature presented in this section has critically examined the historical and cultural context of the Vietnamese education system. Culturally, education has always been viewed as important and this continues to be reflected in current political policies, with education explicitly acknowledged as a top national priority. Over the past two decades, there has been much change in the education system related to policy, management and administration, teaching methodology, textbooks and curriculum. Such changes have brought about considerable achievement. However, the quality of Vietnam’s
education still remains controversial, with many believing that there are many issues that have not yet been addressed effectively.

2.3 **Ethnic minority education in Vietnam**

This section examines the current state of research surrounding education of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. The review includes an explanation of the ethnic groups in Vietnam, their geographical distribution and their social economic conditions. The literature related to the educational status of ethnic minority groups will then be discussed and the policy initiatives which have been introduced to support ethnic minority children in their schooling will be examined. Finally, the issues children from ethnic minority groups face with their education will be reviewed in specific detail.

2.3.1 **Ethnic groups in Vietnam**

As mentioned in section 1.1.2, Vietnam is a country of multi-ethnic groups, each with its own language, lifestyle and culture. The Kinh and the Hoa are the dominant groups representing 87% of the population of more than 80 million. The remaining 13% are of the ethnic minorities and they mainly inhabit mountainous and remote areas in three main regional groups: Northern Uplands, Central Highlands, Mekong Delta (Baulch et al., 2002; Dang Hai Anh, 2006, 2010; Imai & Gaiha, 2007; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001). These groups depend mainly on cultivating swidden fields (World Bank, 2009).

Due to their geographical distribution, the ethnic minorities do not have ready access to infrastructure, public services or health and educational facilities and are considerably poorer than the Kinh and the Hoa (Baulch et al., 2002; Dang Hai Anh, 2010; Imai & Gaiha, 2007; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001). There have been a range of factors contributing to the persistent poverty of minority groups including: isolation and remoteness; reduced access to forests and other land; low access to credit and productive assets; limited access to quality social services; and limited participation in government structures and public life (Poverty Task Force, 2002). Baulch, Pham, and Reilly (2007) state that the ethnic minorities have low school enrolments, nutritional indicators and life expectation.

The Vietnamese government has introduced programs to support and enhance the development of ethnic minority peoples, however the gap between the minorities and majorities is still wide in terms of social-economic development (Poverty Task Force, 2002). That said, the percentage considered to be living in poverty is reducing. In 1993, 86 percent of Vietnam’s ethnic minority population was
living below the recognised poverty line (Baulch et al., 2008; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007). According to the 2004 Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey, 61 percent of ethnic minorities in Vietnam remain poor (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, 2006 cited in Baulch, Pham Thai Hung., et al., 2007; Swinkels & Turk, 2006) and in 2006, 52 percent of ethnic minorities were identified as living in poverty (Tran Van Thuat & Ha Viet Quan, 2008). Data varies considerably, however, as according to Epprecht, Müller, and Minot (2011), 74 percent of the ethnic minority population are below the poverty line.

Poverty reduction strategies employed with different ethnic minority groups vary greatly across different regions. However, it is difficult to determine the success of these different strategies since data on social economic development in Vietnam are not sufficiently disaggregated to allow for classification of trends for different ethnic groups (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Swinkels & Turk, 2006). A number of sources have identified that, over time, the poor living standards of those ethnic groups residing in the Central Highlands and the Northern Uplands, in particular, have remained at very high levels (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Swinkels & Turk, 2006).

2.3.2 Educational status of ethnic minority children

Issues concerning ethnic minority education are often neglected in the literature and, in practice, have become a phenomenon worldwide (Wang, 2011). In Vietnam, ethnic minority children are acknowledged as being educationally disadvantaged in comparison to the ethnic majorities - the Kinh and Hoa (Baulch, Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa., Pham Thi Minh Phuong., & Pham Thai Hung., 2010; Baulch, Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, Haughton, & Haughton, 2007; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; London, 2011; World Bank, 2009). According to Watkins (2000), only half of ethnic minority children were attending school at the turn of the century. In 2005, UNESCO (2005, cited in Nguyen Van Phu, 2009) identified that 20 percent of ethnic minority children in Vietnam had no access to basic education. Baulch, et al., (2002) and Truong Huyen Chi (2011a) placed net primary school enrolment rates of ethnic minority children at below 70% while Dang (2010) records that illiteracy rates for ethnic minorities are in the order of 29%.

At the same time, student learning outcomes are still poor (Atttfield & Vu Thanh Binh, 2013). As discussed in 2.2.3, the quality of education of ethnic minority students is low. For example, even though the children pass from grade to grade, they still face basic literacy problems, poor spoken
Vietnamese as well as a lack of basic calculation skills of adding, subtraction, multiplication and division (Thanh Bach, 2011; World Bank, 2009).

There continues to be a range of issues arising from schooling of ethnic minorities. Compared to the ethnic majorities, ethnic minority children face a number of challenges including: higher dropout rates; later school enrolment; lack of minority teachers; lack of access to preschool in minority communities; lack of bilingual education; and the burden of school fees (World Bank, 2009).

According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2009) survey, ethnic minority children have almost double the rates of school drop-out in comparison to the Kinh. Their access to secondary school is limited. The rates of school-aged children attending secondary schools was less than 50 percent in some communes (Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005; Watkins, 2000; World Bank, 2009). This is especially so in the highland areas of Vietnam, where the communities have far lower enrolment rates and higher drop-out rates, even compared to poor Kinh households (Watkins, 2000). Baulch, et al., (2002) stated that net school enrolment rates of lower secondary education are half the national average. Transition to upper-secondary education is even rarer among minority students (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007). Upper secondary school enrolments are also under 20 percent for the other Northern minorities and the Central Highland minorities (Baulch et al., 2010).

Gender also influences attendance of ethnic minority students in school. The Poverty Task Force (2002) states that girls have lower overall enrolment rates (in all levels) than boys and that their chance of going to school and graduating was far less than that of boys (Bélanger & Liu, 2004; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003). This is likely because schooling of girls is treated more as a luxury (less of a necessity) than the schooling of boys, especially for poor families (Behrman and Knowles, 1999, cited in Asian Development Bank, 2002; Bélanger & Liu, 2004). It is also because there are cultural factors referring to early marriage or a patriarchal cultural that devalues female education (World Bank 2009).

The World Bank (2009) also notes that there is widespread belief in Vietnam, particularly among policy makers, that the dropout of ethnic minority children from school is because they do not value education. The World Bank’s (2009) survey, however, concluded that poverty, long distances travelled to school, lack of self-esteem, language barriers, poor nutritional status, and high opportunity costs (when children’s labour is needed at home) are among the underlying reasons for their attrition.
2.3.3 Policy context of ethnic minority education

Over the past decade, the Vietnamese government has implemented a number of policies and programs that aim to improve living standards and reduce poverty among ethnic minorities (Baulch et al., 2008; Swinkels & Turk, 2006; Watkins, 2000). These various intervention programs have had a positive impact on the education of ethnic minority groups. There has, for instance, been investment in the construction of schools and improvement of school infrastructure in mountainous areas where ethnic minorities live (Truong Huyen Chi, 2011a). Further, Program 135, which supports the socio-economic development of extremely difficult communes in the ethnic, mountainous, boundary and remote areas and the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Program (HEPR) have aimed to improve ethnic minorities’ circumstances (Swinkels & Turk, 2006). In the Vietnam Education law (Article 7, Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, p. 3), it is stipulated that:

The State provides ethnic minorities with opportunities to learn their mother tongue (speaking and writing) so that they preserve and promote ethnic culture. At the same time, this also helps students of ethnic minorities to acquire knowledge more easily in schools and other educational institutions.

Similarly, Article 10 states that:

Every citizen has equal right to education regardless of ethnicity, religions, beliefs, gender, family background, social status, economic conditions… Vietnamese Government gives priorities and provides ethnic minority children with opportunities to have rights and the duty to access to education.

In addition, various pilot programs have been implemented to encourage communities to be more active in the provision of education, with the intention of fostering more active parent-teacher associations in ethnic minority areas. These attempt to train ethnic minority teachers and provide for the use of students’ mother tongue in instruction to assist children during their early years of education (Swinkels & Turk, 2006).

The Government’s efforts to bridge the educational gap between Kinh and ethnic minorities also include a policy to exempt school fees for ethnic minority students. Furthermore, in each province or town, there is a provincial ethnic minority boarding school for upper-secondary school and another lower secondary boarding school for a district level. Students are admitted to the school based on nominations from a commune-level government.

Despite these initiatives, a number of writers have argued that the government’s policies are insufficient and inappropriately targeted (Baulch, Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, et al., 2007), and that they have not been successful in closing the gap between the majority and minorities (Truong Huyen Chi,
In practice, many of the policies are directed to ethnic minority areas, not minority households. Thus, benefits may well be experienced by Kinh households living in these same areas (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001). At the same time, many programs and projects may be overlapping (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Baulch, Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, et al., 2007) and the Government does not include or set specific targets for the ethnic peoples (Poverty Task Force, 2002). Moreover, the policies implemented to solve these problems have frequently brought about undesired outcomes (Watkins, 2000). Dang Hai Anh (2010) asserts that the efficiency and cost/benefits of the programs or projects are seldom evaluated and that ethnic minority families rarely take part in planning development projects, and rarely know what they are entitled to once projects are implemented (Cohen, 2001 cited in Baulch, Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, et al., 2007).

Non-government organisations have also been active in supporting Vietnam to meet its educational policy goals. For example, Save the Children UK works with “key mothers” in highland communities, building their skills as teaching assistants in pre-school so that each class has a resource person who speaks the children’s language. To help prepare children for primary schools, Kinh is introduced verbally and children are familiarised with the Kinh alphabet. The project is small-scale, however, Save the Children UK states that “it is not possible to deliver truly bilingual education through Vietnam’s school system in the politically constrained context, and significant impact may not be seen for many years” (Pinnock, Dinh, and Nguyen, 2006 cited in Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007, p.50).

2.3.4 Issues affecting education of ethnic minority children

Much of the literature on ethnic minorities in Vietnam describes persistent disadvantage in access to education services. Despite supportive programs and policies, there continues to be a range of issues affecting schooling of ethnic minorities. Three main issues contribute to this disadvantage, namely: remoteness; economic background; and quality of education.

Much research identifies the geographical disadvantages experienced by ethnic minority children. Traditionally, remoteness has been viewed as a geographic concept signalling that ethnic groups usually have long distances to travel to school and this discourages them from attending, especially in the rainy or flood seasons when the roads are muddy or they might be swept away by flood water (Dang Hai Anh, 2010; MOET et al., 2008; Phelps et al., 2012; Swinkels & Turk, 2006; Truong Tra Son Luu, 2008). In some regions, it takes ethnic minority students hours to get to school and they are
physically exhausted when they arrive. This also means that their time at school may be reduced, which is likely to then impact on their learning achievement.

Baulch et al., (2007) also point out that remoteness can be thought of as a social concept, explaining that some households may be distant from their neighbours because of language or cultural barriers. From such a perspective, ethnic minorities in some areas find it hard to communicate with their neighbours because they cannot speak Vietnamese. Many minority groups also feel remote from policy processes and decision making because such governance and planning occurs without adequate representation of local people, which in turn creates distrust and misunderstanding.

Disadvantage is also, of course, associated with economic background. In the broader sense, there is a strong correlation between poverty and poor performance in basic education (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Haddad, 2006). Poverty is far more likely to be prevalent among ethnic minority households, which hampers their children’s ability to go to school (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Giacchino-Baker, 2007). According to Dang Hai Anh (2010), approximately 52% of ethnic minorities are considered to be living in poverty and the poorest group consists of the Central Highland minorities (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Baulch et al., 2002). Where standards of living are higher for the ethnic minority groups, education quality tends to be better (MOET et al., 2008; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001). Baulch, et al., (2002) and the Asian Development Bank (2002) also assert that more education is associated with higher living standards. Dang Hai Anh (2010, p.17) notes that educational achievement plays a vital role in reducing poverty and that “education has strong intergenerational impacts on increasing educational accomplishment for future generations”. However, the role of education in improving welfare and reducing the gaps between ethnic groups seems to be underestimated (Dang Hai Anh, 2010). To some extent, minority household are thus poor because of their lack of education and other assets, and because they experience discrimination (Baulch et al., 2002).

A third contributor to disadvantage for ethnic minorities is poor quality of education. Children from ethnic groups may receive a lower quality of education than those from the Kinh majority (Baulch et al., 2002; Nguyen Van Phu, 2009). As discussed in section 2.2.4, in many schools in ethnic minority areas, teaching and learning is hindered due to a lack of school facilities and infrastructure, language barriers, irrelevant curriculum, discrimination and poorly qualified teaching staff.
School facilities and infrastructure play important roles in motivating children. As such, poor learning facilities or poor infrastructure in schools and classrooms can have negative effects on children’s schooling (Dang Hai Anh, 2010; Phelps et al., Unpublished paper; Swinkels & Turk, 2006; Truong Tra Son Luu, 2008). In mountainous and remote areas, public infrastructure is still under-developed (Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; London, 2011) and the structural facilities are poor and insufficient (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007). In some remote areas, despite the existence of a newly available infrastructure, ethnic minorities may not have the opportunity to access and make full use of these resources (Asian Development Bank, 2002). Under Program 135, some new schools have been built. However, classrooms are still in short supply.

Classroom facilities in many ethnic minority areas are thus inadequate and of poor quality and schools have not been equipped with resources and teaching and learning materials. Teachers have few teaching aids (pictures, maps or diagram) and in some contexts use planks of wood with chalk as writing boards (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003). Furthermore, many schools lack toilets and other sanitation facilities; there is inadequate access to clean water and no plumbing, with washing done in streams. Additionally, some schools do not have regular access to electricity (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; London, 2011).

Because of the shortage of classrooms, ethnic minority students have to attend school in shifts and in some circumstances there have been as many as three shifts per day, cutting average learning time by over an hour per day (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003). This impacts on educational achievement in comparison with the ethnic majority students. Furthermore, students with afternoon shifts usually finish their class late in the afternoon and arrive home at 7-8 p.m. Travelling long distances between school and home not only makes children exhausted but also makes parents feel concerned about their safety (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007). Children confront increased traffic while walking or cycling on (often) narrow and mountainous roads. Weather also creates safety and comfort concerns with slippery and sometimes flooding conditions. The safety of girls travelling alone is also a concern for many parents. As previously mentioned, there are ethnic minority boarding schools operating in many mountainous areas, however the reality is that only a few ethnic minority students from better connected families have access to these schools (Asian Development Bank, 2002).
Language is considered the biggest barrier preventing the ethnic minorities from excelling educationally. Although the 1946 Constitution supports the preservation of ethnic minority languages, and such values have been reaffirmed in legislation in 1981 (which paved the way for the use of ethnic minority languages in education), Vietnamese remains the language of schooling. This means that the ethnic minority groups have to study an official language, the Vietnamese language, but not their mother tongue (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Baulch et al., 2002; Baulch, Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, et al., 2007; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; Swinkels & Turk, 2006; UNESCO, 2005; Vu Tuan Anh, 2005). Many ethnic minority children have no experience of the Vietnamese language before beginning school and cannot understand or communicate with their Vietnamese speaking Kinh teachers (Vu T Son & Pridmore, 2006). Some teachers’ local dialect is also hard for children to understand (Asian Development Bank, 2002). These language barriers lead to negative educational outcomes.

Minority languages are now officially recognised and can be taught in schools (Baulch, Pham Thai Hung., et al., 2007) and the government has programs and policies in place to support the development of bilingual books for some of the ethnic minority groups. The Hoa, Tay-Nung, Thai, Hmong, Khmer, Cham, Gia Rai and Bahnar languages have been used in pilot projects of mother-tongue education (UNESCO, 2005). However, this model of bilingual education has been slow to implement on a broader scale. For example, a survey by Vietnam Living Standard Survey 1998 (VLSS98) showed that only 10 of the 334 ethnic primary schools taught lessons in ethnic minority languages and seven of those schools were in the south-east Mekong Delta (Baulch et al., 2008). The dominant language of instruction is Vietnamese, and most officially sanctioned textbooks are in Vietnamese.

With regard to curriculum, Lakin & Gasperini (2003, p.89) state that “most developing countries have a unitary, centrally determined curriculum, which is generally designed for pupils familiar with an urban environment and may contain elements that conflict with local customs and beliefs”. This would certainly apply in Vietnam. Ethnic minority groups therefore may find it challenging when they have to study the official education program for the whole country. Some aspects of the textbooks are not relevant to students in certain regions (Truong Tra Son Luu, 2008; Van de Walle & Gunewaedena, 2001) and it can be difficult for students to make sense of some of the material. Dao (1999, p.18, cited in Aikman & Pridmore, 2001, p.527) critiques the curriculum, stating that “there is growing recognition that the contents are both superfluous and inadequate, with many parts hardly linked to real life”.

64
MOET makes provision for 15% of the curriculum to consist of local content, which allows teachers to teach the local language and focus on history, traditions and crafts. Aikman and Pridmore (2001) observed fifteen years ago that very few teachers felt able to take advantage of this opportunity to make their teaching more relevant to the lives of the children. Personal experiences and observations imply that this is still the case today.

Teaching staff also influence the quality of education. According to Haddad (2006), teachers are viewed as key to effective learning and relevant basic education when they can function as the interpreter and deliverer of the curriculum. Teachers’ capacity to relate curriculum to the local rural context will depend on a number of factors, including personal motivation, competence in a range of teaching and learning strategies and professional attitudes, especially towards learners. However, as previously discussed, teaching staff working with ethnic minority children have been shown to have both poor quality and insufficient professional training.

Much research shows that there has been a shortage of supply of ethnic minority teachers who can work with ethnic minority children (World Bank, 2009 cited in Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; Dang Hai Anh, 2010; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007; Vu Tuan Anh, 2005; Watkins, 2000), with ethnic minority primary teachers accounting for only five percent of all teachers in Vietnam (Nguyen Van Phu, 2009). The transition of ethnic minority children from primary to higher levels of education is low because they face difficulties moving through the education system. Few ethnic minority students graduate from high school and, of those that do, most do not go on higher education. Under Programme 135 ethnic minority students are given priority admission to universities and college, but the scheme is found to be insufficiently promoted, and most high-school graduates simply join the regular workforce. Those ethnic minority students who do perform well at university often do not return to their home communes but find work in more favourable parts of the country after graduation (Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003). These reasons may explain why there is lack of the ethnic minority teaching staff working with ethnic minority children.

The quality of teaching in disadvantaged, remote areas is perceived to be inferior to that available in urban areas in Vietnam (Baulch et al., 2010; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007). As mentioned in section 2.2.4, teacher recruiting during the 1980s has resulted in varying levels of qualifications held by teachers. Such under-qualification may have negative influences on the learning outcomes of ethnic minority children.
As discussed above, because of a shortage of ethnic minority teachers, most classes in high ethnic minority areas are taught by Kinh teachers which has caused problems for both Kinh teachers and ethnic minority children because of the language barrier. Much of the literature on the issue of teaching and learning in ethnic minority areas show that most of Kinh teachers cannot speak the local language. In practice, most of them are monolingual Vietnamese speakers who do not know or understand the experiences of ethnic minority students and have had no professional training related to second language learning or catering for diverse students (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003; Nguyen Van Phu, 2009).

Further, due to the geographical locations of ethnic minority groups (discussed above), the living conditions for teachers in these areas, limited financial resources and the general lack of understanding of the needs ethnic minority groups, most qualified and ‘good’ Kinh teachers, are reluctant to get a job in a mountainous area (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Giacchino-Baker, 2007; Hamano, 2008; Phelps et al., Unpublished paper; UNESCO, 2011) even though they are entitled to special allowances (valued at 70 percent of their pay) (Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003). According to policy, Kinh teachers in mountainous areas are able to be transferred to schools in lowland areas after five years (for men) and four years (for women); however, in practice this system is rarely carried out (Committee for Ethnic Minorities and UNICEF, 2003). This may discourage qualified teachers from moving to these areas to work with children. As such, those teachers who do remain in remote areas are beginning teachers or ineffective teachers with lack of teaching experiences, professional knowledge, and limited capacity to meet student needs, thus adding to the inequality of ethnic minority students. As mentioned in section 2.2.4, about 40-50 percent of primary school teachers in mountainous areas have not met educational standards for Vietnam. Most primary school teachers are unqualified by Ministry of Education standards (grade 12 plus two years of additional training) and some only have five years of primary education and three years of additional training.

Ethnic minority groups might also face discrimination. They are often perceived to be inferior to the Kinh (Baulch et al., 2008; Giacchino-Baker, 2007; London, 2011), with such stereotypical attitudes frequently manifest in schools. MOET, UNICEF and UNESCO (2008) have reported that, in many schools with high ethnic minority populations, there seems to be no friendly teacher-student relationship and there is lack of praise and encouragement from teachers. Many Kinh in Vietnamese society hold negative attitudes towards ethnic minority peoples. These stereotypes are frequently carried into classrooms, and influence teachers’ beliefs about the capacity of individual children to
achieve. Truong Tra Son Luu (2008) and Truong Huyen Chi (2011b) also indicate that teachers are known to discriminate based on students’ ethnic culture and language, which can manifest in rejection of students of other ethnic groups. Additionally, there is evidence of lack of mutual understanding or cooperation between students and teachers, and teachers and parents (Truong Huyen Chi, 2011b) because most teachers are not trained to teach students with different languages and backgrounds and because they are unable to communicate with ethnic minority students (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007).

This section has considered the literature related to the education of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. It indicates that the education of ethnic minority children lags behind that of the Kinh. Even though there have been policies and programs put in place to try to narrow gaps in education between ethnic minority children and their family and the Kinh, ethnic minority children still face considerable issues with their schooling – issues which may hinder them from attending or achieving at school.

2.4 Child-centred education in Vietnam

This section discusses how the historical and contemporary conditions and issues in Vietnam’s educational sector have led to a contemporary emphasis in educational policy on what has come to be referred to as ‘child-centred education’.

2.4.1 Child-centred educational policy in Vietnam

Up to 2001, education in Vietnam experienced significant reform and gained important achievements in expanding and diversifying forms of education and in upgrading school facilities, methods and resources (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001). However, as discussed in section 2.2.2, MOET also points out weaknesses and inadequacies in Vietnam’s education system, one of which refers to a delay in setting strategic directions and sound macro policies to deal with the relationship between size, quality and efficiency in education. The legal documents related to education have not been issued in time and educational development theory has not taken practical matters related to schools, family and society into adequate consideration (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001).

It is clear from the issues outlined in this review regarding Vietnam’s education system, along with challenges in the context of globalization, that there is a need for renewal and change within the education system. The aim of developments in education from 2001 to 2010 was to reform objectives, content, method and education levels (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001). Such reforms
sought to respond in a more dynamic, efficient and immediate way to the needs of the country's development (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001). Official documentation emphasised that general education should focus more on the implementation of holistic education, including on ethics, intellectual knowledge, physical education, and aesthetic education. Emphasis was placed on learners developing positive attitudes toward learning, and implementing an active, positive and creative learning approach. Furthermore, it was felt that learners should be required to have capability to engage in self-directed learning and the capacity to apply knowledge to life.

One of the solutions to educational development is to innovate and modernise methods of education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2001). This requires teachers to shift from the traditional way of teaching and learning, a teacher-centred approach, to a student-centred approach, which guides learners in active and analytical thinking processes, supports them to access information systematically, self-manage activities in schools, teaches them to engage in independent and autonomous (self) study, synthesise information, and take part in social activities.

Following the introduction of the national strategies and policies on education reform (mentioned above), the Ministry of Education and Training introduced a new primary curriculum, which was implemented from 2002 onwards, beginning with implementation in year 1 in 2002, year 2 in 2003 and full implementation by 2006. The new curriculum promoted ‘child-centred learning’, placing children at the centre of the learning process and encouraging children to engage actively in thinking, class participation, problem-solving and relating knowledge to authentic contexts (Dang Van Hung, 2006; Hamano, 2008). The governmental policies related to this curriculum were titled ‘child-centred education’. Such an approach is aimed toward the holistic development of the child. This is articulated in the Vietnam Education Law, 2005, Article 5 as follows:

The content of education and training must be basic, holistic, practical, modern and systematic... It also places an emphasis on inheriting and promoting the fine traditions, ethnic cultures, the quintessence of human culture and that the education and training must be in accordance with the development of physiological age of learners.

In practice, child-centred practices are not entirely new to Vietnam. Professor Ho Ngoc Dai, an educational psychologist in Vietnam, has for decades been interested in CCE. After he finished his PhD in the Soviet Union in 1978, he returned to Vietnam, bringing with him new and innovative teaching ideas and methods. In the 1979 Education Reform, he suggested that the educational system should heed his educational philosophy that “the student is at the centre not the teacher; learning means playing; learning without examining and without giving a mark”. His new teaching ideas were
not strongly supported at that time but the government allowed his program to be put into application at the Hanoi Experiment Secondary School under the supervision of the Education Science Institute.

The child-centred approach was then revived in Vietnam in 1994 with a range of Western donor organisations exerting influence over educational policy and classroom practice by linking financial and practical support to educational reforms – reforms which emulated more child-focused educational philosophies. In order to help Vietnam to improve the quality and efficiency of education, a range of other organisations were influential in the education reform towards child-centred education, including NGOs, the World Bank and UNESCO (Phelps & Graham, 2010). These organisations implemented teaching training programs to develop skills in these teaching approaches. In primary education in particular, there has been much support provided by international organisations in various fields such as the construction of schools, curriculum development, education plans, and teacher education (Hamano, 2008). Oxfam in Vietnam, for example, supported a small pilot project in 1994 that promoted innovative teaching methodologies (Watkins, 2000). A small group of teachers, who worked for the Irish voluntary Agency for Personnel Overseas (APSO), was brought in to train Vietnamese teachers in child-centred, activity-based methods. They worked with Vietnamese teachers and education officials for a few weeks to demonstrate how these methods could be used to motivate and engage children in the learning process. Components of the programme included: teacher training; using simple equipment; improved facilities, including more and better classrooms; and community development work. This small pilot project was carried out in the poor mountainous province of Lao Cai. Teachers and students were pleased with many aspects of the new teaching methods. As Watkins (2000) notes, the pilot project made a significant contribution to the development of education in Vietnam and MOET endorsed the idea of the new teaching methodologies.

The World Bank’s Primary Teacher Development Project (PTDP) agreed to directly support teacher training from 2002 to 2007 in 10 provinces, with the aim to develop teacher professional standards, teacher training materials and to implement programmes to use these tools (Hamano, 2008). The programmes focused on Active Teaching Learning (ATL), highlighting children’s independent thinking. The project employed a ‘train-the-trainer’ model with key trainers selected at provincial level.

The Belgian Technical Corporation (BTC) carried out teacher training projects for primary and secondary education in most provinces in the northern mountainous area from 1999 to 2003 and from 2005-2009 (Hamano, 2008). As with the World Bank initiatives, the projects emphasised ATL, and
chose key trainers to train. Further, a project on primary education for disadvantaged children (PEDC) which was carried out from 2003 to 2010, also placed an emphasis on child-centred approaches and aimed to provide a chance of schooling for children at the appropriate age. At the same time, this initiative focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning in disadvantaged areas, targeting achievement of universal primary education at the proper age (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) launched an ‘In-service Teacher Improvement Programme’ from 2004 to 2007 in pilot provinces (Hamano, 2008). With a view to introducing new teaching methods in line with the new curriculum, this project aimed at developing training materials, implement training and strengthen the abilities of administrators. More recently, Child fund Australia has also provided training to teachers and officials in child-focused methodologies (Phelps & Graham, 2010).

2.4.2 The potential of child-centred education for ethnic minority children

Child-centred education has the potential to provide a safe and friendly learning environment where children have a chance to collaborate and engage actively in the learning process. Lambert and McCombs (1998, p.21) state that “learning is most effective when differences in learners’ linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account”. Ethnic minority children are a case in point, and when these factors are acknowledged and celebrated in the instructional setting, their chance of schooling may be higher because they may feel motivated in the learning process.

Much has been written about the potential of child centred education for different groups of ethnic minorities in both developed and developing countries. For example, research documenting factors which support Indigenous Australian education demonstrate that it is necessary to connect school and community in order for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have a chance to share and learn together (Boylan & Wallace, 2009; Heslop, 1996). In this manner, the broader community becomes involved in the school and curriculum development.

Chen, Mashadi, Ang, and Harkrider (1999) argue that one of the crucial foundations of student-centred learning environments is cultural inclusivity, which enables learners to access learning resources congruent with their values, beliefs and styles of learning. Kennedy (2013) also states that acknowledging each learner’s cultural identity is vital to their educational success and empowerment. Speaking of the Australian indigenous context, Hewitt (2000) emphasises that the first and foremost
step in promoting more positive educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians is to recognise Aboriginal culture and its value as a part of the education of all Australians. Such writers emphasise the very close connection between child-centred teaching and cultural sensitivity and understanding.

Hewitt argues that it is necessary to encourage Aboriginal children to take pride in their culture and give them chances to share cultural value with other students. To achieve this, teachers are required to have understanding of the culture and acceptance of the contribution Aboriginal students make to the learning process (Hewitt, 2000). Additionally, teachers are encouraged to form relationships with parents and local community, using Aboriginal cultural customs (Appleyard, 2002). Similarly, Lette, D'espaignet, Smith, Hunt, and Nannup (2009) encourage teachers to plan units of work which have an Indigenous perspective. Engaging with students in this way provides teachers with a multi-faceted understanding of the complexity and richness of their students. A style of teaching and learning that acknowledges cultural differences may result in positive learning outcomes (Hewitt, 2000).

In the same vein, Qian’s research (2007, cited in Wang, 2011) on diverse minority regions in China also mentions the necessity to include ethnic culture and knowledge in school curricula. Additionally, March (2000, p.58, cited in Dimon, 2000) states that “where parents and community members play an active and decision making role in the school, students enjoy their schooling and feel optimistic about their future prospects”.

As such, according to Wang (2011), it may be beneficial to apply the established theories of multicultural education from other countries to the East Asian context to address the issues on educational inequality for minority students. It is likely that class participation and academic achievement of minority student depends on teachers’ valuing and respecting minority culture and knowledge, as well as an integration of the culture of students into school curricula.

As previously stated, Vietnam’s national curriculum provides for a 15% window program to be focused on local content which allows teachers to focus on local setting or the community or to teach in the local language and focus on history, traditions and crafts so that remoteness which may not be thought of as a social concept. Used effectively, this can close the gap between students, teachers, families and community, thereby bringing more benefits to families and broader communities.
2.5 *Vietnamese teachers’ views about child-centred education*

The child-centred approach has been the focus of quite a lot of discussion and resource provision at both the national and international level in Vietnam, and there have been many arguments on this issue (Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003). Most teachers and educators express the view that it is necessary to implement the child-centred approach in order to enhance the quality of all-round education for the young generation; to respond to the need to develop human resources for industrialisation and modernisation of the country; and to approach the general education level of developed countries in the region and the world (Dang Hoang An, 2011).

Some commentators, however, state that implementing this approach is not in line with Vietnam’s social and cultural context (Dao Hong Thu, 1996). For them, the approach is challenging because teachers are used to imparting knowledge to students; students prefer to teacher-centred approaches (McGrath, 2008) and learning processes are often passive (Dao Hong Thu, 1996). It is not easy for some teachers to change their attitudes toward this new method of teaching (JICA, 2007 cited in Saito et al., 2008). Although teachers took part in training focused on child-centred education, Saito’s research revealed that some teachers were not willing to accept the need to challenge their beliefs about students’ learning and remained negative in their attitudes to child-centred education and to children themselves, illustrating the problematic issues of sharing power with students (Dang Hoang An, 2011; Saito & Tsukui, 2008).

While most teachers have received some form of training related to child-centred teaching methods, most have not been equipped with theoretical understandings of student-centred approaches to education (Dao Hong Thu, 1996) and thus lack deeper understandings of pedagogical practice (Dang Hoang An, 2011; McGrath, 2008). To some extent, student-centred approaches have taken the form of allowing students to voice their opinions and to discuss matters in groups within the higher education context (Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003). At a primary education level, many classrooms maintain a very serious formal learning atmosphere. Saito et al. (2008) illustrate through their observation that teachers still exert their power in class by banging a ruler on the desk as a means of communicating - as an order for the children to follow or for group work to occur. In contrast, students discuss quietly and, when they are allowed to give feedback to their peers or give an answer to the teacher’s question, they behave in a very ‘military proper’ way (ChildFund in Vietnam, 2008). The concept of a good teaching and learning process is that teachers are able to cover prescribed knowledge in a period of 35 or 40 minutes while their students are silent and pay attention to the
teacher’s explanation. Teaching skills of a number of teachers are weak when they are not able to create or design age-relevant learning activities (ChildFund in Vietnam, 2008).

Traditionally, Confucianism has exerted a strong influence on Vietnamese attitudes towards children and childhood itself. As discussed in section 2.1.2, filial piety, as a core value of Confucianism, emphasises children’s respect and obedience to their parents (Le Thi Dan Dung, 2008) and teachers have traditionally perceived children like ‘white pieces of paper’ and in need of upbringing (Rydstrom, 2006, cited in Phelps & Graham, 2010). There exists a traditional and deep-rooted practice of shaping child-related policies based on adults’ experiences (Pham Thi Lan & Jones, 2005). In a school context, this attitude makes teachers feel highly responsible for their duty and, as Kwang and Smith (2004, cited in Phelps & Graham, 2010) note, teachers are viewed as effective instructors when they transmit knowledge accurately and provide a moral exemplars for students to emulate. The image and role of the teacher at school becomes very important and it is the teacher who makes decisions for children and lets them know what is right or wrong.

While views on children and childhood have, and are continuing to, change in many countries, influenced by developments such as Childhood Studies and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) these influences have not necessarily been broadly embraced within the wider Vietnamese community. The term ‘children’s rights’ therefore has not been mentioned in any laws and regulations in Vietnam, even though Vietnam had ratified the UNCRC in the early 1990s (Burr, 2006; Le Thi Dan Dung, 2008; Pham Thi Lan & Jones, 2005). Comments by Hill, Davis, Prout and Tisdall (2004, cited in Phelps & Graham, 2010, p.8) would seem to apply to the Vietnamese context that “while in many countries children have become increasingly important to contemporary social and political agendas, their views and perspectives have not necessarily been adequately or ethical responded to”. Children’s participation is hence usually limited both culturally and socially (Le Thi Dan Dung, 2008). In the educational context, the acknowledgement of the rights and agency of children, resonant with the interests of childhood studies, may encourage them to create contexts where children can actively engage in the learning process.

While most of Vietnamese teachers view a child-centred approach to teaching and learning as beneficial for children, they are inevitably influenced by a whole range of social, cultural and historical influences which impact on their values, attitudes and beliefs. Based on culturally embedded beliefs about teachers’ status and function, teachers may find it difficult to adapt their role or to share power with students. Children’s voice and participation seem to be usually discouraged both culturally
and socially. For these reasons, this study sets out to explore in more depth teachers’ perceptions of CCE.

2.6 Summary

Child-centred practice was introduced in Vietnam along with educational projects funded by NGOs, the World Bank and UNESCO. While it has had an influence on both educational policy and practice, CCE has remained controversial and there is still much debate about its relevance and application. How teachers interpret this educational philosophy and apply it in day-to-day teaching practice has been differential and inconsistent. Because of the influence of traditional Confucianism, some teachers do not agree with the idea of learners being at the centre of the teaching and learning process because they believe this will undermine or lower the position and power of the teacher. Furthermore, their views and perspectives on childhood may not be in line with contemporary social and political agendas, which also limit creativity in applying new methods of teaching and learning. Negative attitudes towards ethnic minority students have influenced teachers’ beliefs about the capacity of individual children to achieve. To date, the literature review has not uncovered any reviews into its adoption, application or effectiveness and there has been no identified research documenting teachers’ perceptions of child-centred education in Vietnam. In addition, due to the fact that Jrai primary school students have continued to experience academic difficulties, it is very likely that approaches to teaching and learning in Jrai classes may not be adequately supported.

Therefore, this study sought to explore teachers’ perceptions and experiences of the child-centred approach to education, especially amongst teachers working in schools with Jrai ethnic minority primary students, in Gia Lai Province.

In this chapter, the literature relating to the context of the study was reviewed. The literature reviewed discussed CCE, education in Vietnam, education of ethnic minority in Vietnam as well as literature on CCE in Vietnam and views about CCE of Vietnamese teachers. In Chapter 3, the phenomenological research methodology and procedures used to conduct this study are discussed.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of child-centred education and its potential in supporting Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai, Viet Nam. This exploration was undertaken from within an interpretivist - phenomenological approach. The chapter begins by explaining why a qualitative approach was chosen for the study. It then details the research paradigm, the research methodology and methods relevant for the study. The chapter will also discuss participant selection, data gathering methods, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Why qualitative research?

This study employed a qualitative, interpretivist research approach as it is concerned with the meanings that teachers themselves attach to their experiences and circumstances in their day-to-day teaching. The researcher sought to examine the notion of CCE from the participants’ point of views and through their own words. Creswell (2007) asserts that detailed understandings about an issue or a problem, as well as the contexts in which participants in a study address that issue, can be best achieved by talking directly with people and allowing them to tell their stories.

Qualitative research is exploratory and qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences and their structures of the world (Creswell, 2007). Hatch (2002, p.7) states that one of the functions of qualitative research is “to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it”. Qualitative research, then, involves the study of a situation or a problem in its entirety and qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products (Creswell, 1994). Interpretive research thus seeks understandings of the meanings of human actions and experiences (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002) and looks for interpretations of the social life-world, both culturally and historically (Crotty, 1998).

Johnson and Christensen (2008) state that qualitative research is appropriate when little is known about a topic or phenomenon and when one wants to discover, explore and learn more about it. According to Creswell (1994) one of the characteristics of a qualitative research problem is that the problem is not fully formed or understood because there is a lack of theory and previous research on it. Qualitative research is commonly employed to examine and understand people’s experiences or their
insider’s perspective and to express these perspectives (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research provides insight into the “human” side of an issue and such methods are effective in identifying intangible factors such as social norms, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and the like, the influence of which may not be readily apparent (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

Qualitative research is thus relevant to this study since it aims to develop understanding of the experiential dimensions “of humans’ lives and social worlds” (Fossey et al., 2002). This research seeks to establish an in-depth and detailed understanding of participants’ experiences and perceptions of child-centred education through the qualitative research methodology hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate methodology for this study.

Hermeneutic phenomenology...is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena (Van Manen, 1990, p.180).

In this research, the phenomenon being studied is child-centred approaches to education and their relevance in contexts of high ethnic minority students. In particular, the research sought to understand this phenomenon through the perceptions, understandings and experiences of primary school teachers working with Jrai students.

van Manen (1990) claims that discovery of knowledge, that is “verstehen” (understanding), cannot be achieved by the empirical-analytical sciences; instead, it is shared with common meaning of mutual history, culture and language of the world as it is lived. Additionally, McManus Holroyd (2007) states that, as evidenced by the growing body of human science research, the scientific method alone cannot explain human experience or, more importantly, precipitate an understanding of it. Hermeneutics can help researchers gain understanding of human phenomena in human science research through the art and science of interpretation (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

The following sections will explore key literature related to phenomenology and explain the basis of hermeneutic phenomenology as it has been applied in this research.
3.2.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology has its roots in the philosophical perspectives of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and the later discussions by Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 2007; Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). It has been used in a range of social and human sciences, including education.

Phenomenology is defined as the interpretive study of human experience in which phenomena are observed and explained through human situations, events and experiences (Bourke, 2007; Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology acknowledges that a person’s life world is a product of society, culture and history (Fossey et al., 2002). It investigates the very nature of a phenomenon and describes the presence of any phenomenon (Kleiman, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). In other words, a phenomenological researcher attempts to understand how people experience a phenomenon from their own perspective (Bourke, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Merleau-Ponty (1962, cited in Kleiman, 2004) states that phenomenology is the study of essences; for example, an essence of an experience in a particular context (Giorgi, 1997). The essence is described as “the inner essential nature of a thing, the true being of a thing... that what makes a thing what it is rather than its being or becoming something else” (Van Manen, 1990 p.177). Jopling (1996, cited in Goulding, 2005) asserts that phenomenology critically reflects conscious experience, and is designed to reveal the essential invariant features of that experience.

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches value the importance of the meaning each individual attributes to the phenomenon (Jurema, Pimentel, Cordeiro, & Nepomuceno, 2006; Lester, 1999). In the broadest sense, phenomenology emphasises the effort to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena “as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencers” (Moran, 2000, p.4). In agreement with Moran, Denscombe (2007) states that, rather than explaining the cause or measuring the extent of the event, phenomenology emphasises individuals’ perceptions, views and experiences, their point of view of the phenomenon, how they understand the situation, how they apply these understandings, as well as how they interpret events. Fossey et al., (2002), van Manen (1990) and Crotty (1998) state that phenomenological research focuses on how people experience the world, what it is like for them and how best to understand their experiences. Therefore, in employing phenomenology, a researcher prefers to discover the meanings of phenomena from lived experiences rather than from universal principles (Giorgi, 1997; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).
In addition, Crotty (1998) asserts that phenomenology allows the possibility for new meanings of phenomena to emerge, or at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning, through the laying aside of prevailing understandings of those phenomena. This supports the assertion of Jurema et al., (2006) that phenomenology deals with a reality of unending possibilities because it is based on perspectives. In other words, each researcher experiences the phenomena differently in view of seeing and interrogating it.

There are a number of different forms of phenomenology. The approach which underpins this study is hermeneutic phenomenology, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur are among key figures in the development of hermeneutic phenomenology (Thompson, 1981, p.36, cited in Sharkey, 2001). According to Kakkori (2009), hermeneutic phenomenology represents the connection between hermeneutics and phenomenology; it is defined as “the research of the meaning of the Being as a fundamental ontology” (p. 19). Unlike Husserl who focused on understanding beings or phenomenema, Heidegger’s focus was on “Dasein” - “the mode of human being” or “the situated meaning of a human in a world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 7). As such, hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies persons (Van Manen, 1990) and focuses on the life world or human experience in all aspects as it is lived, aiming to create meaning and to achieve a sense of understanding (Wilson & Hutchins, 1991, cited in Laverty, 2003).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a research methodology, is aimed at developing rich or dense textual descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context (Smith, 1997, cited in Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). Wilcke (2002) also asserts that the goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to elucidate lived experience and to reveal meaning through a process of understanding and interpretation.

Hermeneutic phenomenology includes the components of description and interpretation (Heidegger, 1962 and Husserl, 1965, cited in Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). Henriksson and Friesen (2012) argue that it is impossible to study experience without, at the same time, investigating its meaning; and it is impossible to study meaning without experiential grounding. Thus, research utilising hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to go beyond description in order to discover meanings that are not immediately conveyed or apparent (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, cited in Wilcke, 2002). In the same vein, Heidegger (1962, p.37, cited in Finlay, 2009) emphasises that “the meaning of
phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation”. van Manen (1990) also argues this, stating that meanings are not given directly to us; rather they must be inferred. Interpretation plays a vital role in this process of understanding to disclose hidden meanings. It is, therefore, not an additional procedure but is considered an inevitable and basic structure of our ‘being-in-the-world’.

According to hermeneutic phenomenologists, interpretation is required to bring out the ways in which meanings make sense in a context (Finlay, 2009). When description is mediated by expression, including nonverbal aspects, action, artwork, or text, a stronger element of interpretation is involved (Van Manen, 1990). As such, interpretation is viewed as a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Polkinghorne, 1983, cited in Laverty, 2003); a dialectical interaction between the expectation of the interpreter and the meaning of the text. At the same time, understanding takes place as a fusion of horizons: a fusion between the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon projected by the text (Gadamer, 1989, cited in Sharkey, 2001).

Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on meaning emerging from the interpretive interaction between historically produced texts and the researcher (Laverty, 2003). This view is consistent with Heidegger’s (1927, cited in Laverty, 2003) argument that one’s background cannot be made completely explicit because views of people and the world related in cultural, in social and in historical contexts influence ways of understanding the world. Laverty (2003, p. 8) claims that “meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences”. For Heidegger, it is necessary that every experience involve an interpretation influenced by an individual’s background and historicality. This interpretive process includes explicit statements of the historical movements or philosophies that are guiding interpretation, as well as the presuppositions that motivate the individuals who make the interpretations. The researcher therefore explores the participants’ horizons and their own historical and cultural horizons, in order to make these explicit (Laverty, 2003).

Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that all research is value-laden, since researchers bring their biases, prejudices and assumptions to the endeavour, and these colour the findings (Wilcke, 2002). When deciding to do research on a particular experience from a hermeneutic or phenomenological perspective, the researcher begins a process of self-reflection (Laverty, 2003). This orientation or pre-understanding shapes the interpretive process (Sharkey, 2001). The researcher is required to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched. Gadamer and Heidegger describe ‘bracketing’ of
pre-understanding or prejudices as impossible (Ashworth, 2000; Sharkey, 2001). Rather, Heidegger emphasises the importance of our preconceptions by postulating that we experience and understand the world by means of projection, and that “an interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless apprehending of something presented us” (Spiegelberg, 1982 p.191 cited in Wilcke, 2002, p. 3).

Sharkey (2001) asserts that, while many research approaches seek to eliminate the prior understandings of the researcher, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to test those prior understandings and that such pre-understandings are seen as the requirement for any act of interpretation or understanding. This unfolds as a deep and genuine engagement with the object of one’s research interest. Gadamer (1997, p.26, cited in Wilcke, 2002, p. 4) views the elements of ‘prejudice’ and ‘fore-meanings’ as the means by which we orient ourselves to a topic, stating that “the important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own foremeanings”. Hermeneutic phenomenology, in this case, seeks to open up a middle space of rich engagement between the research object and the researcher. As such, researchers are required to be open to having their current understandings confirmed or varied by what arises as the research process unfolds (Sharkey, 2001).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is consequently the study of experience together with its meanings, and this type of phenomenology is open to revision and reinterpretation (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). The use of hermeneutic phenomenology, therefore, enables the researcher to explore participants’ experiences with further abstraction and interpretation, based on the researchers’ theoretical and personal knowledge (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). As van Manen (1990, p. 7) states, “hermeneutic phenomenological research edifies the personal insight, contributing to one’s thoughtfulness and one’s ability to act toward others, children or adults, with tact or tactfulness”.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is thus employed in this research, since it aims to emphasise the meaning making process of each individual participant. Through this methodology, the research explores teachers’ understandings of the child-centred approach. Child-centred education needs to be understood beyond a policy directive but rather within the life world of teachers; namely, the school context where teaching and learning activities happen every day. This research will explore how each participant makes sense of CCE by encouraging them to recollect, reflect on their own perceptions and describe them authentically.
3.3 **Sampling**

Purposive sampling methods are frequently used by qualitative researchers to identify primary participants whose qualities or experiences relate to the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Goulding, 2005; Litchman, 2006; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Participants are selected if they have experiences related to the study (Goulding, 2005). According to Patton (2002), cases are purposefully selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative; that is, they offer “useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest”. Purposive sampling is particularly suited to phenomenological research in that it enables the collection of detailed information from a manageable group of stakeholders (Polkinghorne, cited in Creswell, 1994; Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 1990).

As discussed in section 1.5, this research is focusing on primary school teachers in Gia Lai, Vietnam, who have had experiences implementing CCE in classes of Jrai ethnic minority students. This section will explain how schools and teachers were selected, and will outline some of the limitations of the sampling approach.

### 3.3.1 Selection of schools

The decision to focus on schools catering for children of the Jrai ethnic minority group was made primarily because Jrai is the major ethnic group in the area in which I (as the researcher) live and work. This decision, therefore, might be considered to represent convenience sampling. Jrai represent 30% of the overall provincial population of Gia Lai and, like many other ethnic minority groups, currently experience poor educational outcomes. Although the province is also home to another ethnic minority group, namely the Bahnar (representing 11% of the population), these individuals primarily live in separate districts from the Jrai, and would attend separate schools. Therefore, in order to focus the research, the decision was made to sample only within two regions of Gia Lai province where there is a high population of Jrai, namely Chu Pah and Ia Grai.

Within Chu Pah and Ia Grai regions, I sought to work with schools or satellite schools (a branch of a local primary school which is situated in more remote, solely ethnic minority areas) where 100% of the student population was Jrai. For the reasons explained in section 1.5, this group was seen to be of particular interest given their very minimal exposure to the Kinh population or Vietnamese languages outside the school context. Most, but not all, of the teachers at the school are Kinh, and for some children attending school is their first significant encounter with Kinh people. Focusing on 100% Jrai
classes provided a unique insight into how both Kinh and Jrai teachers conceive the dynamics of the classroom.

Access to the schools needed to be gained through the provincial offices of education. I therefore met with staff from the office responsible for primary education and provided them with my letter to participants and the informed consent form translated into Vietnamese (see Appendix 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b). These administrators then introduced me to two schools (which will be referred to as School A and School B) and nominated one of their members to accompany me to the school. Letters were given to the two principals (see Appendix 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b) and permission was gained to approach staff in each of the schools.

Unbeknownst to me, and due to issues discussed in section 3.3.3, both School A and School B were experimental schools funded by UNICEF. School A had a total of 19 classes, of which there were four funded classes. There were 14 classes in the main schools and five classes in the two satellite schools. On average, each class had from 28-32 students, however the four funded classes (years 2 and 3) had between 15 to 20 students per class. These funded classes have long-day learning at school from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Funded classes at the main school were designed with a friendly classroom climate where there were paintings on the wall referring to the familiar images and/or symbols of the community. At the end corner of the classroom there was a shelf with some books for children to read during break. There were some local tools and products displayed on the self.

Similarly, School B had 20 classes altogether. They also have four funded class. There were 14 classes in the main schools and six classes in the two satellite schools. There were 28-32 students in each class. School B also had four funded classes (years 2 and 3) with around 15 to 20 students per class. These funded classes had long-day learning at school from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The teachers at these schools had thus been provided with more support in terms of school facilities, resources and professional development workshops focused on applying CCE. For this reason, it was important to approach a third school, School C, which did not receive UNICEF funding to see whether there were differences amongst teachers’ perceptions about CCE at that school. School C was recommended by teachers interviewed at School A and School B on the basis that it might provide divergent teacher perspectives and experiences. This approach is aligned with snowball sampling.
School C was also a big school with 20 classes. It also had two satellite schools with four classes. There were around 30 students in each class.

### 3.3.2 Selection of participants

Classroom teachers were selected as the main group to be interviewed, since they are the ones who are at the “coalface” in the classroom and who make the everyday decisions on teaching and learning. It was therefore deemed important to focus on their views, experiences and perspectives in relation to the research questions. I aimed to involve a broad sample of teacher participants from both Kinh and Jrai backgrounds, and to involve a balance of male and female teachers, as well as beginning teachers and those with more than 5 years teaching experience.

The study also sought the participation of principals and a local educational manager because they contribute significantly to the culture in their schools and influence teachers’ practices in both explicit and implicit ways. In addition, they take a leadership role - managing, organising, guiding and inspecting implementation of educational policies at a school and a local level. They are also considered as gatekeepers, who would facilitate my access to teachers from the schools participating in the study. The research thus involved interviews with three school principals.

Additionally, one teacher trainer (tutor/lecturer) at Gia Lai Teacher Training College who is a teacher of methodology was invited to participate in the research. This teacher was interviewed about his views on CCE and how it is addressed in pre-service training and professional development programs.

While it would also have been valuable to seek the views of children and young people themselves, this was considered beyond the scope of this particular study.

Once permission was provided by school principals, details of my research were presented at these schools at a school staff meeting. A letter concerning the study (Appendix 1b) was handed out to teaching staff and I also explained the research procedures and talked through the teacher consent form (Appendix 2b), including issues of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Teachers then had time to consider whether they were willing to participate in the research. Once they decided, they contacted me, signed and returned the consent form when they met for the interview.

The study thus involved 30 participants. Basic demographic information including school, current class, gender, ethnicity and year of graduation is provided in Table 1 below. This table also provides
information on whether the teachers’ class was funded through the UNICEF project, noting that all teachers at schools A and B were indirectly influenced by the project.
Table 1. Profile of participating teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Current class</th>
<th>Whether funded class</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Year of graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms Khanh</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Nuong</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Nhien</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Son</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Nguyet</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Tan</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Thanh</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jrai</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Loan</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jrai</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Trang</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Trung</td>
<td>A school</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Minh</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Jrai</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Thuyen</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Lan</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Suong</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Bich</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(indirect)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Hoan</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jrai</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Phuong</td>
<td>B school</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Trung</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Hai</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jrai</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Trang</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Nam</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Y</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Lam</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Phu</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Binh</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Hoa</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Trinh</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Tuyet</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Dao</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Chien</td>
<td>C school</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Nguyen</td>
<td>Teacher training college</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kinh</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.3 Limitations of the sampling approach

As explained in section 3.3, I sought to purposefully select participants with diverse experiences who were likely to provide rich data related to the study. However, the process of recruiting participants was not easy. In this case, purposive sampling was not chosen by me but by the local educational manager, specifically the office in charge of primary education. They themselves identified School A and School B to be involved in the research. The educational manager no doubt believed she was doing the right thing for me as a researcher by referring me to schools that already had a specific focus on CCE through the UNICEF project. While it was beneficial to have access to these schools, in terms of gaining diverse insights into teachers’ perspectives in more typical schools in the area, this presented a limitation.

Selection of the teachers within Schools A and B also presented some limitations, primarily due to the ‘gatekeeper’ role played by the principal. After I had explained the project to the teaching staff (see above), the principal provided me with a list of those teachers who would participate. It was not entirely clear how this list was compiled and it is likely that the principal may have put forward the ‘best’ teachers in terms of ‘doing CCE well’. As is culturally the case in Vietnam, the principal would no doubt have felt that their district and schools were being scrutinised and possibly judged (despite reassurances to the contrary). It is therefore understandable that these principals would influence those teachers who “volunteered” to participate.

Some teachers, especially those in the UNICEF funded schools, were enthusiastic to participate. It was clear that they volunteered to join the research because they felt interested in the topic and they thought that it was a good opportunity to share their feelings and concerns. Other teachers, however, were not keen and after an initial discussion with them I recognised that they did not imply consent, and I indicated to them that they did not have to continue. These teachers ARE NOT listed in the table above.

A note might be made here about the reasons why many teachers did not volunteer to participate following my presentation at the schools, or clearly did not wish to continue after they had been nominated. Culturally, being interviewed is something that is serious or strange to both rural Vietnamese and Jrai people (in particular), and the idea of their conversation being recorded may have caused concern. While I acknowledged this issue with them and tried to explain matters of
confidentiality and anonymity, I recognised that some teachers did not feel easy and comfortable with the interview.

Furthermore, because most of them graduated from the Teacher Training College where I previously worked, many of them knew of me. While it was not explicit, they viewed me as the teacher who would test their knowledge. The concept of right or wrong is strongly held in Vietnamese educational contexts and some teachers were no doubt afraid to “lose face” if they answered or said something wrong. For these reasons it was most appropriate to discontinue interviews with those teachers who did not imply consent.

As will be described in section 3.4, some teachers preferred group interviews because this was felt to be less confronting. For this reason, two group interviews of three teachers were carried out.

3.4 Data gathering methods

Qualitative research is often concerned with exploring the identity of those you are seeking to research (David & Sutton, 2011). In many types of qualitative research, observations and interviews are commonly used as the instrument of data collection. However, I did not choose to observe classrooms to collect data for a number of methodological, ethical and pragmatic reasons. Firstly, class observation is time consuming and my time available to collect data in Vietnam was limited. Secondly, I was concerned about the reliability of data obtained from class observations since my presence as an observer in the classroom would likely influence the nature of the lesson, making the lesson a typical of the teacher’s usual style of teaching. Teachers in Vietnam were likely to interpret classroom observation as an inspection, and observed teachers may over prepare for their teaching and learning activities to show themselves at their best.

Finally, the reason for not choosing class observations relates to the ethics of such observation, an issue which will be discussed in detail in section 3.6 below. Interviews were therefore employed to collect data. In this way, participants are encouraged to use their own words to express or share their feelings and emotions and to develop their thoughts with the aim to discover meanings rather than to check knowledge (Denscombe, 2007; Fossey et al., 2002; Kvale, 1996; Litchman, 2006). In other words, interviews provide a means by which participants are asked to give accounts of their views, perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Stark and Trinidad (2007) state that the purpose of an interview is to capture the participants’ language in order to discover, elucidate and gently investigate the participant’s story, including any
references or appeals to other discourses. As a method of inquiry, interviewing draws on people’s
capacity to use language to make meaning. It acknowledges the importance of the individual.
Additionally, interviews provide the potential to expose the mystery which constitutes the way the
interviewee sees the world (Kvale, 1996). As such interviews are considered as the appropriate method
for this phenomenological study.

The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and uses open-ended
comments and questions (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Semi-structured interviews are the most common
interview technique used in phenomenological research (Langdridge, 2007).

Langdridge notes that during the interview, the interviewer works with the questions in the light of the
conversation that occurs with the interviewee and the aim is always the development of rapport to
enable joint exploration of the participants’ worldviews relating to the topic. Qualitative research,
through in-depth semi-structured interviews, can obtain rich information about a participant’s
thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feeling about a topic while giving
participants the freedom to explain a situation in their own words (Kvale, 1996; Morse & Field, 1996).
In other words, the goal of these in-depth interviews is to have the participant reconstruct his or her
experience and make sense of their experiences to deepen the researcher’s understanding about their
meaning of the phenomena of investigation. This function was highlighted for the specific case of
hermeneutic phenomenological method (Van Manen, 1990).

Semi-structured interviews are conducted in a friendly manner, and vary in length and the formality of
language used, as well as being flexibly timed to suit the respondent (Burns, 2000). A researcher will
thus construct a semi-structured interview guide with questions organised under a list of topic
headings (Robson, 2002) on which the interviewer is allowed to elaborate on what the interviewee
says, while maintaining the focus of the interview (Borg, 2006; Hansen, 2006). This is consistent with
van Manen’s (1990) view that the role of the researcher in the hermeneutic interview is to keep the
interviewee focused on the topic being investigated.

In order to maintain privacy and to prevent interruption or the presence of others and to create a
comfortable atmosphere, interviewees were asked to choose a venue for the interview. As
(Nieswiadomy, 1998) states, regardless of the setting, the researcher should attempt to seek as much
privacy as possible for the interview. Therefore, twenty-four participants chose to be interviewed at
their home while two interviews were held at the participant’s school and four were at local cafes.
Each participant was interviewed once. One-to-one interviews (of about one hour) were used in this research. These interviews provided an opportunity to investigate in detail each participant’s personal perceptions about, and experiences of, CCE.

Further, the interviews were conducted face-to-face (Giorgi, 2009) so that each participant might feel more comfortable to speak about their personal experiences.

Before interviewing, I asked the participants about their students and/or school and their daily activities, which helped them to feel relaxed. After establishing rapport with the participants, I reminded them about the research topic, making sure that they understood what the research was focused on. The research interview in phenomenology usually begins by asking the participant to share his/her particular experience (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). This was followed by the use of focused questions to elicit specific detail, open-ended questions to enrich the description and a small number of closed questions requiring a yes or no answer (Dphil, 2011). During the interviews, I encouraged participants’ deep and reflective engagement and observed their behaviours and body language.

All the interviews were recorded with an audio recorder, with the participant’s permission, for the purpose of capturing the exact words of the interview as accurately as possible (as recommended by Holloway and Wheeler, 2002).

As further discussed in the 6.2, it would be beneficial if I could have conducted follow-up interviews in order to ask further questions of participants, follow up on comments they had made, or discuss issues that had arisen in the research further. However, because of my limited time available in the field and financial difficulties when travelling, it was only possible to conduct one interview. While considered the possibility of following-up with participants via email after I returned to Australia, this was not possible because I did not know how to contact them. Very few of the participants had access to a computer or the internet, nor did they have email addresses.

The questions provided in Appendix 3 represent a semi-structured interview guide; however I encouraged participants to take the lead in telling their stories and relating their experiences. The interviews were conducted in a focused but flexible and conversational manner. This approach to collecting data is advantageous in ensuring sensitivity to participants’ language and privileging their knowledge (Fossey et al., 2002).
3.5 *Data analysis*

Analysis of the interview data was through thematic analysis using open and axial coding, as explained by (Patton, 2002). The phenomenological process of analysing data described by van Manen (1990, p.92-93) includes three approaches to identifying themes, namely:

- a holistic or sententious approach, in which the interpreter reads the text as a whole and then formulates a phrase that captures the foundational meanings;
- a highlighting approach, in which the interpreter selects specific phrases or sentences on the text that capture the essence of the phenomena; and
- a detailed approach, in which every sentence is examined to determine what it reveals about the experience.

Moustakas (1994) also suggests identifying significant statements from participants. After that, the researcher lists and clusters these statements into meaning units and themes. These meaning units are used to develop a textural description of the experience. From this, textures and structures are integrated into the meanings, and essences of the phenomenon are constructed.

The coding process was achieved with the support of qualitative data analysis software (Phelps, Fisher, & Ellis, 2007, p. 215), specifically NVivo. The process of reading and coding data was an iterative and cyclical process until all codes and/or themes had been discovered. Text-based data was imported directly into NVivo.

Each transcript was read through, and each phrase or section of text that related to a particular theme or issue was “assigned” to a node in NVivo. Some of these themes/issues/nodes were constructed ahead of data collection. In other words, some initial codes were created “a priori” from the list of research questions. Individual extracts of data were sometimes coded and recoded more than once, at times into one or several themes.

Many of the sub-themes then emerged during the reading and analysis process in response to the data. After an initial analysis and coding process with each of the interview transcripts, I then carefully re-read all the data, including both the full transcripts and the data in each of the coded nodes, examining the coding choices thoroughly and analytically and recoding where required. By focusing on each unit of data, I could reorganise the various generated nodes, merging some to form more general categories.
and splitting others to form more specific groups of data. In this way, interconnections of ideas were gradually formed and meanings were created.

NVivo allowed me to see coding summaries of each node by source, which can be from one individual participant/ focus group or from several participants. I used NVivo to do the sorting in which I merged similar nodes together, deleting overlapping ones, and adding more categories when necessary.

Themes were continuously checked and re-organised until the interconnections between them were clearly specified. As such, thematic data analysis was "an ongoing organic process" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of analysing data in this research was particularly challenging because the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. I initially transcribed the interviews using the Vietnamese language. Data were transcribed word-for-word to ensure that the interview was captured in its entirety.

While in the field in Vietnam the researcher transcribed the first four interviews and then offered the transcripts back to these participants for clarification and member-checking. This also allowed the researcher to listen back to, and subsequently refine, her interviewing techniques. Two of these initial interviews were translated into English and sent to the researcher’s supervisor in Australia. This allowed the supervisor to read these transcripts and provide feedback and advice on interviewing techniques, particularly strategies to gain rich data from the participants. After that, the researcher continued conducting interviews with others participants. It was not, however, possible to sustain this process of transcribing immediately following the interviews, due to the limited time available in the field. Hence, after returning to Australia, the remaining 26 interviews were both transcribed into Vietnamese and then translated into English. The translations and transcriptions were sent back to four teachers of English in Vietnam so that these teachers could double check and endorse the accuracy of these text documents. After that, the analysis process was begun. Once back in Australia, the researcher was able, on occasions, to contact some of the participants via email to clarify some issues or points raised during the interviews.

During the process of translating, there were times when the researcher had difficulties in finding equivalent English words, terms or phrases which conveyed the equivalent meaning to the Vietnamese words and phrases used in the interviews. In these cases, the words and phrases were discussed in some detail with the supervisor who assisted to articulate an appropriate translation. In some cases, when the researcher was not able to find equivalent words in English, the explanation in English was
given and the Vietnamese words were provided so that Vietnamese readers would ascertain the authentic meaning of the text.

3.6 Ethical considerations

All social research raises ethical considerations. According to Punch (2009), there are various potential ethical issues that need to be carefully identified and considered when planning research. This ensures that the potential respondents have full information before voluntarily taking part in a research. Researchers need to place themselves in the participants’ position and consider if there is any reasonable possibility of harm arising. The responsibility of the researcher is to eliminate or minimise this possibility.

It is important for researchers to bring to their research cultural understandings and sensitivities which should influence the methodological decisions made in designing research.

Class observation was not considered to be ethically appropriate as a means to collect data for this research (see also section 3.4) since, in practice in Vietnam, class observations are usually employed when teacher inspectors want to evaluate teachers’ professional knowledge and pedagogy. Teachers and students often dislike and even fear being observed, as they find classroom inspections stressful and intimidating. Employing classroom observation for data collection would have put both teachers and students under psychological pressure. Most teachers feel worried and anxious when it comes to classroom observation, as observers tend to exercise top-down authority, and a negative report on teaching practice can have devastating impacts on an individual’s career.

Because this research involved collecting data from participants through in-depth interviews, ethical issues such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality needed to be addressed. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University in Australia (Approval number is ECN-11-262).

There are no formal ethical approval processes that have to be followed in Vietnam. The researcher did, however, meet with various stakeholder groups, including teachers, principals and local education authorities to seek their permissions to take part in the study. In order for them to voluntarily participate in the research, the researcher provided each of them with an invitation letter (Appendix 1a and 1b - which includes both the English version and the Vietnamese versions). This letter outlines the purpose and focus of the research, the research methods used, the proposed duration of the interviews,
an explanation that the interview will be recorded, as well as participants’ rights to privacy and anonymity. Potential research participants were assured that all information provided in the interviews would be treated confidentially. The information sheet also advised participants that they could withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time.

At the interview, potential research participants brought back their signed consent letter (see Appendix 2a and 2b - which includes both the English version and the Vietnamese versions) confirming that they had read and understood the details in the letter. However, in order for the participants to deeply understand the research purposes, the researcher verbally talked through the information in the letter and the participant information sheet again to ensure that they fully understood the issues related to their rights. Each participant signed the Consent Form and handed it in to the researcher before the interview.

Pseudonyms were used throughout the data analysis and reporting phases to protect the participants’ privacy (see Table 1 above). Schools were also assigned a code to and care was taken to avoid presenting any information which might enable them to be identified.

As mentioned in section 3.3.3, principals nominated teachers to be interviewed, implying that these teachers would accept their nomination and participate in the interview. However, bringing such cultural understandings with me to the research, I considered it was not ethical to assume consent for participation from these nominated teachers. I explained to them my purpose for collecting data, encouraging them to join and share their understandings and experiences of CCE if they felt like it. However, I also emphasised that they could withdraw at any time. Some teachers did withdraw before being interviewed.

3.7 Ensuring the quality of the study

Literature reveals a broad range of measures of research rigor and argues that there are different measures applied to research from qualitative and quantitative paradigms (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Scaife, 2004). Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that the criteria for judging qualitative research processes and outcomes include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

alternative framework of four qualities to judge trustworthiness, namely: vividness; accuracy; richness; and elegance. van Manen (1990) further suggests four foundation components of rigor: orientation; strength; richness; and depth. In the same vein, Langdridge (2007) argues that the quality of hermeneutic phenomenological research should be based on analytical rigor, persuasive account, and participant feedback. Kafle (2011, p.196) adds one further criteria, namely “rhetoric”; meaning the writing or reporting style of the research, and how language is employed. This then incorporates the capacity of the research to elicit the true intention of the research participants. de Witt and Ploeg (2006) proposes a further framework of five expressions for judging the rigor of phenomenological research. Balanced integration and openness are criteria used to reflect the research process, while concreteness, resonance, and actualisation are applied to judge the research outcome.

Building on these frameworks, but specifically those of van Manen, de Witt and Ploeg, and Langdridge, the following criteria have been applied to ensure the quality of this particular study.

Orientation refers to the researcher’s involvement in the world of the participants and their stories. This criteria has been applied in this research in that the researcher has (as far as was possible) set aside her pre-understandings about the phenomenon (CCE) and has listened to the research participants to gain insights into their perceptions through dialogue with them. Some phenomenologists argue that this cannot be wholly achieved unless the interview is unstructured and emerges from the discussion itself. However, in this research I chose to use a semi-structured interview schedule because people in Vietnam are not used to being interviewed or asked to present their views in this way. Many of them tend to believe there is a right and a wrong answer and subsequently feel worried about losing face if they give wrong information. It was thus necessary to provide some guidance and prompting to assist the interviews to elaborate.

Strength refers to participants’ texts from which they are able to convey the core intention of their understanding of the phenomena. In this study, the researcher transcribed the full interviews, retaining as much of the context of the interviews as possible. At the same time, the researcher took care with the translation of key terms from Vietnamese into English. Where a Vietnamese term or phrase may not have a clear equivalence in English, the research chose the closest translation and retained the original Vietnamese words in brackets (see section 3.5).
The criteria of richness of the texts was also taken into considerations in that each interview was organised to allow at least an hour so as to encourage participants to provide rich, thick descriptions and concrete examples during the interviews.

Depth provides an indication of research quality by considering whether the data collected and the analysis conducted presents rich and thick description. This requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the descriptions, read between the lines, re-read them carefully, obtaining understandings from single sentences and phrases as well as the text as a whole so that deeper meanings are discovered.

Balanced integration refers to the expression of the general philosophical theme and its fit with the researcher and the research topic. It includes in-depth intertwining of philosophical concepts within the study methods and findings and a balance between the voice of study participants and the philosophical explanation (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). This criterion was demonstrated in this study in which the researcher tried to explain themes consistent with participants’ comments and provided rich quotes in the data chapter.

Openness might be associated with Guba and Lincoln’s notion of dependability, such that multiple decisions made through an interpretive phenomenological study are accounted for in the research; in other words, an ‘audit trail’ is provided. In this study, this methodology chapter provides numerous indications of why, when and how methodological decisions were made. In chapter five and six, where the data is discussed and conclusions are drawn, I critique the basis of my analytical decisions.

The criterion of concreteness refers to the findings in which readers are provided with examples that situate themselves concretely in the context of this phenomenon (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). In this study, data collected from participants might be acknowledged to be useful for practice when it connects readers to the phenomenon in the context of everyday classrooms.

Resonance refers to the “experiential or felt effect of reading the study findings upon the reader” (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006, p. 226). It might be considered as paralleling Guba and Lincoln’s notion of transferability, Langridge’s criterion of persuasive account and Polkinghorne’s notion of accuracy. In this study, resonance may occur for readers from non-Asian countries, particularly where issues of rurality might apply, but it is most likely to resonate for readers from Vietnam or other Asian contexts where similar ethnic minority issues exist.
It is beyond the scope of this research report to account for the criteria of actualization, which is the future realisation of the study’s findings.

Langdridge’s (2007) notion of participant feedback refers to returning the interviews to research participants so that they can check what they have expressed about the phenomenon. It may be associated with member checks, one of the strategies for achieving credibility. While this criterion was applied in some interviews (see section 3.5), I also used peer debriefing criterion when the Vietnamese transcriptions were translated into English versions with the assistance from the supervisor.

After analysing the data, I also sent the findings chapters, written in English, to four other Vietnamese PhD students who have been doing research about education in Vietnam at other universities in Australia to get feedback. These peers were considered appropriate as they were familiar with English at tertiary level and could marry theoretical understandings from literature with practical experience in education within Vietnam.

In these various ways, the research can be seen as meeting both the general quality criteria traditionally discussed by Guba/Lincoln, as well as the specific criteria applied to phenomenologist research.

This chapter has discussed the methodology used in the research, including the reason for the use of the qualitative methodology hermeneutic phenomenology. The methods and techniques used to collect the data for the study have also been presented, including sampling decisions. The issues of ethics and ensuring the quality of the study have also been addressed. Chapter 4 will present the data analysis.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to better understand primary school teachers’ perceptions and experiences of child-centred approaches to education, especially amongst teachers of Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai Province. As indicated in the previous chapter, semi-structured interviews were employed in order to collect rich information from the participating teachers.

In this chapter, the data from these interviews is presented. The chapter will begin by exploring when and how teachers learnt about CCE, since this data provides insights into how they formed their beliefs and understandings. Section 4.2, then, explores teachers’ understandings of CCE as a general concept. A number of themes are discussed including CCE being about: teachers acting as facilitators; active engagement of students; using group work; catering for students’ individual difference; using teaching aids; and creating a friendly and caring learning atmosphere.

In section 4.3 discussion turns to data which highlights the specific issues impacting on the learning of Jrai students, as perceived by the interviewed teachers. Section 4.4 then builds from these issues to present teachers’ explanations of how CCE can specifically enhance Jrai students’ learning. The final section in the chapter presents teachers’ comments about what hinders and enables the implementation of CCE in their teaching context.

As discussed in chapter three, pseudonyms have been used to ensure teachers’ anonymity and any identifying information has been removed from their stories.

4.1 When and how teachers learnt about CCE

When questioned about how and when they learnt about CCE, most of the interviewed teachers strongly associated CCE with the 2000 policy directive (NQ40/2000) from the Vietnamese Government and the accompanying new curriculum implemented in 2002 by MOET (see section 2.4.1). Since then, they have attended courses and professional workshops held for teachers at local and national levels, guiding them as to how they should apply CCE with their class.

Teachers stated that the workshops modelled CCE teaching approaches and gave them sample lesson plans. They described how they played the role of students who took part in all learning activities, and
that by following the trainers’ guidance they could recognise and directly experience the difference between TCE and CCE. As Ms Nguyet recounted:

In the workshop, they used CCE. They divided us into groups; handed out materials and let us explore the content. We would raise questions if we have any problems and they will help us. After that, all groups will do a presentation and give feedback and come to a conclusion. Through the workshop, I can imagine what CCE is.

However, a small number of interviewed teachers indicated that they had some experiences of using CCE before 2002. Four teachers (Ms Phuong, Ms Nhien, Ms Lan and Mr Trung) described employing child-centred approaches when teaching classes comprising both Jrai and Kinh students. Because both they and the students faced a lot of difficulties, they had to try and find teaching methods to assist the Jrai students to become more motivated in their learning. Ms Phuong, the principal of school B, reflected on the experience:

I felt TCE was boring because students sat passively listening to the teacher. I thought of a way of teaching which makes students physically active (discussing with friends, teachers or moving around the class) and mentally active (thinking or brainstorming.....). I am the person who would guide them or give them some clues, group them to work with their peers....Since then, at the end of a class day, I use a variety of games to consolidate knowledge.

Ms Phuong stressed that, at that time, she referred to the teaching methods she was using as ‘learning game methods’ [phuong phap tro choi hoc tap]. As with Mr Trung and Ms Lan, when they later attended professional workshops about implementing the “new” method of teaching and learning, they recognised that the ways they had previously organised their class and guided Jrai students were consistent with CCE:

When I had a chance to attend workshops, I was very happy to realise that I had always known and applied this method (Ms Lan).

These teachers thus indicated that they felt confident using CCE and Mr Trung emphasised that his methods of teaching and learning were highly appreciated when he had his class observed and that the inspectors encouraged him to disseminate these methods to other teachers in his school and in the local area.

Two teachers (Mr Nguyen and Mr Son) stressed that they had known about and applied CCE since they attended workshops about multi-graded classes in 1991. As Mr Nguyen, the lecturer at the Teacher Training College, described:

The project on multi-graded classes was implemented in some schools of remote and disadvantaged areas of five provinces. Multi-graded classes require teachers to use more methods of teaching to cater for different student abilities. They focus on the methods of teaching students with different levels (years) in the same class.
In summary, most teachers indicated that they learnt about CCE in the workshops run since 2000 and that these workshops demonstrated teaching skills and techniques as part of their deliver. A small number of teachers used what they considered to be CCE techniques prior to 2000, although at the time they did not refer to it as “CCE”. Some of these teachers developed these approaches independently, while two learnt about such approaches in the 1990s as part of multi-grade class training. Running through all these comments was a close association between CCE and the implementation of specific teaching methods, as will be further elaborated in the following sections.

4.2 Teachers’ understandings of CCE

This section focuses on teachers’ understandings of the concept of CCE. While this research was (in part) seeking to document teachers’ theoretical definitions of CCE, most of the interviewees talked specifically in terms of their own personal experiences and practice in class. Key features frequently mentioned as associated with CCE included: teachers being facilitators; students’ actively taking part in learning; group work; catering for students’ individual differences; use of teaching aids; and building a friendly and caring learning environment. Data related to each of these themes is presented in this section.

4.2.1 CCE is about teachers being facilitators

Most teachers noted that, in a teacher-centred classroom, teachers predominantly did all the talking and did not create a chance for all students to discuss or express their ideas. Only good students, or students who were confident, were chosen to answer the teacher’s questions publicly or demonstrate tasks to the rest of the class. In such teacher-centred classrooms, if students could not respond to a question, teachers would offer the answer to save time, rather than prompt or assist students who were unsure.

In contrast, when describing a student-centred classroom, teachers spoke of their role as facilitators or guides, organising learning activities and providing support or advice so that the students themselves gain new knowledge (Ms Thuyen, Ms Khanh, Ms Y, and Ms Lan). Similarly, one of the teachers made a comparison between the role of a teacher in a teacher-centred classroom environment and that in a student-centred classroom:

Teachers used to stand on the platform explaining the lesson while students sitting passively listening to the teacher. Now, teachers are not allowed to do it like that. The role of the teacher is quite different. Teachers come to students’ desks, observing and providing support when necessary (Ms Nguyet).
They emphasised that teachers do less of the talking but give instructions, suggestions or cues, and move around the class to manage their students, encouraging them to discuss and solve problems together. One teacher’s comment illustrates this well:

> When I have a Vietnamese grammar lesson teaching them what an adjective is, if I apply the traditional method, I prepare a paragraph and indicate which words are adjective and explain why they are considered as adjectives and come to the conclusion that adjectives are words referring to state, quality, size, colour… However, with the new method of teaching, I require them to read the paragraph and to collect or underline words used to describe about characteristics or quality… After I might check them by asking one or two students to write down the words they have found (Ms Hoa).

From their narratives, teachers thus clearly associated CCE with playing a facilitation or mentoring role, and contrasted this with traditional approaches where the teacher would primarily deliver information. Implementing CCE thus required new roles for teachers, in which they aided their students’ learning by setting clear guidelines, offering support and suggesting ways for their students to easily acquire and retain knowledge.

### 4.2.2 CCE is about active engagement of students

The interviewed teachers also associated CCE with active engagement of students in their learning process, contrasting this to the traditional passive learning atmosphere of the classroom. As Ms Chien, the principal of School C, described:

> Teachers used to require students to cross their arms on the table. Now students are able to move around to discuss with their peers…

Ms Hoa also provided a similar perspective on CCE:

> With the new method of teaching, students feel excited because they are provided with exciting learning activities. With the old method, they just look at the textbook, they feel bored.

Teachers stated that, under their guidance, each individual student had a chance to take an active part in the learning process through group work, individual or whole class activities. They would take turns to express their own ideas and opinions, to discuss and discover knowledge and provide feedback to each other. In this way, the teachers believed that students learnt by doing, interacting, and gaining first-hand experience.

During interviews, teachers were asked to provide examples of how they might encourage students to actively engage in learning. Ms Phu illustrated with the following example of a reading lesson:

> With the new method of teaching, teachers do not read the text but warm up by introducing some things related to the topic or having learning games to motivate students. After that, some good students can volunteer to read the text. Teachers then ask them to divide the text into paragraphs. Then they take turns
to read their paragraphs in groups. Teachers come to their places to manage their activities in 5 or 10 minute time slots. After that, each student in a group will read their paragraph. This group will read the questions and the other group will give answers. They give feedback later. Teachers then deliver handouts to each group to consolidate the lesson. Then they have a competition to demonstrate their verbal expression.

Another teacher similarly recounted:

When having a lesson about the relationship in a family, I let them work in groups, taking turns talking about the members in their family. I go around the class to get information. After that, I ask a member in each group to speak aloud in class about his/her own family and introduce their partner’s family so I can have information of their families. I also introduce them about my family. In this way, we know each other and we can have a close relationship (Ms Loan).

Furthermore, some teachers provided examples of CCE lessons where they had engaged students in learning activities outside the classroom, often drawing on authentic resources and situations which students would already be familiar with. This is illustrated by Ms Phuong’s description of a natural science lesson: “When learning about roots of trees, I ask small groups or pairs to go outside together and collect roots. In this way, they learn by doing”.

The teachers indicated that, because each individual student was encouraged to actively take part in learning activities, to discover and explore new knowledge first, they acquired knowledge easily and quickly, and were more likely to deeply understand the content of the text and remembered knowledge longer. Ms Suong expressed:

If teachers give them the answer from the beginning, when students do not have a chance to think about the problem, it is certain that students do not deeply understand. I have found that the new method of teaching is more beneficial when students explore knowledge by themselves and make improvement. I mark their paper and recognise that they have made much progress. I have made a report supporting CCE, emphasising that students can acquire knowledge easily and remember it longer.

CCE was thus strongly associated with active engagement of students in authentic and meaningful learning activities. Providing opportunities for all students, not just the most able ones, to contribute to lessons was a key as well. Most interviewed teachers had observed positive outcomes from such teaching strategies.

4.2.3 CCE is about using group work

When discussing child-centred approaches to teaching and learning, all of the interviewed teachers strongly associated CCE with group work. Teachers asserted that the interaction provided via group work was a part of child-centred learning and, by providing opportunities for students to work in groups, students learnt from and with each other.
In describing their implementation of groups, all of the teachers talked about the size of groups they divided students into. Most mentioned groups of 4 to 8 students working together in which a group leader was nominated to manage activities. Some other teachers mentioned groups as pair work (Mr Minh, Ms Loan).

Teachers also talked about ways of grouping students, including teacher-selected or student-selected arrangements. Some teachers asserted that they based the grouping of students on learning ability, while others mentioned groupings based on friendship or (in the case of some specific lessons) family relationships. The most astute teachers spoke of varying their groupings depending on the nature of the lesson or the specific needs of their students:

> With periods about family relationship, I group students who have family relationship… I divide them into groups according to their learning ability. Sometimes, I group students of the same level to assign them suitable tasks. I also divide a group of all levels so that the better student can support the one with lower level (Ms Nhien).

Interviewed teachers provided a number of reasons why they felt group work was a key part of CCE. Firstly, group work offered students a chance to learn from and with each other, especially in a mixed-ability group. It was also seen to encourage cooperation among students. For example, Ms Hoa described a strategy she used to emphasise to students that they all needed to help each other learn:

> In order to check if all the group members pick up knowledge or not, I tell them which student I want to answer a question or present their understandings in front of class and the result will be marked for the whole group. The student I select is a less able student. In that way, a more able student in each group will guide or explain the exercise to their group members so that they all can get good marks.

The ability to support each other was particularly seen as beneficial in terms of language development, as will be discussed in section 4.4.1.

Secondly, all the teachers believed that students did not feel under as much pressure during small group work, thus motivating students and increasing their active participation in learning:

> At first, only students with good learning ability answered the questions or presented something in class while the lower ones just sit passively and copied their friends. Now they all discuss the problem critically and choose the best ideas to give answers. Any student in the group can do a presentation in class. If other groups disagree with something, they can argue or present their ideas. Students work actively in groups. The class used to be silent, especially when the principal or the vice-principal passed by. Now they are all engaged in learning activities (Ms Nhien).

Thirdly, interviewed teachers stated that group work made students less dependent on teachers and more reliant on their own ability to think and seek information from other sources. According to Ms Binh:
They also became independent because when they take part in a learning game, they have to do it by themselves.

Finally, these teachers noted that group work encouraged students to verbalise and contribute their ideas and opinions, thus improving oral communication skills, and supporting students to become more confident:

My students have opportunities to communicate with their peers. They may make mistakes but they feel more confident when they share opinions with their peers. Their friend can find and correct these mistakes, which helps them deeply understand (Ms Phuong).

Hence, interviewed teachers viewed group work as a key part of CCE. Through group discussion they acknowledged that their students could assist one another, providing them with more chances to exchange and gain knowledge. At the same time, the interviewed teachers stated that their students improved other skills such as communication and public speaking skills and the capacity to work together in a group.

4.2.4 CCE is about catering for students’ individual differences

Some interviewed teachers indicated that CCE was associated with catering for students’ individual differences. These teachers explained that if they let all the students do the same task, more able students would feel bored when the task is simple. On the other hand, if they gave their students difficult tasks, less able students would feel discouraged and might drop out. Therefore, they emphasised that by grouping students by ability level, they could vary learning tasks for different groups of students, thus adapting lessons to students’ learning and abilities. Ms Trang provided an example of how group work aided in the differentiation of learning activities, particularly when practicing what had been taught:

In a reading lesson, to practise reading, I group students by their ability. Students who are able to read the text I group together and they will practise in their group while the others who are not able to read a word or a sentence can practise or revise spelling (Ms Trang).

Where students were struggling with their learning, differentiation allowed the teacher to focus their assistance on those students who needed help most. This was particularly assisted through group work processes. As one teacher described:

Students who are good will work together with harder tasks so that they can discover knowledge by themselves first… Meanwhile, weak students will need support from the teacher to do easier tasks first (Ms Hoan).

CCE was thus associated, by some teachers at least, with catering for individual students’ learning needs. Group work (as discussed in section 4.2.3) was a key strategy to achieve this aspect of CCE.
Through group activities, teachers were able to pay more attention to students who most needed assistance and challenge those who needed extending, thus ensuring that all students remained fully engaged.

4.2.5 CCE is about use of teaching aids

All interviewed teachers mentioned using teaching aids as a part of CCE. Teachers confirmed that their students were more actively involved in the learning process, and found it easy to understand new knowledge and remembered it longer, when their lessons were enriched by physical or pictorial resources. As Ms Trang expressed:

I invest a lot in preparing teaching aids. I have found that the more teaching aids I prepare, the better they (students) acquire new knowledge.

Most of the interviewed teachers spoke of using pictorial teaching aids as the most common tools in class because they knew that primary students were fond of these pictures, especially colourful pictures or images (for example, Ms Suong). Some other teachers mentioned using physical resources (jasmine flowers - Ms Lan, roots of trees - Ms Phuong) to complement pictorial resources.

All of the interviewed teachers emphasised a range of advantages of using both pictorial and physical teaching aids. They noted that these resources help students to obtain knowledge more effectively and efficiently because the students have a chance to observe and explore the objects first hand which helps to engrave the new knowledge in their memory (Ms Suong, Ms Hoa, Ms Phuong, Ms Trang and Ms Trinh).

Teachers also confirmed that teaching aids motivated students; that students were more engaged because they had a chance to observe, hear, touch, smell and even taste. This made the knowledge they were gaining more personally relevant:

I have found that when I bring a real thing to class, a rectangular prism, for example, students can see the box clearly, through which I teach them how to calculate the surface area, they catch my ideas quickly. If we use visual aids and pictures, students will understand the lesson more easily. Meanwhile, drawing a rectangular prism on the board takes time and students view it as abstract (Ms Trinh).

Some teachers took advantage of teaching aids for promoting ongoing learning and revision. Several teachers, for example, mentioned using wall charts. Examples included displaying mathematical formula, times tables or alphabet letters on the wall for some weeks so that their students would have more chance to look at them every day and memorise them (Ms Phuong, Ms Hoa and Ms Nhien).
In summary, these teachers made connections between the concept of CCE and the use of teaching aids. Teaching aids were seen as effective tools to enhance students’ learning engagement, making their learning more authentic and meaningful, and assisting with the learning of abstract concepts.

4.2.6 CCE is about creating a friendly and caring learning environment

All of the interviewed teachers stated that they associated CCE with creating a friendly and caring learning atmosphere for students. These teachers confirmed that, unlike a teacher-centred classroom, students in a child-centred classroom were learning and playing at the same time. They felt that, when students did not feel under pressure and the learning atmosphere was exciting and comfortable, they were more effectively engaged in their learning. Small group work (as discussed in section 4.2.3) was viewed as one of the ways to create a friendly and caring learning atmosphere in the classroom.

Interviewed teachers acknowledged that by being more involved with students at a personal level, teachers could enhance students’ engagement in the learning process, so they tried to keep close to their students. Some teachers referred specifically to informal conversations with students, not only in class but also during recess. This shortened the distance between teachers and students and built mutually respectful relationships with one other. This contrasted considerably with traditional ways of teaching:

The old method of teaching makes a teacher keep distant with students because the teacher just stands on the platform and keeps talking. Meanwhile, with the new method of teaching, the teacher has to come to students’ table, listening to them or guiding them to do the task. Students, therefore, are very happy because they can keep close to the teacher and teachers give them encouragement or a pat on their head. The learning atmosphere is more active, too (Ms Phu).

Another teacher (Ms Bich) provided a very practical and (she felt) effective example of how she ensured her students kept close to her:

We sit in class and talk to one another. I try to understand their psychology, getting to know their hobbies, knowing what they like so that we can chat with them and they will like us. For example, when I know that my students like a program or a show on TV, I have to watch that program and have a talk with them during break. In this way, students recognise that they have something in common with me so they like me (Ms Bich).

All the teachers asserted that, in fostering a child-centred classroom, they always encouraged their students to express their ideas and opinions. At the same time, they knew that they had to listen to, and respect and value, their students’ ideas and provide them with positive encouragement. As Mr Nguyen, the lecturer at Teacher Training College, expressed:
If you always think that you are right and others are wrong, you will never respect students’ opinions and appreciate their creativeness.

Ms Phu also described her approach to engaging with the children through play:

If you want them to listen to you, you have to share feelings with them. Be their friend before teaching them something. Now I am nearly 40 years old but I always behave like a child, playing what they would like to play. Try to behave as if you are a kid so that you can make friends with them. In class, we all feel comfortable. I don’t focus on teaching but on having fun with them, singing or dancing with them. They feel very happy when I am in class.

By designing learning activities in small groups, proactively keeping close to students, encouraging students to speak out, and sharing feeling with students, teachers assumed that they provided their students with a friendly and caring learning atmosphere which was viewed as a part of CCE. To summarise, CCE, as acknowledged by the interviewees, requires teachers to act as facilitators, to use group work and teaching aids and ensure that each individual student is actively engaged in authentic and meaningful learning activities. Teachers also recognised that, in a child-centred classroom, students’ individual differences are identified and catered for and a friendly and caring learning atmosphere is provided. These are key elements which describe teachers’ understanding of a child-centred classroom.

4.3 Issues impacting on the learning of Jrai primary school students

Most of the interviewed teachers had been working with Jrai students from disadvantaged and remote areas for some time. In their interviews, these teachers revealed a great deal about the many challenges impacting on the learning of Jrai primary school students. Themes which emerged include language barriers, socio-economic background, and families’ attitudes towards schooling. These themes will be explored in this section.

4.3.1 Language barriers

When teaching and working with Jrai students, all interviewed teachers referred to language differences as a serious obstacle for both Kinh teachers and Jrai students. They stated that most Jrai students did not know the official language, Vietnamese, particularly Jrai students in years 1 and 2. Meanwhile, Kinh teachers did not know the local Jrai language.

All of the teachers asserted that the language barrier posed a most serious problem for Jrai students. They explained that Jrai students lived virtually exclusively in their own community, which was far from the Kinh, and that they rarely visited or travelled to other areas. Teachers also described that, at
home, most of their students used their mother tongue and their parents would not use or even know Vietnamese. There were very few people in their community who spoke Vietnamese so the children had little opportunity to hear, read or speak Vietnamese to native speakers. As a consequence, most of the Jrai students knew very little Vietnamese – they did not have enough Vietnamese vocabulary to speak, nor did they understand enough Vietnamese to comprehend directions or conversations.

Yet when they go to school, students are immediately expected to learn everything in Vietnamese and speak Vietnamese, the official language at school. Teachers emphasised that this had a major, negative influence on their learning. This was reflected by Mr Tan, who conveyed that this really challenged both teachers and Jrai students:

In a class of 21 students, there are about a quarter who can follow the teachers’ instructions and do tasks as instructed. Most of the students in class are not able to read fluently or to write well thereby leading to a big problem. They can’t even understand a simple question… They can’t write out a word and they can’t speak and read thoroughly. This happens in most classes.

Ms Nguyet described that, even in everyday communication, students would often misunderstand her ideas:

Although we talk about simple things, they hardly understand what we mean. For example, one day when I came into the class seeing a broom at the door, I told them not to put the broom at the front door and asked them to take the broom to the corner of the class. However, a student took the broom and swept the floor. She kept sweeping. I explained to her again for 3 times until she knew what I meant… In fact, the language barrier hinders them. They do not have enough Vietnamese vocabulary and do not feel free to speak.

Many teachers also added that Jrai students felt more uncomfortable and worried when their class teacher was Kinh because the teacher did not know any Jrai language. These teachers stated that their students kept silent, fearing that if they said something wrong they would be laughed at or scolded. As Ms Loan shared:

It is clear that students and parents do not have enough Vietnamese vocabulary to communicate so they find it difficult to express their ideas. Therefore when the Kinh teachers teach the Jrai students, the students do not dare to say anything, especially if the teachers are not kind and nice. They are afraid of being scolded. They are not confident.

Language difference thus not only created communication problems for Jrai students when they were with Kinh teachers; it also fundamentally undermined the confidence of students and their relationships with their teachers.

Meanwhile, all the Kinh teachers stated that not knowing the students’ language was a considerable disadvantage when working with both Jrai students and Jrai parents. Most of them confirmed that they
did not know, nor had they attempted to learn, any local language. It was thus challenging for both
teachers and students to understand each other, particularly for the younger students. As Ms Thuyen
shared:

When mentioning about teaching students of year 1, a lot of teachers cry... Students of year 1 do not
know any Vietnamese alphabet letters and we work very hard... I still remember observing a class. The
teacher wanted to teach her students the consonant ‘CH’. She showed a picture of a dog [CON CHO]
and asked if her students know the animal. Unfortunately, her students could not speak Vietnamese but
use their local language. That teacher didn’t know the local language, which made the teacher and
students confused. Sometimes, there is misunderstanding between teachers and students because of
language difference.

Similarly, Ms Lan expressed:

I feel like a puppet, especially when teaching students in year 1. They do not know any Vietnamese and I
do not (know) the Jrai language.

While most of the teachers indicated that they had not known Jrai before coming to this area to teach,
a small number of interviewees stated that they had undertaken a unit of 45-60 periods about Jrai
language as part of their teacher training at College. Even in these cases, such training proved
problematic because the dialect they learnt in the course was not the same as they were experiencing in
the real context:

At the College, I also learn Jrai, but not much and it was different to the language spoken here. When I
am in a real situation, teaching students in year 1, I cannot understand what they mean.

In summary, language obstructions were the most concerning issue for both Kinh teachers working
with Jrai students and (it would seem) for Jrai students themselves. This was particularly pronounced
for students in the lower years of primary school who had little exposure to Vietnamese before
arriving at school.

4.3.2 Socio-economic disadvantage

The interviewed teachers acknowledged that most of the Jrai students were educationally and
financially disadvantaged. Many teachers commented that, because of their poor family background,
Jrai students frequently did not have access to resources and facilities in their home which would
support their learning:

Students do not have a study corner and tables at home. Children sometimes learn in the dark because
parents want to save money (They can’t afford to pay for electricity bills) (Ms Chien).

This comment was mirrored by another teacher:

When I give them homework, some children stay in class after school to finish their homework; they do
not have tables or chairs to study at home (Ms Dao).
Furthermore, participant teachers stated that because of poor living condition, Jrai students had to help their parents and share responsibilities for such things as doing housework, taking care of their siblings or working on the farm. Some older children (year 4 and 5) helped their parents earn money by picking coffee-berry or extracting rubber from the trees after school. Typical comments included the following:

With Jrai students, they have to work hard at home, looking after their siblings or feeding cows (Ms Nam).

Older students of years 4 or 5 had to work on a farm or earn living with parents in the afternoon. When asked why they hadn’t done their homework, they replied, “I worked all the afternoon and I am too tired to do homework. I want to go to bed early” (Ms Bich).

As such, participant teachers asserted that the social-economic disadvantage experienced by Jrai children had negative influences on students’ learning.

4.3.3 Families’ attitudes toward their children’s schooling

Teachers recognised that Jrai students’ family background contrasted considerably to that of many Kinh students and that this significantly disadvantaged students:

The Kinh students have extra private classes and they also get support from their parents or siblings at home. On the contrary, Jrai students only learn what teachers teach them in class without getting other support (Ms Phuong).

Interviewed teachers who were implementing the mainstream curriculum stated that a majority of Jrai parents were not aware of the importance of schooling and they did not care about their children’s schooling. As Ms Loan shared:

What they need their children to learn at school is that they can read and write their name. They do not think of the importance of schooling for better life later. For example, when their children can go out to collect recycled things to sell, this means they can get some money and their parents will not encourage them to go to school any more. Even though we come to their house to ask their children to go to school, parents promise to take their children to school but in fact, they let their children decide everything.

Some teachers of year 1 students indicated that most parents left their child’s education wholly to school and class teachers and that the class teachers had to prepare things such as pens, pencils and notebooks for students at the beginning of a school year to assist their students (Ms Tran, Ms Khanh). Other teachers in higher years added that when the children in their class did not go to school for a few days, they would go to see parents to discuss the non-attendance and the teachers received responses such as: “I don’t know”; “I told him but he did not want to go”; or “you scolded them and they drop
out” (Ms Nguyet, Mr Lam, Ms Trinh). Similarly, one teacher articulated that Jrai parents did not cooperate with teachers in assisting their children’s learning:

I tell them (Jrai parents) to remind their children about their learning at home. At first they feel concerned but gradually they ignore this. They leave the whole thing to teachers and the school. This happens to every school (Ms Nuong).

In explaining why parents had such attitudes, teachers referred to Jrai parents’ functional illiteracy, which made it difficult for them to offer academic support:

Most of them are illiterate. Only about a quarter of the parents in class can write. The others can’t even write a signature on their students’ work book at the end of semester (Mr Tan).

In addition, some of the teachers’ comments revealed that Jrai parents had a sense of scepticism and despair about the value of education to their children's future. As one teacher commented:

They think that their children won’t be able to do anything [get a job in the future] even if they are literate (Ms Trang).

Two other participating teachers (Ms Hoa, Ms Thuyen) revealed that Jrai parents simply felt obliged to send children to school for the sake of teachers but they did not recognise that schooling would bring benefits to them or their children:

Parents do not care for their children’s schooling. They used to think that they let their children go to school so that the teacher could be paid.

Teachers of the UNICEF funded bilingual project (see section 3.3.1) provided a somewhat contrasting picture. They described an interesting intergenerational dynamic occurring between parents and children concerning their learning. Most Jrai parents did not speak, read and write Kinh language nor did they read and write in their own language because the Jrai written language has largely fallen into disuse and has disappeared. Yet these Jrai parents (as the teachers explained) were very happy that their children were now having a chance to go to school, not only to learn Kinh but also to learn written Jrai, something they did not have opportunities to learn themselves. As a result they had become committed to, and advocated for, their children’s schooling as they hoped this younger generation could maintain and preserve their traditional culture and customs. For these reasons, Jrai parents valued the bilingual program and teachers noted that, whenever parents were asked by the School Board or class teachers to provide support to the school (such as doing cleaning, planting trees, cultural performances or preparing local products to display at the rear corner for students to learn) these parents were willing to do so. The following is typical of comments:
...the parents actively participate in the project because the benefits had been explained to them. They coordinated and supported the project enthusiastically. They contributed school resources (Ms Hoan).

These teachers explained that parents were delighted to see their children learning how to read and write bilingually:

Generally speaking, the Jrai parents are very happy and pleased when their children have opportunities to learn their mother tongue as they can read in Jrai and sing in Jrai. They are happy and agreeable because their children can read, speak and write in Jrai.

However, Ms Loan and Ms Hoan added that Jrai parents were also afraid about whether their children would face difficulty in learning Vietnamese in higher years given that the experimental project in the funded school program would terminate in year 6.

In summary, interviewed teachers acknowledged that, although almost all Jrai parents were illiterate, Jrai parents whose children followed the bilingual project seemed to have more supportive attitudes towards their children’s schooling when compared with Jrai parents whose children followed the mainstream curriculum.

From their stories, teachers confirmed that Jrai students themselves were disadvantaged, not only in learning but also in their daily life. Language differences were one of the most significant difficulties that they had to face. In addition, poor family economic background together with parents’ lack of interest in, and commitment to, their children’s schooling impacted on Jrai students’ learning.

The following section will present data related to how participant teachers implemented CCE in these predominantly Jrai classrooms, and how CCE helped to counteract students’ educational and social-economic disadvantage.

4.4 *Ways CCE enhances Jrai students’ learning experience*

The previous section discussed the issues interviewed teachers perceived as impacting on Jrai students’ learning. This section will focus on teachers’ views on the value of CCE in supporting Jrai students’ learning and enhancing their learning outcomes. Themes which will be covered include: use of students’ ethnic language; use of visual teaching resources to overcome the language barrier; establishing close relationships with Jrai students and their families; providing additional support for the students; focusing on each individual Jrai students’ learning needs; and giving students positive encouragement and feedback.
4.4.1 Use of students’ ethnic language

Most of the participating teachers stated that they associated CCE with the use of a local language. Given that Jrai students faced considerable language difficulties at school, with Vietnamese representing their second language, those Kinh teachers who could speak Jrai (particularly those teaching year 1-3) used the local language instead of Vietnamese to assist these younger students. They spoke of using Jrai in class when they knew that their students “felt bored” (Ms Trung and Ms Phu) or when the students did not understand or did not catch what the teacher meant (Ms Suong, Ms Loan, Ms Nhien and Ms Tuyet).

As such, almost all Kinh teachers teaching years 1-3 stated that they endeavoured to use Jrai to provide explanations and instructions and then used Vietnamese afterwards so that students became familiar with Vietnamese language. Additionally, two teachers stated that they allowed their students to use Jrai in group discussions or in role plays to ensure the students could understand the lesson (Ms Chien, Ms Trung). In some cases, teachers stated that they combined the use of local language and visual teaching aids in class. For example, Mr Lam showed pictures or images and used Jrai to make questions or give hints so that his students could provide answers.

Participant teachers argued that using local language during the teaching and learning process assisted Jrai students to acquire new knowledge easily and quickly. One teacher commented:

> Sometimes, when they can’t catch the meanings in Vietnamese, I use their mother tongue to explain or transfer the meaning of a word, for example, then use the Vietnamese again. I do not know much Jrai but I recognise that if we can teach them with their mother tongue, they pick up knowledge much more quickly - except the Vietnamese subjects (Ms Trang).

Teachers from the bilingual project consistently emphasised that, if Jrai students had a chance to learn their local language first, they could learn Vietnamese more quickly (Ms Minh, Ms Hoan, Ms Loan, Ms Thanh). These teachers further explained that because the textbooks for the bilingual project were written in Jrai, students did not have troubles with the language and their learning outcomes improved. Because class teachers were able to speak Jrai, their students felt more confident and both teachers and students had more chances to communicate with, and keep close to, one another.

> I used to teach Jrai students in Vietnamese so about 1/3 or ¼ can read and write… Now 100% of Jrai students in this program can learn well (Mr Minh).

In summary, most of these interviewed teachers recognised the language barriers that students’ faced and used local language in class to support their learning. They believed that using Jrai to teach was
the best way to meet the needs of individual children and that it assisted them to overcome language difficulties, motivating the Jrai students and leading to more positive learning outcomes. Using local language was thus, for these teachers, a key component of CCE.

4.4.2 Use of visual teaching resources to overcome the language barrier

In section 4.2.5, it was highlighted that interviewed teachers closely associated CCE with the use of teaching aids. Teachers argued that such resources were a particularly important component of supporting the learning of Jrai students.

All teachers noted that the use of pictorial and physical teaching aids diminished Jrai students’ reliance on language ability, particularly in terms of classroom directions. These teachers indicated that they could rely less on verbal directions but used visual cues to convey meaning, as Ms Suong described:

I remember teaching year 2 a long time ago. At that time, they could not understand what I said to them because of the language barrier. You know, you can’t tell them, “Open the book at page…” Instead, I showed them in detail. I opened my book at that page, showed them the picture and asked them to find the picture in their book. In that way, students could find the page quickly.

As such, almost all teachers spoke of utilising teaching aids when they explained concepts or introduced new knowledge to their Jrai students. Teachers confirmed that this assisted Jrai students to acquire knowledge more easily. Pictorial teaching aids helped maintain Jrai students’ attention and engagement with the lesson because (as teachers explained) Jrai students loved pictures, images and paintings. For example, Ms Suong prepared pictures with no words to ask students to warm up and guess a topic. Other teachers showed a series of pictures with cues or hints in story-telling sessions for students to match and tell a story (Mr Minh, Ms Hoan).

Some teachers also mentioned using other physical resources when possible. For example, Ms Trung explained that, when teaching simple calculations (for example, $2 + 3 = ?$), she would draw some symbols or some kinds of fruits and ask students to count. Ms Trang also brought to class stuffed toy animals to teach her students this calculation. Similarly, in a Maths lesson on division with remainder (Phép chia có dư), Ms Nhi used some lollies and asked her students to follow her instructions to divide the lollies in groups so students could understand the concept of a remainder.

Some other teachers also mentioned that they brought to class objects and artefacts which Jrai students may not have previously encountered because of their limited experiences outside their communities. For example, in a composition session, Ms Hoan brought some pictures of a beach and a bottle of sea water which she took from the sea. Her students had a chance to taste the sea water and they were very
excited, particularly since the majority of Jrai students would never have gone to the coast before. In another session about ‘Nghe nhan Bat Trang’ [Bat Trang craftmen who makes beautiful ceramics], Ms Phuong recognised that Jrai students living in remote districts would not have encountered this workmanship before. Thus, she collected some ceramics (glass, bowls, plates...) and brought these to class. Only one teacher mentioned using technology-based resources i.e. PowerPoint (Mr Lam), although some other teachers also spoke of employing a digital projector (Ms Chien, Ms Phu).

All the interviewed teachers believed that using visual aids helped Jrai acquire knowledge more quickly because the students had a chance to observe and explore the objects first hand, which would help them to retain the new knowledge (Ms Suong, Ms Hoa, Ms Phuong, Ms Trang and Ms Trinh). These teachers asserted that the use of visual aids in class made students’ learning more authentic.

These teachers also confirmed that teaching aids stimulated Jrai students’ learning because they did not passively listen to the teachers but had a chance to learn by doing, interacting and sharing their ideas. As such, the teachers argued that they gave their Jrai students a chance to actively engage in their learning process, through which the students could gain knowledge by themselves first. One teacher described how she sought to stimulate her Jrai students to learn unfamiliar topics in a composition lesson:

In a Composition which asks students to describe about Jasmine flowers, I brought some flowers to the class... showed them the flowers and said, ‘This is a jasmine flower and there are a lot of jasmine flowers in my house’. Then I went forward to them and let them observe these flowers (size, colour, petals and smell). I told them that I love this kind of flower because it smells delicious... After that, I asked them to write a paragraph about jasmine flowers... I found out that they could write a paragraph so well because they had an opportunity to see a real thing and describe it (Ms Lan).

It should be remembered that in traditional Vietnamese classrooms, teaching and learning is very much reliant on verbal lectures from the teacher and such visual teaching resources would rarely be used. Students would passively listen to their teacher’s voice. These initiatives by the teachers interviewed in this study thus represent a significant departure from traditional teaching and learning methods.

To summarise, by using visual aids, these teachers noted that they were able to actively engage Jrai students in the learning process and offer them concrete and relevant examples to simplify abstract concepts. The use of such resources went some considerable way to overcoming Jrai students’ language barriers.
4.5 **What hinders and enables implementation of CCE with Jrai students**

When asked what they believed hindered and/or enabled teachers to implement CCE with Jrai students, themes emerging from the interviews included: professional training and school culture; teachers’ personal beliefs and commitment; teachers’ skills and confidence; school facilities and resources; curriculum and textbooks; and assessment. These issues will be discussed in the following sections.

4.5.1 **Professional training and culture of support**

Interviews revealed that all teachers had attended local and/or national professional workshops about CCE. Additionally, all teachers stressed that there had been a series of professional seminars held at their own school every month for teachers to discuss their methods of teaching and their experiences of change. They stated that the purpose of these professional learning activities was enabling them to implement CCE in their Jrai class. As Ms Tuyet shared:

> In our school, we usually have professional meetings every month where teachers discuss and exchange ideas about how to plan a lesson. After that, one of the teachers will use these suggestions to plan a lesson carefully and have his/her class observed. After the class observation, we all provide feedback about the lesson.

Data revealed, however, a clear distinction between the training experiences and culture of support provided to teachers in the bilingual project and those in the mainstream curriculum schools.

Teachers involved in the bilingual project expressed their satisfaction with a range of distinct learning activities provided to them as part of the project. These included workshops at the beginning of each semester and field trips to other schools. As Ms Hoan explained:

> We learnt from the ways the trainers presented and we not only listened to, but also discussed and practiced, as if we were in a practical class. For example, we did exercises in groups, in subjects, in the form of lessons. We practised teaching then provided comments or feedback. We were taught how to apply the appropriate method. We had a fact-finding trip to the schools which have experimental classes in Tra Vinh province to see how they organised their project.

Teachers who were part of the bilingual project also valued the continued support from the trainers associated with the project. One of the typical comments was:

> We have officers from the Centre to support us in detail with techniques, the procedures and methods applied in each learning activity and when to use L1 or L2 or if we use TPR. If we forget, these officers will give feedback. These officers always come to inspect my class, observing how my students and I work in class. If I go wrong, they will remind me to adjust my method (Mr Minh).
These experiences greatly assisted in developing their teaching methodology, particularly through the provision of model lesson plans for teaching ethnic minority students.

In addition to the workshop or field trips, the class teachers of the bilingual project also had additional support from the members of the School Board who guided and gave them assistance to implement CCE in the funded classes:

The School Board (particularly the principal) is outspoken and is very supportive… They are fair and sympathise with teachers and students. They always help teachers who need assistance in class. They often come to inspect these teachers’ classes and give them feedback. After that, they come to observe the class again to support those teachers (Ms Hoan).

The teachers confirmed that they also learnt a great deal from their colleagues and were becoming more confident with the process of teaching and learning. As Ms Thuyen asserted:

Every year, teachers who take part in the bilingual project have 3 main workshops including learning Jrai language, methods of teaching and curriculum content. This has helped them a lot (Ms Thuyen).

In contrast, most teachers in the mainstream curriculum schools stated that they did not apply CCE frequently. One reason offered was that there was no encouragement or reward from locally influential educational managers for teachers who tried to apply child-centred approaches in a normal day:

…the application of CCE has not been encouraged by educational managers. They just focus on it when observing class periodically and this is not authentic because they just check lesson plans and have one period of observation. It is very bureaucratic. They can’t see students’ needs (Mr Nguyen).

Not only did some teachers feel that they were not encouraged, data revealed that in some school context, aspects of the school culture actively discouraged teachers from applying aspects of CCE. This will be presented in details in section 4.5.2 below.

In sum, all the teachers asserted that they had had a chance to attend professional workshops or meetings at local and national levels to implement CCE in their class. However, many teachers in the mainstream curriculum schools noted that they did not apply CCE frequently and effectively because of a perceived lack of support or reward from the broader educational system.

4.5.2 Teachers’ commitment to implementing CCE

As presented in section 4.2, most interviewed teachers demonstrated an understanding of CCE and strongly believed that it was generally beneficial to students. However, only a small number felt that it was appropriate or practical to implement with Jrai students. Therefore, in the day-to-day context of their classroom, only a small number of teachers demonstrate a strong commitment toward implementing CCE.
Mr Trung, the principal of School A, was amongst those teachers who did believe in the benefits of CCE in supporting the learning of Jrai students:

CCE is so beneficial when students in class really feel excited, encouraged, active and self-controlled, especially Jrai students. The learning atmosphere in class is comfortable when students work with one another. They do not feel confined but take part in the learning process actively.

These teachers strongly supported CCE and argued that it well met their students’ requirements. They were more likely to use flexible teaching and learning methods and implement them well:

Those teachers who believed in the value of CCE for Jrai students also reflected their strong commitment to implementing CCE by attempting to learn the students’ language, either from students or colleagues, in order that they could teach Jrai students, communicate with them, and support them:

I learnt Jrai at the College but not much and I learnt a little bit from my colleague. He is very good at Jrai. I have a notebook and write down what is useful. When I explained something to my students but they couldn’t understand, I asked a colleague to help me to explain in Jrai. After that, I explained it to my students again (Ms Lan).

While the majority of interviewed teachers demonstrated deep understandings of CCE, many lacked commitment to implementing CCE in their class. In some cases, they did so simply because it was policy, rather than because they were intrinsically motivated to organise teaching and learning activities focusing on the child. In other words, while they believed in the tangible benefits of CCE in enhancing students’ learning, they mainly used it when they had their class observed, arguing that implementing CCE for all sessions every day was impractical:

When district educational inspectors come to observe my class, they ask me if I have always had such learning activities [activities/learning games which could involve Jrai students in active learning] in class in a normal day and I reply ‘No’, confirming to them that it takes time and efforts (Ms Trinh).

They (teachers) use it when having class observation but in a normal day, they are still lazy (Ms Tuyet).

A number of interviewees felt that other teachers did not want to make change because of their old age or their familiarity with the traditional way of teaching. In this case, they were not committed to implementing CCE:

Some teachers do not apply CCE in class because they are old or conservative and they are afraid of making a change. They are not enthusiastic. Some are afraid of leaning information technology. They think that they are going to retire in the next few years… (Ms Tuyet).

The following teacher’s comments indicated that he was only motivated to apply CCE because it was the policy, rather than being motivated by wanting to do the best for his students: “I do not know for sure. I think that my duty is to apply what I have learnt at the workshop” (Mr Tan).
Another issue influencing class teachers’ level of commitment to implementing CCE was the disagreement among teachers, inspectors and local educational managers regarding what teaching and learning activities might constitute a good lesson. This made class teachers feel worried and lose confidence when they had their class observed. Some teachers stated that they did not dare to make a change or be creative because inspectors (observing teachers) were inflexible and gave a lot of negative feedback such as “You have to teach like this” or “Why do you teach like that?” or “It is not the appropriate method” (Ms Loan). They stated that such feedback might have negative consequences for their teaching career later on. As Ms Nguyet expressed:

> When I have my class observed, I do not dare to create new situations or I am sometimes not confident to do that because not all the teachers observing my class have ever attended workshops… Some teachers will not agree to adapt or adjust the curriculum content while the others still hesitate in their approach to the new method of teaching.

While some teachers were clearly committed to CCE, but felt limited in their own skills or confidence to implement it, others indicated that their lack of commitment to implementing CCE was because of Jrai students’ learning capacity:

> Frankly speaking, if I worked with students in the city centre or in the provincial centre, I can use CCE. In my school, I also use the old method of teaching. I can’t implement CCE because I acknowledge that CCE means letting students work more than teachers do. They have to take part in learning activities and it requires students to brainstorm a lot. Unfortunately, Jrai students can’t do this. As mentioned above, I explain something to them carefully and in detail but when I call them to repeat what I have taught, they can’t remember anything. Therefore, I don’t think we can apply CCE for the Jrai students. The CCE approach to teaching and learning is a good method of teaching but it does not work with Jrai students (Mr Tan).

> Some other teachers have different attitudes towards the ethnic students [They think that they only need to cover the very basics with the Jrai – we don’t need to encourage them to actively take part (Ms Lan).

In summary, while some teachers were eager and active in employing child-centred approaches and using different teaching and learning strategies, the majority did not demonstrate such commitment towards implementing CCE with Jrai students, viewing it as impractical or unfeasible and indicating a lack of willingness to make changes.

### 4.5.3 Teachers’ skills and confidence

A small number of teachers recognised that the implementation of CCE in a class of Jrai students depended on teachers’ skills and confidence. According to some teachers (Ms Phuong, Ms Tuyet, Ms Phu, Mr Nguyen), although all the teachers had a chance to attend professional workshops and meetings, not all of them could apply CCE in class and some teachers got confused about what, how and when to organise specific learning activities. As Ms Phuong, the principal of School B, shared:
Most of them are passive. They feel the new method is difficult to apply and they do not feel confident when using it. That said, after their class observation, they ask me, “Am I on the right track with this way of teaching? [day nhu vay co dung khong?]”. When I give them some suggestions, they say, “I have thought of it but I am afraid that it is wrong”.

In the same vein, Ms Phu argued:

If they are creative and skilled teachers, they can deal with this. On the contrary, if they are not capable, they are not able to prepare much for their lesson and their teaching in class they may not be successful.

A number of the Kinh teachers who were interviewed commented about the lack of professional knowledge and creative ability of Jrai teachers, who they believed were not able to motivate students’ learning. As Ms Nuong expressed it:

In fact, they have language but their professional knowledge is limited. Their capacity to impart knowledge is also limited. They just follow the sample lesson plan but they are not creative to adjust and adapt to suit their students’ ability. They used to have short courses of 5+3 or 9+3….

Such views were echoed by Mr Nguyen, a lecturer at the Teacher Training College:

…local teachers (the Jrai) are not so creative but make a copy, which sometimes does not suit with their students’ ability. If teachers know how to organise a class, Jrai students will learn effectively.

Such comments revealed beliefs that some teachers, particularly those of Jrai background, lack professional knowledge and creative ability to design a variety of teaching and learning activities. As such, they might not feel confident in applying CCE in class.

Hence, the data showed that a small number of teachers may not be implementing CCE in these Jrai classrooms because of their lack of professional knowledge and limited capacity to be creative when planning lessons suitable for children in their local context.

4.5.4 School facilities and resources

During the interviews, the issue of lack of school facilities and resources was also frequently mentioned, including in relation to both teaching and learning aids and classrooms themselves.

As discussed in section 4.4.2, teachers acknowledged that teaching and learning aids played a vital role in enhancing their students’ learning motivation. However, most of the interviewed teachers stated that the school was not equipped with enough teaching resources and that this posed a serious problem for students’ learning activities. While schools were generally provided with one or two sets of basic teaching aids (for example pictures, wall clocks, globes, shapes), the prescribed curriculum and rigid timetable required all teachers of the same year to teach the same thing at exactly the same time. This
posed major problems in schools where there were six or seven classes in each year such that all teachers of the six or seven classes could not use the teaching aids at the same time.

This issue was further compounded for satellite schools. As explained in section 3.3.1, satellite schools were smaller branches of a main central school and located in more remote areas of the district. Typically a satellite school had little more than a single classroom and teaching resources were mainly kept in the main school. If teachers wished to use teaching aids, they had to take them from the main school and bring to the satellite school every day. However, travelling to these schools was difficult because they are located remotely in the hamlet and the roads are generally not in good condition. Most teachers would have to travel the windy, dusty, muddy or/and unsafe roads on a motor cycle which further discouraged them from bringing teaching resources to class. If they wished to prepare teaching aids on their own, there was no room at the satellite school to store these resources. The only resources they would typically use in class, therefore, were the provided textbooks and students’ workbooks. Such teachers might only prepare and use pictorial teaching aids and/or physical teaching aids when they have their teaching observed. The impact of such resources shortages will be further discussed in section 5.2.

In addition to a lack of resources, most of the teachers in non-funded schools noted that there were not enough classrooms for each year to learn the whole day because classrooms were used for two shifts. Therefore, teachers could not provide additional time to students, nor deliver support classes for those with low learning ability. The shortage of classrooms also hindered class teachers from using the walls for decorating, designing learning activities or displaying students’ work, which they believed might have increased students’ learning motivation. As Ms Bich shared:

The School Board encourages us (teachers and students) to decorate our classroom but we share the room with another shift in the afternoon, so no one would like to do it (Ms Bich).

Other teachers revealed that in some satellite schools, the rooms had no keys, no windows and were often vandalised by local people. Therefore, it was not safe for them to decorate the room or display learning resources.

Another issue that all of the teachers mentioned was that classrooms at satellite schools were not in good condition, were not large enough for group work activities, and desks and chairs were old and damaged, which disadvantaged both teachers and students:
The school is not well equipped. School furniture is old and out of date (fixed tables and benches). Students sit in rows which takes time when having group works. The classroom is small, and there is not enough space for students when they have learning games or work in groups (Ms Chien).

Sometimes I want to change the way students sit in class in U shape or sit in round but I can’t. And when students work in pairs, groups of 3 or 4, they only turn back but have no opportunities to move around in class because we do not have enough space (Ms Hoan).

In contrast, teachers of the bilingual project stated that they were provided with good resources. They noted that both teachers and students had their own classroom for the whole day in which they had a bookshelf, and a study corner to display student work and traditional local products to promote students’ learning. As such, class teachers stated that they could organise learning activities and spend extra time supporting students with lower learning abilities in the afternoon.

In summary, most the teachers of the bilingual project stated they were able to implement CCE effectively because they were provided with adequate resources. In contrast, teachers of the mainstream curriculum were not provided with adequate physical resources, which discouraged them from implementing CCE in their daily teaching.

4.5.5 Curriculum and textbooks

All of the interviewed teachers complained that the new mainstream curriculum was heavier, and more overloaded in comparison to the pre 2002 curriculum and was not suitable for Jrai students. They all noted that, even though there had been official documents indicating that teachers were able to be flexible with their expectations for ethnic minority students and that were not required to insist all students reach the general standards, the curriculum was still not relevant for Jrai students’ backgrounds and experiences. The prescriptive way in which they were required to follow the curriculum, including designated times allocated for each lesson and the necessity to fit curriculum content into these periods of time, worked against them catering for local students’ needs. They were not able to adequately teach a session of Maths or Literacy (Vietnamese) in 40 or 45 minutes as prescribed and acknowledged that their students felt overwhelmed. As one participating teacher illustrated:

For example, in a composition session in year 3, students are required to summarise news or events. In practice, even the Kinh find it difficult to do. Jrai students have never known or imagined what news is and their listening skills are not good, so how can they do this task? (Ms Trung)

Another teacher made a similar comment:

With the former curriculum, year 1 students used to learn how to add or subtract in a 1-10 number range but now they have to learn addition and subtraction in a 1-100 range. Formerly students would not have
Most teachers agreed that the textbook content did not relate to students’ daily life or community and sometimes it was not practical. They also noted that some images or situations in the textbooks were not familiar to the Jrai students (Ms Thuyen and Ms Nguyet). They commented that their students had to learn a lot about theory but had no chance to practice it so the students felt bored in class. Some teachers also mentioned that Jrai students found it difficult to learn History and Geography. One representative comment was:

…when we introduce to them (Jrai students) about computers and the internet, they hardly know anything because they have never had access to these things. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult for us to explain something in words which are not familiar to them (Ms Khanh).

Interviews revealed that only a small number of teachers in mainstream schools were confident and flexible enough to make adjustments to the curriculum. Some teachers knew it would be beneficial, but indicated that they did not have enough time to modify it to meet the requirements of the ethnic students. Teachers also noted that there was no official endorsement or provision for them to adjust or reduce irrelevant content or topics in textbooks and that to do so may not be supported consistently by other teachers and/or educational managers.

Furthermore, most of the teachers of the mainstream curriculum noted that they were not able to cover all subjects in the prescribed curriculum and thus they mainly taught Jrai students Maths and Literacy (Vietnamese) so that the students could read, write their name and do some simple calculations. As one teacher put it:

We mainly focus on Maths and Vietnamese but do not pay more attention to the other subjects. Therefore, I feel guilty to them. During a day at class, I can’t impart all prescribed knowledge with the new method of teaching because activities for students to take part in the lessons take more time and we are not allowed to extend the time allocated to the lesson (Ms Lan).

In contrast, all teachers of the bilingual project stated that the textbook, which had been designed specifically for the bilingual program, catered well for Jrai students’ backgrounds and experiences. They stated that when they had a professional workshop about the textbook content, they were allowed to adjust, to input and to edit the content so that it might suit their students. They also had a diary to write down what they found irrelevant in their real class so that they could later report to members of the project. As Mr Trung, the principal of school A, stated:

These are experimental classes. Books and materials are being edited and taught so we adjust or put in what is suitable with the area or region. For example, we will put in language / vocabulary to teach students, or we choose pictures or images relating to the local area; members from the project agree to
make correction; they are not conservative. Later when teachers are in class to teach students, they also have rights to make suitable adjustment with their students in class.

The interviews thus highlighted that there were issues with the mainstream curriculum being overloaded and impractical, hindering teachers from implementing child-centred teaching methods with their Jrai students across all the subjects as prescribed. One of the interviewed teachers strongly argued:

If you believe that textbooks are authoritative, it does not mean students are placed in the centred of teaching and learning. Influential people such as managers and inspectors still believe that texts are central/mandatory so we can’t apply CCE (Mr Trung).

4.5.6 Student assessment and its correlation to teacher appraisal

All of the teachers in the interviews raised the issue of assessment, which impacted on both students and teachers. The data revealed a close relationship between the assessment of students and how teachers’ performance was evaluated, and this potentially had a negative influence on the implementation of CCE.

When asked how Jrai students were assessed, these teachers stated that the quality of students’ learning was based on marks on the final examination of each school year. The paper tests included Maths and Literacy for years 1 and 2 while students of years 3 to 5 had three more papers of Natural and Social Science, History and Geography subjects. Teachers disagreed regarding the value/efficacy of the current criteria for assessing students. One teacher commented:

They (students) used to have 4 or 5 tests each semester and we averaged these marks out to rank their learning ability. Now, we use the final examinations (marks) as the main criteria to assess students. I find this way of assessing is not relevant… Such assessment is all a matter of luck (Ms Nuong).

Teachers asserted that this way of assessing students placed both parents and students under pressure and was this not consistent with their ideal of CCE. Some teachers also stated that the result was not always objective:

I know each individual’s learning ability but when they have paper tests, some of them with low learning may cheat to get high marks. When they get high marks, they will be rewarded. In this way, I found this assessment not adequate (Ms Dao).

Most of the teachers stated that they felt that Jrai children shouldn’t be assessed on the same assessment tasks and according to the same standards as the Kinh, given the many disadvantages they faced, and the issues associated with covering the curriculum within the allotted time. Ms Tuyet stated “If we have a test like the Kinh’s one in a city, students in my school will fail.”
Teachers in some schools also complained that they felt pressure when their school board focused mainly on the number of students able to move to the next year, but not the quality of their students’ learning outcomes. They indicated that ‘achievement syndrome’ (see section 2.2.4) had been widespread in this geographical district, and had negative influences on students’ learning outcomes, as well as their own teaching career. Ms Trang illustrated:

At the beginning of a school year, the school board require us to register the number of students who will pass (successfully complete) that year of schooling and the school is expected to reach 75% of that figure. If the class teacher can’t reach that figure, their performance appraisal is affected. It is dangerous for the teacher, who can be moved to another very disadvantaged area, so they use all means to reach the targeted figure. Teachers will sometimes allow students with low academic achievement to pass.

Similarly, Ms Trinh explained:

Jrai students’ learning capacity is limited but we are not allowed to let them resit. For example, only 20 of the 30 students in my class are able to get to higher classes but influential people would like us to push the other 10 students to a higher class, too. Therefore, when they are in the higher class, they do very badly in their studies. It’s not the teacher’s fault. We work with them very hard in class. If there was any better policy, don’t push them in higher class; encourage them to resit, which does no harm to them. Even though I try my best, I can’t support them because they haven’t acquired any prescribed knowledge of year 1 or 2. And it is too late for them now. Now in year 5, I can’t teach them $1 + 1 = 2$. I have no time.

Teachers of the bilingual project noted that their students also had two or three paper tests at the end of each school year. However, they explained that the ways their Jrai students were assessed was complicated. As Ms Khanh described:

With the two bilingual classes, the Department of Primary Education sends paper tests to the schools and this is really challenging to students because they are not used to the format of paper tests and then each individual has to face an oral examination with a strange examiner from the Department of Primary. Therefore, they feel under pressure. Teachers consider these examinations to be like an entrance examination to university.

While teachers stated that they did not support the way their students were assessed, most of them also did not personally approve of the performance appraisal system and believed that it did not help them to implement CCE approaches. As they described it, this was based on one class observation session, teachers’ lesson plans, the number of students being retained and able to move to the next class and a scientific research paper (relating to their creativeness or experience in teaching their students). They confirmed that it was not authentic and students’ needs were not taken into account. As Mr Nguyen, the lecturer at Teacher Training College, asserted:

CCE requires educational managers to have a vision for education because if they maintain the present way of assessing, it does not work effectively. It is not necessary to check teachers’ lesson plans. Furthermore, in practice some teachers are devoted to their teaching career while some others are not. The current assessment does not encourage teachers to strive to achieve positive student learning outcomes.
As such, all teachers were unsatisfied with the way they were guided to assess their Jrai students and felt that the current assessment policies emphasised quantity over quality, which concerned both teachers and students. According to them, such assessment was a hindrance to the implementation of CCE with Jrai students.

4.5.7 Establishing close relationships with Jrai students and their families

Section 4.2.6 established the close association teachers held between CCE and the atmosphere existing in (and outside) the classroom. Establishing a friendly and caring relationship with Jrai students and their families was perceived by interviewees as a key way of enhancing Jrai students’ learning outcomes.

Participants commonly stated that Jrai students were timid and passive when their class teachers were Kinh. They therefore found it important to proactively create a close, warm and friendly personal relationship with each child. Some teachers mentioned treating Jrai students like their own children and indicated that they spent much time with their students during the recess, talking with them, asking them about family or discussing if they needed any additional learning support (Ms Nhien, Ms Hoa, Ms Nguyet). One participant described their relationship with students as follows:

There is no distance between teachers and students because I have games to play with them especially in a class activity period, usually on Saturdays. Some of them ask about my family. During the break, we also have time to chat (Mr Tan).

Similarly, another teacher described her friendly manner with the students: “I use a smooth-tongue, keeping close to them, rubbing their heads and displaying that I am fond of them” (Ms Hoa).

Teachers of the bilingual project and a small number of the teachers in the mainstream curriculum stated that they usually tried to contact students’ parents and regularly reported to them about their children’s learning or behaviours. This involved meetings in addition to the three official parent-teacher meetings every year. As a result, one teacher stated that “Parents feel secure when I teach their children” (Ms Thuyen).

Hence, Kinh teachers emphasised the importance of building close relationships with Jrai students and their parents. In this way, they were able to demonstrate their sympathy with students, helping them feel comfortable when interacting with teachers and encouraging students to enjoy going to school.
4.5.8 Providing additional support for the students

Acknowledging that Jrai students faced difficulties in their life which affected their schooling, most of the teachers stated that they provided more support for their Jrai students than they would for Kinh students. Given that some Jrai students lived far from school, a number of interviewed teachers mentioned that they travelled to these students’ houses in the morning to pick them up for school. Some teachers also collected second-hand clothes to give the children and their families. Teachers of years 1 and 2 described how they would buy notebooks at the beginning of a school year and that they always had a box of pens and pencils in their bag in case students forgot to bring theirs to class (Ms Khanh, Ms Nuong and Ms Thanh).

These efforts by teachers indicate recognition of the financial hardship of many of the Jrai families and the affect that this had on children’s learning. It also indicates their personal commitment to providing additional support for Jrai students – and that they perceived this as an aspect of CCE.

4.5.9 Focusing on individual Jrai students’ learning needs

As demonstrated in section 4.2.4, the notion of catering for students’ individual differences was viewed as a key part of CCE. This perception was regarded as vital by most interviewed teachers when they were in a class of Jrai students.

Most teachers recognised that there was a need to carefully guide and explain to their students each task, while some of them spoke of needing to adapt tasks so that they were suitable for each individual’s learning capacity, especially for students perceived to have lower learning ability. For example, in a dictation session, Ms Nhien and Ms Nuong noted that they grouped students with lower learning ability together so that they could spell difficult words for these students to write down. Similarly, Ms Nhien revealed that she gave these lower learning ability students more time to finish a Math exercise.

Furthermore, some other teachers mentioned that they minimised requirements, broke down the questions, adjusted or made their own questions so that students could catch the meaning and complete the tasks. One of the typical comments was:

…if they (Jrai students) can’t read the whole text fluently, I will encourage them to read a paragraph, a sentence or even a word. It is not necessary to ask them to answer the questions in the textbook. Instead, teachers can make their own questions. Ask them to find out any word in paragraph 1 or 2 containing the vowel ‘AU’, for example (Ms Phu).
The majority of interviewed teachers stressed that they spent more than the allotted time for sessions such as Maths and Literacy (Vietnamese). They also mentioned that they had extra classes in the afternoon for students with lower learning ability. In some areas where they had two shift classrooms, teachers noted that in order to spend more time helping less able students, these teachers had to come to class early and left the class late.

As such, interviewed teachers argued that by identifying the learning needs of each individual Jrai student and designing suitable learning activities for them, this would support students’ learning. This focus on individual learning needs was clearly a key part of CCE for these teachers.

4.5.10 Giving students positive encouragement and feedback

Knowing that Jrai students love to be praised, teachers indicated that they gave the students positive encouragement, feedback or gave them higher marks than they deserved, even when the students had made little effort. As Ms Hoa reflected:

I usually look at his/her eyes and nod to make sure that he/she is doing very well. When they catch a glint or a nod implying encouragement from me, it really works… I usually provide positive comments about their work and efforts and let them see that I value their work.

Such positive encouragement is also evident in Ms Hoan’s comments about encouraging Jrai students to raise their voice:

I come to their group, encouraging these students to share their thoughts, “Please feel free to talk. Don’t worry. If you make a mistake, I will help you. I will not punish you” (Ms Hoan).

Similarly, Ms Lan was excited when she was able to encourage Jrai students to express their opinions and feelings about school via a suggestion box:

There is a mail box at the school gate and students are free to have a voice about the teacher or the school. I have always encouraged my student to voice if they want to share something.

In addition, teachers involved in the bilingual project asserted that they displayed the work samples of good students (good handwriting paper, good compositions or the like) in the study corner at the back of the class to motivate other students (Ms Hoan and Ms Lan). Other teachers recounted that they sometimes rewarded their students who had made progress with small gifts such as lollies or coloured chalk (Ms Trang, Ms Hoan).

Hence, most teachers acknowledged that giving encouragement and positive feedback to Jrai students was one of the effective ways to stimulate their learning. At the same time, they also encouraged Jrai
students to give feedback about school and teaching staff. In this way, they associated CCE with providing their Jrai students with positive encouragement and the opportunity to ‘have a say’.

To summarise, the study indicates that teachers who were more enthusiastically and consistently implementing CCE were more likely to be those teachers working in the bilingual project. Through this project they were provided with professional training and workshops about textbooks, curriculum content, methods of teaching, teaching and learning resources and the like. At the same time, they were empowered to adjust the content in textbooks to ensure that it is appropriate to local students' background. Provided with this additional training, support and autonomy the teachers felt more confident, generated more creative teaching ideas and gained more support from colleagues and school management; therefore, they were more likely to be implementing teaching strategies consistent with CCE.

In contrast, those teachers who were not implementing CCE were mostly teachers of the mainstream curriculum. Those teachers were not provided with regular training and workshops, nor physical resources or supportive conditions, like teachers working with the bilingual project. They were required to follow the rigidly prescribed curriculum and use nationally prescribed textbooks. These conditions worked against teachers building professional and pedagogical capacity or creativeness which is necessary to plan child-centred approaches to teaching and learning. These teachers were thus more likely to make comments indicating that they either did not understand, or were not supportive of, CCE.

The next section of this chapter will consider the factors which influence teachers’ capacity to implement CCE with their Jrai students.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has presented data revealing when and how interviewed teachers were initially introduced to CCE as well as their insights about, and understandings of, CCE. Data shows that teachers associate CCE with them playing a role as facilitators and students as active participants in their learning. In such a CCE environment, teachers mentioned using specific teaching methods and strategies to meet individual student differences, providing them with a friendly and caring learning environment. In a classroom of Jrai students, teachers clearly identified that Jrai students experienced difficulties because Vietnamese was their second language, and because of the difficult economic situation of their families, as well as their parents’ lack of interest in, and support for, their children’s learning. Teachers
identified a numbers of ways that CCE enhances Jrai students’ learning and could recognise that CCE might help them overcome linguistics and social-economic disadvantages. However, there was a whole range of factors that hindered them from implementing CCE. While some of the issues related to teachers themselves, such as their training, their commitment, or their skills and confidence, other issues were more systemic and beyond the capacity of teachers to address, namely school facilities and resources, curriculum and textbooks, and assessment system for teachers and students.

The following chapter will further discuss the themes and issues emerging from the findings presented here in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is structured to discuss eight key themes and issues emerging during the interviews with teachers. The first six of these themes represent key understandings of CCE as expressed by teachers, namely: CCE as a policy directive; CCE as a teaching method; CCE as individualisation of learning; CCE as understanding and valuing each child; CCE as a comfortable learning environment; and CCE as collaboration and connection. Section 5.7 will then consider the incongruence in understandings of CCE at the local and systemic level. Finally, section 5.8 will discuss the under-emphasis on teachers’ values, attitudes and beliefs about CCE as part of the introduction and ongoing implementation of CCE in Vietnam.

The latter sections of this chapter in particular will draw connections between the data and Childhood Studies theories. However, it might be remembered that hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on developing rich, dense textual descriptions of the phenomenon through description and interpretation (Heidegger, 1962 and Husserl, 1965, cited in Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). It emphasises the importance of meanings each individual attributes to the phenomenon (Jurema et al., 2006; Lester, 1999). Phenomenology thus requires that we resist from theorising, emphasising instead that the meanings of phenomena emerge from lived experiences rather than from universal principles (Giorgi, 1997; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The emphasis is thus on the understandings emerging from the interpretive interaction between the research texts and the researcher (Laverty, 2003). Consistent with this, Chapter 6 will go on to reflect further on how engagement in this research has influenced the researcher’s own historical and cultural life-world.

5.1 CCE as a policy directive

As presented in section 4.1, most teachers’ comments revealed that they knew about CCE and perceived it as a national policy introduced in 2000. In interpreting CCE in this way, these teachers were clearly indicating that because CCE was the policy passed from the Government and MOET, they were required to implement it. In other words, they approached CCE as a top-down imposed policy rather than personally embracing and valuing what CCE might mean or embody.

Consistent with the association of CCE with the 2000 policy and new curriculum initiatives, teachers also linked CCE with professional training workshops held at both national and local level from which
they had a chance to learn about CCE and how to implement it in their class. As such, most of teachers’ understanding of CCE derived from the accompanying training workshops they received.

Training had been operationalised through a ‘train the trainer’ model, with a filtering down of information from trainer to trainer, and a subsequent shortening and simplification of information provided. Thus, the training experience of classroom teachers, particularly those in rural and regional areas, may not have had the depth and detail of training required to provide a rich understanding of CCE. Furthermore, what teachers learnt about CCE was heavily influenced by the trainer and the depth of understanding of that person. If the trainers did not fully grasp the concept of CCE, they were unlikely to be able to convey it to other practising teachers. As such, teachers attending the workshops focused on and valued the teaching methods and strategies they had learnt rather than being challenged by and embracing CCE as a teaching philosophy. Furthermore, with CCE being understood as a “policy directive”, as presented in 4.5.2, some teachers did not show commitment to using it every day in order to support their students. This was especially reflected in teachers’ admissions that they mainly used CCE strategies when they had their class observed – and mainly because if they did not do so it would have negative influences on their ranking at the end of each school year:

Most teachers use CCE in periods observed. They prepare their lesson plan very carefully (Ms Khanh).

Interviews revealed many inconsistencies and contradictory elements between the ideals embodied by CCE and the reality of implementing the policy in rural schools. Several of the interviewed teachers who appeared to have a deep understanding of CCE were acutely aware of these inconsistencies, which hindered them from responding to the policy effectively.

Teachers reported that those inspecting classes often had rigid understandings of CCE and strong points of view about what is right and wrong, which influenced their responses to observed lessons. At the same time, teachers recognised that to do well in the inspections they had to meet these ideals and there was little room for variation:

When I have my class observed, I do not dare to create new situations nor am I sometimes confident to do that because not all the teachers observing my class have ever attended many workshops like me. Therefore, some teachers will not agree to adapt or adjust the content or topics in textbooks while the others still hesitate in their approach to the new method of teaching. For that reason, I have to follow what were written/ offered in textbooks when being observed (Ms Nguyet).

As such, when inspectors held a formulaic understanding of what child centred practice might look like, and this did not include a deeper appreciation of the values and ideals underpinning it, they were unable to recognise when teachers’ different practices were, in fact, more child centred.
Further, some teachers pointed out that inspectors tended to be older and more conservative in their teaching practices and may not be familiar with, or value, newer CCE practices. As such, unless the inspectors deeply understand and personally value the approach, those classroom teachers who may be engaging in child centred practices may find it difficult to have these accepted and acknowledged.

Some teachers also complained that there was no consistency (“Trong danh xuoi, ken thoi nguoc”) between the directives given by different educational managers. For example, Ms Loan reflected:

…trainers from the bilingual project school say that they do not need teachers to write down too much in lesson plans. What they need is teachers’ activities in class or how teachers manage/ control students in class, how to encourage students to participate in activities or how to promote students’ creativeness. However, local educational managers pay more attention to lesson plans, requiring teachers to plan learning activities in detailed. They do not allow re-using and editing the lesson plans but teachers have to rewrite or type lesson plans every school year, which takes time.

For many teachers, then, CCE was associated with implementing a policy directive. Even though they recognised that they were required to implement this policy, teachers identified a lack of clarity in what this might ‘look like’, and reported clear inconsistencies in understanding and valuing of CCE by those inspecting their performance. Systems of teacher appraisal were noted as focusing on teacher-centred issues (such as lesson planning) rather than on child-centred matters such as student learning outcomes or wellbeing.

5.2 **CCE as a teaching method**

All interviewed teachers associated CCE with using specific teaching methods. Amongst these, group work and preparing teaching aids were emphasised by all of the teachers. The implications of this emphasis on CCE as method is discussed in this section.

While teachers generally had a clear understanding of why they implemented group work, namely to facilitate students’ cognitive and psychological development, a small number seemed to be less clear on the benefits of the approach, even amongst those who were implementing group work. These teachers seemed to be highly influenced by what they had learnt from workshops or their trainers:

I mainly ask students to work in pairs. MOET also confirm that it is not necessary for students to move in class which cause noises. Therefore, when I ask them to work in pairs, they can only move themselves [i.e. they can’t move their table/chairs but can work with a student sitting beside or behind them]… I am flexible. Sometimes, I have group work and require students to move to their group. The officer (the trainer from the project) believes that we should not overuse such activities (group work all the time) (Mr Minh).
Such comments implied that some teachers passively adopted group work because they were directed to use it by MOET and training officers, and that they implemented it in a formulaic way as they had been instructed. Such teachers did not seem to be as able to adapt group work processes to best facilitate students’ learning in their own classroom context. This implies that these teachers did not really understand why and how group work might be beneficial, nor how they might adapt and implement the general principles to the specific learning needs of individual students, or the physical context of their classroom. This raised the question of whether some teachers understood the relationship between group work and CCE – and thus whether they understood CCE at a deep or surface level.

Further, as mentioned in section 4.2.3, most interviewed teachers made decisions about who would work with whom when they arranged students for group activities. Comments often indicated that these teachers were not open to sharing responsibility for such decisions or providing their students with choice. Only one astute teacher recounted a period when she allowed her students to choose their own group members:

Today, I let you sit with anyone you would like to get support (Ms Nhien).

This particular teacher evidenced deeper understandings of CCE because she was willing to share power and provide students with a voice in classroom organisation. This was consistent with Cornellius-White and Harbaugh (2010) view that teachers may gain some insight about their students’ social and academic dynamics from such self-selected group allocation. Additionally, this approach to group allocation might help students feel more comfortable and confident and this may also contribute to promoting students’ independence (Marshall, 1998a; Walkerdine, 1990).

The ways in which teachers organised students to work in groups also reflected their understandings of CCE in terms of creating a psychologically friendly and comfortable classroom environment. As discussed in section 4.2.3, many teachers simply chose more ‘able’ students to act as group leaders or secretaries. In doing so, such teachers revealed that they did not hold high expectation for their less talented students, nor provide them an opportunity or encouragement to demonstrate their potential – as might be considered more consistent with CCE. Rather, it is likely that in such group work, the more able students become more confident and are more likely to achieve both socially and academically while the less able students lose confidence and motivation and might feel inferior to their peers and teachers (Brenner & Smith, 2004; Dollman, Morgan, Pergler, Russell, & Watts, 2007). In other words, while there may be benefits in organising group activities in such a way, such
strategies (when implemented without sensitivity and due consideration to the feelings and needs of individual students) reveal limited understanding of CCE and a lack of focus on the “whole child”.

In addition to the strong association between CCE and group work, teachers also revealed firmly held beliefs that implementing CCE required the use of teaching resources. Here teachers spoke of a clear contrast between TCE and CCE. For most teachers, TCE involved talking or lecturing and it was not essential to employ teaching aids. In contrast, the use of teaching aids was strongly encouraged in a CCE class to create an active learning atmosphere in which students would be required to take part in discovering or exploring new knowledge (Marshall, 1998a).

It is widely recognised that teaching aids play an important role during teaching and learning activities in both a TCE and CCE class because they help students understand abstract concepts easily (Yalin, 2003, cited in Marshall, 1998a; Yildirim, 2008). Further, when students are offered real things and objects relating to their learning process, they are likely to be more motivated and able to acquire new knowledge easily and remember it longer (Yildirim, 2008).

However, as was the case in relation to group work, only some teachers in this study revealed deeper understandings of the reason why and how they needed to use teaching aids to enhance CCE. Those who did typically recognised the needs of individual students and viewed teaching aids as tools to overcome learning difficulties and provide students with authentic learning experiences. Such teachers demonstrated great creativity in developing meaningful lessons, whether that be bringing to class physical resources which Jrai students may not have encountered (for example, sea water – Ms Hoan; ceramics- Ms Phuong) or adapting the curriculum to use local items rather than those from remote, unknown contexts (e.g. Jasmine flowers – Ms Lan). At the same time, this also conveyed that they were thinking from the standpoint of their students – of their prior knowledge and understandings, and how everyday resources might be adapted to best support these particular students’ learning (Marshall, 1998a).

In contrast, some other teachers revealed a less sophisticated understanding of the role of teaching resources in a child-centred learning environment. Typically, for many of the teachers in the study, such teaching resources were prepared for ‘show’ when their lessons were being inspected, rather than using them to assist their students’ learning. They also reflected that preparing and using such resources automatically equated to ‘doing CCE’ and that using such resources was instrumental in implementing CCE policy, especially when they had their class observed. As one teacher commented:
In practice, when I have a class observed, I have to prepare a lot of pictures in order not to be poorly evaluated (Mr Loan).

Such teachers were more likely to emphasise the time-consuming nature of resource preparation – quite understandably, since they were manually ‘manufacturing’ resources such as posters, pictures, photocopies and/or activities themselves. Simple, everyday objects that were easily adapted to support learning (e.g. a box to teach geometry) were less likely to be mentioned by this group.

This way of understanding CCE seemed to prevail, not only amongst teachers themselves, but also amongst those inspectors conducting teacher evaluation. Many comments implied that class observers did not themselves understand the purpose, value and/or benefits of using teaching aids to support students’ learning, and may have also held quite superficial understandings of the reasons why they should be employed. One of the typical reflections was as follows:

If teachers do not prepare teaching resources these people (observers/inspectors) think that they are not preparing appropriately for class. Even though there are pictures in the textbooks, these people expect the teacher to reproduce these pages to pin on the wall. Whenever they have a class observed they have to pay a lot to prepare these teaching resources (Ms Loan).

Further, teachers implied that, in some inspection processes, simple resources that might be very appropriate for students’ needs in that lesson might be viewed less highly than (for example) a PowerPoint presentation or other ‘showy’ resources. These teachers recognised that it was ‘safer’ to prepare based on the inspector’s expectations to ensure a good report on teaching. This simply created added stress and pressure for teachers and was not representative of the reality of the classroom, nor necessarily the needs of the students.

The study thus revealed that, if the reasons for using teaching aids are not fully understood, this can lead to a superficial form of lesson preparation and hence a superficial implementation of CCE. It could also reinforce inappropriate and negative understandings about the very nature and value of CCE, further diminishing the central focus on the child.

5.3 **CCE means individualisation of learning**

Much literature firmly associates CCE with catering for individual students needs and differences (Alexander & Murphy, 1998; Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Marshall, 1998a; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Ryan, 2005). However, this study revealed that the notion of putting the needs of the child, whether these might be academic or social and emotional needs, ahead of consideration of a range of
things like curriculum, text books, policy, inspections and assessment, was not clearly reflected in a child-centred classroom.

As discussed in sections 4.5.5 and 5.1, all interviewed teachers indicated that they acknowledged that the prescribed curriculum did not meet their local students’ learning needs – that the curriculum and associated prescribed national textbook content were heavy, impractical and inadequately recognised the diverse backgrounds of students. However, most of the interviewed teachers followed the curriculum rigorously, clarifying that it would have negative impacts on their performance appraisal if they did not. This implied that rather than focusing on the children and their needs, these teachers placed emphasis instead on implementing and completing the prescribed curriculum. While there were supplementary documents providing flexibility for teachers to adapt and adjust content to meet students’ learning needs, most class teachers did not express commitment to implementing these policies:

…even though MOET allows us to adjust topics to suit students in different regions, I find it hard for teachers to do that; we think it would be better to skip that topic (Ms Bich).

Such comments indicated that these teachers might lack understanding of local knowledge or community and thus did not feel knowledgeable enough to adapt curriculum. Another issue might be their lack of skills, creativity, confidence or authority to be flexible in their teaching, and make adaptations to meet students’ needs.

Data revealed that some teachers ignored the needs of each individual student because of the “achievement syndrome” (as discussed in section 2.2.4):

At the beginning of a school year, the school board require us to register the number of students who will pass (successfully complete) that year of schooling and the school is expected to reach 75% of that figure. If the class teacher can’t reach that figure their performance appraisal is affected. It is dangerous for the teacher, who can be moved to another very disadvantaged area, so they use all means to reach the targeted figure. Teachers will then allow students with low academic achievement to move to the next year (Ms Trang).

In theory, such ‘regulations’ are designed to ensure teachers support each individual student so they pass. However, in practice, because there is so much pressure on teachers to ensure students to succeed the opposite resulted, with teachers feeling forced to ‘teach to the test’ and limited in their capacity to authentically meet the academic needs of students as a key part of CCE (Marshall, 1998a). The regulation also resulted in significant added pressure on students to succeed, which may not be appropriate for students, particularly in disadvantaged areas.
Even though teachers generally acknowledged the learning needs of each individual student as part of CCE (Marshall, 1998a), few were able to meet these needs. For example, knowing that some children in their current year were not able to keep up with their peers because they had not gained prescribed knowledge from lower years, and that these children required additional support, most of the interviewed teachers of School C could not address this issue due to allotted time for each session (see section 5.1) and the lack of rooms for another shift if they want to have support classes for these students (see section 4.5.4). Because children’s learning needs were not being met, they would subsequently not feel like going to school, thus creating a downward cycle leading to school attrition.

Only a small number of teachers (for example, Ms Nuong, Ms Nhien) expressed comments demonstrating their deeper understanding about the learning needs of each individual student and their subsequent ability to be creative and adaptive in their teaching. Examples included the way Ms Nuong grouped her students in a dictation session to provide specific support for individuals needing additional teacher time, and Ms Nhien’s initiative to extend time for students in a maths session (Ms Nhien). While very simple strategies, these initiatives stand out as somewhat a-typical. When contrasted with descriptions of issues and barriers perceived by other teachers, it might be concluded that many teachers lacked the knowledge, initiative and skills required to truly individualise learning.

5.4 **CCE means understanding and valuing each child**

All teachers’ comments revealed that CCE involves understanding each individual child. They emphasised that this implied not only taking into account the children themselves but also acknowledging additional factors beyond the school such as their family’s socio-economic background and culture. These beliefs were consistent with broader literature (American Psychological Association Board of Educational Affairs, 1995; Marshall, 1998a). However, there was little evidence in the data that Kinh teachers had a good understanding of their Jrai students and their culture, particularly when they initially came to teach in this Jrai area.

In order to better understand their children, the most common strategies most of interviewed teachers employed were keeping close interaction with students in group work activities and talking to them outside the class. In this way, teachers were able to be more involved with students, gaining insights about their lives, and thus enabling them to relate more deeply with students and sympathise with their circumstances (Marshall, 1998a).
However, data revealed inconsistencies in teachers’ commitment to better relate to the Jrai children. While the majority of teachers recognised the value of good communication with their students, most did not know the local language, nor did they show interest in learning it so that they could communicate with, and understand, their students. In other words, while they understood the importance of knowing some Jrai language they did not make an attempt to do so (as explained in section 4.3.1). Explanations such as “I do not have much time to study it [Jrai language]” (Ms Dao) or “I wish to attend a course about the Jrai” (Ms Nguyet) demonstrate that there was an assumption that formal study would be needed, rather than a commitment to learn with and from students. More significantly, some teachers refused to learn the local language because they stated that, when at school, it was compulsory for Jrai students to learn Vietnamese, the official language. These teachers were in fact adhering to the policy and legal directives set by educational authorities at high levels, which insisted that if students rely on their language, they would not improve the Vietnamese language. However, these teachers, and the educational authorities themselves, did not appear to be sympathetic to the significance of the language barrier. If students are not able to understand teachers’ communication or express themselves to their teachers, this significantly undermines the child centredness of the educational experience. By not demonstrating a willingness to meet students’ need at least part way in using a language that might be more familiar and comfortable to them, these particular teachers were likely to be sending inconsistent messages to the children about the degree to which they understood and valued them as individuals. Further, the inability to recognise that their students provide a valuable resource to assist them to learn the Jrai language signified particular conceptions of the roles of teachers and students and possible associated ‘power’ structures. The concept of valuing students was not fully understood and clearly demonstrated in the data collected because most teachers’ comments revealed negative attitudes toward their students’ learning capacity:

I don’t think we can apply CCE in the class of Jrai students. Their capacity for being aware of something is not the same as that of the Kinh or children living in a city centre. They do not have enough vocabulary to understand meanings of some things (Ms Dao).

For example, I just need to explain a lesson to them (Kinh students) once and they can do the task. However, I need to explain the lesson to the Jrai 10 or even 20 times in the morning, but in the afternoon they forget what I have taught them (Ms Nguyet).

The majority of teachers made assumptions that Jrai students were not capable of learning as well as the Kinh. Such reflection indicated that these teachers might not accept each student for who and what they are, nor focus beyond generalisation from cultural background to a focus on each student as an individual (Marshall, 1998a; Shore, 2008). These teachers did not value or respect the uniqueness of
each learner when making a comparison between the Kinh and Jrai students. Such comments also indicate that they might not really sympathise with their students, even though they had admitted that their students were educationally disadvantaged children who encountered numerous barriers, especially the language barrier. Rather than actively seeking to build on the existing strengths of each child, or assist them to reach their individual learning potential (Shore, 2008) these teachers’ attitudes and beliefs set up barriers against them enacting CCE with their students. Thus the majority of teachers did not hold high expectations that all children could learn, but rather were influenced by assumptions based on culture. From these teachers, there was little willingness to change their approach to teaching, or to explore and stimulate their students’ motivations and interests or to adapt their teaching so that it was more appropriate for the students’ needs, something which might be considered one of the key aspects of CCE.

Moreover, while most teachers’ comments revealed that Jrai students were good at sports, arts and music, it seemed that many of the interviewed teachers were failing to take advantage of these strengths, interests and hobbies to motivate their students to learn, as recommended by Cole (2008). In practice, they assumed that it was better to focus on their students’ literacy and mathematics. This way of thinking reflected that they had low expectations of their students’ capacity to learn beyond the basics and that they emphasised academic dimensions of learning over other life skills. Further, they did not recognise that they could use such interests and hobbies to build their students’ literacy and numeracy.

Only a small number of teachers (Ms Lan, Ms Nguyet, and Mr Trung) demonstrated their deep understandings about their students’ background and valued their students’ agency. For example, one teacher commented:

> The Jrai students are very intelligent but they seem to be passive because they are timid and shy because of language barrier. If teachers can organise and create a good learning atmosphere, students will acquire knowledge quickly (Mr Trung).

This positive belief about students’ learning capacity may help to build students’ self-confidence and self-esteem (Marshall, 1998a) because most Jrai students were not growing up in educationally supportive environments and they may feel inferior to their peers and develop negative beliefs about their own worth and ability. In addition, when these teachers recognised difficulties their students may be facing, they were able to work with their students differently, taking responsibility for providing a suitable learning environment for their students. This implies that they might deeply understand about their students and ensure that their student learning needs are being met.
Some teachers’ comments also indicated that CCE implies valuing children’s efforts. As one teacher commented:

> You always respect their ideas though they give wrong answers or they can’t give enough information. Don’t tell them that, “You are wrong or it’s a wrong answer”. Otherwise, you will discourage them and they will never raise their voice in class (Ms Nguyet).

This comment reveals that the teacher was able to take into account not only academic needs but also psychological and motivation dimensions to enhance students’ learning outcomes and achievements.

Some teachers demonstrated that they consciously employed specific strategies to recognise students’ efforts and progress and they understood the importance of making their students feel that they are valued (Marshall, 1998a). Examples such as encouraging all students to contribute to discussions and emphasising to students that they can learn from mistakes indicated a deep respect for individuals, an awareness of the comfort levels of each student and a positive expectation that all students could complete the set tasks. Such approaches explicitly value students’ effort, thus building students’ beliefs that they could succeed (Cole, 2008; Lambert & McCombs, 1998; Shore, 2008). This implied that these teachers could expect the best from all children and communicate that expectation to them in positive and motivating ways.

As discussed in section 4.5.4 above, the notion of using art work, local product for decoration in class reflected that these teachers understood and valued the cultural backgrounds of their students. When children see their culture, heritage and community reflected in classroom materials, they understand that who they are is valued, accepted and deemed important (Marshall, 1998a). This simple, yet deliberate act can make the difference in how well children are motivated to learn.

In sum, while most teachers associated CCE with understanding and valuing each child, the majority did not demonstrate commitment to achieving this by learning the Jrai local language so that they can communicate and understand their Jrai students. Further, while some teachers could see that their not knowing students’ language had negative influences on students’ learning, most others focused on (and often complained about) their students’ learning capacity instead. Only a small number of teachers described tangible initiatives to convey to students that they understood their background and culture and valued each individual child.
5.5 **CCE means providing a comfortable learning environment**

Data reveals that most of the interviewed teachers associate CCE with creating a comfortable environment, both physically and interpersonally.

In terms of physical comfort, teachers associated CCE with providing good school facilities to support students’ learning. However, as presented in section 4.5.4, issues such as old school buildings, and small and cramped classrooms with old desks and chairs made it difficult for teachers to create a comfortable environment for children, particularly in satellite schools. Old and heavy benches were very inflexible and difficult to move around for different types of activities such as group work. Lack of electricity and heating and cooling made classrooms uncomfortable and in rainy seasons, classrooms were dark and damp and grounds muddy (as also discussed by Phelps & Graham, 2010). All these physical factors inhibited teachers’ capacity to provide a comfortable learning environment for their students.

While providing a comfortable physical environment was one component of teachers’ understandings of CCE, more central to their discussions were aspects of psychological safety and comfort. All interviewed teachers acknowledged that students respond well in a classroom environment in which they can develop a sense of belonging and feel comfortable making a contribution. Most of interviewed teachers spoke of CCE being about building relationships between teacher and students, as well as amongst students, so that students can trust them and share feelings with each other (Marshall, 1998a).

As discussed above, group work was perceived to be beneficial for students because, in such a cooperative learning context, students may not feel under as much pressure; they may feel free to express their own opinions; and they can provide and receive support from group members and teachers (Murphy, Mahoney, Chen, Mendoza-Diaz, & Yang, 2005). Less able students may not feel alienated in their group because each of them will have the same responsibility and they have to work together to fulfil the task. By providing opportunities for students to reflect and present ideas, teachers may assist students to increase their self-esteem and self-worth (Marshall, 1998a). Group work, at least in principle, was intended to bring about a safe learning environment. However, only a small number of teachers provided tangible evidence that their approach to group work was having this outcome.

As discussed in section 4.4.3, most teachers deliberately made efforts to establish close relationships with students when possible, seeking to understand their behaviour, hobbies, interests, their family
background or difficulties their students may be facing. Building trust with both students and their families has been identified as beneficial in establishing a psychologically safe environment where students perceived teachers to be readily accessible and, as a result, shared their feelings and were comfortable to ask for assistance (Alexander & Murphy, 1998; Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Lambert & McCombs, 1998; Marshall, 1998a). For example, two teachers (Ms Nhien and Ms Nguyet) spoke of making changes to their classroom by removing desks and chairs and letting students sit in a circle on the floor playing and learning with teachers. These two teachers were successful in breaking down the traditionally formal learning atmosphere in class where students sit in rows passively. Through such student-student and teacher-student interaction students were (in these teachers’ view) able to satisfy their basic needs for belonging, control, fun and freedom. As such, the teachers demonstrated deep understandings of the role of a comfortable learning atmosphere in enhancing students’ learning.

The interviews also provided some evidence that teachers, especially teachers at the bilingual project schools, associated putting up decorations in their classroom (such as pictures, art work and local products related to the children’s community) with CCE. This indicated that the teachers were active in attempting to make connections between school and the community where the children were exposed to such artefacts (Marshall, 1998a). As such, students may feel more welcome at school and thus become excited and motivated in their learning, reinforcing a sense of belonging in their class, school and communities (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). As one teacher commented:

The Jrai students can pick up knowledge quickly if they learn something familiar to their community (Ms Hoa).

(Marshall, 1998a) Some teachers spoke of the methods they used to encourage their students to vocalise ideas during the lesson:

Some shy students do not feel confident to have opinions but now I come to their group, encouraging these students to share their thoughts, “Please feel free to talk, don’t worry. If you make a mistake, I will help you. I will not punish you” (Ms Hoan).

This implies that some teachers understand students’ psychology and are aware of their fear of making mistakes. With teachers’ encouragement, students are more likely to exchange ideas, to reveal their lack of understanding, and put forward suggestions without feeling embarrassed or worried (Brophy, 2004). A small number of teachers’ referred to non-verbal communication such as eye contact, nodding, facial expression and gestures as being effective in creating a supportive learning environment.
Teachers could also be seen to be addressing issues of safety and comfort when they allowed their students choice in learning activities (Marshall, 1998a). As discussed above, by letting students choose group members they were more likely to be motivated because they were trusted and empowered by their teacher. Furthermore, they may perceive the learning environment as a comfortable, orderly, safe and secure place, thus diminishing stress and anxiety. This also implies that teachers were valuing the development of students’ social skills, including taking responsibility.

The notion of providing safety and comfort was also associated with encouraging students to have their own voice. In a teacher-centred classroom, students are not provided with opportunities to give opinions or question teachers and rarely, in traditional Vietnamese classrooms, would this occur (Dao Hong Thu, 1996; Tran Ba Hoanh, 2003; Vo Tri Thanh & Trinh Quang Long, 2005). It was thus particularly notable that School B had set up a mail box providing students with the opportunity, and encouragement, to provide opinions or express ideas and feelings relating to their schooling. This indicated that these teachers might consider the views of their students and be willing to listen to them. By collecting such information from students, teachers (it is assumed) might make necessary adjustments to the classroom or their teaching, hence notionally enhancing the safety and comfort of the learning environment. Moreover, the notion of having such a mail box at school implied that teachers may be willing to share power with their students, and that by providing opportunities for them to reflect and articulate their own ideas and feelings about learning, they were establishing a democratic classroom context and focusing on enhancing students’ self-esteem and self-worth (Marshall, 1998a). As such, this reflected a shift in some teachers’ beliefs, away from teachers needing to be authoritative and students having to passively listen.

As such, many teachers’ comments revealed their awareness of the benefits of creating a friendly and comfortable learning environment as a key part of CCE and they were able to employ teaching methods and strategies to provide a psychologically comfortable learning atmosphere. However, the provision of a physically safe and comfortable learning environment was largely beyond their control.

5.6 **CCE means collaboration and connection**

The study revealed that the majority of interviewed teachers had a limited understanding of the importance of cooperation amongst teachers, students’ parents and the community in facilitating students’ learning.
To some extent, teachers in the two bilingual project schools associated CCE with establishing close connections between teachers, parents and the community; therefore, they tried to connect with local parents and encouraged them to get involved in school related and extracurricular activities. For example, they encouraged students’ parents to prepare local products and display in them in class (Ms Lan, and Ms Y) and invited them to give performances about their traditional festivals at schools on special occasions (Ms Phuong). Teachers perceived such connections as enhancing the child-centredness of their teaching because it provided students with a familiar learning environment (Marshall, 1998a). At the same time, it also demonstrated that teachers acknowledged the vital role of parents in assisting their children’s learning and that they sought to share responsibility and accountability with parents to improve students’ learning outcomes (consistent with Fan & Chen, 2001).

Further, such activities lessened the gap between the schools and parents because they brought families and teachers together, helping parents gain trust in the school. In this way, parents may see that their contributions and opinions are valued and mutual relationships can be built and strengthened, thus enhancing positive impacts on children’s schooling and creating a more child-centred classroom (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012). As one teacher commented:

Teachers have to keep close contact with families so that parents don’t see discrimination. In this way, they will respect and build relationship with teachers (Ms Thuyen).

It is evident that children can achieve better learning outcomes where schools can make strong connection with parents as part of a learning community (Emerson et al., 2012). As one teacher commented:

Just some parents pay attention to their children’s schooling and those children learn very well at school (Ms Y).

However, the study revealed notable differences between the way teachers in the bilingual project schools and teachers in the mainstream curriculum approached the integration of parents into school life. Teachers in the mainstream curriculum were less likely to expect parents to play any role in supporting their children’s schooling and most of them did not appear to work actively to involve parents in school matters. Data indicated that there was not as strong a connection between teachers and students’ families in the mainstream curriculum. Teachers’ official meetings with parents appeared to mainly be about reporting on the children’s learning achievement or when the children dropped out or misbehaved. Teachers outside the bilingual project schools were less likely to have explored parents’ potential in supporting the children.
Further, teachers’ assumptions such as “Parents are illiterate” and “…they (parents) can’t assist them or parents are not really interested in their children’s learning” demonstrated that these teachers had negative attitudes towards the parents’ ability in supporting their children’s learning at home as well as at school. Therefore, the teachers deliberately did not share responsibility for supporting their children’s learning with parents. This indicated that these teachers did not fully grasp the value of engaging the parents in their children’s learning as a key part of CCE.

Teachers’ comments also reveal that not only parents but also teachers held a concept that learning only happened formally at school with teachers and it was the teacher’s duty and responsibility to help children obtain knowledge (as also discussed by Phelps & Graham, 2010). Such perspectives overlook the wealth of learning that happens for children in their community and undervalues the important role that parents do play in teaching their children many life skills and culturally relevant practices (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Such assumptions may not only hinder teachers in collaborating with students’ families to best facilitate their children’s learning but are also at odds with CCE. This may inadvertently reinforce local parents feeling unconfident about assisting their children’s learning.

Some teachers’ believed that parents had little ambition or hope for their children’s future:

Parents believe that no matter how well their children learn, the children will work on a farm (Ms Bich).

They do not encourage their children to go to school because they think that their children won’t be able to do anything [get a job in the future] even if they are literate (Ms Trang).

Such comments implied that some teachers may not be well placed to build trustful and respectful relationships with the local parents. A number of teachers claimed that “parents leave the whole work to class teachers”, and did not seem understanding or sympathetic of the difficulties that ethnic minority parents had to face. For most local parents, language was a real barrier, both in terms of interacting with teachers but also in supporting their children’s learning. The study reveals that in many ways, like their children, it was also hard for most parents to actively engage with the school because of their sense of inferiority to the teachers, especially to the Kinh teachers, due to their own negative or non-existent experience of formal education. As one teacher commented:

On the one hand, they are afraid of teachers. On the other hand, they think that when they have opinions, we might think their degree of understanding is low and they are workers so they do not have enough vocabulary to speak out or they are afraid to say something wrong (Ms Bich).

Thus, parents may not feel confident about interacting with the school because of the language barrier and their inexperience in education, and staff in the mainstream schools did not, in general, actively
encourage parents to get involved in school activities, in part because of negative assumptions and cultural generalisations. However, the practice of making connections between teaching staff, parents and the community was quite well developed in the bilingual project school where teachers were actively encouraged to work collaboratively with the community.

5.7 Incongruence in understandings of CCE at the systemic level

Underlying these findings is a fundamental systemic issue in terms of the implementation of CCE in rural Vietnamese contexts. The study revealed that aspects of the education system in Vietnam, particularly at the policy level, work against the practice of CCE at the classroom level. While some teachers had a deep understanding of CCE and wanted to implement it, they were frustrated and disempowered by policies and practices implemented and reinforced by MOET and some local educational managers.

As mentioned in sections 2.1.6 and 2.4.1, the concept of CCE had been introduced to Vietnam, and supported through educational projects funded by international aid organisations. MOET evidently believed that implementing CCE would bring benefits to Vietnam’s education system in general and Vietnamese students in particular, so they instigated the CCE policy, requiring teachers to implement it nationally. However, in rolling-out the policy, the need for a shared and consistent “vision” of what CCE is was under-addressed. The implementation approach also appears not to have anticipated the many challenges in relation to cultural factors; teachers’ professional capacity; teachers’ beliefs; and parents’ and students’ attitudes towards CCE (Altinyelken, 2011; Emenyeonu, 2012; Lall, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2011, 2013b). As such, the ‘one-size fits all’ approach represented in policy and systemic-level directives suggests that MOET might not take into account the nature of CCE in its deeper sense nor have considered the applicability of CCE in the Vietnamese cultural context at both national and local levels.

Workshops about CCE held by MOET predominantly introduced the new curriculum and textbooks, and focused on specific methods and strategies for teaching. This resulted in teachers associating CCE with a new method of teaching that would replace the traditional way of teaching and learning.

Notions of valuing and respecting children as individuals, recognising their rights and providing them with a voice seem to be poorly articulated, both in policy and also in training. While the policy conveyed the meaning of placing emphasis on children as the centre of teaching and learning, teachers and students were required to use nationally prescribed textbooks with little opportunity to adapt the
curriculum for local students, especially ethnic minority students or students in remote areas who have quite different backgrounds and life experiences to children from other areas of the country. As such, while MOET introduced the new policy of child-centreness and required teachers to implement it, by making textbook use compulsory, they were inadvertently sending incongruent messages about what it means to be child centred. Such inconsistence indicates that MOET may not deeply understand CCE as an educational philosophy.

Further, MOET prescribed that teachers had to cover the set curriculum strictly over the country whether students in that year were ready for it or not. Even when teachers did recognise the need to remediate when children had not grasped concepts from earlier years, they faced overwhelming pressure to keep covering the set work for the age group to prevent poor teacher evaluation and performance reports. This mitigated against their capacity to implement what they viewed as authentic child centred practice and made it nearly impossible for class teachers to focus on individual students’ needs.

Consistent with CCE, students’ assessment is best approached as a process rather than as a product (Weimer, 2002). However, when teachers were introduced to, and trained about, CCE as a new method of teaching, most of the emphasis was placed on what was taught, and organising learning activities. Little consideration appears to have been given to approaches to evaluating or assessing students consistent with CCE. While MOET released a policy requiring changes to the way students’ learning is assessed, it still placed an emphasis on students completing standardised tests and examinations. The current way of assessing students emphasises children learning by rote the information in textbooks. For that reason, it is difficult for teachers to modify what they teach, or to encourage their students to be creative in their learning. Moreover, marks have traditionally been viewed as important, especially marks on the end-of-year examinations, because they have always been used as an indicator of students’ success or failure. As a result of this continued emphasis, teachers create a competitive learning environment, rather than a co-operative one. Very few teachers commented on, or questioned, the practice of heavy summative assessment of students at a young age. Only a small number of teachers’ comments reflected their disagreement with this practice, indicating the pressure it caused for students, teachers and parents. Additionally, students’ marks still play a role in teachers’ performance evaluation (see section 4.5.6). Such regulations emphasise the inconsistencies in understandings of, and commitment to, the philosophy of CCE at the systematic level. They also send mixed messages to teachers about what is important in teaching and learning.
Even at the highest levels, the implementation of CCE has been problematic. The policy was not successfully implemented because, in practice, it was not synchronously carried out with in line ministries. In other words, while the policy directives from the Vietnamese Government allocated joint responsibility for implementation of CCE to several ministries (including MOET, Ministry of Finances, Ministry of Planning and Investment), in practice, most of the responsibility and action has fallen to MOET. As such, necessary school facilities and teaching and learning resources have not been upgraded, even though the need for this was emphasised in the policy. Most of the satellite schools visited in this study were in poor condition with old and dilapidated classrooms, broken windows, fixed desks and benches, and no teaching and learning aids. Not only did this mean that teachers lacked basic resourcing to put new policies into practice or implement innovative teaching approaches, it left them feeling like there was little authentic support for CCE itself – that, as a policy, it was given ‘lip service’ only.

Up to the time of this research being conducted, the implementation of CCE in Vietnam has not been formally evaluated. Little attention has been focused on its implementation at the local level and whether amendments and/or modifications might be required to meet the needs of ethnic minority children in particular. Instead, there have been somewhat ‘superficial’ annual reports produced by schools and sent to higher educational managers levels listing what had been done so far and what issues need overcoming. There is little focus on these issues being addressed.

5.8 *An under-emphasis on values, attitudes and beliefs*

The success of CCE, and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of Jrai students, would seem to rest on the personal beliefs and understandings of teachers about the nature of CCE, which in turn is influenced by their beliefs and understandings about children and childhood, and teaching and learning itself.

Culturally, Vietnamese people are committed to following directives from people in higher positions without questioning or making adaptation. Perhaps, for this reason, teachers’ deep understanding of the philosophy of CCE, and their values and beliefs that inform *why* they should choose to teach in a particular way has not been a focus in implementing CCE policy. Rather, teachers have been obliged to implement the policy and are forced to follow the nationally prescribed curriculum content.

For most teachers, their beliefs and understandings about CCE originated from the MOET policy directive. Having been influenced by workshops held by MOET, most interviewed teachers have
understood and employed (at some level at least) CCE as a new method of teaching and learning - but not necessarily as a teaching philosophy. Teaching strategies such as group work activities, learning games, and preparing and using teaching aids were, therefore, employed by the majority of interviewed teachers – at least sometimes - as part of their teaching process. Ideas as to why they used such teaching strategies were often related to their own “performance” – not necessarily to meet their students’ needs in the real context.

It might be assumed that because these teachers had themselves been educated in a very teacher-directed environment, the expectations they had regarding a teacher’s role rest on doing things in the way they were instructed or guided; and because of this they tend not to be creative in their teaching methods. For example, many of the interviewed teachers believed they were not ready or able to implement CCE because the resources they perceived as necessary – those that had been modelled to them - had not been provided. Few teachers thought creatively about preparing simple teaching aids from materials available in their daily life. In other words, because teachers had been shown how to implement CCE by using particular teaching aids, they expressed frustration and scepticism about their capacity to implement the policy when these resources weren’t available. While it is quite clear that these remote rural schools were highly under resourced and operated in impoverished conditions, such beliefs expressed by teachers reflected their association between CCE and specific teaching methods, rather than their deeper commitment to placing the child at the centre of the teaching/learning dynamic. While teachers predominantly associate CCE with method and use of specific teaching resources they are unlikely to feel that they are able to create a child-centred classroom - classrooms will never be big enough; there will never be enough teaching resources, and there will always be too many problems for teachers who work with Jrai students because of the language difference. Such beliefs contrasted with the small number of teachers such as Ms Loan, Ms Phuong and Ms Lan who evidenced a deeper understanding of CCE, and who used their creativeness to source and make very simple teaching aids from everyday objects from the children’s worlds – even involving them in finding and bringing them to class.

A small number of teachers also assumed that putting children at the centre of teaching and learning meant having the children actively do tasks or assignments by themselves without the teacher’s guidance and instructions (for example, to work directly from a text book without teacher instruction). Such a widespread assumption, in turn, put Jrai students in a more difficult situation because Vietnamese language is not their mother tongue. Teachers rightly pointed out the difficulty of Jrai
students following written directions in order to complete their tasks. This assumption led a number of teachers to believe that CCE was not suitable for ethnic minority students. Such comments highlight that these teachers did not really understand concepts of self-directed learning nor did they take into consideration their students’ agency. They made assumptions that self-directed learning meant children did not require input from the teacher. Rather, more professional development is required to assist teachers to understand that children need appropriate scaffolding and support to promote their learning, and that this is not antithetical to CCE.

The study did reveal that some teachers possessed a sophisticated understanding of CCE as a teaching philosophy, such that they related deeply to students, trying to understand them and provide as much support as they could. They could clearly see benefits in CCE but, for various reasons, they felt they could not implement it in the way they would like. This is very understandable, given financial and resource issues and because they were working in a system that, essentially, “missed the point”. While the system explicitly required teachers to implement CCE by following the policy directive and fulfilling the prescribed curriculum content, such prescriptions themselves worked against them effectively implementing CCE.

Those teachers who understand CCE at a deeper level, are personally committed to it and recognise that it is more than just a new curriculum, different teaching methods or the use of specific resources, did realise that ultimately CCE is about putting the child at the centre of their teaching, acknowledging his/her agency and providing them with a voice. Such a perspective represents quite a radical departure from many traditional teaching practices and from aspects of the policy itself. It requires a considerable shift by teachers in their understandings about children and childhood, focusing on building relationships with them, respecting them and valuing their voice (Morrow, 2010; Phelps & Graham, 2010).

The depth of teachers’ commitment to achieving positive learning outcomes for Jrai children, but even more so, their commitment to the welfare of each individual child, would seem to influence significantly their capacity to implement CCE. As such, because of teachers limited professional and pedagogical capacity (see section 2.2.4), it may be challenging for them to implement CCE.

The study also revealed that those teachers who understood CCE at a deeper level were those who have had a chance to work with NGOs and/or were part of the UNICEF funded projects, thereby having been influenced by what they have experienced rather than by the policy directive. Unlike
teachers of the mainstream curriculum, who implemented CCE rigidly as they had been trained to do, teachers involved in the bilingual project have been provided with much support in implementing CCE (before and during the project). It is not just the additional resourcing that makes the difference. Fundamentally, these teachers “get it”. Working within the funded projects, they were empowered to edit, choose, write and collect materials suitable for their local students and were more confident because they could pursue what is most appropriate for their children, how best to engage with the curriculum, and how to teach creatively. This raised issues of equity not only for teachers in terms of their professional learning development but also for the children in the high ethnic minority classroom.

This chapter has argued that the notions of CCE as a policy directive and CCE as a teaching method have dominated implementation of CCE by most of the interviewed teachers. The notions of CCE as catering for individual students’ needs and differences, understanding and valuing each child, providing children with a comfortable learning environment, and collaboration and connection between teachers, students’ parents and the community seem to be poorly understood or implemented. It would seem that CCE as an education philosophy has been incongruently understood at the systemic level and that there has been an under-emphasis on values, attitudes and beliefs of interviewed teachers about children and childhood, and teaching and learning itself.

The final chapter will summarise the findings of the research, its limitations and recommendations for class teachers, local educational managers, teacher educators, and policy makers.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate Vietnamese primary school teachers’ perceptions and experiences of CCE, particularly teachers working in schools of Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai Province. To achieve this aim, hermeneutic phenomenology was employed to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of primary school teachers with regard to CCE. This chapter will recap key findings of the research. It will highlight some limitations arising during the conduct of this research and then present recommendations, in which specific suggestions will be made to enhance the implementation of CCE in classes of Jrai students. The chapter will conclude with reflections on my own experiences as a student and parent during four-year time I have spent conducting the research.

6.1 Summary

This study set out to answer four research questions:

1. What understandings do primary teachers in Gia Lai have of child-centred education?
2. What issues impact on the learning of Jrai primary students?
3. In what ways might a child-centred approach to teaching and learning enhance Jrai primary students’ learning experience?
4. What hinders or enables teachers to implement child-centred educational strategies?

The study revealed that primary school teachers in Gia Lai province do have personal understandings of what CCE is, and these ideas predominantly relate to CCE being either, or both, a policy directive and/or a teaching method. Teachers who focused on it as a policy directive associated it with the 2000 educational changes, which were heralded by the Vietnamese Government and MOET as new and innovative, and necessary to improve Vietnam’s educational system. These teachers spoke at length about the role of curriculum, assessment and classroom inspections. When teachers spoke of CCE as a teaching method they referred to teachers as facilitators; active engagement of students; using group work; catering for students’ individual difference; and use of teaching aids. Only a small group of teachers associated CCE with understanding and valuing each child, speaking of the need to create a friendly and caring learning environment and to build collaborative connections with family and community.
All interviewed teachers felt that CCE was valuable in the Vietnamese context and they perceived CCE as positive in helping students become more active, independent, critical thinkers so that they could work in the global community. To some extent, all interviewed teachers believed that they were using CCE, but what it looked like, and how deeply they understood what it was they were implementing and why, varied considerably.

These teachers working with Jrai students did acknowledge the issues impacting on the learning of Jrai, including language barriers, families’ socio-economic conditions, and Jrai parents’ limited capacity and lack of commitment to supporting their children’s learning. Most teachers acknowledged that a child centred approach to teaching and learning might help Jrai students overcome these difficulties. Teachers spoke of the potential benefits in minimising verbal lectures in class and making use of teaching aids in order to overcome the language difficulties between themselves and Jrai students. Other perceived benefits for Jrai students from CCE included building mutual and close relationships with Jrai students and their families, personal commitment to giving additional provision for the child and their family, placing emphasises on learning needs of each individual Jrai child, and giving encouragement and positive feedback to Jrai students.

However, in practice, after more than 10 years of nationwide implementation, based on the findings of this research, closer attention needs to be given to why CCE may not have been embraced as an education philosophy. Data revealed that CCE is subject to a variety of interpretations and is viewed differently by individual class teachers, school boards, and educational managers at local and higher levels, because of a lack of operational clarity.

This research suggests that one of the issues with the implementation of CCE is that most teachers do not embrace it as a personal philosophy. Most interviewees viewed CCE as a top-down policy and therefore they had implemented it unquestioningly rather than developing a personal commitment to applying it. Some teachers viewed it as impossible to implement because of: deficiencies in school facilities and teaching resources; the heaviness and inappropriateness for Jrai students of the nationally prescribed curriculum and textbooks; and the discord between CCE and the assessment systems and policies. Further, some teachers personally may not commit to CCE as a teaching philosophy due to their lack of confidence, skills and creativity, particularly teachers with limited professional knowledge or personal educational background.
Teachers implementing CCE with Jrai students are also hindered by lack of professional training and ongoing professional development. CCE policy was introduced and implemented by MOET through one-off workshops for TOTs (Training of Trainers) of each grade; a workshop which essentially focused on introducing a new curriculum textbook. Videos were provided to class teachers, demonstrating new teaching methods. These have heavily influenced teachers’ understandings of what CCE is about. A lack on ongoing professional development and dialogue about CCE has not assisted teachers to develop deeper understandings and commitment to CCE as a philosophy of teaching. As such, adopting CCE as an educational philosophy would require that training and professional development challenges teachers deeply held attitudes, values, beliefs and assumptions about children, childhood, teaching and learning.

The study also shows there is not a deep, well developed or consistent understanding of CCE at the systemic level. The notion of placing children at the centre of teaching and learning has not been well understood, despite it being implied as the key element in child-centred education. This is particularly evident in ethnic minority contexts, since children all over the country are required to use and apply the same curriculum content and textbooks written by MOET, and there is minimal customisation of curriculum to meet local needs. Moreover, there has not been coherence between the new policy and current regulations. For example, the policy changes in pedagogy have not been supported by adequate changes in examinations and assessments which may hinder class teachers from effectively implementing CCE. Further, regulations passed by MOET to support the implementation of the new curriculum and textbooks (the 15% window program) have not been well articulated or explained, so these have been differently interpreted and implemented by most of the interviewed teachers.

Only a small number of the interviewed teachers had a deep understandings of CCE and embraced it as a teaching philosophy. They were more likely to be teachers who were part of the funded projects and have had lots of opportunities for professional learning from project facilitators, as well as chances to reflect upon and share ideas with other professionals, and go on field trips to other provinces. They were more flexible, adaptive, proactive and less passive in how and what they teach. They were personally committed to implementing CCE and were more creative in their use of different teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of Jrai children. These teachers were more likely to learn a local language, not only for teaching their students but also for communicating with them and their families. They were also creative when making use of everyday artefacts to enrich the learning experiences of Jrai children.
How teachers understand CCE will fundamentally influence their teaching and their students’ learning. CCE is not just about the amount of time or money invested in developing teaching aids, nor about exams, nor about teachers’ performance or promotion systems, nor the new curriculum, nor lesson plans. Rather, a deep understanding of CCE will be evident when education is, first and foremost, about children and childhood. Childhood Studies Theory prompts us to consider child-centred teaching practice as emphasising an acknowledgement that children are persons in their own right and worthy of recognition, respect and voice (Phelps & Graham, 2010). It will focus on children playing an active role in constructing their own lives and having a voice in their own education. From a Childhood Studies perspective, the cornerstone of child-centred teaching practice is the wellbeing of the ‘whole child’. These considerations would require educational officials to re-examine CCE theory and the values they bring to implementing it in Vietnam and provide more considered approaches to assisting teachers to understand CCE deeply and to employ it more effectively in their everyday classroom setting.

6.2 Limitations

There are a number of identified limitations of this research, particularly in relation to sampling, time in the field and subsequent depth of data and capacity for member checking.

As mentioned in section 3.3.3, even though I had intended to select participants myself to ensure diverse perspectives were represented, permission needed to be obtained through official channels. In practice, this meant that managers and principals generally chose the participants and suggested to them that they volunteer. This was advantageous in that teachers may not have participated without encouragement. However, it also meant that the sample did not represent a balance of male and female teachers, nor of Kinh and Jrai teachers and did not involve beginning teachers. At the same time, there was an absence of local Jrai teachers in School C because of cultural issues, with the Jrai teachers not feeling comfortable when being interviewed, perhaps due to fear that their answers might have a negative influence on their teaching career.

I also planned to involve a local educational manager in my research (as mentioned in 3.3.2). Although I contacted a provincial manager and he agreed to be interviewed, he cancelled at the last minute due to his business affairs. Instead, he sent me some documents outlining what had been done since CCE was implemented in primary schools in general and in primary schools Gia Lai Province in particular.
This information was valuable to my study, but did not allow me to explore issues in dialogue with him.

Further, had more time been available to spend in the research context, I would have been able to conduct follow-up interviews with teachers to clarify their ideas and opinions. Because my research was carried out in Australia with limited funding, I was not able to return to Vietnam to collect further data. These constraints also meant that I was not able to transcribe all the interviews whilst in Vietnam and undertake member checks in person with them. More than half of the interviews were transcribed back in Australia and I was not able to send them back to each individual teacher in Vietnam because few had their own email addresses.

Following transcription, interviews were translated into English. Since most teachers did not speak English, interviewees were not able to revisit the translation of what they had shared. However, the data was then checked independently by four other teachers of English, an important process which could endorse my transcriptions and translations to be accurate with what the interviewees had provided.

Having noted the above limitations, this study has contributed new knowledge in relation to CCE, especially in relation to teachers working in a Jrai primary school context. This study is the first to explore the understandings of teachers working with Jrai primary school students. In terms of trustworthiness and the criteria of transferability, the issue of whether or not the findings of this study hold in other contexts is an empirical issue and is not the focus of qualitative enquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings of this present study therefore convey what these participants perceive to be their authentic views and experience in this particular context.

6.3 Implications

Child-centred practice was introduced in Vietnam in the 1990s, however its implementation has been sporadic and inconsistent. The literature review did not uncover any documentation related to its adoption/application or effectiveness and there has been no identified research documenting teachers’ perceptions of child-centred education in Vietnam.

The present study has brought to light understandings of CCE as it manifests in practice in Vietnam. It shows how definitions of CCE can vary so much between contexts and that there can be a disjunction between understandings embodied in policy and understandings implemented in practice.
The study indicates that teachers’ understandings of CCE are sometimes quite restricted and are based on a filtered down version of the policies, which are subject to a variety of interpretations. CCE is viewed differently by individual class teachers, school boards, and educational managers at local and higher levels, because of a lack of operational clarity. Understandings of the nature of CCE are quite different in bilingual schools to other mainstream schools.

These findings are significant since they extend our understanding of teachers’ perceptions of CCE, filling a gap in the literature. They suggest a number of practical strategies (see sections 6.3.1 to 6.3.5) that might be implemented to support teachers to implement CCE effectively in the Vietnamese context.

The Vietnamese educational system (including textbooks, curriculum, methods of teaching and its policy development) is structured and organised in a top-down hierarchical manner emphasising teachers replicating set strategies and following established directions, without necessarily understanding or embracing the philosophy underpinning the strategies. For this reason, the implementation of CCE in Vietnam has not been consistently successful because CCE really requires teachers to embrace a philosophy that places the child at the centre of teaching and learning activities and to understand why and when they would implement certain strategies.

This study has created an opportunity for participants’ beliefs, experiences and viewpoints to be documented, and their voices heard by policy makers, educational managers and government officials. Such empirical data documenting issues relating to day-to-day teaching and learning context, including what hinders and enables implementation of CCE, means that policies can be better informed by the realities of implementation and practice.

As it is not common for teachers’ views to be taken into account in policy development, the study also has implications, demonstrating the value of taking grass-root teachers’ experiences and views into account, particularly in terms of changes that are meant to affect ethnic minority education in remote areas.

6.4 **Recommendations**

The study reveals inconsistencies in understanding of the nature, practice and value of CCE amongst those involved in primary education in Vietnam. It suggests the need for closer alignment between policy and practice in respect to class teachers, teacher educators, policy-makers, MOET and related
ministries and a pressing urgency to revisit CCE policy to evaluate how it has been implemented, and the outcomes for children themselves. This section provides a number of recommendations for education officials and for teachers working with Jrai students. These recommendations are put forward with the intent of not only enhancing the effectiveness of CCE implementation in the Vietnam context but also in challenging how children and childhood are viewed and understood, particularly in respect to their voice, competence and agency.

**Recommendation 1: That high quality in-service professional development is provided to teachers.**

In a high ethnic minority classroom, such as in the Jrai schools included in this study, CCE requires teachers to have a high level of individual commitment, to be innovative and creative in using pedagogical resources as well as time to establish positive classroom relations. In order for teachers to embrace and embody child-centred practice, there is a need for all those involved in children’s education to cooperate and provide sufficient support, including school principals, the local teacher training college, local educational authorities, as well MOET and educational policy makers.

In order for teachers to have a deep understanding of CCE and implement it effectively in their everyday contexts, it is recommended that MOET regularly run workshops providing professional development for all teaching staff. These workshops or training courses should not only focus on teaching skills and methods but also address deeply held personal and professional beliefs, values and assumptions about CCE, children and childhood, valuing each child, and recognising diversity and capability. Such changes are not straightforward and will not come about from single one-off workshops. Rather, it is important that professional development opportunities are provided regularly, and that ongoing professional discussions are sustained over longer periods of time, as teachers adopt and adapt to different teaching philosophies and may change their attitudes towards, and values about, CCE.

It would also be beneficial to hold conferences and workshops that bring together teachers from different schools to exchange ideas and experiences about applying CCE in their classrooms. In practice, only teachers in the bilingual project schools have opportunities to sit together and share experiences, and such initiatives usually end when the project finishes. Teachers of the mainstream curriculum operate in a competitive rather than cooperative environment, especially when they are chosen to give demonstration lessons (see section 4.5.2). Therefore, it would be valuable to establish intra-school support networks for teachers and improve collaboration amongst teachers, encouraging
them to communicate with each other, discuss difficulties and share good practice and engage in mutual teaching observation. For example, teaching aids were often not readily available and teachers would have to spend time to construct and build resources themselves. When they have an opportunity to be in such workshops, they can learn from each other, sharing good practice of how to make teaching aids or how to use recycled and easily available materials.

This recommendation also requires that local educational officials and teacher training colleges should consider holding annual workshops so that less academically qualified teachers (see 4.5.3) can develop expertise and supplement content knowledge in order to better work with their students. In this way, these teachers might move towards being creative and innovative in how they teach and in how they meet the needs of each individual student, rather than rigidly following what has been stipulated in teachers’ books and textbooks.

It would be beneficial to establish a recognition and/or awards scheme to encourage teachers who have displayed outstanding levels of creativity to successfully deploy CCE. Achievements need to be recognised and celebrated for the sake of the individual, but these also provide a means for sharing innovative practice and encouraging other teachers. The focus of teacher inspections should not be on the glossy preparation that teachers only do for the inspection, and rewards and recognitions should not be based on one-off classroom inspection. Rather, such processes should evaluate teachers’ day-to-day creativity and their capacity to authentically meet the needs of the students in their class, in a sustained way. The focus must be on outcomes for children.

To further enhance the professional development of teachers, local support networks for teachers are required to enable engagement in professional dialogue about CCE. By encouraging teachers to have a voice when implementing new policies, teachers will be empowered to reflect critically and feel that they have the capacity to adapt guidelines to their local contexts. There would thus be a greater likelihood that teachers shape their teaching practices to meet children’s learning needs.

**Recommendation 2: That focus is placed on the recruitment and training of pre-service teachers.**

This study documented critical shortages of qualified ethnic minority teachers to work with local children. As mentioned in 2.2.4, past policies of recruiting local teachers with less educational background have been problematic, resulting in lower academically qualified teachers. This does not help establish higher educational outcomes for ethnic minority children. Furthermore, teaching does not provide a good salary, even though traditionally teachers have been greatly respected. In practice,
talented young people pursue other careers with more salary and/or authority. Also, many young people from remote areas who experience life outside their local communities do not want to return to their hometowns. Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds have a great understanding of their local community’s needs including language, cultural traditions and social-economic background and they are thus more likely to meet the needs of students in their classes. Therefore, there should be incentivised policies to encourage ethnic minority youth to pursue a teaching career and commit to coming back to work in their community after graduation.

This research has clear implications for the development and recruiting of bilingual language teachers who understand and respect children’s language and culture. Teacher Training Colleges should revisit their teacher preparation programs to encourage more teachers to learn ethnic minority languages and, in the process, develop deeper understandings of cultural practices. Ultimately, teacher education needs to give closer consideration to diversity, focusing on valuing differences and recognising the strengths and capabilities of each individual child, regardless of background.

At the same time, trainee teachers should be allowed to practise and experiment with CCE approaches through more extensive use of micro-teaching and demonstration lessons. This might include lecturers or exemplar teachers modelling CCE approaches. In addition, trainee teachers themselves should be provided with non-threatening opportunities to experiment with, practice and implement strategies and approaches that are consistent CCE.

Educational policies should attract qualified bilingual language teachers to work with children in remote areas. Incentives might be provided for those working in these areas, including basic support such as more comfortable accommodation, provision of public services and health care or entertainment including television reception. After a certain time, they should have the opportunity to be transferred or rotated to a less remote area should they prefer. Once such conditions are provided, teachers may feel comfortable and secure and more committed to their students.

**Recommendation 3: That teachers build supportive school, family and community networks.**

Data from interviews reveals that teachers over-estimate the role of schools in educating children, and under-value the role of families and communities in providing valuable learning opportunities for young people. Therefore, professional development programs for trainee and practicing teachers might help them understand that learning does not only happen formally at school and that knowledge students have acquired is not only from textbooks or imparted by class teachers. Teachers should
recognise that children come to school having already learnt a lot from their parents at home and in community. They are not a “blank slates” but they may bring to school various skills and knowledge including the language of their ethnic area. Therefore, it is necessary to help teachers value and respect the kind of learning that happens in family and community context. It is also necessary to help teachers to understand how they can teach creatively to build on that learning.

The role of parents and community in helping children feel engaged and motivated to attend school should be also be considered. Local authorities, local educational managers and school boards should have training programs for teaching staff to recognise and value the important role of parents and community in educating children, improve the quality of school-family collaboration, and help to build a supportive network among schools, family and community to support students to develop a positive attitude to learning and feel motivated to go to school. Local authorities, local educational managers and school boards should also help parents to understand their vital role in their children’s schooling and encourage them to get involved in school activities. Such engagement of parents would be viewed as necessary in order to underpin the CCE methods and the consolidation of learning at home.

Recommendation 4: That teachers focus on their interactions and relationships with students.

As part of implementing CCE in their classroom, it is recommended that teachers should engage in more communication with children, seeking to embrace and integrate their diversity. Clearly, teachers will benefit from getting to know, value and respect Jrai children in their class, particularly their cultural, social-economic and learning background. Further, it would be beneficial for class teachers to be approachable to Jrai parents and their community. Teachers should encourage external support networks to assist students to develop a sense of belonging at school, and actively foster opportunities for students’ families and communities to engage.

As discussed previously, Jrai children, especially children of year 1 and 2, face a language barrier when they go to school. In order to address this issue, teachers should provide clear instructions, including a combination of verbal and non-verbal clues, and use accessible language and examples so that children do not feel confused. By speaking and writing in plain language, it is more likely that children will clearly understand concepts and ideas being taught.

Further, it is beneficial for teachers to know how to scaffold children’s learning. Child-centred approaches to teaching and learning may be new to children and require them to be more active and independent in their learning and less reliant on teachers. It can take children time to adjust to this new
learning environment. Therefore, teachers should be approachable to guide children learning, taking a step-by-step approach to provide the necessary support. Teachers should acknowledge that, at different times in a lesson, their role may change from teacher-led to student-directed and back again. They should be responsible for assisting children to work independently, monitoring them while they are working together, and giving them feedback afterward.

Finally, for teachers to adopt child-focused pedagogies, they must hold high expectations that every child can learn and that children are capable of being engaged in learning activities when teachers provide enthusiastic support to them. Teachers should avoid generalisations that are coloured by assumptions about ethnic minority groups and their capacity to learn. Rather they should acknowledge that it is their responsibility, as teachers, to find ways to engage, motivate and support. It should also be expected that teachers acknowledge and respect students’ diversity and be willing to adapt learning experiences to their students’ individual needs and differences.

**Recommendation 5: That national policies and resourcing are reviewed to support CCE**

It would be beneficial if MOET and related ministries worked together to provide adequate financial support and to invest in school facilities and teaching and learning resources for class teachers. Children will not feel they are valued as learners, and teachers will not feel their role as teachers is respected, where school facilities are highly inadequate. Both children and teachers will be uncomfortable when there is not enough room for interaction and they are not able to move chairs and tables for group work. While implementing CCE is not theoretically dependent on additional finance and resources, clearly teachers need to feel that facilities and basic resources are available to enable them to create a comfortable classroom.

In order for teachers to effectively implement CCE, it is necessary to consider ways to assess and evaluate students’ learning outcomes because the current way of assessing students through examinations which pupils sit at the end of the year puts children, teachers and parents under pressure (see section 5.7). There should be a review of approaches to testing students’ knowledge, with a particular focus on whether such approaches test recall of facts versus problem solving. In this way, teachers will be able to re-orient the way they conduct their lessons. This might make teachers start to encourage students to work collaboratively with each other in class through active learning, problem solving and group activities.
Recommendation 6: That further research be undertaking in other contexts.

This study sought the views of teachers in Gia Lai Province to explore their understandings and perceptions about CCE. It has focused specifically on primary school teachers working with Jrai students. As the first study to explore teachers’ understandings about CCE in Jrai primary schools in Gia Lai, Vietnam, further research is needed in order to consolidate and extend these findings.

For instance, further research would be valuable to explore different segments of teacher demographics in Gia Lai to understand if there are any differences in the way they perceive CCE. This may be conducted in a multitude of ways by exploring possible differences in level of school teachers and or educational institutions (secondary school teachers, high school teachers, lecturers at Teacher Training Colleges and at University). This may enable more detailed identification of patterns of beliefs and practices, and enable further actions which can be targeted toward specific groups of educators.

While this study has provided an insight into the implementation of CCE in one province, no attempt is made to generalise the findings to other geographical and cultural contexts. Future research on the application of CCE in other provinces in Vietnam would be valuable, and would enable comparative analysis.

The current research has also indicated several possibilities in terms of further research on children’s voice. It would be valuable to investigate students’ understandings about, and attitudes toward, CCE; particularly given they are believed to be placed at the centre of a teaching and learning process. For example, research on primary school students in general and ethnic minority children in the Vietnam context could be carried out to see how they understood and perceived CCE, what helps them to feel valued and enjoy school, and what teaching approaches they find most beneficial for their own learning.

While this research was focused on child-centred education, similar research could be conducted in higher education settings focused on understandings of learner-(or student-)centred education. This could involve secondary school students, high school students, and learners at Colleges and Universities in order to inform policies on service provision.

This study also signals the potential value of further research in contexts other than schools or other educational institutions in Vietnam. Such contexts might include (but are not limited to) family and
local communities through to higher levels including MOET, educational policy makers and other related ministries in Vietnam. Therefore, additional work on their understandings about, attitudes towards and values regarding CCE also need to be explored.

6.5 Reflections

Spending four years living and studying in Australia has been a great experience for me and has enabled me to reflect upon teaching and learning, and the nature of CCE. My personal journey in relation to both my professional self and my role as a parent has been profound and will impact on my future practice and parenting.

Being a mother of two young children who have been enrolled in the Australian school system from preschool to high school level, I have had a chance to observe the nature of Australian pedagogy and curriculum in different school settings and have come to recognise that these educational contexts have much in common. From pre-school to high school, teachers generally get to know their students well. They appear to build close relationships with them, respecting and valuing their social and cultural background. They actively establish a positive and collaborative relationship between school and family, seeking to involve parents in school activities. These values have been embodied in all aspects of my children’s Australian schools, from the school administration and management to classroom teaching and learning activities.

I will never forget our first arrival in Lismore, Australia. We were like ethnic minority students coming to learn in a very big strange community. We have faced language difficulties and cultural differences. Without sympathy and assistance from my supervisors and teaching staff, we would not have been able to integrate and socialize into the community.

After one week settling down in Australia, I decided to enrol my son in the local school. After being taken on a tour around the school and introduced to some class teachers I asked the principal when my son might be able to start going to school. I was very surprised when he replied “Whenever he is ready.” My initial response was of concern and trepidation. In Vietnam, such an answer would imply that my son would need to have caught up with all the work he might have missed since it was nearly a month since school had started – something that would cause considerable trouble in Vietnam. If children in my country get such a reply from teaching staff or from the school board, they will never be ready to go to school. Moreover, the principal was suggesting that my son could and should decide when he was ready to start. Culturally, in Vietnam, we assume that children are not old enough to
make such decisions and that “Children must sit wherever their parents ask them to sit” (Cha me dat dau con ngoi do). Looking back, I recognise that I did not seek my son’s opinion or ask his feelings, and made the decision for my son to go to school the following day. I did not understand the principal’s notions until I shared the story with my relatives and friends. We all acknowledged what it means to think of children, let them have a say and respect their opinions. By giving them such voice, they may be more responsible in their actions, resulting in better outcomes.

This notion of respecting and empowering children is clearly reflected in the Friday school assembly at our local primary school, which I regularly chose to attend. I was impressed when seeing that the school captains (four children elected from year six) were able to manage and organise the school assembly, demonstrating just how confident and independent young people can be when they are allowed to take leadership roles. At a classroom level, I was also impressed by the rotation of class leader roles each day, providing most children a turn at leadership. This contrasts with the class monitor role in Vietnamese classrooms, where a single bright and usually good looking child is given the role for a whole year.

An important experience for me has been observing how teachers build relationships with students. At first I was very concerned that my son, Quan, would be the only international student in this school and I felt worried that teachers may not have the skills or experience working with international students. However, the class teacher was so subtle when she communicated with Quan, exploring his interests and hobbies so as to get to know him well and gain his trust and confidence. She acknowledged that Quan was facing a language barrier, so she grouped him with other classmates who had similar hobbies and interests so that Quan could more easily learn English from his peers. In class, she prepared special learning activities, avoiding wordy explanations so that Quan would not feel pressured with his limited English vocabulary. She made use of his strengths to build up his self-confidence. The teacher clearly saw her role as supporting my son, not only educationally but socially and personally, and she was able to tailor the learning activities to his specific needs. She was proactive in building a close and trusting relationship with students so that they did not feel alien to the school, teachers and friends. After one semester, I felt relieved that Quan was doing well academically, that he was motivated to go to school and enjoyed being with his friends.

Having my children attend school in Australia has made me aware of what a child-centred school environment means here. Schools in Vietnam in general, and in Gia Lai in particular, are very formal and surrounded with high walls. Parents stay outside. Children are kept inside and are strictly limited
by the school’s physical and social structures which emphasise control and formality. It appears difficult for members of the community to access the school, except when parents are “invited” to come in and see the school board and/or teacher staff. It is not uncommon for students to run in the other direction when they see the principal approaching from afar, since students may feel scared of the principal; they do not dare talk to him (and it is usually a he) because he is an authority figure. Principals themselves also may emphasise their power governing the school by remaining distant to students when they are at school.

In contrast, the Australian schools which my children attended, as well as those I have visited, are less formal. The principal, teaching staff, students and parents talk freely before and after school time. They update and share information relating to children, learning activities, academic achievements and sport activities. Any child can talk to the principal if they have questions or suggestions. The school always involves parents in school activities and they seek to work together to bring about the best outcomes for the children. In such a learning environment, children are happy to go to school. When they are on holiday, my children often say, “Mum, I want to come back to school; I miss my teacher and friends”. I feel very happy that my children have fun at school and learn through play. This is quite contrary to children in Vietnam who view school as a competition to gain academic achievement, which may make them feel under pressure and scared of school.

On my part, as a PhD student, doing this research has been extremely challenging. It has required me to work hard and independently. There are few specific guidelines for students and no requirement to attend classes. The doctoral student has to be a self-directed learner, has to make a study plan and work toward a clear goal. Students are required to engage in critical thinking when discussing an issue. In this learning environment, students may easily find themselves under pressure managing their time and/or keeping on track. They sometimes might feel isolated because of different relationships with supervisors versus class teachers. The journey has been challenging for me because of my experience as an ethnic minority student facing language barriers, different attitudes towards learning and different cultural backgrounds.

However, I have developed considerably in my capacity to initiate and direct my own work. I have come to understand that doctoral supervisors act as facilitators providing structure and support through their positive regard and practical guidance. They encouraged me to discuss openly when I felt confused or stuck during my time of carrying out the research. I gradually adapted and adjusted to the doctoral learning environment. Discussions with my supervisors were beneficial, not only in the
academic field but also to help me build up other skills. They challenged me to reflect upon my cultural expectations of there being a ‘right answer’ and helped me develop my capacity for explanation and critical thinking and to feel more confident in sharing my view about an issue. They created a psychologically safe learning environment for me to share ideas and provided me with clear feedback. In this way, I felt treated with respect, became more confident and took responsibility for my learning.

My supervisors not only supported my academic achievement but also helped me address issues affecting my daily life. I could share with them any problems and they listened. Sometimes they can fix things, but sometimes I just needed them to hear my concerns. Without my supervisors’ assistance, I myself could not keep on the right track and reach my learning and research goal.

As such, what I have experienced in this new learning environment deepens my understanding of the value of many elements associated with CCE, such as developing close relationships with students, respecting and valuing their cultural background as well as their previous learning experiences, and building mutual relationships with them. These are vital and indispensable components of student-centred education.

I have learnt a lot about CCE from my research, both from reading the related literature, and from my own data collection and analysis. However, there is no doubt that the most profound learning that I have experienced is from observing my own children in schools here in Australia and reflecting on what they have gained in this different environment. I have seen what they have achieved during the past four years and how independent, confident and happy they have become in a child-centred learning environment. This has transformed my attitude, beliefs and values about CCE. When I return to Vietnam, perhaps the most profound way of sharing my learning with my colleagues at the College, and with my own students who will be future teachers themselves, will be to explain what the experience has meant for my own children.

6.6 Final words

The principal intent of this study was to provide an insight into the under-researched phenomenon of teachers’ understandings about CCE in Vietnam. The findings highlight both positive and negative teacher perceptions of CCE and inconsistencies in how it is understood and implemented. Only a small number of teachers held an understanding of CCE that placed the child at the centre of teaching and learning that prioritised social and psychological wellbeing and confidence and empowered children to
have a voice and participate actively in their own learning. This research has generated findings and recommendations which, it is hoped, might challenge MOET and other educational policy makers to revisit their fundamental understandings of CCE, and consider what it is that Vietnamese primary education is seeking to achieve by implementing this policy. It is also hoped that the findings and recommendations will inform educators, administrators and scholars in their efforts to understand and more effectively support class teachers. Educators at all levels of the Vietnamese school system need to be supported to achieve a deeper understanding of child-centred approaches to education. Childhood Studies theory, with its emphasis on recognising children’s voice, agency and competence, provides a valuable foundation upon which such professional learning could occur.

Through such a persistent and sustained transformation, Vietnamese children – particularly our ethnic minority children - will potentially feel more confident and inclined to go to school since they will be engaged in more creative, relevant and fun learning activities. This stands in contrast to the current physical, psychological and spiritual burden which is still prevalent throughout the Vietnamese education system.
REFERENCES


Hughes, & J. B. Terrell (Eds.), Handbook of developing emotional and social intelligence: Best practices, case studies, and tools (pp. 329-358). New York, NY: Wiley.


Hoang Thanh. (2009). Đào tạo giáo viên dạy tiếng dân tộc thiểu số: Xóa dần tình trạng “mù tiếng dạy mù chữ” [Training teachers to teach ethnic minority languages: Teachers have to learn ethnic minority languages in order to teach the illiterate]. Retrieved from Dân tộc và Phát triển [Committee for Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Area Affairs] website: http://cema.gov.vn/modules.php?name=Content&op=details&mid=8213##ixzz1dRpw1DM5


Dear............,

My full name is Huynh Thi Nhan Hieu. I am studying a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at Southern Cross University in Australia, investigating primary school teachers’ perceptions and experiences of child-centred about child-centred approaches to education in Vietnam, particularly in relation to the education of Jrai children. It is hoped that the research will provide insights and recommendations to help overcome the current educational problems in Vietnam, identifying the meaning of child-centred education for teachers and its implications for the education of Jrai children. This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University. The approval number is ECN-11-262

As part of my research, I will be interviewing teachers, principals, local education managers and teacher educators from Gia Lai province, Vietnam. I would like to invite you to take part in my research.

If you choose to be involved, I would negotiate with you an appropriate time and place to conduct a one-to-one interview which will last an hour. The interview would explore your experiences of teaching Jrai students and your perceptions of child-centred approaches to education. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers to any of these questions and the research is interested to better understand the diversity of teachers’ views.

With your permission, the interview would be digitally recorded and later transcribed by me. All information you provide will be treated confidentially and your responses to the questions will not be able to be linked back to you personally. Your name will not be used in storing or reporting any of the research findings. All information collected will only be used for this research investigation.
After the interview, I will summarise our discussion and I will provide you with the opportunity to check that what I have recorded accurately represents your views. You will also be provided with access to the final research report. The results of this study may be published in a peer-reviewed journal and presented at conferences, but only group data will be reported.

If you do not wish to continue with your involvement in the research, you can withdraw your consent at any time.

The Consent Form is given to and retained by the Southern Cross University researcher for their records. Therefore, please give it to the researcher in a return self-addressed envelope which has been included.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me on 0905291819 or email nhanhieu2005@gmail.com. If I am not immediately available, I will return your call as soon as possible. I am very happy to talk to you about any aspect of my research.

Finally, should you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research, these concerns will be conveyed in writing to the: The Ethics Complaints Officer, Southern Cross University, PO Box 157, Lismore NSW 2480. Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All information is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible. Thank you in anticipation of your involvement.

Yours sincerely,

Huynh Thi Nhan Hieu
Appendix Ib: Informed Consent Letter (Vietnamese Version)

PRINTED ON SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD

Thu mở tham gia phòng văn

Kính gửi Thầy /Cô: .................................................................


Về phần nghiên cứu, tôi sẽ xin phòng văn các giáo viên tiểu học hiện đang giảng dạy ở các lớp gồm 100% học sinh dân tộc Jrai, ban giám hiệu nhà trường, lãnh đạo giáo dục địa phương, và giáo viên ở trường Cao đẳng Sư phạm Gia Lai, Việt Nam.


Nếu quý thầy/cô chấp thuận tham gia phòng văn, tôi xin được phép ghi âm, sao chép và dịch cuộc phòng văn sang tiếng Anh. Tất cả thông tin quý thầy/cô cung cấp sẽ được bảo mật và những câu trả lời liên quan đến cá nhân thầy/cô sẽ được mã hóa khi công bố. Những thông tin này sẽ chỉ được dùng trong nghiên cứu này.

Sau khi phòng văn, tôi sẽ tổ chức những thảo luận và gửi lại đề thầy/cô kiểm tra lại. Thầy/cô sẽ được xem lại bản báo cáo cuối cùng nếu muốn.

Nếu thầy/cô không muốn tham gia vào nghiên cứu, thầy/cô có quyền rút khỏi cuộc nghiên cứu bất kỳ khi nào.
Xin thầy/cô vui lòng ký vào mẫu đơn đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu. Mẫu đơn này sẽ được thu lại để lưu trữ trong hồ sơ nghiên cứu.

Nếu thầy/cô muốn biết thêm bất cứ điều gì, xin liên lạc với tôi theo địa chỉ email: nhanhieu2005@gmail.com hoặc điện thoại di động: 0905291819. Tôi sẽ trả lời ngay khi nhận được thông tin.

Cuối cùng, nếu thầy/cô còn lo lắng về chuẩn đạo đức của nghiên cứu, xin gửi thông tin đến địa chỉ: The Ethics Complaints Officer, Southern Cross University, PO Box 157, Lismore NSW 2480. Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

Tất cả thông tin sẽ được bảo mật và giải quyết nhanh.

Xin chân thành cảm ơn.

Huỳnh Thị Nhân Hiếu
Appendix 2a: Consent Form (English Version)

The Consent Form is given to and retained by the Southern Cross Researcher for their records. The Informed Consent Letter is retained by the participant.

Title of research project

Teachers’ perceptions of child-centred education and its potential in supporting Jrai ethnic minority primary students in Gia Lai, Viet Nam

Name of researcher: Hieu Thi Nhan Huynh

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researcher.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

I agree to allow the interview to be recorded.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

I understand that my participation in this research will be treated with confidentiality.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

I understand that any information that may identify me will be de-indentified at the time of analysis of any data.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that all information gathered in this research is confidential. It will be kept securely for 7 years at the University.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant’s name: ………………………………………………………………………..

Participant’s signature: …………………………………………………………………..

Date: ………………………………………………………………………………………..

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive a summary of the results:

Email: ________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2b: Consent Form (Vietnamese Version)

DON XÁC NHẬN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA PHÔNG VÂN

(Mẫu đơn này được phát cho người tham gia phỏng vấn. Người làm nghiên cứu sẽ thu lại để làm dữ liệu. Người tham gia phỏng sẽ giữ lại thư mời tham gia phỏng vấn)

TÊN ĐỀ TÀI NGHIÊN CỨU

Nhận thức của giáo viên về quan điểm dạy học lấy người học làm trung tâm và tình khả thi của nó trong việc hỗ trợ học tập cho đối tượng là học sinh dân tộc Jrai

bắc Tiểu học ở Gia Lai, Việt Nam

Người làm nghiên cứu: Huỳnh Thị Nhân Hiếu

Quí thầy/cô vui lòng lõng thông tin bên dưới và đánh dấu V vào ở Có hoặcKhông dưới đây:

| Đơn ý tham gia vào đề tài thực hiện tại Đại học Southern đã được đề cập trên. | Có | Không |
| Đơn ý tham gia phỏng vấn. | Có | Không |
| Có thể rút khỏi cuộc phỏng vấn được ghi âm. | Có | Không |
| Có thể rút khỏi cuộc phỏng vấn 1 cách tính nguyên và tôi có thể rút khỏi cuộc phỏng vấn bất kỳ lúc nào | Có | Không |
| Có thể rút khỏi việc tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này được bảo mật tuyệt đối. | Có | Không |
| Có thể rút khỏi những thông tin được nhận ra tôi sẽ được mã hóa khi phân tích dữ liệu. | Có | Không |
| Có thể rút khỏi những thông tin về cá nhân tôi sẽ không được công khai. | Có | Không |
| Có thể rút khỏi tất cả thông tin thu thập được sẽ được bảo mật và lưu giữ tại trường đại học Southern Cross trong vòng 7 năm. | Có | Không |
| Tôi nhận thức rằng tôi có thể liên lạc với người nghiên cứu bất kể lúc nào để hỏi thông tin. Họ | Có | Không |
đã cung cấp cho tôi về thông tin của họ.

Tôi hiểu rằng để tài nghiên cứu này đã được duyệt bởi Hội đồng nghiên cứu của trường đại học.

Họ và tên người tham gia phòng vấn: .................................................................

Chữ ký người tham gia phòng vấn: .................................................................

Hãy đánh dấu vào hộp này và cung cấp địa chỉ email hay hộp thư nếu thầy/cô muốn nhận lại tóm tạc của kết quả nghiên cứu.

Địa chỉ email: .........................................................................................................
Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview guide

TEACHER BACKGROUND
How long have you been a teacher?
How long have you been working at this school?
What sort of teacher training have you had?
Why did you decide to become a teacher?

OPENING PROMPTS
Have you ever heard (or do you know) about CCE?
Please tell me what CCE means to you?

FURTHER PROMPTS REGARDING TEACHER STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES IN CLASS
Which methods do you believe help students learn best? Are these teaching methods you often use in class? Why or why not?
What sort of relationship do you believe is good between a teacher and a student? Is this the type of relationship you try to establish with students? Why or why not? How do you go about doing this?
How do you assess learning outcomes during the learning process?

FURTHER PROMPTS REGARDING BELIEFS ABOUT JRAI STUDENTS AND THEIR LEARNING
What proportion of students in your class are Jrai?
What are your observations about Jrai students and their approach to school and learning?
What is the Jrai students’ attitude toward school and learning?
What do you believe are the factors that impact on Jrai students’ learning?
Do you interact differently with Jrai students?
How do you encourage the Jrai students to engage in the learning process?
Do you have much contact with the Jrai students’ family? What for?
FURTHER PROMPTS REGARDING TEACHERS ATTITUDE ABOUT CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH

Have you heard about the child-centred approach? Could you share with me what you know about this? If you haven’t heard about it, what do you think it might mean?

Can you provide me with some examples of what you believe child-centred education might look like? For example, what teaching methods and strategies do you perceive being child-centred?

How would you compare a child-centred approach to a teacher-centred approach?

What value or benefits do you see in the child-centred approach (as you understand it)? Are there any particular skills that learners acquire in the use of the teaching methods you consider child-centred?

Do you think child-centred education is relevant in the Vietnamese context?

Can you think of an example when you implemented more a child-centred approach?

Can you tell me some of your feelings about implementing the child-education approach yourself? What hinders or enables you to implement such strategies?

What aspects of the child-centred teaching do you think are difficult to implement given the realities of the classroom?

Are there any other issues with child-centred teaching that you would like to comment on?

FURTHER PROMPTS REGARDING JRAI AND CHILD CENTRED APPROACH

What do you think is the potential of a more child-centred approach for improving the learning outcomes of Jrai students?