The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parents/guardians viewpoints and perspectives

by

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DECLARATION

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This Thesis entitled: The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parents/guardians viewpoints and perspectives

Is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of:

Master of Social Practice

Candidate’s declaration

I confirm that:

- This Thesis Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: No UREC 2015-1046

Candidate Signature: Date: 4 April 2016

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ABSTRACT

Primary schooling in Laos improved dramatically after Laos got full independence in 1975. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has expanded a number of schools, improved the quality of teacher training and made teaching and learning relevant to all children. Primary school is a very significant place for all children to develop their learning tools and it is a place where children ought to be threatened equally in terms of access to education. Enrolment of girls at primary school brings vital benefits not only for the children but also for their families, their communities and their country because these females can contribute to the quality of productivity.

This qualitative research investigated the benefits of primary schooling for girls as perceived by parents/guardians. The research takes into account their perspectives on keeping their daughters at primary school. Parents and guardians were interviewed in a village in the Xieng Ngeun district, Luang Prabang, Laos. While emphasising the parents’ perceived benefits for enrolling their daughters at primary school, this research focuses on the issues that the parents confront in keeping their daughters at primary school as well as what other parents could do to enrol their daughters in primary school in the future.

A qualitative approach was employed for this research. Two different groups of participants were interviewed using mainly a semi-structured interview strategy. The first group consisted of the parents of female Hmong students who were studying at primary school, while the second group consisted of the teachers who taught at primary school. All twelve participants had played a significant role in education for girls and they could provide relevant data and answer the research questions.

The results of the findings indicate that the participants acknowledged the advantages of enrolling their daughters at primary school such as improving their literacy, numeracy, learning Lao, exchanging cultural knowledge and various other benefits. These benefits could improve the quality of life of Hmong girls as well as their families. The findings of this study also reveal that primary schools have improved considerably. More and more Hmong girls were enrolled in both kindergarten and primary school and this could help
to enhance students’ Lao language and eliminate illiteracy. The primary school is a very important part of the education system because it is the foundation for literacy acquisition within a population. It also became apparent that a basic level of education for everyone must be achieved before continuing their education at secondary school.

The findings of this study suggest that even though the numbers of female Hmong children enrolled at primary school have increased, there should be more support for these girls and that support should be ongoing. Another crucial recommendation is that there should be more Hmong or Khmu teachers especially at first grade and second grade. The quality of Hmong or Khmu teachers who teach at first and second grades at primary school is vital because students need to be able to speak, read and write Lao fluently.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere thanks are given to everyone who has been involved in my learning process throughout this programme.

I would firstly like to thank my principal supervisor, Dr Helene Connor, for her support, thoughtful advice and guidance during this research project. This has been sincerely appreciated. I also would like to thank my associate supervisor Sue Elliott who has reviewed several drafts of this thesis and made many useful comments and suggestions.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to five supportive lecturers _ Dr Geoff Bridgman, Associate Professor Helen Gremillion, Dr Irene Ayallo, Dr Selina Akhter and David Haigh _ who kept encouraging me when I attended their courses at Unitec. Their constructive feedback, suggestions and advice have developed my learning process significantly. I also would like to thank Caroline Malthus from the Learning Centre, Unitec for her help and support.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to all the research participants who volunteered their time and provided some very useful information throughout the interviews.

I would like to thank the International coordinator, Raewyn Castle and NZ Aid for providing me with the opportunity to attend the Master of Social Practice programme at Unitec Institute of Technology. Without the support from NZ Aid, the project would not have been completed.

I also wish to express my gratitude to my parents, my family, colleagues and Lao Kiwi families for their guidance, encouragement and support during my two years of study in New Zealand, as well as for their unconditional assistance and love.
Contents

DECLARATION ........................................................................................................................................... i

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................................ ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ................................................................................................................... iv

LISTS OF TABLE OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................. ix

ABBREVIATIONS ...................................................................................................................................... x

PROLOGUE .............................................................................................................................................. xii

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................... 1

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Background of Lao People Democratic Republic .......................................................................... 1

1.2 A brief description of Hmong culture and tradition ...................................................................... 5

1.3 Lao economic development .......................................................................................................... 7

1.4 The history of education in the Lao People Democratic Republic .............................................. 9

1.5 Reforms in education ..................................................................................................................... 11

1.6 Aims of education in Laos ............................................................................................................ 15

1.7 Systems, policies and contents of Lao education .......................................................................... 16

1.8 The purposes of the project ........................................................................................................... 18

1.8.1 Research questions .................................................................................................................. 18

1.9 Thesis outline ..................................................................................................................................... 19

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................................... 21

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 21

2.1 The right to education .................................................................................................................... 21

2.2 Gender equality in education ......................................................................................................... 23

2.3 Measures to increase girls’ participation in school .................................................................... 24

2.3.1 Early childhood education and kindergarten ............................................................................. 26

2.4 Benefits of education for girls ......................................................................................................... 27

2.5 Inclusive education in Laos .............................................................................................................. 29

2.6 Teacher attitudes and attributes needed for successful education for girls .............................. 31

2.7 Education for girls in Lao People Democratic Republic ............................................................ 32

2.8 Ethnic minority education .............................................................................................................. 33

2.9 Language policy and education ..................................................................................................... 34

2.10 Barriers to education for girls ...................................................................................................... 36
2.10.1 Language barrier ................................................................. 37
2.10.2 Cultural issues ....................................................................... 37
2.10.3 Geographical issues ............................................................. 38
2.10.4 Shortage of primary school and quality of teaching ............... 39

Conclusion ....................................................................................... 41

Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS ............... 42

Introduction ....................................................................................... 42

3.1 Research paradigm ................................................................. 42
3.2 Research methodology ........................................................... 43
3.3 Research design ....................................................................... 46
3.4 Methods of data collection and analysis .................................... 46
3.4.1 Sample selection ................................................................. 46
3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews .................................................. 48
3.4.3 Semi-structured interview samples ....................................... 50
3.4.4 Conducting the semi-structured interviews ......................... 51
3.4.5 Data analysis ....................................................................... 52
3.5 Ethics issues ............................................................................ 54
3.6 Validity .................................................................................... 57

Conclusion ....................................................................................... 57

Chapter 4: FINDINGS ....................................................................... 59

Introduction ....................................................................................... 59

4.1 Personal background participants ........................................... 59
4.2 Acquisition of literacy ............................................................. 62
4.3 Acquisition of numeracy .......................................................... 64
4.4 Learning social skills ............................................................... 65
4.4.1 Hygiene and health (Self-care) ............................................ 66
4.5 Balancing household chores and schoolwork for the Hmong girls 67
4.6 Preparation for the future ........................................................ 68
4.7 Contributing to the development of Lao People Democratic Republic 70
4.8 Language used for teaching and learning ............................... 71
4.9 Ways that parents/teachers support Hmong girls .................... 72
4.10 Traditional beliefs .................................................................... 74
4.11 Changes in female Hmong students observed by parents and teachers .................. 75
4.12 Feelings about being a primary school teacher .................................................. 77
4.13 Factors leading to success in learning for Hmong girls .................................... 81
    4.13.1 Parents’/teachers’ aspirations for Hmong girls ........................................... 82
4.14 Learning outcomes of Hmong girls .................................................................. 84
4.15 Suggestions on how to improve primary education ............................................. 85

Summary ..................................................................................................................... 87

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .................................................................. 89

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 89

5.1 Gains in literacy ................................................................................................. 89
5.2 Gains in numeracy .............................................................................................. 90
5.3 Girls’ developing social skills ............................................................................ 90
5.4 Learning to care for themselves ........................................................................ 91
5.5 School tasks as examples of household chores .................................................. 92
5.6 Future possibilities .............................................................................................. 93
5.7 Learning supports income generation and eliminates poverty of the Hmong .... 94
5.8 The challenges of learning a second language ................................................... 95
    5.8.1 What makes learning harder for Hmong girls ............................................. 95
    5.8.2 Positives about learning Lao ....................................................................... 97
5.9 Support for Hmong girls ................................................................................... 98
5.10 Participation in primary education of Hmong girls ............................................ 101
5.11 Suggestions about primary education for Hmong girls ................................... 102
5.12 Limitations of the research .............................................................................. 103

Summary ..................................................................................................................... 104

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION ....................................................................................... 105

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 105

6.1 Summary of key research findings ..................................................................... 105
    6.1.1 What benefits do the parents and teachers of Hmong girls who are enrolled at
          primary school perceive for their daughters? .................................................... 106
    6.1.2 What difficulties have these parents confronted in keeping their daughters enrolled
          in primary school? ......................................................................................... 107
6.1.3 What do these parents think other Hmong parents with daughters in general might do to address educational participation when their children are enrolled in primary education in the future? ................................................................. 107

6.2 Recommendations for further study .............................................................. 108

References ............................................................................................................ 110

Appendices ........................................................................................................... 127
Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview questions ...................................................... 127
Appendix 2: Information sheets for participants ......................................................... 129
Appendix 3: Participant’s consent form .................................................................. 131
Appendix 4: Interpreter confidentiality agreement .................................................... 132
Appendix 5: An approval letter from District Administration Office ......................... 133
Appendix 6: An approval letter from District of Education Bureau ............................ 134
Appendix 7: Application approval letter (An Ethic approval letter) ............................ 135
LISTS OF TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of Lao PDR ........................................................................................................... 2
Figure 2. Map of villages grouping by different Ethno-linguistic families ................................. 3
Figure 3. Map of Luang Prabang, Kiew Kacham region ............................................................. 5
Figure 4. Structure of education system in Lao PDR ................................................................. 13
Figure 5. Personal information of parent’s and teacher’s groups ........................................... 61
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ADS</td>
<td>Australian Development Scholarship</td>
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<td>AID</td>
<td>Australian for International Development</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Country Assessment</td>
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<td>CFS</td>
<td>Child Friendly Schools</td>
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<td>DEB</td>
<td>District Education Bureau</td>
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<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>EDP</td>
<td>Education Development Plan</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EMP</td>
<td>Ethnic Minority Policy</td>
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<td>ESDF</td>
<td>Education Sector Development Framework</td>
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<td>ESDP</td>
<td>Education Sector Development Plan</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GoL</td>
<td>Government of Lao</td>
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<td>IE</td>
<td>Inclusive Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund's</td>
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<td>LPRP</td>
<td>Lao People’s Revolutionary Party</td>
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<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDCs</td>
<td>Least Developed Countries</td>
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<td>LPB TTC</td>
<td>Luang Prabang Teacher Training College</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MoES</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Sports</td>
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<td>NESRS</td>
<td>National Education System Reform Strategy</td>
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<td>NGOES</td>
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<td>NUOL</td>
<td>National University of Laos</td>
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<td>NEM</td>
<td>New Economic Mechanism</td>
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<td>NLT</td>
<td>Non Lao-Tai</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PES</td>
<td>Provincial Education Service</td>
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<td>PPA</td>
<td>Programme Pedagogical Advisers</td>
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<td>SEA</td>
<td>South East Asia/n</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>VEDC</td>
<td>Village Education Development Community</td>
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PROLOGUE

I was born a few years after Laos gained its full independence in 1975 and I have observed that many things have changed in my life time. I have noticed that a number of new primary schools have constructed and more children attend schools. Education is well structured and has expanded from the urban context to the rural countryside.

Luckily, I was born into an educated family. My father became a monk in order to educate himself and he left his parents and his hometown to stay in a temple when he was very young. After he left the temple he became a lay person and became involved in community development. He got married to my mother, who had graduated from grade six primary school under the educational system of the colonial French Indochina. After getting married they moved to live in the rural countryside because my father had to help the villagers to build wells so the community members could have clean water to use and drink. My parents often moved regularly to remote areas until my first two older sisters were of school age. Then, they moved to the town because they wanted my sisters to study. Both my parents could speak French because they had been gone through the education system. When they lived in town they both became teachers, but they had not been trained in pedagogy. However, they gained teaching skills from observing their teachers’ teaching while they were taught at schools. My father taught in a public primary school for a while, then he worked at the Provincial Office for Educational Services and now he is retired.

For about ten years, after the Lao's independence in 1975, my mother taught in non-formal education. These were the classes which were held in the community or village hall. My mother did not get any money from her teaching, but did it because she was the chief of the village and wanted the adults in the community to be literate. At that time, I was about to start my first year at primary school and I went to the community hall to join her classes. I found what she taught was similar to my lessons at a public school so I practised my alphabet with those adults. The non-formal education programme started by offering a few hours per week in the evening and ran for a while until the point where there were not many adults attending the class so the class had to close.
My parents’ families are categorised as belonging to the middle income group as they have their own farms and grow their own rice. Each year they could provide themselves with enough food and rice which many families could not. Because they are educated, my parents had jobs and they attempted to support us while we attended schools whenever possible. My parents said that they could not afford to buy a car but they could afford for us to be educated. This is what they could give us and they believed it would help us in the future.

In addition, because my parents had moved to the town, it was very convenient for us to attend schools. In large towns, schools are provided at least from primary to upper secondary schools. Therefore, my parents’ goals were achieved; my siblings and I had more opportunities to study compared to other people who inhabit the countryside. Brothers have graduated from college or university and have had great opportunities to get jobs. I graduated with a Bachelor of Education Degree and work as a teacher for more than ten years.

I taught at Luang Prabang Teacher Training College (LPB TTC) for more than ten years and it was where I graduated. Teaching was challenging but I loved my job because I could provide pedagogical skills for my students. This was also a great opportunity for me to help establish new teachers who might eventually teach at lower secondary schools and primary schools in the six Northern provinces.

As a college teacher, apart from my regular teaching activity, I had opportunities to take the follow up programmes. For example, I visited upper secondary schools, lower secondary schools and primary schools to monitor teachers, especially in schools in the northern provinces of Laos. I observed that there were more boys than girls at school. When the girls came to school, they had to bring their younger sisters or bothers along with them at times because they had to look after them while their parents worked in the field. Then, many schools in rural region could not provide pre-schools within their communities.

I am married with two lovely children. In my generation, many people are well educated; my husband loves studying and he completed his Master’s degree from Thailand two
years ago and we would like to be good role models for our children by having educated ourselves. Now my daughter, who went to nursery when she was 11 months old, is 10 years old. She is in her fifth grade at primary school this semester, academic years 9/2015-6/2016. Now she has become an excellent student and, at the school assembly each semester or year, she always receives awards from her school. She studies French as her foreign language and she dreams of studying abroad. My son turns six this year and he is in his second grade at primary school.

Education is very useful and many educated parents enrol their children in school because they want their children to be knowledgeable. My husband and I will support and encourage our children to learn to as high a level as they can because we are aware that education is important for their future. Additionally, when they learn, they can gain knowledge and skills which they can use at all times.

Before I received a New Zealand (NZ) scholarship, I had an opportunity to attend Pre-ADS (Australian Development Scholarship) programme which was supported by Australian-AID. Then I attempted to apply for NZ scholarships and luckily I was selected to attend an exam and passed through to the interview stage. This programme has shifted my direction from being mainly focused on the field of educational to the social practice field. Through social practice I can observe a wide array of social issues that connect to real lives of people in their communities.

Attending the Masters of Social Practice Programme in New Zealand, has given me great opportunities to see a different learning strategy to that which I had experienced. This learning strategy is very student centred and all students are encouraged to be active and creative in their study. I have to manage my study time and try to consult with the lecturers and supervisors if I have problems with assignments or research reports. The professors are very supportive and they are ready to help if I am in need. I really like the ways that the support staff, teachers, lecturers, professors and supervisors work. Classmates are very helpful and they always help to explain what we have learnt and analyse the assignments keys points for me. Therefore, this journey will last forever.
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter provides some background information about the Lao PDR and a brief description of Hmong culture and tradition, the Lao economic development, the history of education in Lao PDR and the education reforms which include educational statistics that relate to the improvement of the education sector throughout the country. The aims of education in Lao PDR are also outlined in this chapter alongside the Lao education system, policies and contents. Additionally, the chapter presents: the aims of the research, the project questions that are relevant to or answered by the research topic and purposes, and the methods that the research project will employ. Finally, it will set out the thesis chapter outline.

1.1 Background of Lao People Democratic Republic

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) or Laos was unified as the Lan Xang Kingdom during the mid-14th century. Then, it became the Lao PDR and this new name was constituted in 1975 by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party\(^1\) (LPRP) or the Lao Communist Party. Political decision-making together with the national socio-economic development strategies and policies are in the hands of the Lao Communist Party (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). The Lao PDR covers an area of 236,800 square kilometres. It is a landlocked country, located in the heart of South East Asia (SEA) and bordered by China to the north, Vietnam to the east, Thailand to the west, Cambodia to the south and Myanmar to the northwest. Mountainous terrain forms a large part of the eastern boundary with Vietnam while the Mekong River forms most of the western boundary with Thailand. Therefore, a number of bridges were constructed in order to open up trade routes, which in turn, contributed to substantial growth in the economy and opened up the country to the outside world. In 2013, the Lao population was estimated at approximately 6.8 million people with an average population density of

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\(^1\) Lao People’s Revolutionary Party is the new name of the Lao Party or Lao Communist Party. This name was officially used on 22 March 1955
24 people per square kilometre (World Bank as cited in United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2011). The following figure is a map of Laos.

![Map of Lao PDR](image)

**Figure 1. Map of Lao PDR**

("The political map of Laos," 2009)

Lao citizens are divided into three major groups of people, Lao Loum (Lowland Lao), Lao Theung (Midland Lao) and Lao Sung or Hmong (Highland Lao). The country is rich in multicultural communities, having 49 ethnic groups and these ethnic groups have been identified as four language-based ethno-linguistic groups. For example, Lao-Tai or Lao Loum includes eight ethnic groups that are estimated at about 66 percent of the whole population, Mon-Khmer or Lao Theung covers 32 ethnic groups, approximately 21.5 percent of the population. Hmong-Mien includes two ethnic groups, making up roughly 8.8 percent of the total population and Sino-Tibetan is estimated to be about 3.1 percent. Approximately 80 percent of the Lao population lives in rural remote areas and they are involved in subsistence farming (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011;
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2011). Lao Loum is the predominant group who gain benefits in both language and culture. These people inhabit the lowland and major urban areas. Hmong and Lao Theung live in rural areas which are inaccessible by convenient roads and other forms of public services are minimal or absent (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012).

Figure 2. Map of villages grouping by different Ethno-linguistic families

(Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2005)

Luang Prabang is the old capital city of the Lao PDR and is located in the northern part of the country. It was named as a World Heritage town in 1995 by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Luang Prabang was recognised as the capital of the powerful Lan Xang Kingdom (Kingdom of Million Elephants) from the 14th to the 16th century and it has been the centre of Buddhism in the region from the Xieng Thong Kingdom period until the present. Therefore, many
temples or wats\textsuperscript{2} remain preserved in every community. During French colonisation from 1893, the country was divided into three kingdoms, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak. The ancient royal and religious town of Luang Prabang was the capital until 1946 and then it was passed to Vientiane. Currently, Luang Prabang province consists of 10 districts, namely Luang Prabang, Chompet, MeuangNarn, XiengNgeun, PouKhoun, PakOu, MeuangNgoi, NumBark, ParkSeang, PhonXai, PhonThong, and ViengKhan. Most of these districts are located in rural mountainous regions (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013).

Berliner (2012) claims that when the country received independence fully in 1975, Luang Prabang was similar to many provinces in Lao PDR and it was not a very important place compared to the time when it was an ancient royal capital. However, because of its location, rich architecture, artistic heritage, traditions and culture, Luang Prabang has become a tourist attraction (Berliner, 2012).

The Xieng Ngeun, Kiew Kacham region is roughly 80 kilometres away from Luang Prabang town, and it is located in the mountainous range, on the Number 13 Northern Road. The population of the community includes Hmong, Khmu and Lao. Hmong are considered a major group and their main occupation is that of farmers who practise slash and burn agriculture. Recently, sustainable development has been promoted and the government has restricted shifting cultivation because they want to develop a more sustainable livelihood for the people (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment & Japan International Cooperation Association, 2015).

\textsuperscript{2} Wat means the temple where the monks and novices stay in Laos and it is the place where many boys and men receive training in religious knowledge.
1.2 A brief description of Hmong culture and tradition

Historically, the Lao Soung, Miao or Hmong of the Lao PDR originated and migrated from Southwest China in approximately the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century. When they first arrived and were in \textit{Lan Xang Kingdom}, they chose to settle down on the sides of the mountains (highland) in the northern part of the country and they became highland ethnic minorities. In the past, these highlanders were interested in growing poppies and producing raw opium to sell on the market as well as planting rice to supply their needs (Michaud, 1997).

Hmong are the third biggest ethnic group in the Lao population and the Government of Lao (GoL) has made great efforts to develop these rural people and other ethnic minority groups since independent in 1975 (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

Hmong families were similar in many ways to other Lao ethnic families but they lived in extended family groupings because after their sons got married, the young couples still lived with the husbands’ families. There were approximately nine to 14 family members living together. The young Hmong always looked after their grandparents when they
were old or ill (Center for Disease Control Prevention, 2008). Traditionally, Hmong practiced a patriarchal society; women had less voice than men. Men had more power; they became the family leaders and made decision for their families. The sons inherited family property and they were the ones who always had an opportunity to receive education (Center for Disease Control Prevention, 2008). The Hmong language, which is oral, is used among Hmong widely in the community (Marieke, 2012).

The Indochina Wars from 1949 to 1975 and the Sino-Vietnamese conflict in 1979 had an impact on Laos because the LPRP fought on Vietnam’s side. Therefore, the conflict spread through Laos (Michaud, 1997). In this regard, a group of Hmong or the mountainous inhabitants were forced to take sides because during the Vietnam wars in the Lao PDR there were two different political ideals - the monarchies versus communism. The national struggle impacted on the lives of these highland minority groups as they had to choose either the monarchy or the communist regime-LPRP(Michaud, 1997). As a result, Hmong were divided into two groups; one group belonged to LPRP and other Hmong who were independent fought against the LPRP. Some Hmong who did not win in the war had to leave the country to seek safe havens. Most Hmong who fought with LPRP remained in the Lao PDR and they were acknowledged as Lao people. They could also practise both Hmong and Lao cultures (Michaud, 1997).

In 1981 the Hmong Policy was established and aimed to keep peace, to protect and, to promote solidarity among Lao citizens and to improve the living conditions of Lao people especially, Hmong and other ethnic groups (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012).

According to Yokoyama (2001), the 1981 Hmong Policy was replaced by a new one called, “Resolution 1992” or “the Ethnic Minority Policy” (EMP). This new adaptation attempts to make a determined effort to deal with some of the concerns for ethnic minorities: language issues, beliefs and culture differences. The EMP established five areas of main focus:

1. To strengthen the political foundations;
2. To encourage production and open channels of distribution in order to shift from a subsistence economy to a productive economy; promoting and developing the potential mountainous areas; improving the quality of life;
3. To expand education, culture, health and social welfare;
4. To improve and strengthen national defence and peacekeeping and
5. To strengthen the Party’s leadership in ethnic minority affairs (Yokoyama, 2001, p. 7).

Some Hmong people have been relocated to places close to the main roads on flat land because they lived very far away from the city. These people can benefit from economic advantages more easily (Marieke, 2012), however, some Hmong still inhabit the upper slopes of the mountains (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012). Hmong have experienced prolonged poverty and underdeveloped infrastructure. Government services such as education, health care and social welfare are poorly distributed across the country (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012).

1.3 Lao economic development

After the country’s independence, the Lao economy adopted a new socialist strategy and policy from the 1980s, and this policy is recognised as The New Economic Mechanism (NEM). The reform has contributed to rapid economic growth for both the national and South East Asian (SEA) regions and opened the country to international trade and investment (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). The average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was US $ 1069 during 2009 and 2010, which represents growth of about 18 percent compared with (GDP) in 2008-2009. The estimated poverty ratio dropped from approximately 34 percent in 2002-2003 to about 26 percent in 2009-2010 (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011). However, the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy’s (NGOES) indicates that the Lao PDR is made up of 142 districts, and 37 of these were found to be very poor and 48 districts were found to be quite poor (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012; United Nations, 2012).
The report of the Country Assessment 2007 (CA 2007) from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that the national economy has increased substantially compared to other counties in the SEA region. The growth in GDP is attributed to the rise in quality of education as well as the high enrolment rate of girls studying and more effective learning outcomes (Maushek and Woessmann, 2008 as cited in Tandon & Fukao, 2015). However, the Lao PDR remains classified in the group referred to be Least Developed Countries (LDCs) because of severe ongoing effects related to colonisation and the Indochina war. For example, Laos was bombed extensively. Though some of these bombs have been cleared out, one-third of them are still under ground and are activated when disturbed. These contribute to negative effects on ethnic minority residents, especially, Hmong or Khmu because these groups of people inhabit rural areas. In addition, these people lack awareness of the negative impacts of the harmful weapons because some of them are illiterate (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

The Government’s 7th five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plans (NSEDP) 2010-2015 is similar to many previous development plans. It has contributed many positive changes and has been acknowledged by the 9th Party Congress Resolution. The 7th five-year NSEDP also focused on the achievement of socio-economic development, the industrialisation and modernisation by 2020. The GoL is also expected to eradicate poverty and free the Lao PDR from the status of a Least Developed Country by 2020 (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011). This five year development plan, additionally, includes four dynamic objectives:

1. dynamic in imagination,
2. dynamic in human resource development,
3. dynamic in mechanism, regime, administrative rules, and
4. dynamic in poverty reduction by seeking sources of funds and implementing special policy and constructing basic infrastructure (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011, p. 8).

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3 The dynamic means the main development goals that the government needs all citizens to overcome or approach them in order for other goals to be successful, and it is the government’s significant breakthrough.
In the context of the GoL moving away from the rank of the LDCs by 2020, the National Socio-Economic Development 2006-2010 programme (NSED 2006-2010) has implemented four national development plans. One of the plans focused on the education sector because education is able to rise literacy level among the people and then they can contribute to the poverty reduction process (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Bureau of Education, 2010).

Education builds a strong labour force that contributes to the national development of society and economy. Education is a crucial tool to improve health and productivity because people with education (not least women and girls) are able to work and take care of themselves (King & Hill, 1997).

1.4 The history of education in the Lao People Democratic Republic

In the Lao PDR, public education did not exist before the 18th century and there were no schools. At home, children were taught orally by parents about everyday life and activities and how to solve everyday problems. Parental instruction did not involve a curriculum or textbooks so the potential knowledge that parents transferred to their children related to the life skills of survival and values of their own group (Clayton, 1995).

However, boys had more opportunities than girls to be educated because they could be monks and study in temples or wats. Education that was carried out in temples by monks was targeted only at boys or men using Pali Sanskrit 4 language. This form of education remains in practice today. The main purposes of education in the temples are training in Buddhist rules and passing on traditional, religious and cultural activities as well as practising sermons. The first Pali school in the Lao PDR was established in 1928. This education was only for Buddhist boys who were willing to gain religious knowledge, not for ethnic minority people, who did not believe in Buddhism and it was free of charge (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011; Stuart-Fox, 1997). Temples are usually found in the major communities (Bouasivath, 1996 as cited in Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011; Clayton, 1995).

4 Pali Sanskrit is a kind of language text of Buddhism
Laos was a colony of France from 1893 to 1954 and education under French colonialism developed slowly; it lacked Lao educational participation because France wanted to maintain power in the colony. In 1917 a few French primary schools were established in some provincial capitals and there were six grades in a primary education cycle which was instructed in French (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Later, still during French colonial rule, there were two educational systems. The first system was limited to children whose parents were French working in Laos and Lao parents working with French officials. Another system was called the Colonial French Indochina System and this delivered knowledge of cultural, social and traditional adaptation skills. This education system was established in major cities and it was for Lao people who wanted to study. Many parents did not send their girls to school at that time because they thought it was not relevant (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007). After the country’s revolution in 1975, the French system of education was replaced by a Lao curriculum (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011; Lewis & Lockheed, 2007). Lao Educational reforms have been classified into different period of times. Initially, it was called pre-colonial education which dated from the century 17th or it was acknowledged as religious education. Then, between 1894 and 1954, education was described as colonialism; it offered various contents for learners to study. Next, it was the post-colonial education system which was formed in 1954 and went through 1975. Later, Lao education was described as the post-1975 era, which last from 1975 to 1986 (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

From 1975 until 1986, there were two educational interventions: (1) the education that is oriented towards the economy which in turn is associated with social structure, and (2) education relates to a market-oriented economy or the New Economic Mechanism (NEM). The NEM’s educational framework is established in relation to development assistance. The post-1975 education system provided more opportunities for Laos to open up its country’s economy to join the world market. The latest reform of education focuses also on meeting the goals of universal primary education (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

Since the country has opened itself up to the world, there have been various international organisations contributing to the development of the National Education
System (NES), such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank (WB), the Government of Australia, Japan and Germany, the European Commission (EC), and some United Nations agencies. These major investors work together on drafting a long-term strategy, vision and commitment as they want to fully support in education sector (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2009).

Over more than four decades, the new Lao educational system has been established and developed to meet the changes in of society and the development of modern technologies (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

The Lao Government Ministers said that children should be educated from when they turn six. All children also needed to enrol in primary schools and primary education should be relevant to them (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2014b). The Lao MDG targets for 2015 for the net enrolment rate in primary school for both boys and girls are expected to reach nearly 98 percent. The ratio of girls to boys in primary education should be around 100 percent (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

1.5 Reforms in education

Every reform of the Lao educational system not only aimed to meet the local socio-economic situation, but also to meet the goals of the educational development plans suggested by the GoL (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011). The national development plans that were implemented in education emphasised the enrolment rate for all ethnic groups who are in rural remote areas (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Bureau of Education, 2010). Reforms of the new education system were also about educating all Lao people to be good citizens and have useful knowledge to contribute to the development of themselves, their families and their communities (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).

Mangnomek, the former Minister of Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR states:

The resolution of the Eighth Congress of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party clearly identified that education is the core for human resource
development - a key factor of socio-economic development for the Lao PDR today and in the future. Government of Lao PDR policy and strategy documents acknowledge that underpinning economic development is a requirement for substantial reform to the education system: reform has now become a top priority for the development of the education sector with an implementation plan from 2006-2015 Mangnomek (as cited in Ministry of Education and Sports, 2009, p. 3).

Generally, the Lao education system is provided from nursery or kindergarten to higher education. Kindergarten is provided for children when they are three years old; primary education starts for children aged six and continues for five years; lower secondary school was extended from three to four years since 2010-2011. Upper secondary education is three years of study and then some students continue to the vocational college level for two or three years depending on the subjects chosen. At university level, students undertake four years of study and people who are interested in continuing to Masters level should have at least two years of experience in the field but this level of education is not provided for large numbers of students (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).
Figure 4. Structure of education system in Lao PDR
(Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).
The GoL believes that development of the education sector has improved dramatically and this has contributed to human resource development. In the period 2009-2010 education changed from a 5+3+3 year school system to a 5+4+3 year school system. This means the lower secondary education expanded from three to four years (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008). Currently, the elementary education\(^5\) includes primary and lower secondary education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Bureau of Education, 2010).

The MoES has also implemented Teacher Training qualifications. They are called a 5+3 year system and a 9+3 year system and these systems of training programmes are suitable for rural remote children: Hmong, Khmu or even Lao who graduate from elementary education to train because Upper secondary school is often in the town. The 5+3 system is for some good students who complete primary school and the 9+3 system is for students who finish lower secondary school. Each training programme delivers pedagogical knowledge and principles for three years and when students finish training, they can become primary school teachers in their region (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Bureau of Education, 2010).

Education in rural remote areas has been expanded and improved dramatically since the country got independence in 1975. There have been number of primary schools constructed, including ethnic group schools and ethnic group boarding schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008b). The government builds more primary schools in the rural regions in order to encourage children who are six years old to attend school. By 2020, the government aims at ensuring that all children will stay at school until they complete grade five (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment & Japan International Cooperation Association, 2015). The reform of education not only covers expanding educational networks to rural mountainous areas, but makes education more relevant to

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5 Elementary education includes primary school and lower secondary school and all children are required to enrol in these levels of education; in other words, they constitute compulsory schooling.
rural residents’ lives because it aims at recruiting more ethnic minority teachers (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

The enrolment rate of girls who are from rural regions where convenient roads do not exist is still low, compared to the enrolment number of girls who live in the towns though it has improved. The number of students who attend to school account for approximately 50 percent of the total number of the children who are at school age (Asian Development Bank & World Bank, 2012).

According to the report from the (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011), there has been a dramatic change in the enrolment rates of primary education each year. It has been shown that the proportion of primary education participation has expanded gradually from 84.2 percent in 2005 to 93 percent in 2010. Furthermore, primary school's net enrolment trends have increased for both sexes, from 92 percent for boys and 90 percent for girls in 2009 to 94 percent for boys and 92 percent for girl in 2010 (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2011). The differences of primary education participation between boys and girls also diminished from 21.6 percent in 1996 to approximately 14.2 percent in 2005, a fall of 7.4 percent (Siharath, 2010). The net enrolment rate of Non Lao-Tai (NLT) children in rural areas was approximately 58.6 percent for boys and 51.0 percent for girls (Packer, Emmott, & Hinchliffe, 2009).

1.6 Aims of education in Laos

The GoL states that education is a key to help development of Laos and it could improve individuals’ quality of life (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2009). The main aim of education in Lao PDR is to eliminate illiteracy and to promote the right to education for all children. All school age children should be enrolled at school in order to be well educated and they can contribute to development of the country (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011b).

Another aim of Lao education is to build up the young Lao people to be qualified, healthy, enthusiastic and intelligent (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). The principles and general goals of Lao education from now on focus directly on policy and
implementing plans for poverty reduction. Moreover, if the status of people is improved, the country can also withdraw from the LDC list. Education not only builds strong human resource development, but also improves the quality of people’s general knowledge (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).

There are twin goals\(^6\) for the GoL to develop the nation—(1) leaving the LDC list by 2020; and (2) meeting the MDGs by 2015— the government has committed to education as their main target for these national development goals. To do this, the Lao education policy covered areas of: “equitable access, improved quality and relevance and strengthened education management for formal and non-formal education at all levels” (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014a, p. 4).

Article 19 from the GoL that is specific to education explains that efforts must focus on the area of education. The main objectives of national education are to train a new generation to be good and strong citizens and these educational precepts include: the spirit of patriotism, love of the people’s democracy, a sense of solidarity with all people who are from different ethnic identities and spiritual independence (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014a). According to the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF), the implementation of universal primary education in Laos requires high-levels of literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2009).

1.7 Systems, policies and contents of Lao education

The Ministry of Education has changed its name to the Ministry of Education and Sports. This new name aims to promote a healthy lifestyle for students by including sports and exercise in the school curriculum (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).

Generally, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is controlled and managed at the central level and the main office is in Vientiane Municipality. Provincial Education Services (PES) and the District Education Bureau (DEB) are responsible for the educational network at the provincial level (United Nations Educational Scientific and

\(^6\) Twin goals are two main intertwined tasks that the Lao government aims to achieve and implement together, one cannot achieve without other.

The MoES is responsible for the role of education policy decision-making: for example, what to teach in the school curriculum, which teaching methods to use and whether these are suitable and relevant or not. They also put these policies into practice and monitor them. The Lao Education Law which was drafted in 1996, established that compulsory education was to be free of charge, however parents had to pay registration fees at the beginning of each term (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2012).

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2011) or (UNICEF, 2011) notes that basic education in Laos is usually supported by a Village Education Development Community (VEDC). The VEDC helps to encourage community members to take part in school activities and motivate their children to study, paying particular attention to girls. The VEDC is responsible for providing Programme Pedagogical Advisers (PPA), who is tasked with monitoring in schools, assessing education and providing material for teaching and learning. They also promote gender equality in schools and try to reduce all acts that discriminate against girls.

The school curriculum at all levels of schooling contains five pillars of education and these are: the good sense of behaviour (moral dimension); a good sense of mind (the intellectual dimension); a sense of spiritual labour (labour ethics dimension); a spirit of physical dimension; and the love of arts (artistic dimension) (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). Within the moral dimension, students are taught to be polite and have good manners, love the country and be proud to be Lao. With regard to the intellectual dimension, education is about learning content and students will be trained in order to have the ability to use the Lao language, mathematics, social science knowledge, foreign languages (English or French), and modern technology including social media. Education which is focused on the labour ethics dimension emphasises both knowledge-based education and students' labour. This pillar relates to the training in
ways of incorporating relevant physical activities in students’ daily life and instilling the notion that they should be happy when they work. It also focuses on how to critically analyse situations or events that they have experienced in order to know how good or bad that situation is. Physical dimension is a pillar that is included in the school curriculum because it aims to be trained children in exercise to strengthen students’ bodies and health and they should have opportunities to move when they sit and study for a long time. In this pillar, education also links with games, physical movement activities and sports for students. Finally, the artistic dimension pillar means that education focuses on beauty, tidiness, art and entertainment. When students attend school, they will be train these educational pillars through the real practice and some will be present in school textbooks (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). Local knowledge and skills relate to handicrafts such as weaving and knitting are also added to the national curriculum (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

At school, there are several skills that students practise each day such as planning, communicating, negotiating, persevering, solving problems, observing things and working together with their peers (Ross & Mirowsky, 2010).

1.8 The purposes of the project

In this study, the key benefits of keeping female Hmong enrol at primary education are explored in relation to parents’ and guardians’ viewpoints and perspectives. From the researcher’s experience when she visited primary schools in rural region seven years ago, she noticed that there were fewer Hmong girls than boys attending primary school but why these parents enrolled their daughters at primary school was not clear. The purpose here, then, is to explore this issue. This is particularly important since there are few studies that address this research’s concern. This research project is conducted in the rural Hmong community, Kiew Kacham region, Xieng Ngeun district, Luang Prabang province, Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

1.8.1 Research questions

- What benefits do the parents/guardians of Hmong girls who are enrolled at primary school perceive for their daughters?
• What difficulties have these parents confronted in keeping their daughters enrolled in primary school?
• What do these parents think other Hmong parents with daughters in general might do to address educational participation when their children are enrolled in primary education in the future?

1.9 Thesis outline

This research thesis is divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter one briefly describes the background of the country, a brief description of Hmong culture and tradition, its economy and its education reforms, the history of Lao education, reforms in education which are related to the research purpose. This chapter also outlines aims of Lao education, system, policies and contents in education and the purposes and the research questions. In addition, it identifies the process for gathering information and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two reviews a range of literature that relates to the research topic, aims and questions. These include the right to education, gender equality in education and measures to increase the numbers of girls to study. This chapter identifies the early child education and kindergarten in terms of system. Benefits of education for girls are also presented in this section. There are various contents that are related to the topic such as education for Lao girls, ethnic minority education, language policies in education and barriers to entry education for girls.

Chapter three presents the methodology that was adopted in this research project. The research methods include methods of data collection such as sample selection and requirements and the semi-structured interview, together with the approach to data analysis. This chapter also identifies the ethical issues raised by this research approach.

Chapter four provides the results and findings gathered from interviews with primary school teachers and parents by using semi-structured interviews. The research data
results and findings are categorised according to the themes identified by the researcher.

Chapter five presents a discussion of the findings and relates these to similar findings in the literature review that was prepared for the research topic and appears in chapter two. It also outlines limitations of the research.

Chapter six provides overall conclusions resulting from this thesis research and lists recommendations for future research practice are suggested.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explores a range of literature related to the education of girls. Primarily the review identifies the right to education for girls, gender equality in education, measures to increase girls’ participation in school, early childhood education and kindergarten, benefits of education for girls, inclusive education in Lao, teachers’ attitudes and attributes needed for successful education for girls. The literature review also covers other contexts of Lao education such as, education of girls in Laos, ethnic minority education, language policy in Lao education and barriers to girls’ education,

2.1 The right to education

The right to education is well established globally. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights document, Article 26 paragraph one the United Nations (1948):

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (p. 1).

Dakar World Educational Forum goals state:

Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality (Bruns & Rakotomalala, 2003, p. 25).

The UN reveals that development policies over the last seven decades have been focused on the education sector. An educational framework which prioritises free exchange of knowledge and ideas may put more effort into basic learning needs and
provide more support to primary education. Therefore, the learning needs and support become crucial in providing for children’s success in schooling and in life (Aiglepierre & Wagner, 2013). This is related to the second and third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which stated that children would be able to complete a full course of primary school, boys and girls alike in 2015 (Bruns & Rakotomalala, 2003).

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) which was held in Jomtien, Thailand focused on reducing adults’ illiteracy by half of the total amount. The Conference also guaranteed that all children should have rights to participate in quality primary school education by 2000 (Oxfam, Smyth, & Rao, 2005; Putzi, 2008). In the mid-20th century, most international aid which was from rich countries flew to underdeveloped countries in order to improve education for development (Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006), and EFA was supported by and interested a number of international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF), World Bank’s or UN’s frameworks - including universal primary education (Zajda et al., 2006). EFA also emerged in the commitments of the Association of South East Asian Nations’ Committee (ASEANC) that aim for one hundred percent of children who are of school age (six – seven years old) to enter primary school and to motivate all these children to be active participants during study and ensure they could complete their primary schooling (Postlethwaite & Thomas, 2014).

Little (2006) states “Education for All is a worldwide movement that promotes the expansion and quality of learning for all children, young people and adults” (p. 3). Progress toward the EFA goals has been made; since 2000 global estimated primary education enrolments rose from around 647 million in 1999 to 688 million in 2005. The measurements in South and West Asia reveal an increase of 22 percent roughly 51 countries out of 129 reached the goals, 53 countries have made minimal progress, and only 25 countries remain far from achieving of the EFA goals. The existence of compulsory education law exists in nearly 95 percent of 203 countries around the world (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2007). Additionally, in almost every country around the world, the education which follows MDGs lead to
increasing primary schools net enrolment rate with growth from 75 percent in 2000 to 89 percent in 2010 (Dundar, Béteille, & Riboud, 2014).

A school is the place where students can enhance their academic life, especially, scientific knowledge, it also involves promoting healthy children in terms of developing their cognition, socialisation and emotion (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Children need to be prepared in order to be capable participants, contributing both to the development of nation and themselves (Mundy, 2006). Children can also learn from their participation in activities and observations of their friends at school (Popper, 2014).

By receiving effective primary school education at a young age, children can develop self-confidence and know and understand what they need so they can locate themselves independently in the school environment (Hayes, 2009). These factors can build strong and reliable senses of decision making and it improves the lives of individuals when they grow up to be adults (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010).

Moreover, Thompson (2010) claims that teaching mathematics at every level of school can contribute to the improvement of people’s logical thinking. Students’ intellectual abilities are improved and they are able to know, understand, evaluate and generate knowledge and skills because of mathematics knowledge.

### 2.2 Gender equality in education

Gender equality has many different meanings depending on the situation. One meaning is considered to be the inclusion of women and girls so they have an opportunity for social participation. Another meaning refers to equal numbers of boys and girls for access to and participation in education development progress (Unterhalter, 2007).

Gender equality under EFA illustrated that equal participation of boys and girls appeared in all forms of education and this equality included different groups of ethnicities, ages and citizens. The second MDG promoted educational equality for all children. These two goals work together in order to improve the rights to educational
access and participation. In many regions, there are nearly two hundred countries meeting the goals of gender parity in primary education (International Labor Office, 2009).

The World Bank (as cited in Herz & Sperling, 2004) states that many education investors claim that nearly 105 million children aged 6-11 are out of school each year, including approximately 60 million girls. Estimates of these out-of-school children, indicate that 35 percent is represented in South Asia and currently about 150 million children enrolled in school will drop out before completing primary school-100 million are girls (World Bank, 2002 as cited in Herz & Sperling, 2004).

Eliminating gender imbalance in education has made significant progress in most schools of every nation (Baker & Wiseman, 2009). For a decade and a half, in some low-income countries, the number of females’ participating in primary school has increased from 87 percent in 1990 to 94 percent in 2004 and gender disparities in education have become smaller (Tembon & Fort, 2008). Previously, boys used to gain advantages in learning over the girls but now the number of girls attending school has improved (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005).

In Laos, the imbalance in the proportion of each gender in education has continued to fall, from 4 percent in 2008 to 1.7 percent in 2010 (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2011). The National Development framework in the Lao PDR shows that gender equality in education probably requires meeting the goal of access to school for all children. For example, the goal was that there were roughly 86 girls per 100 boys who attended primary education. This goal is estimated to reach 100 percent of all children going to school in the year 2015 (International Monetary Fund, 2007).

2.3 Measures to increase girls’ participation in school

In order to improve girls’ access to and achievement in education, four main areas of policies and programmes are considered significant such as making girls’ schooling affordable, building local schools with community support and flexible schedules,
making schools more girl-friendly and focusing particularly on the quality of education (Herz & Sperling, 2004).

Girls’ education was also a high priority and a range of methods in development goals of both international organisations and national governments and a number of scholarships were provided for all girls, female teachers and female staff who wanted to upgrade their qualification (Tembon & Fort, 2008).

According to Sercombe and Tupas (2014), the educational failure of girls has been taken into account by governments of the countries in the SEA region. The children’s first language or mother tongue is to be used in the early stages of education.

UNICEF promotes investment in the framework of Child Friendly Schools (CFS) – the schools where they focus on gender equality and girls’ learning happily. This organisation works together with governments in order to improve the quality of public primary schools. They encourage children who are of school-age to attend and stay at school until they complete all five grades of primary school (Lloyd & Hub, 2013).

According to Bellamy (2003), all children have more opportunities to enjoy their education while education itself is a key tool for more effective development. However, girls who are from poor communities, ethnic minorities or from low income countries have some disadvantages in schooling because they find that participation in school is challenging. The percentage of girls leaving primary school before completing is 9.6 percent, in comparison with 8.2 percent of boys. This shows that girls have a higher drop-out rate than the boys and some young girls do not receive quality education (King & Hill, 1997).

The World Bank (2011) claims that if we want to improve the benefits of girls’ learning, there are three key factors to focus on: enrolling children on time, keeping them learning and staying at school continuously, and improving their cognition and attainment.

Psacharopoulos (2014) articulates that each level of education has a different purpose. For instance, at primary school, students learn the basic knowledge of how to read, write and calculate numbers. More advanced levels of information are taught at
subsequent grades. Another benefit of students completing primary school is that it will enable them to continue to the next level of education such as the lower secondary school.

2.3.1 Early childhood education and kindergarten

It is clear that preschool and kindergarten education has improved dramatically in Laos since 1990 (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011). The number of preschools has expanded from approximately 1,580 in 2011 to 2,120 in 2014 throughout the country, an increase of 540 and this includes both public and private schools. The enrolment rate of preschool and primary school students has grown from approximately 36,280 to 44,387 between 2011 to 2014, a rise of nearly 8,110 which has helped raise the literacy rate (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2014a).

The investment in early childhood development brings more rewards in terms of the life cycle of the poor, especially in the developing world. ECE not only promotes good health and nutrition and provides opportunities for learning, but it also protects against violence towards and the neglect of children (Behrman, Fernald, & Engle, 2013).

Generally, the urban and rural areas ratios of access to early childhood education (ECE) of children are very different, and in remote rural areas educational coverage is of a very low proportion; it estimated to be that about one in five of the children aged five years is registered in school (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2009). Children in urban areas are also more likely to attend pre-schools, but not all children throughout the country (Marieke, 2012). For example, there was around 10 percent of children aged three to five who attended pre-school in Phongsaly province compared to approximately 40 percent of children who were of a similar age group in Vientiane (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2009).

The report from the MoES showed that there has been a gradual increase in the number of students, schools and classrooms in nursery and kindergarten levels and the increasing appeared both urban and remote rural regions (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).
Barnett (2008) states that all positive effects on children’s learning and development are attributed to well-designed pre-school education programmes. These positive impacts include lower rates of grade repetition, higher achievement test scores, and lower rate of juvenile delinquency. These contributors are relevant to all children who are from various socioeconomic backgrounds (Barnett, 2008).

Many pre-school classrooms include students who are from ethnic minority groups, and introduce the activities that children can do at home and school. The activities are related to their daily lives. Students are trained in the knowledge around appropriate behaviour, love and the protection of cultural diversities and beliefs (Fowler, Yates, & Lewman, 2007).

Children who attend pre-school education have more opportunities to enhance their cognition and behaviour. Thus, the government needs to ensure that those pre-schools are of good quality and meet high standards. If children attend low quality and non-qualified pre-schools, the results are the same for them as those children who do not attend pre-school at all (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2011).

2.4 Benefits of education for girls

Many reasons are given for enrolling girls in school. For example, it promotes gender equality in education and it contributes to a gender balance in terms of social and economic opportunities. Investment in the human capital of girls is a key contributor to better educational attainment and a better society (Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development, 2013); well-being and happiness across nations are usually associated with gender equality and education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development, 2013).

Tembon and Fort (2008) highlight how girls’ education has various benefits. There are many different meanings of benefits of education depending on individual perspectives. Some include direct economic support and some are social benefits and they represent ways that people enhance their social well-being in relation to maintaining better societies (Behrman & Stacey, 1997).
The dramatic income growth for both individuals and for nations is attributed to education for girls. Educating girls could solve a number of social issues such as reduction in the fertility rate and smaller and more sustainable families (Herz & Sperling, 2004). More generally, “investing in girls’ education today...is a strategy that will protect the right of all children to quality education... and a strategy that will jump-start at all other development goals” (Bellamy, 2003, p. 5).

The former UN- Secretary General, Kofi Annan stated that “to educate girls is to reduce poverty. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective that the education of girls” (as cited in Rihani, 2006, p. 6). If we educate girls, we educate a whole household as well as a whole community because the education of girls is necessary to raise family’s income and economic productivity. Encouraging girls into schooling can also create more sustainable families, women’s empowerment and democracy (Bellamy, 2003; Herz & Sperling, 2004; Tembon & Fort, 2008). The workforce can earn differently depending on their level of education and abilities. Often people with education can earn more money than individuals who are without education (Johnes & Johnes, 2007; Marieke, 2012).

The education of girls might improve child health, and education gives girls more opportunities to act, to be and to do what they think is relevant to, and useful for them (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999; Jackson, Paechter, & Renold, 2010). Young children require significant knowledge and learning tools for their everyday life (Haylock & Thangata, 2007). Education of girls helps them to be more confident and they are able to share their opinions when they participate in activities (Bruns & Rakotomalala, 2003).

Educating girls not only contributes to economic development and poverty reduction, but it also becomes an essential tool for the fight against the practice of risky activities that might result in HIV/AIDS (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2012). Furthermore, educated girls are less likely to engage in, or become a victim of crime and violence (Rihani, 2006).

Education for girls provides children with knowledge of environmental safety and the motivation to explore new ideas and interests (Organisation for Economic Co-operation
The benefits of education for girls extend far beyond gaining higher wages. They assist in the creation of a generation of educated women who will contribute to educating children in the future when they have their own children (Rihani, 2006).

Eisemon (2014) indicates that the benefits of primary schooling not only provide good nutritional practice and better health, but are also associated with lower fertility. This means that an extra year for girls and women attending in school leads to a reduction in the infants’ mortality (approximately nine per thousand). Save the Children reports “....the more time girls spend in school, the more likely they are to grow up to be mothers who are healthy, well-nourished, economically empowered, and resourceful when it comes to the health and education of their children” (as cited in Rihani, 2006, p. 40).

Encouraging girls to go to school and/or stay at school can improve their status in society and that of their family. Their ability change their orientation towards social development is also improved (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2012). Interestingly, the structure of the local economy has shifted away from slash and burn methods toward manufacturing, and this has been associated with the increased participation of girls in education (World Bank, 2012).

One benefit of girls’ education is certainly community or social development. The education of girls results in lower levels of sexual harassment, and reduces sexual trafficking of young girls as well as labour trafficking, which are a major concern in Laos (Murphy & Carr, 2007). Given that gender equality and the empowerment of girls or women is associated with advancing education, education is a crucial tool to enhance issues of girls (Tembon & Fort, 2008).

2.5 Inclusive education in Laos

In the Lao PDR, Inclusive Education (IE) refers to education for children with disabilities and also education for children from ethnic minorities. This thesis focuses on the latter.
When all children have equal access to education, Stubbs (2008) describes it as IE which he describes as follows:

inclusive learning refers to a wide range of strategies, activities and processes that seek to make a reality of the universal right to quality, relevant and appropriate education; it acknowledges that learning begins at birth and continues throughout life, and includes learning in the home, the community, in formal, informal and non-formal situations; all differences according to age, gender, ethnicity, language, health status, economic status, regions, disability, life-style and other forms of difference are acknowledged and respected. (p. 8)

IE engages various categories of students and those who are from different ethnic groups. The list includes girls, children from vulnerable groups such as disadvantaged ethnic minorities, and children from economically deprived families (Grimes, 2009). The Minister of Education is required to promote the participation of all young children in education in order to assist all children to look after themselves and their families (Grimes, 2009).

In Laos, girls and women and ethnic minority people are the categories relevant and fit with the National Policy on Inclusive Education (NPIE). In this regard, three significant projects have been implemented by the MoES: the National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS) 2006-2015; the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) 2009-2015; and the Education Development Plan (EDP) 2011-2015. These projects also focus on and promote the education of ethnic children (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011c). Many ethnic minority parents and community members require education to be more inclusive and relevant to diverse ethnic minorities and to do this education policy needs be flexible (Hasmath, 2013).

A major plan of action of inclusive education in Laos is to focus on improving those primary schools that do not have all five grades to include five grades. By doing so, multiple-grade classrooms are organised because there are not enough classrooms and teachers in some schools, especially primary schools in the remotest region. In relation
to this, training multi-grade teachers who could work in a local remote multi-grade school is also essential (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011c).

The contents of what to teach in IE education should be relevant to students’ purpose. Students can learn better if the teachers can build upon knowledge that students already have. This means students want their teachers to know and deliver what is necessary for them (Osler, 2010).

2.6 Teacher attitudes and attributes needed for successful education for girls

Adams and Barreiro (2013) explain that teaching is one of the most stressful jobs. Feeling of tension, tiredness and lacking on energy sometimes appear after or during teaching, but teachers are very significant, indeed essential. They teach young children to read and write and’ apart from their teaching, they are responsible for checking students’ homework and exam papers (Adams & Barreiro, 2013). Sometimes teachers may cause stress while they are teaching. However, they can gain prestige and respect. This respect is key to maintaining a positive environment and contributing to strong relationship between the teachers and the students (Kearney, 2013).

Young (2011) states “dealing effectively with the behaviour of the students, it is a huge part of teacher’s job and acquires great skills and experience” (p. xiii). Having students centred values are key to being a successful teacher (Robinson, Bingle, & Howard, 2013).

Teachers who always think students are the most important focus are the most reliable. They view their students as the main resource to develop (Young, 2011). Student achievement is also associated with specific teacher attitudes. These help to build on the positive aspects of students’ lives. The positive attitudes of teachers entail teachers’ willingness to use quality and relevant teaching methods and acting in an appropriate manners towards students (Scrivner, 2009).

The good teacher seeks to find out about students’ interests and background knowledge in order to create student interest in learning. Teachers’ positive attitudes
contribute to educational achievement for their students (Willis, 2010). Good teachers also contribute to a good future for all children (Hudson & Hudson, 2008).

Teachers who work in remote areas have received more pedagogical training because the Education Minister wants to ensure that these teachers have been trained in the appropriate pedagogies to be used for high standard teaching of rural ethnic groups. Helping local ethnic minority children requires a higher skill level than other teaching in Laos (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011).

Bluestein (2015) asserts that some new teachers have difficulties in teaching because their lack of teaching experience means they may have inadequate teaching skills. The author also claims that “schools with the largest percentages of poor and minority students tend to have the least-qualified teachers and high-poverty schools have nearly doubled the percentages of teachers with three or fewer years’ experience” (p. 51).

Sometimes the gender of the teachers has effects on the learning outcomes of students; the evidence suggests that male teachers might encourage higher learning outcomes for boys. On the other hand in some subjects such as mathematics or science, girls have better learning outcomes than boys when joining a female teacher's class (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008).

2.7 Education for girls in Lao People Democratic Republic

Education for Lao girls has been progressing indeed it has improved dramatically. The percentage of women and girls who are literate is relatively higher than in the past (World Bank, 2012). King and Hill (1997) suggest that though education of girls has improved, it is still far behind that of boys. Gender disparity in schooling is persistent particularly in remote areas because of the family situation, and the costs and benefits of educating girls when compared with educating boys (United Nations, 2012).

Knowledgeable individuals are able to think critically and make the shift towards exploring, mobilising and updating ideas and interests, and they can monitor and make their own decision as to what is good to do and what is not (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Bureau of Education, 2010).
Furthermore, educating the girls creates more literate citizens so they can cooperate with the neighbouring countries (Sercombe & Tupas, 2014).

Due to the growth in public and private development partnerships in education in last ten years, the EFA Mid-Decade Assessment reports that in primary education, all processes related to education for girls are in progress, such as early child care programmes (pre-school) (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2009).

The World Bank (2011) suggests that while EFA focuses on encouraging all children to attend school, one essential concern is students’ health. This means that the Lao EFA programme has to ensure that all children are healthy enough to study or even to take part in school activities. Both illness and malnutrition make many children feel too weak to take part in learning. These problems have a substantial impact on education for children because they cannot attend school. If they miss school a lot, they cannot follow what teachers deliver and then they perhaps may withdraw from school. Therefore, the school health and nutrition programme which is practised by the UN’s EFA framework, will bring the key educational benefits to children who are, especially poor and disadvantaged (World Bank, 2011).

In order to achieve the framework for Lao EFA, there are many activities to concentrate on. For example, it has to increase the participation of girls in learning, encourage girls to continue to study at school and involve both girls and boys in study. When students cannot pass their exams or when they have to move to new schools that are offered in nearby schools, the teachers, the parents and the members of VEDC need to support them because it represents a big change in their lives (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

2.8 Ethnic minority education

In the past, some Hmong were not interested in education. However, the first school in a village was constructed in 1939, the first Hmong completed upper secondary school around 1942, and the first Hmong to graduated from college occurred in 1966 (Center for Disease Control Prevention, 2008). In the 1960s Hmong language publications that used the Latin orthographic script were printed for the first time. Then, the Lao
orthographic scripts which were developed and utilised primarily in the materials for education were published in the 1970s (Cincotta, 2009).

Article 19 of education for ethnic children revealed that “the state and the people will collaborate to build schools at all levels in order that a complete education system will be available to all, especially areas inhabited by ethnic minorities” (The Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2006, p. 7).

Ethnic minority education is practised throughout the country, from the province to village levels. Everyone has responsibilities to contribute to, support and participate in the implementation of education for the ethnic children (Santibanez, 2014). The goals of education for ethnic minorities are the same as the goals of Lao basic educational development - equal access, contents relevance and educational management (Asian Development Bank, 2012, p. 3).

The objective of improving the quality and relevance of ethnic education for district levels articulates that for the first grades of primary schooling, especially for schools in poor, rural districts and villages, use of the local language and the national language in the teaching process is needed (Cincotta, 2009).

Investing in primary education for ethnic minorities will have a positive impact on social and economic development in the region, both today and in the future (Tembon & Fort, 2008). The ratio of Lao-Tai children who attended primary school is estimated at approximately 80 percent compared to 50 percent of Mon-Khmer children and 33 percent of Hmong-Mien children (as cited in Grimes, 2009).

Gay (2010) points out that the most effective teaching in ethnic classrooms involves the teachers acknowledging the backgrounds of students as well as the teachers’. These backgrounds draw on experiences of individuals, ethnicity or culture and community setting (Grimes, 2009).

2.9 Language policy and education

There are complexities involving language usage in education for Laos. The Lao PDR is a multicultural nation, so people speak different ethnic minority languages. However,
Lao is the national language and it is dominant in politics and education and thus Lao is the main language that is used to instruct at all levels of education (Cincotta, 2009). However, when the country attained independence, there was a bilingual education policy, supported by the Lao people's Revolutionary Party. On this basis, teaching could be in two languages - Lao and the regional language of the community. This policy was not fully practised at that time because of the low rate of teachers who were trained to use this approach (Ahuja, 2006).

Later, the Lao Education Law, dated 2000/2005, formally states that at all levels of Lao education, from basic education to higher education, the Lao language must be used officially in teaching and instruction. This law aimed to make the language issue politically sensitive since ethnic languages were as important as the national language but are used for certain communication only (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008). In the context of students' local languages, mother tongues are used to communicate orally in public places but they are not used in written materials (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014b). The Language Law in education was in direct opposition to the education policy for ethnic diversity of the Lao people’s Revolutionary Party mentioned above (Cincotta, 2009).

Subsequently, when EFA was introduced to Laos, the National Plans of Action for Lao’s EFA from the MoES from 2003 to 2015 was established. The Lao education system implemented bilingual education in primary education again and it made education more relevant to all ethnic groups (Cincotta, 2009). Bilingual instruction can promote even ethnic cultures (Malone, 2005). The multilingual school policy could raise the number of ethnic children enrolling in school (Low & Hashim, 2012).

The challenges and limitations of ethnic bilingual education for rural remote ethnic minority groups have been addressed significantly (Peters, 1998). Expanding the number of new teachers who are able to deal with education of ethnic groups is one of the potential factors to be addressed (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).
The concern for the national language has to be taken into consideration. Ahuja (2006) states that 43 percent of primary school children from ethnic minorities in Laos has a problem with the national language, Lao, because they enter school with no basic Lao; for example, these children do not speak Lao when they are in grade one and grade two. When children attend school, sometimes they face discrimination among their friends because of speaking different languages (Marieke, 2012; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008b). Ball (2010) claims that this complex situation might be resolved if we take account of children's learning and encourage more supportive family members to work in cooperation with schools (Benson, 2002).

Moreover, Hovens 2002, as cited in Ball (2010) explains that education which is based on mother tongue brings substantial benefits to the groups of ethnic children who are from rural communities. Many scholars point out that by using bilingual education, young ethnic children can achieve better enrolment rates and more achievements, in other words, better overall outcomes (Kosonen, 2005). The education system which relies on mother tongue based instruction could encourage disadvantaged ethnic groups to enrol and succeed in school. According to Ball (2013), using the first language instruction, children who are from local areas have better learning outcomes and the number of students who repeat grades is reduced or eliminated.

2.10 Barriers to education for girls

Some Asian nations encounter educational discrimination even though the law states firmly that males and females have equal opportunities to develop themselves educationally (Putzi, 2008). A number of reasons are given to explain the low educational participation of female children in rural areas and they remain severe issues. These problems, on the other hand, have been addressed step-by-step through the reforms associated with a socio-economic development framework and policy of the country (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphan, 2011).
2.10.1 Language barrier

Even though the quality of basic education has improved and overall nationwide illiteracy has been reduced, there are some challenges that need to be addressed such as high rate of grade repetition in school, high drop-out rates and the low completion rate in primary education. These challenges are attributed to gaps in curriculum, a lack of teaching aids (textbooks and material), the language chosen for instruction, instruction duration and inadequate infrastructures (Than & Tan, 1996; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2012).

Generally, the school curriculum is published in the national language which is not relevant for rural ethnic children (Ball, 2010), except in the case of foreign language subjects (Kosonen & Young, 2009). Many parents who from ethnic minorities are illiterate and they can do little improve their children’s situation (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

However, Chounlamany and Khounphilaphanh (2011) further explain that when a new learning approach - groups work learning has been used in the classroom, the language issue in education is addressed. Since group learning methods have been introduced to the classroom, the language issue for ethnic minority students has been minimised because when writing, reading, and even speaking, the students are assisted by their friends. Therefore, language issue is likely to be addressed in several ethnic schools through group work in the classroom (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

2.10.2 Cultural issues

Some educational concerns continue to exist for ethnic minorities. A socially excluded group usually refers to people who are not perceived as very important in the society. The excluded group is often found in isolated rural regions. A socially excluded group is less likely to encourage their young children to enter schools. Moreover, these people tend to abide by their children’s decisions; for example, if their daughters want to leave school before they complete all five grades, they often allow their girls to do so (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007).
Some Hmong parents have not let their children go to school because they believed that it consumed a lot of money. This resulted in not many Hmong children being able to obtain jobs in companies or in offices (Marieke, 2012).

Culturally, girls also play crucial roles in helping to do household chores and looking after their younger brothers and sisters at home when their parents have to work. Therefore, their parents have wanted to keep them at home rather than send them to school (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005).

Sometimes obstacles to girls’ participation in education emerge from family decisions because some parents think that investing in boys’ education brings more social benefits and a strongly positive effect on the family’s income than their female children. Furthermore, these parents claim that formal education is not relevant for their girls. There are also some challenges regarding cultural perceptions of girls needing protection because they are weak (Benson, 2005; Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development, 2013).

Barriers to education that some groups of girls have experienced are disadvantages due to the social structure and norms related to the country’s economy, the family financial situation and religion’s economy, lack of female teachers and school facilities, and the cost of school fees (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2012).

Less educational support often is associated with “remoteness and lack of awareness of the importance of education for girls in the country” (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008a, p. 24). Furthermore, disadvantaged ethnic minority groups may enrol their girls in primary school late. Because they are enrolled at school when they are quite old, they feel shy about studying with younger students (Cincotta, 2009).

2.10.3 Geographical issues

Access to public services such as education is the main challenge that the Lao universal primary education programme experienced. The school participation of
children from remote areas is quite low when compared to the total number of school-age children in the community. Many parents do not send their children, especially girls to school if the distance between home and school is far because they worry about their children’s safety (Nadeau & Rayamajhi, 2013).

According to the United Nations (2012), the major problem for primary education is that one in three children from rural primary schools did not complete five grades of a primary school cycle during 2008-2009 because of an incomplete primary school offering in some remote regions. Furthermore, the challenges in education faced by ethnic minority groups in rural schools have to be addressed in order to manage the current situation (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012).

Poor districts in Laos are located in isolated and inaccessible regions. According to Tattersall (2011), even though the number of primary schools in rural remote regions has increased, not every child receives the same educational opportunities. Family limited facilities often result in children not enrolling in schools, especially girls (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012; United Nations, 2012). King and Walle (2007) elucidate how the poorest level of participation in schooling has emerged amongst disadvantaged ethnic children. These people have been living in the highlands of the most remote areas. Thus, the places where they live may have limited facilities (International Fund for Agricultural Development & Association of International Property Professionals, 2012). In order to address the poor learning outcomes of these children, the Lao government has adopted a policy of focal areas- allocate new places for minority groups to live (King & Walle, 2007).

2.10.4 Shortage of primary school and quality of teaching

Not every rural village has their own primary school; therefore their children have to attend a primary school in a nearby community (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011). The average number of the villages that do not have primary schools is about 15 percent and approximately 70 percent of the districts with financial problems cannot
provide all five primary school grades. This causes complications for students because some students have to take long journeys to study in nearby villages or communities (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008b).

Only a small proportion of enrolled ethnic minority students who completed grade three from a local incomplete primary school continue on to study at primary schools in other communities. In this regard, it can be said that these children are less likely to attend other primary schools that are provided in a community that is far away from home (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008b; Willis, 2010).

The teachers in rural areas have encountered difficulties in teaching because of limited facilities and inadequate use of the school curriculum (King, 2010). Moreover, a barrier to education for many disadvantaged ethnic children in remote areas is that there is a lack of teachers who are able to use local languages. When the teachers are based at a local rural primary school, they sometimes have difficulties in communicating with students because they cannot speak local languages. As a result, many teachers prefer to work in the city because they do not have to worry about the language of instruction. Inevitably, this results in a lack of teachers in rural regions (King, 2010).

The quality of primary education in Lao PDR, especially in rural areas, has not reached the demands set by national and international standards (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011a). Using inadequate methods for teaching ethnic minorities can lead to high drop-out rates (King, 2010). When examining the subject of mathematics, educational failure is associated with many teachers only teaching what is in the book. They forget to look at what material is suitable for ethnic students (Willis, 2010). According to King (2010), review does the best learning outcomes sometimes depend on the teachers. Therefore, teachers should be well-prepared before starting their jobs in order to teach ethnic children; they need to know what are relevant to students and how they should deliver knowledge to, and deal with the problems faced by ethnic students. King (2010) suggests that the teachers who are from local rural areas have a special role to play; they can communicate with their students by using the local language properly and they are more likely to remain teaching in rural areas.
Therefore, some of the teachers who are from, or teach in the local primary schools need to be trained in how to address problems ethnic children confront in education so they can help to resolve such problems as they arise (Benson, 2005; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005).

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter reviewed a wide range of literature related to the benefits of primary education for the girls. It discussed the right to education, gender equality in education, measurements to raise girls’ participation in school, the values of education for girls, inclusive education and teacher attitudes and attributes needed for the successful education for girls. The literature was also drawn on here to explore the issues of girls’ education in Laos, ethnic minority education, language policy and education and barriers to education for girls in Laos.

This literature review revealed that education for girls who are from minority ethnic groups’ has improved in response to government efforts, teacher instruction, inclusive learning and a gender balance framework. However, the content of curriculum and the quality of ethnic teachers at primary school need to be taken into account.

Because the benefits of primary education are recognised as significant factors for the individual, the family, the community and the social and economic development of the country, this chapter highlighted those reports and research studies that examined those benefits. The review doses reveal gaps so this research builds upon the existing literature by learning more about the topic from teachers’ and parents’ perspectives.
Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology focused on and used for conducting the research: the research paradigm, methodology and methods. This chapter outlines the method for the data gathering process that was employed in this research project and the rationale for undertaking that process. The qualitative research approach is explained and how it relates to the objectives of the research. After the description of the methods used for data collection in this research, in particular the semi-structured interview, the chapter will discuss the process of data analysis, limitations of the research and ethical issues.

3.1 Research paradigm

There are many ways that people interpret the world. This may depend on the values and beliefs they practise (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). This research project draws on the perspectives associated with an interpretive approach. The interpretive paradigm emerged in response to social actions and it is suitable for analysing points of view that participants have based on their personal experience related to society, culture and history (Tracy, 2012). The interpretive paradigm also allows the researcher to explore the “contextually based, lived experience of individuals and social groups” because such an interpretive approach draws on a view of ontology “that acknowledges a concrete and real world” (Zimmer, 2006, p. 315).

This paradigm is relevant when research seeks to gather data from different people in terms of sex/gender and age group, and how such groups approach sharing their knowledge and experience. In addition, the interpretive paradigm pays close attention to effective strategies to bring about social change (Mertens, 2008).

An interpretive paradigm is utilised in this study because it gives the researcher opportunities to obtain “valuable alternative qualitative content analysis” (p. 11) related to a rich description of social reality. Themes, coding and interpretation are acknowledged as the most important processes within the paradigm that can produce
that rich content (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Creswell (2009) explains “Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual’s perspective as well as the historical and cultural context which people inhabit” (Scotland, 2012, p. 12). Moreover, these methods provide insight and understandings of personal characteristics, articulate actions from the participant’s points of view, and the interviewees feel free to engage in the study because the methods do not dominate them (Scotland, 2012).

Interpretive research does not draw directly on information gathered from statistical analysis, rather, it focuses on what appears in the social world through the forms of interpretation (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

3.2 Research methodology

The first area that researchers may think about is the differences between the qualitative and quantitative research. Every research approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. Given that no one approach is better than others, the researchers select the methodology that they think is most relevant to, and appropriate for the purpose of their research (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

This research project only focuses on qualitative research. Qualitative research includes case studies, descriptive studies, field studies and interview studies. These approaches elaborate on how to explain social phenomena that are related to individuals, and they assist researchers to explore culture (Jha, 2008). Bryman (2012) highlights how qualitative methodology has the capacity to provide a breadth of information in order to elaborate upon the meaning of events or situations for both the researcher and the participants. Bryman (2008) also suggests that educational research itself has a broader context which integrates social research and focuses on the study of the problems of society and the solutions through changing situations or events.

Furthermore, qualitative research design allows the researcher to explore and enrich descriptions of societies and enables the researcher to learn about the real world setting by collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Patton, 2005). Qualitative research
also focuses on studying individual’s personal experiences (Habib, Pathik, & Maryam, 2014).

Qualitative research design is a relevant and appropriate methodology to use in this research because it focuses on data which is related to thoughts, beliefs, feelings or behaviours of the parents of girls enrolled in primary school. It does not focus on statistical or numerical data collection. Instead, the research works with the definitions, concepts and characteristics or symbols of things (Bryman, 2012). This qualitative research allows researchers to understand the reality of the world, as understood experienced by the research participants, because the researchers engage in the processes of making assumptions and interpretations through their interaction with the people around them (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research, additionally, aims to investigate human behaviours, motives and desires and the most important goal of this kind of research is to understand worldviews (Dhawan, 2010). Gray (2013) explains that researchers have a lot of opportunities to analyse and review a powerful resource when they draw on qualitative data.

Bogdan and Taylor (as cited in Banister, Bunn, Burman, & Daniels, 2011, p. 7):

noticed early the potential for qualitative methods. Through them we learn about people we would not otherwise know; we hear them speak about themselves and their experiences and, though we do not accept their perspectives as truth, develop an empathy which allows us to see the world from their points of view.

The qualitative research consists of four functions “assumptions, purpose, approach, and research role”, therefore, they help the researchers and participants to interact with each other during an interview stage (Jha, 2008, p. 6). According to Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Gray, 2013) qualitative research is useful when scholars seek to study circumstances which have been of title prior interest to others or add value to existing studies.

Creswell (2013) states that “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups as scribes to a social or human
problem” (p. 4), and therefore involves many stages; for example, data collection, which is always held in the participants’ setting, data analysis, whereby the researcher categorises the data into different themes depending on the research purpose, interpretation, which works on the meanings of the data, and a final written report (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research has become of major interest in fields that explore the social world so that make connections between how individuals’ see and understand the world around them (Atkins et al., 2008). In order to help the researchers to identify social and cultural phenomena, qualitative study is a relevant design and helps to make sense of people and their environment (Myers, 1997).

In addition, Miles, Huberman and Saldana (as cited in Gray, 2013, p. 162) conclude that there are many characteristics identifiable in the qualitative research process. These are as follows:

- It is conducted through intense contact within a field or real life setting
- The researcher’s role is to gain a holistic or integrated overview of the study, including the perceptions of participants
- Themes that emerge from the data are often reviewed with informants for verification
- The main focus of research is to understand the way in which people act and account for their actions.

As suggested by many qualitative researchers, a deeper understanding of social phenomena is provided through the use of the qualitative design (Silverman, 2013).

Even though Bryman (2012) claims that the qualitative approach is relevant to study of the social world, it consumes more time because of the complexity of the very nature of the research. Therefore, this can lead to the idea that this is the weak point of qualitative research. Nevertheless, in order to address the issue of time qualitative researchers need to concentrate on the process very carefully.

The qualitative approach, within an interpretive paradigm, allows the researcher of the project to make interpretations of what they gather from the field of the research. It also
allows the researcher to reflect on the epistemology of the research participants (Creswell, 2012).

3.3 Research design

This research used an interpretive paradigm because of its focus on the emergence of the complexity of social phenomena. The researcher utilized a qualitative methodology therefore semi-structured interviews were used to collect ideas and perspectives from parents/guardians. By using this approach, the researcher had opportunities to analyse and review a powerful source of qualitative data. The qualitative data is enriched with meaning so required the researcher to interpret the recorded information. This methodology assisted the researcher in getting more information about the participants’ understandings, feelings and thoughts of parents/guardians on the benefits of their daughters’ primary education. The researcher also gathered the data from various groups of people who shared knowledge and their reality through interviews. This interpretive paradigm identifies effective strategies in order to assist social change.

Some demographic information was also collected - such as gender, age, educational status and family income - in order to learn more about the background of people who supported educating their female children. Twelve participants were recruited from a small township in Luang Prabang province – including six teachers as guardians who were representatives of each primary school grade and six parents of Hmong girls attending primary school recently. The interviews started from general questions about girls’ education to more specific ones, designed to draw out the benefits perceived by parents/ guardians for supporting their daughters attending primary education, especially the Hmong girls.

3.4 Methods of data collection and analysis

3.4.1 Sample selection

Within qualitative research, there are a range of data source sampling methods from which the researchers can select. The selection of the sample type may depend on
what the researchers want to explore so it is important that they choose a relevant sample type for the purpose of the project (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Based on the objectives and the methodology of this research, a snowball sampling was viewed as the most appropriate because it allows the researcher to gain access to a small number of subjects (Gray, 2013). Snowball sampling is connected to the convenience sampling approach because it supports the collection of data from a population that is difficult to reach or locate. In fact, the sampling approach is very common and relevant for social research (Abbott & McKinney, 2013; Handcock & Gile, 2011). A snowballing sampling strategy recruits participants recommended by other participants (Abbott & McKinney, 2013). In this way, participants in the snowball strategy are able to provide more data which can support the research purpose and answer the research questions (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2014). Moreover, it ensures that data collection is specific to the group of people who are being directly addressed through the research topic (Bryman, 2012).

Abbott and McKinney (2013) further explain that “snowball sampling occurs when researchers begin with one person of interest and ask that person to refer others from the population or who share the characteristics to be studied to the researcher” (p. 124). The purposes of snowball sampling are to recruit and ensure that “a few individuals who have certain characteristics or experiences are selected first. Then they are asked to nominate others with similar characteristics or experiences. The nominees may also be asked to identify additional potential participants” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 139). In addition, a snowball sampling includes individuals and communities that have similar problems and personal life experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, these participants will be able to give rich details on the relevance of information in relation to the objectives of the research (Given, 2008).

According to Biernacki and Waldorf (as cited in Gray, 2013, p. 223), when the researcher gathers qualitative data that considers a sensitive issue, in applying this approach, the researcher needs to be involved “actively in developing and controlling the sample’s initiation, progress and termination”.

47
In the study herein, the researcher interviewed twelve participants, who were divided into two groups, with six people in each group. At first, the researcher aimed to use purposive sampling because the researcher had to meet with the village chief. Then the village chief guided the researcher to meet the group of participants.

In fact, the practice was that the researcher met the participants and one to one each participant introduced other potential participants and then the researcher invited them to participate in the interviews. When the participants wanted to take part in the interviews, the researcher designed a plan for the interviews – setting the interview time and the, place where interviews were to be conducted; time and place were determined by the participants. After finishing each interview, the participant introduced further potential interviewees to the researcher. This continuously happened until the researcher completed all interviews.

Almost all of the participants have had recent experiences of enrolling their female children at primary school and others were teachers at primary school. These people included seven men and five women who were able to provide rich information on this topic and answered the research questions.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews usually used in qualitative research are called ‘semi-structured’. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher creates a list of issues, topics and areas that do not have enough information. This also assists the research in gaining responses to each research question. At the same time, the researcher who asks the questions is able to react to the interviewees’ responses (Miller, Strang, & Miller, 2010).

Some researchers claim that, through conversation, researchers can obtain rich and critical knowledge of human thinking and behaviour (Merriam, 2014). One of the best methods of creating conversation is the semi-structured interview, which is usually done face-to-face in order to understand the meaning of human subjective experiences (Brinkmann, 2013).
Semi-structured interviews are very popular methods among those who use qualitative research (Flick, 2008). This study utilized semi-structured interviews as they allowed the researcher to study a particular topic or issue in more detail, and to ask about some sensitive issues such as problems, and difficult situations and prompt the interviewees to ask questions if they did not understand. Further questions could emerge for the researcher to ask during the interviews as they are conducted (Wilson, 2013) “The use of semi-structured interviews also allows the researcher to probe for more detailed responses where the respondent is asked to clarify what they have said” (Gray, 2013, p. 383). Furthermore, the researcher does not need to be strict on the prepared questions; she/he can vary what she/he wants to ask in relation to the responses (Matthews & Kostelis, 2011).

Thus, this research used semi-structured interviews and each interview was recorded by using a digital audio recorder. The key point is that the semi-structured interview has the capacity to assist the researcher to elaborate upon, and explicate further the original information and ideas that the interviewees provided for the researchers (Baumbusch, 2010).

The semi-structured interview helps the researchers begin with general questions and move to more specific ones, but all of them are related to the research topic and aims. As indicated above, the researchers can interact more if any points are not clear (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, this data collection approach is appropriate for gathering information about interviewees’ vision, attitudes, ideas, viewpoints and experiences. In this regard, it is particularly useful as it allows interviewees to talk about their past experience in their own words and follow their own understanding of what the key aspects in relation to the research topic are (Merriam, 2014). Merton and Kendall (as cited in Flick, 2015) state that there are four helpful criteria to guide the researcher when conducting the interviews: (1) the researcher does not know or have any connection with the interviewee; (2) the interview focuses on the big picture and the meanings of the situation through the participants viewpoints; (3) the interview covers or explores a range meanings of the issue; and (4) the interview is conducted by the researcher of the project in order to get in-depth context from the interviewees.
The interviewers may not only be listening to the verbal responses, but be noticing other elements of the interview process such as the body language of the interviewee. However, despite the challenges involved, the well-conducted interview is a powerful tool for eliciting rich data on people’s views, attitudes and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviours (Gray, 2013, p. 382).

Walford (as cited in Blaxter, 2010) argues that usage of the interview approach allows the researcher to participate in the interview. Working in the field may be challenging because of meeting a new group of people who are already familiar with the environment. Thus, “the researcher is often overwhelmed by the amount of new information that it is necessary to take it” (p. 184).

3.4.3 Semi-structured interview samples

The participants were divided into two groups and the criteria used to select participants for this project were that the first group consisted of six parents who were Hmong and had enrolled their daughters at primary school.

The way the sample was selected initially was through approaching the village chief for help and guidance. Appropriately, when the researcher worked in the community, she had to inform the village chief about the research purpose and show him/her the authority’s letter for allowing the researcher to conduct the interviews. Fortunately, one of the village chiefs was responsible for the coordination of the primary school tasks and she knew her community members who had sent their daughters to schools. Moreover, her own children were enrolled in the final years of primary school and lower secondary school. I asked the village chief if she was interested in being one of my research samples, but she was not available because she had to work in the town. However, she led me to one parent. Then I invited this parent to be my interviewee and he agreed. Next I showed the research details and handouts, such as the Information sheet and the Consent Form, to him so that he could read them before signing. I also told him that he could withdraw if he so chose. When finishing the first interview, I asked the participant to introduce me to someone who they thought might be relevant for my next interview.
and then I met the next parent by myself and followed the same until I had interviewed six parents.

The second group also consisted of six participants, but in this case they were primary school teachers. They included all the main classroom instructors (but not the specialist teachers who only were involved for a few hours a week) in the school under study. I wanted to include teachers of all five grades, but in case there were not teachers of all different grades, I was prepared to seek more teachers from schools in the region. Fortunately, six teachers from the same school agreed to be involved in the study. To approach the teachers, the researcher went directly to meet with the principal of the primary school and introduced the research project to her as well as invited her to an interview session. When I finished the interview with her, she led me to next teacher. This process happened in the same way with subsequent teacher interviews.

3.4.4 Conducting the semi-structured interviews

The research was conducted in the Hmong community, in the remote region of Xieng Ngeun district, Luang Prabang province, and it was carried out in July 2015.

The parent interviewees, even though the parent group was Hmong, preferred to be interviewed in Lao and they could speak Lao fluently and clearly. However, for the first interview the researcher needed to use a local interpreter because when the Hmong participants used a mixture of Lao and Hmong languages he could step in and help immediately. This local interpreter understood well the local accent and slang. During the interview, the Hmong participants did not speak Hmong anymore and the interpreter only said a few Hmong words so I asked them to explain directly. The interpreter engaged in the first interview of the parents of Hmong girls.

The interview of each participant took between 40-60 minutes. In order to ensure that participants felt happy to talk about their feelings and experiences, the researcher planned to make individual interviews. Importantly, the researcher needed to make sure that participants felt relaxed and wanted to talk about the topic.
The interview questions related to education of ethnic girls and the benefits for enrolling them at primary school. The guide for asking questions followed Davidson’s strategies, starting with descriptive questions and moving to evaluative questions, then possible solutions followed by demographic questions (Davidson, 2003). The approach allows for a storytelling process through which participants describe their contexts. The questioning technique is a crucial process for the researcher to go through before pressing on with more difficult evaluative and solutions questions (Bryman, 2012; Miller et al., 2010).

The first five minutes began with a general description of the Hmong girl’s education, and questions were asked of parents which enabled them to explore the story of their child’s first days at school through to the current situation, accompanied by prompts which explored such issues as what was being learned, relationships with other children and teachers, language issues, problems and successes. Next, for about 15 minutes, the researcher asked evaluative questions related to the girl’s education. For example, how do you think education might change your daughter’s life in the future? What factors help Hmong girls to succeed in their primary school education? Then, the rest of the interview focused on solutions. These were about suggestions as to how education could be relevant for Hmong in terms of economic and cultural development. Finally, I collected from these participants general demographic information such as gender, age, education, family members and income.

The questions asked of teachers followed a similar pattern, starting with exploring the pattern of their teaching year with its problems and successes and moving through to evaluative, solution and demographic questions (see Appendix 1 Interview Guide). By using this approach, participants had more motivation to give sufficient details related to what the researcher has asked.

3.4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is one of the main processes of the research because it is a stage when the researcher interprets and labels the data gathered. It is the step that helps the researcher to figure out the scope of discussion (Neuman, 2011).
Robson (2011) suggests that thematic coding data analysis is a relevant method for qualitative research methods. When working with information that is given by a small amount of participants, thematic analysis helps in identifying the themes within the data gained from this small group. In addition, this approach is able to address a large amount of qualitative data gathered from these participants (Myers, 2011).

The data collected from the teachers and the parents had a similar structure to analyse. It focused on confirming, amending and extending the summary and solutions that were drawn from the interviews.

In every interview, personal information was collected about gender, age, family members, qualification, occupation and even family income. This information was very significant for the research project because the researcher wanted to know more about the background of the research participants.

Additionally, the audio-information that the researcher obtained from the participants was reviewed and played again after each interview. This was because the researcher wanted the participants to check what they had said so that they could add or change anything. Meanwhile, if any point was not clear, the researcher could clarify it immediately. Within this process, the researcher had to check the Lao transcripts with the local ethnic language interpreter again to ensure the meaning was correct before the researcher could use the data in the next step of data analysis. However, the original recordings will be kept for five years after completing of the research in-keeping with Unitec requirements.

My data analysis was based on the process of analysing information from the interview sourced from Braun and Clarke (2006). They suggest that there are six stages of thematic analysis once the information from the participants has been transcribed and translated. The researcher checked for the main points. This means that the researcher needed to become familiar with, in order to understand, the content of the data collection. At the same time, the researcher could figure out the core themes which related to either the objectives of the study or the research questions.
The next step was coding, which meant that the researcher had to review the data carefully. Similar ideas were coded under similar headings in order to make them easy to use. In this regard, the researcher paid a lot of attention to reading and analysing data.

The third step was identifying themes and sub-themes from the coded data that were relevant to the questions and themes generally in the literature. Within this step the researcher could notice the meaning underlying each theme and attempt to group data under each theme.

In the fourth step, the researcher needed to review all the collected data and kept asking herself- was it relevant to the objective of research? The researcher checked the themes that had emerged against the coded data and against relevant contextual information including demographic data.

In stage five, after checking the themes and their meanings, the themes were organised into a coherent story relating to the research questions and objective. The researcher had to revise and think about the connection with each step or planned labelling. This was crucial because it could contribute to the thesis findings.

In step six, when the researcher reviewed all collected data, coding, meanings, and themes, the researcher started writing. In this regard, the researcher was always thinking about how to write in response to the questions and the objective of the research.

3.5 Ethics issues

Before collecting the data, the ethical considerations needed to be taken into account. Therefore, there were two main steps the researcher had to complete. Initially, the research proposal application was reviewed by the Unitec Research Proposals Committee on 30 July 2015. Next, there was the research ethics application; ethics approval was granted on 28 August 2015 under Ethics application number: 2015-1046 issued by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC). These crucial documents are provided in the Appendices.
Sumner (2006) notes of following ethical principles when engaging in research is necessary so as to ensure participant confidentiality, minimisation of harm, and informed consent. This research project closely considered all relevant ethical considerations in relation to the guidelines from the UREC. The researcher studied the appropriate places, people and other factors involved in the project. Research ethics were very significant in this project because the local people did not have experience in giving information (except one parent who was a doctor). In fact, Lao people are very sensitive to and concerned about ethics so this research collected the data sensitively from people who were from ethnic minority groups in the Lao PDR. The study did not reveal the names of any participants to ensure the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality.

Another ethical consideration when working in the rural community in Laos was that the researcher had to get permission letters from concerned authorities. For permission to approach the primary school teachers’ group, the researcher obtained an approval letter from the District Education Bureau because these people play significant roles in assisting researchers to interact with participants. The Bureau has responsibility for improving the literacy of Lao citizens in the local areas (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Bureau of Education, 2010). For the parents group, the approval was reviewed by the District Administration Office (The Government of Laos, 2010). Both participant groups comprised of community members and primary school teachers were involved in the interviews actively.

According to Bryman (2008), in every type of research, one of the most important considerations is that of ethics because it relates to issues of fairness and morality. In this regard, the most important documents that the researcher focused on were the Consent Form and the Information Sheet because these documents were used during the data collection process. As a result, the participants who were involved in the research were aware of the researcher’s purpose.

In the context of informed and voluntary consent, there were three groups of people involved in the interviews: the researcher, a local interpreter and the participant. The interpreter and participants were involved voluntarily because before the interviews
each participant received an Information Sheet and a Consent Form. The Information Sheet and the Consent Form are utilised in the data gathering process to ensure that all participants who undertake interviews understand the purpose of the research, and to show that there are no negative consequences for participating in the research (Polonsky & Waller, 2011).

Give that more than the half of the participants were Hmong, and during the interviews some parents spoke Hmong, the researcher arranged to use a local interpreter to translate the Hmong into Lao during the interviews. Therefore, the interpreter was informed about the confidentiality of the data collection before interviewing started and signed an interpreter confidentiality agreement. In practice, only the first interview with a parent included the interpreter because from then on all participants spoke Lao.

This research project employed semi-structured interview questions. However, some participants worried about what to say while a digital audio recorder was working in front of them. In addition, the participants were afraid that their responses did not answer the researcher’s questions. Furthermore, a few participants were afraid that they gave inappropriate information when responding to the questions. However, these problems were solved by asking simple and clear questions. These problems were addressed also through establishing a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. In addition, the researcher gave interviewees time; it was important not to rush them. The researcher ensured that the interview remained interesting and pleasant, and adopted a neutral stance.

In terms of the context of ownership of information, this data was used only for the purpose of this study and does not allow any third party to use it again. Furthermore, it was important that the Hmong parent group and the teacher group felt comfortable with the interview stage and satisfied with what they wanted to communicate with the researcher. It was established that this research report would not be published if permission was revoked by the participants and the concerned bodies mentioned above. It was clear that this study had the limitations.
3.6 Validity

Effective qualitative research should consider validity. There are many different forms of validity in qualitative research such as fairness, richness, depth and based on the data emerging from the qualitative data collected. One of the principles of validity in qualitative research is that “data are presented in terms of the respondent rather than the researchers” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 180).

The term validity in qualitative approach refers to the degree of accuracy of data interpretation as well as the use of appropriate data collection tools. In addition, validity in qualitative study is based on considering the perspectives of the research participants (Efron & Ravid, 2014). Furthermore, Jha (2008) argues that validity should be defined incorporating the concepts of truth and legitimating, though many qualitative researchers show at times that in their research validity is replaced by the word ‘understanding’. Moreover, in qualitative approach, “understanding is the primarily rationale for investigation” (p. 210) because it is based on how people view the world and the different assumptions that inform their view (Merriam, 2014).

According to Bryman (2008), the validity of the research ensures valid research findings. In this regard, the validity of the study pertains to the trustworthiness of qualitative research outcomes. All types of research outcomes are concerned with ethical matters so dealing with validity in qualitative research is very important (Merriam, 2014).

The research carried out for this project did not intend to harm or negatively impact on anyone; it was conducted in order to educate and with the idea that it might be useful for future development plans. The process of the research was examined and monitored by trustworthy organisations such as the Unitec UREC, the District Administrative Office and the District Education Bureau.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the research methodology that was employed in this qualitative research. In this regard, it discussed the research paradigm, methodology
and methods of data collection and analysis. Provided also was a description of the sample selection method and the semi-structured interview approach used in the study. Furthermore, the chapter presented thematic analysis which informed the method of data analysis for this research. Finally, the limitations of the research and ethical considerations for conducting the research project were outlined.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the findings based on the data collected from school teachers by using semi-structured interviews. This chapter includes background data of the research participants and presents the themes emerging from the interviews. These are as follows: acquisition of literacy, acquisition of numeracy, preparation for the future, how the girls learnt to be culturally competent in Lao and Hmong cultures, balancing household chores and schoolwork for the Hmong girls, ways that parents and teachers support for the Hmong girls, feeling of being a primary school teacher, changes in female Hmong students observed by the parents and teachers, factors to succeed in learning at primary school, language used in teaching and learning, learning outcomes of female Hmong students, suggestions on how to improve primary school and traditional beliefs.

The research participants included twelve people divided into two groups: participants who were parents of female Hmong primary school students (PFS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and the participants who were primary school teachers (PST 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

The region where the research was conducted was located in a rural mountainous area and it takes about four to five hours to reach from the city on the Number 13 Northern Road bus. The road to this village lies high on the mountains and is in a poor condition in the rainy season. The village covers more than fifty households and the majority of families in the area are people of ethnic minority.

4.1 Personal background participants

The first group of six participants comprised Hmong parents, including two females and four males from different occupations - a housewife, a repair person, a farmer, a doctor and two small business owners. They were all married with at least two children each. Their children were all enrolled at primary school. Most of the parents had completed Lower Secondary level schooling, except one participant who was the farmer. He
completed his education at primary school level. More details of parent participants are provided in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family size including parents</th>
<th>Number of boys and girls</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Number of daughters attending school</th>
<th>Years of teaching/working</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 boys and a girl</td>
<td>Lower secondary school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair person</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 boys and two girls</td>
<td>Lower secondary school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 girls and a boy</td>
<td>Upper secondary school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>a boy and a girl</td>
<td>Lower secondary school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 boys and 2 girls</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7 boys and 5 girls</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (grade 2)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 boys and a girl</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (grade 2)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Two girls</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>a boy and three girls</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a girl</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a boy</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5. Personal information of parent’s and teacher’s groups**

The second group were primary school teachers and among this group there were three female teachers and three male teachers, including two Hmong men, one Khmu man and three Lao Loum women. They had their own families and four of these parents enrolled their children at the primary school. They all graduated from Teacher Training College (TTC) with a major in primary school teaching, but they taught in different grades and are sometimes moved to teach at primary schools in nearby regions. Their experience in teaching was from four to fifteen years. In addition, they had experience in teaching at almost every grade at primary school since they had started work.

The primary school where the teachers were employed was a complete⁷ school and it has improved over the last decade. In the past, this school provided two levels of education that students could attend; primary education and the lower secondary education. Students who finished lower secondary education and wanted to attend upper secondary education or high school had to leave their home to stay in the town near the high school. Today, all students in this region can continue to study at the school until they complete high school. This complete school offers education from

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⁷The complete school is a school where there is a primary school and a lower secondary school or an upper secondary school at the same place.
kindergarten, through primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school. In the academic year 2014 – 2015, the primary school had a total number of 148 students, including nearly 80 Hmong students and approximately 40 Hmong girls. There was a total number of 27 students in grade five, approximately 28 students were in grade four, 30 students were in grade three, 32 students were in grade two and 31 students were in grade one. Kindergarten had 27 children enrolled.

Of the twelve participants, all of them said that although the number of female Hmong children enrolled in primary school has increased, some girls do not complete the cycle of five grades at primary school, especially those girls who live further away from the centre of a community. Community and school authorities have to work together on this point to encourage parents to keep their children in primary school until they finish and even enrol them in school when their children are six years old or three years old in the case of kindergarten.

For the Hmong parents who participated in this study, when they saw their children attending primary school they felt very proud and satisfied with them and the parents knew that their children and other young boys and girls could go to school together. The parents reported that their children also enjoyed their study and liked learning very much and some of the children could speak Lao quite well.

In the community, the local people welcomed me warmly; they lived simply and quietly and invited me into their houses and I had conversations with them.

4.2 Acquisition of literacy

The six parents were interviewed about how they felt when they registered their children at primary schools. All of them had a similar response; they said that the education of their children today was very different from when they were students because, when they attended school, the school was not well-organised. They had to take long journeys to go to school and the roads were in poor condition. A complete school was not provided in the same place like at present. Many girls in their generation did not continue their schooling when they finished their study at the local/nearby primary school or lower secondary school. They sent their girls to study at school because they
wanted their daughters to be educated so they could learn to read and write and learn content that was relevant to them.

Parents and teachers could observe that a variety of basic knowledge and skills was acquired from children attending primary school. For example, they learn calculation, Lao alphabets, a sense of the value of labour, and a sense of behaving in line with good manners. Moreover, the children began to use these skills when they were at home, in public places and even when they were alone.

As one parent said:

My children are very active and they study hard. Before going to bed, they will do their homework: reading a Lao language subject or solving maths problems. When their siblings do not understand how to do it, they also help to explain for each other (PFS 2).

The following two parents said:

I feel happy to see my girls going to school like other children because they will have knowledge and skills and they learn to read and write regularly and they start writing Lao characters. I started to enrol my children at kindergarten and then at primary school. As they started school early they were able to get a lot of benefits such as using Lao very well, reading story books in school, learning how to work in teams and helping teachers to clean the classrooms (PFS 1).

Besides reading story books well, my daughter’s handwriting is very beautiful and it improves very fast (PFS 3).

Of the six parents more than half of them said that their girls integrated what they learned at school into everyday life, especially the language. They commented that:

My girl sometimes communicates with us in Lao because she needs more time to practise after school to be fluent in the language. She can ask and
answer the questions fluently and corrects mistakes when she hears us say something wrong (PFS 3).

One parent explained his reasons as follows:

I enrolled all of my children at school because I wanted them to learn how to read/write. These were crucial elements for many children because they will use them throughout their lives. Recently, boys or girls are equally important because they can contribute to improvement of their own families. If they both attend school, I am their father and I should be happy (PFS 2).

The teacher participant explained that apart from enrolling in school, students needed practice in the Lao language. Generally, children should be registered in schools from a young age because as young children, it would be easier for them to learn to read and write the Lao language. He said:

I want Hmong students to read a lot so they can practise their pronunciation and they should ask questions if they do not understand (PST 6).

It is interesting to note that parents felt very pleased seeing their daughters at primary school and studying with friends; they understood that primary education was very important for their children in order to learn to read and write Lao and learn to be socialised into the society.

4.3 Acquisition of numeracy

At this level of education students were taught about the significant basics of calculation and measurement through maths and this knowledge was practised at home.

One parent said that at school their children were taught about the calculation of two digits:

What my children learn from school they usually report to me. For example, my daughter said I learnt to add two digit numbers today. When
she finishes her homework, she asks me to check for her. I will tell her this is right/that is wrong and she will do the calculation again for the one is wrong (PFS 1).

My daughter also counts the numbers alone while she is playing at home even though she only went to school for a few months (PFS 3).

The teachers commented on subjects that the girls studied. Usually if the girls like to study or talk about a particular subject a lot that means they are probably good at it and they also have better results in it.

One teacher participant said that:

Hmong girls are good at mathematics but Khmu are good at social science subjects (PST 1).

At first and second grades of primary education, students might learn a Lao language subject more than maths, but when moving to higher grades such as years 3 to five, students might learn more about mathematics. As one teacher said:

From my experience, in grade 4, Hmong girls like a calculation subject and they are good at maths and they have good learning outcomes and they can do maths exercise very well (PST 1).

4.4 Learning social skills

The study indicates that parents are aware of the importance of education for girls; when children go to school, they can explore a new and wider environment. They meet many people and have many friends and sometimes play after school in the school playground. Some parents could notice that not only were children taught everyday lessons, but also they learnt how to share Lao and Hmong cultures.

I observe that my children are trained to behave in good manners in the society because I see that my children’s behaviours are polite and nice while they talk (PFS 3).
My daughters know how to dress properly and they like to wear both Hmong and Lao dress. My children talked to me that they were lucky because they understood and knew both Hmong and Lao (PFS 6).

When returning home from school, I think my children are well-organized and they tidy up their bedrooms very often (PFS 2).

One teacher also had some views regarding the changes that they could observe in their female Hmong students and they commented that:

Hmong girls adapted themselves quickly in classes and Lao culture. For example, they greet the teachers or elderly people with their head bent down a little and pray (put their palms together like a lotus). They participated in activities with good manners and teachers demonstrated activities for them for a couple of times and they could follow what the teachers did properly (PST 4).

4.4.1 Hygiene and health (Self-care)

At school, Hmong girls were taught to look after themselves, especially their clothing. Their hair must be worn in a pig tail- they make a bun or a pony tail - and they needed to wear a clean school uniform. Schooling changes the lives of girls in positive rather than negative ways. Many girls looked cleaner and healthier.

One participant commented that:

My daughter can adapt herself quickly and she knows how to dress and wear her hair beautifully. Not only her learning process is improved, her strategies of how to look after herself is also developed (PFS 3).

Another parent said:

They love to be clean and they do not want to wear dirty clothes and they clean it after wearing each day (PFS 5).

Also one primary school teacher commented that:
There is a project that promotes how to take care of students’ health regarding the dental care. In a morning break, the program focuses on students from grade one to grade three; they should brush their teeth (PST 3).

4.5 Balancing household chores and schoolwork for the Hmong girls

Generally, children may help their parents to do household chores and work is divided among siblings according to their age and gender according to the community norms. One teacher participant commented as follows:

I think Hmong girls are the most active because when I give them the task to work on, they want to complete it on time. Often they come back and do their task after playing during the break (PST 5).

Moreover, one of the teachers commented that:

Hmong has divided work between male and female and they do not involve in others work. At home, Hmong girls have to work hard in order to help their parents. If a family has three daughters, one or two daughters have to stay home to help family while another girl will go to school. When those girls finished school, they will send the one who does not enrol in school yet to study. In this regard, some of them will be quite old to begin at first grade so they will be shy to study with younger friends (PST 3).

However, a few teachers pointed out that in very remote areas, where parents do not change their mind or beliefs easily, some girls remained out of school and they had to help their families while their parents were working in the paddy field up the hill. As one participant said:

At home, Hmong girls often do household chores: cooking, cleaning washing clothes and other activities (PST 3).

Girls not only do school tasks or activities and household chores. Many Hmong girls also have fun playing either in the school playground or at home with friends from the
neighbourhoods. Parents appreciated seeing that their children’s social skills were improving every day. As one parent notes:

At lunch time my children may prefer to play at school with friends a lot. During the afternoon break many students usually go back home to have lunch with parents but my daughters sometimes take their lunch to have with friends at school. For example, they said that after meal they could play before the next class started (PFS 5).

There was another activity that students in primary school liked to do and it was drawing. One parent said:

After school my children prefer to draw cartoons and colour them. She shows us, she can do it (PFS 5).

The findings from both parent and primary school teacher participants in this study showed that the lives of the Hmong girls who attended primary school have changed a lot. The findings also indicated that at school the Hmong girls not only study hard, but also play. In addition, they help the teacher with various tasks, such as cleaning the floor and collecting rubbish, and when they are at home they work around the house to help their parents.

4.6 Preparation for the future

The years at primary school provide knowledge and skills for children in the future whether they study at a higher level of education or move into the workforce. One participant who owned a repair shop said that education not only gave opportunities for his girls to become literate, but also provided job opportunities. He believed that education was able to assist his girls to take care of themselves when they grew old.

As one of the teachers said:

I want parents of the children in the community to enrol their children in primary school, lower secondary school, upper second and university so they can look after themselves in the future (PST 3).
One participant also thought that education could make the life of girls better and that education brightened the future of his daughters. They could move away from poverty and malnutrition and they could protect themselves and families. He commented that:

    I appreciate sending my daughters to go to school. I want my daughters to be happier than us and they should not work in the farm any more. I can rely on them in the future (PFS 6).

    I want my children to be educated and I enrol them in school. I will send them to learn in college or vocational schools when they finish the upper secondary school at the home village and they might have more opportunities to look for good jobs and they can take care of themselves when they are older (PFS 2).

Primary education might contribute to various job opportunities for children in the future and as one parent commented:

    I believe that education will improve my daughter’s life in future because from my experience I see many people with education have jobs. I now go to farm knowing nothing because I just can read or write but not complete my education (PFS 4).

In addition, one parent argued that the benefits occurred when their children became older so he said:

    My children will be clever and they will overcome the problems with the knowledge they receive from taking part in education (PFS 1).

The findings revealed that when the girls were at school, there were more advantages than disadvantages. Usually parents linked the benefits of primary education to their everyday activities and their future. As one parent said:

    My children will not need to work in the farms and they could earn some money when they become people with education. Their families’ status might be better than mine (PFS 6).
Another parent commented:

I believe that my educated girl can take care of her own children and people who are nearby in the future because the school has prepared a lot of significant knowledge for her to use (PFS 2).

One of the teacher participants said that:

Before or after my teaching each day I will spend three to five minutes to talk to my students, I usually inform my students that if they complete primary school level, they can continue to study at secondary schools then at college. After that some students might want to train to be teachers in the community to help reduce numbers of people who are unable to read and write in this area (PST 6).

4.7 Contributing to the development of Lao People Democratic Republic

The findings showed that primary education was seen as very necessary for all children. The participants believed that future problems will be able to be addressed through the knowledge acquired by young children. These children could also contribute to developing the country of Lao PDR in terms of reducing illiteracy.

I think enrolling my daughter in school can also contribute to development of the country both in the present and future as the government tries to reduce illiteracy (PFS 1).

Furthermore, another parent participant added:

Education will change my children’s lives to better ways and they can look for work that they like and is relevant to them. They can contribute to their work and duty (PFS 2).

When girls are educated they have more chances to search for jobs that they like to do, as one parent said that:
After graduating, my daughter will probably be able to work in factories, private companies and businesses (PFS 6).

4.8 Language used for teaching and learning

According to the education policy of the Lao government, Lao is commonly used in teaching and instructions at every level of education throughout schools. However, local languages can be used in order to encourage and help rural ethnic groups. All of the six teacher participants who were teaching in the rural primary school confirmed that they use Lao to teach their students, but sometimes the teachers needed assistance in translating from Lao to Hmong.

As one participant commented:

In my class, Lao is used for instruction but when the students cannot understand I will ask a student who can communicate in Hmong to interpret what I said to the class (PST 4).

Another participant also said that some people who worked in rural primary schools usually were able to communicate in Lao and local languages. He said:

Hmong students need to learn to read and write Lao because I teach Lao textbooks. However, because I am Hmong, I will translate what I am saying to Hmong for my students when the phrases are too difficult to understand in Hmong (PST 1).

One participant said that language problems occurred when students entered school, especially at Grade one and Grade two of primary school. Later on the problems could disappear. If students could overcome this stage, then they could find it easier to learn thereafter.

One participant who was a teacher of Grade four at primary school said:

Most of my students are Hmong so they always communicate in Hmong with the classmates except me. However, I use Lao when teaching and I often ask students to interpret in Hmong from Lao and check for
understanding for what I explain. Thus, observed in my class, students can speak, write and read Lao fluently (PST 5).

It is interesting to note that some Lao or Khmu teachers who taught in a primary school in the region were able to communicate in Hmong a little. However, during teaching they asked Hmong students to help to interpret for Hmong students rather than speaking Lao themselves.

As teachers said that:

In my grade sometimes if some Hmong students need extra explanation and they will ask, then I will explain in Hmong for them because I am Hmong (PST 3).

Overall, if Hmong children do not have any problems with the Lao language- they can read and understand it well, and then they will become excellent students in the classroom or even in a school level (PST 1).

The findings revealed that the majority of participants who were teachers said Lao was mainly used as the language of instruction in their teaching because all textbooks were in Lao even though the teachers were Hmong or Khmu. The purpose of Lao education is to train ethnic people to understand and know the Lao language. However, if the explanation or the contents of the lesson were too complicated, the teachers had to ask for voluntary interpreters to translate the information for their classmates. Furthermore, the responses from participants who were Hmong teachers showed that Hmong was used additionally when difficult phrases emerged during teaching. However, in order to help Hmong girls learn more easily, the findings suggested that Hmong students had to practise their reading a lot because reading helped them to get useful knowledge and information. They could also improve their pronunciation in Lao by reading aloud.

4.9 Ways that parents/teachers support Hmong girls

It is interesting to note that there were various ways that all parents used in order to stimulate girls to continue their education and stay at primary school until they completed all five grades. All parents spent some money on buying school uniforms,
learning materials (e.g. books, pens, textbooks), and paying for extra lessons. They also walked to and from school with their children. All of the parent participants confirmed that they had supported their children’s education and they attempted to do their best. The comment below is illustrative:

I pay for extra lessons for my children when they want to study in their free time such as mathematics, physics or English. I will support both male and female children equally because they are my children (PFS 1).

Another participant commented that her daughter had just started first grade and was in second grade this year. Although her daughter was quite young, she wanted her daughter to complete secondary school and then continue at upper secondary school. What she could do for her was similar to other parents. She said:

I buy school uniforms and learning material for my daughter. I always take her to school and pick her up when the school finishes (PFS 3).

One participant who owned the family business said that:

I spent some money for sending my girls to study with teachers who many people said they were excellent and skilful during a school holiday for a few hours per week. In addition, when my daughters received good results, I bought them presents as times (PFS 5).

One parent said there was a project to support the poor, including Hmong girls, to study at primary level education. Her daughter received the educational fund and she explained that:

My daughter was supported by one project that’s carried out in the school. She received education equipment, new uniforms each year and some supplement to stay healthy to learn (PST 3).

Parents were also encouraged to support their daughters in other ways as one teacher commented:
Parents should encourage their children to go to school. At home they may check what their children have learned from school each day and they can teach or explain to them sometimes (PST 6).

Nowadays, many Hmong men look for girls who are educated to be their wives. This will change their parents’ perspectives on keeping Hmong girls at home to work; they will be inclined to send their daughters to study at school. As one comment from parent illustrated that:

Currently, this situation has changed from the past, many parents, including me, want to have educated daughters-in-law and I did, too and I sent my girl to study (PFS 1).

4.10 Traditional beliefs

The participants also provided some insight into why some Hmong families still did not send their daughters to school.

One of the Hmong parents and one Hmong teacher argued that in the past parents liked to support only boys’ education because parents believed that there was no benefit in educating their female children, certainly not in terms of a return on the investment - education costs a lot of money. They actually thought that their daughters are best suited for doing household chores, looking after younger siblings, and getting married whereby they left parents for husbands. Currently, some parents still hold on to these old beliefs so they aimed to educate their girls only in the basics of reading and writing. These capabilities can be attained by the Grade three of primary school.

As one of the primary school teachers said:

Some parents do not want to enrol their female girls in school for education, because they believe that if their girls are married, they will become members of their husband families (PST 1).

Culturally, girls are not encouraged to participate in education because it costs lots of family money. In turn, they will live away from the family (PST 3).
Another teacher commented that:

Some girls do not continue their study at upper secondary school education because their families need them to help on the farm. Many parents thought that when their children could read and write that was enough. One of my girls does not continue her study at higher education though I have already encouraged her. She believes that she could not work in our places because there were not any companies in the region and she does not want to leave home. However, my two out of five daughters are attending college in the city (PST 4).

The findings showed that most participants who were parents wanted to support their children to learn at as high a level as they could. These parents promoted education for both male and female children.

4.11 Changes in female Hmong students observed by parents and teachers

The research participants were interviewed about the changes in the Hmong students, especially girls, when compared with the past. The findings revealed that there were positive changes. Many girls had access to, and completed at least the Lower Secondary School level. The school authority and village chiefs were in charge of collecting statistics about children in the region and they monitored children who were of school age to see if they were enrolled at school.

As one of the participants commented:

There are nearly 100% of Hmong girls enrolling at primary schools if compared with the past. Primary schools are provided in almost every community. Because the schools have statistics of children in the community so at the beginning of the term, the teachers or the schools’ representative will go to the community in order to inform parents that they must register their children in schools. At the beginning of first semester of school year, the school teachers will work with one of the village chiefs who were responsible for working cooperatively with primary schools to
help in collecting possible statistics of children who live in the community and they check and assure that children are enrolled at primary school on time (PST 3).

Furthermore, two participants described the changes in female Hmong students as being due to having good role models. Many young Hmong and other children had respect for others both inside and outside the school. The following comments were representative:

I observe that female Hmong students listen to their teachers and have good manners and they obey the school rules (PST 1).

Other participants noted:

At the beginning, Hmong students know nothing about school life until they begin and practise, they learn to write and I sometimes demonstrate for them how to write and they try to copy. They want to learn more and more and then some of them take their younger brothers or sisters to the class with them. I thought they talked about learning process to their parents or their siblings (PST 4).

The findings showed that the teachers noted an increase in the number of Hmong girls attending school over the past five years. However, a few Hmong girls did not want to continue to study at a higher level of education. Yet the behaviours of Hmong girls have changed a lot. For example, they paid attention to teachers’ explanation; they were very active when the teachers asked for volunteers to work in front of the class and to help classmates.

The teachers noticed that the number of female Hmong students has increased every year and they said:

In the past, there was not any support for education of girls. There has been change for a half of decade, the parents have motivated their daughters to attend schools and most of the girls are enrolled in primary school recently (PST 1).
When Hmong girls attended school they improved themselves very quickly in the classroom, as one teacher explained:

Hmong girls sometimes ask for advice for doing homework. Furthermore, to help them learn with friends well, I always set learning in groups that include Lao, Hmong and Khmu together (PST 6).

4.12 Feelings about being a primary school teacher

This study did not set out to investigate teachers’ motivations. However, discussions with teachers revealed relevant information about why they were working in the area.

As one participant commented:

Sometimes teaching a multicultural classroom is challenging but I like it. Many children need me and I can help to improve their knowledge so they become educated people in the future (PST 3).

Three primary school teacher participants were born locally but some were not. However, they were all familiar with the environment of the village. Even though they were moved to other primary schools, they just moved to those nearby in the region. Of the six participants, all of them said that they had been teaching for awhile, especially teaching children who are minority groups, and that teaching ethnic children was not an easy task if they did not understand any ethnic languages. In turn they could see the results of their teaching enter the society. All participants thought that they could help their communities and that they would continue to do so. For example, one teacher said:

Teaching ethnic children was challenging because some Hmong students who are from more remote places, when they first came to school they did not speak Lao. For example, in the classroom if they were more than two Hmong students sitting together, often they communicated with their Hmong friends in Hmong (PST 3).

One participant said:
After teaching for a while, I feel I like my job very much because I can help my people and develop my Hmong people and other ethnic groups (PST 1).

Another participant who has been working as a teacher for more than ten years commented that:

I like my job because it can contribute to human resource development and they will help to develop the country (PST 2).

This participant further explained:

I want to help people in remote areas, especially my Hmong people and Khmu to be educated and to gain knowledge so they will be able to help themselves when they have problems (PST 2).

During the interviews I noticed that some participants smiled when they talked about their past experiences and they felt relaxed and wanted to talk about it. One participant said:

I like my job and I really love to help ethnic children in rural community because I understand and speak Hmong, it is easy to teach Hmong children (PST 3).

He added further information:

I have tried many careers but I love teaching very much so I end up in teaching in local primary school in rural area but I like it (PST 3).

Furthermore, one female participant who taught Grade two commented:

I like my job very much because I can pass on my knowledge to people who do not know anything about school and later on they become knowledgeable and skilful (PST 4).

In this regard, most participants were absolutely delighted and satisfied with their careers, these participants said that:
I felt excited and was proud to be a teacher. I taught young children and I felt connected. Some of them came to school without knowledge about Lao language and then they developed themselves until they could read and knew how to read (PST 5).

I like to teach mathematics the best and many Hmong students are good at it. I feel happy when I see some students help their friends. This is the greatest thing about teaching. When I teach my students, I always suggest that they can learn together and help each other (PST 6).

The findings revealed that all teacher participants loved their job because, as teachers, they could help young children -the majority of whom do not speak Lao in their region - to become educated. They were very proud to see an improvement in the young children in terms of the process of learning; they could read and write properly. In addition, the teachers wanted to work with the children so that they could improve their lives as well as contribute to society and human resource development at a national level. The teaching and learning also contributed to the development of the ethnic group. Furthermore, the teachers felt that seeing students become self-reliant was valuable.

Most participants liked to reside and work in this place because they wanted to improve the community as well as children's knowledge. The teachers were very supportive of each other and worked cooperatively.

As one of the participants said:

I like to work in this school because I see many teachers working together and they help each other. When I am busy and I cannot teach my class, my office will organize another teacher to substitute my duty (PST 6).

One participant told me that the motivation for her to work in this school was that teaching others was the way she could gain knowledge. Therefore, she said that:

I like to create activities for the students to do because I can learn from these tasks (PST 5).
One teacher had a very straightforward response:

I want to help many children in my community. I am worried about their future, I want to take care for them and want them to have jobs and work in particular workplaces in order to earn money like us so they can help their family (PST 1).

During class, the teachers used real objects as teaching aids to make lessons more interesting. Teachers also gave examples about people who were educated acting as role models for their students by having succeeded in education. They believed that students should attempt to continue learning until they complete higher education so that it may be possible for them to have the same opportunities as their teachers:

When I teach my students, I often use teaching aids in order to motivate my students to learn. I want more playgrounds to be built in order to get the young children to go to schools. I think they can look for work either at private company or public sectors if they are educated people and they have more opportunities than children who do not attend schools (PST 2).

I like to talk to students about people who were successful in education in the communities and some of students may want to be like those people (PST 4).

The findings show that most of the teachers had similar motivations for persuading students to stay at school and complete their primary education. Furthermore, they talked about their successes to their young students. In addition, the findings from the interviews with teacher participants indicate that in school the teachers usually introduced the topic of furthering their education and told their students that if they had high educational qualifications, they would have better opportunities to find jobs. They could earn some money rather than work in the rice fields for their subsistence. The teachers also explained why they think the girls should study longer at school.
Factors leading to success in learning for Hmong girls

According to the participants, there are many factors involved in supporting the Hmong girls to succeed at primary school. Firstly, motivation comes from the students themselves and, secondly, it comes from the assistance of teachers and parents because these are the people close to the children and so understand their situations.

As one teacher commented:

I think if students pay attention to their study a lot and along with the supports from their parents. These students are very active and they become good students and accomplish their study (PST 1).

This participant further explained that children could not complete their schooling if the people around them did not provide encouragement.

Parents need to help, encouraging their children to study when they are at home. Furthermore, daughters are expected to complete and get better result in education if they have chances to study like their brothers (PST 1).

Four out of six primary school teacher participants further indicated that education has been changing for more than a decade. In the community, there is a complete school that is provided for everyone, and many students in the school completed and continued on to higher education. Some of these now have jobs in the community, while others work in the city. Therefore, all children are encouraged to complete at least Lower Secondary School as the following comments illustrate:

Parents understand about education and they enrol their children in school now (PST 2).

The school’s authority and the committee of students’ parents work together and they meet students of parents who have problems attending school. They try to find out the reasons why a few students do not attend school (PST 4).
In cases there is not a primary school in the community, one parent expressed concern about his daughter who had to leave home to study far away:

The drawbacks of primary education can appear when children have to leave parents to study in a different place. For example, if they have friends who behave inappropriately, bad manners, they would become a bad student because parents do not know and see their behaviours when they are at school (PFS 2).

As teacher respondents pointed out, the school authority had responsibility for encouraging all students to study. For instance, every month there a school meeting is held; at the meetings there are many useful issues raised such as morality and manners, issues raised by students, school attendance and even study results of students. After the meetings, the best and the worst of school performance is discovered. Then, letters will be sent out to students’ parents. These are to inform the parents about their children’s education and contain requests for them to encourage their children to study more at home (PST 4).

4.13.1 Parents'/ teachers' aspirations for Hmong girls

Some parents have some aspirations for their daughters as is evident in the following examples:

I want to support my children to learn as high as they can and I want them to be trained in subjects that are relevant to them. They can learn to be any professions such as a doctor, a teacher or an engineer, so they can look after themselves, the family members and patients and work in the town (PFS 4).

I want my daughter completing her study and she has to have a job before getting married. It now is different from my time because boys and girls need to be educated in order to enhance their lives (PFS 3).

One teacher also said that:
I want to see all Hmong children complete their degrees and have capacities to work so they can improve their families’ status (PST 3).

In addition, the parent of three children commented that:

My children should be educated before getting married because they can help their families and they should not rely on their husband families (PFS 1).

The participants understood that many things that related to education had changed now. One stated that:

Our children needed to have knowledge and skills in order to look for jobs to earn money to help themselves and our families because they could not cut down forests or trees to grow rice in the present. We believe that our children had to find new methods to manage our farms. As parents, we hope that our children gain good knowledge and skills could help to improve our children’s living condition. In these regard, education could provide these things for their daughters if they achieved their study (PFS 1).

One parent participant expressed the following view:

I hope to see my children to complete their education at least at upper secondary school level and I want them to have further education, I will support them. When they graduate from college, I will help them to look for jobs that they like (PFS 2).

Another parent who completed primary school also said:

I do not want my children to be unemployed like me, I am a poor farmer and I do not want them to work on the farms. I hope my sons and girls should complete at least the upper secondary school level. Then they can keep on their study at college (PFS 6).
The findings reveal that parents, community members and teachers at schools had to work together to solve all kinds of problems that occurred at primary school education: low attendance rate, absenteeism and repeating the same grade (i.e. because students cannot pass the examination). All of these adults had to pay a lot of attention to all children and protect them.

4.14 Learning outcomes of Hmong girls

Of the six teachers who have trained, observed and evaluated students’ leaning progress, most of them thought that the Hmong girls achieve more highly than boys in their learning at primary school. The findings related to learning outcomes for Hmong girls show that the girls could study quite well and that their learning had dramatically improved.

As one teacher also commented:

> In my class, I notice that Hmong girls or Khmu girls study quite well. They study hard and get good marks in the subjects that they learn (PST 2).

In addition, one Grade five primary school teacher participant added:

> In grade five, Hmong girls have good results in their learning. They pay attention to what teachers explain carefully. While learning they like to listen and do not make loud noises and ask questions sometimes (PST 6).

He further commented that the Hmong girls are very good students. For example,

> Hmong girls can perform well in learning nowadays. They become excellent students when the District Education Bureau organized the examination in region level (PST 2).

Another factor appeared to be how well parents knew their children and how to give them individual encouragement. As one father said:

> I can understand the characteristics of my children clearly and I know they are different from each other because I have three children. They all are
attending primary school. My first and third sons study quite well compared to my second child who is a girl (PFS 2).

The findings show that in almost every grade at primary school level the Hmong girls can learn and have good outcomes. They also are curious so want to learn and study hard.

4.15 Suggestions on how to improve primary education

Even though participants knew that schools have improved a lot when compared to those attended by their generation, they had some comments as to how they could be further improved. The findings show that most participants wanted primary school to improve in terms of its relevance to students. The school authority and the community members had to work together in order to encourage all children to enrol at preschool or primary school. The children could start at an earlier age so they can start immediately on language learning. This would also establish, right from the beginning, some sort of connection between the children and the schools. The most concerning factor according to one of the parents was expressed as follows:

Teachers in grade one and grade two should be able to communicate in more languages such as Lao, Hmong and Khmu. Potentially, Hmong or Khmu teachers have these characteristics but I observe that there are few of them (PFS 3).

The same respondent continued on to suggest that the school registration fee was quite expensive for the poor parents and it should be reduced. Though the school is free, at the beginning of a semester there is a fee for the study equipment that is necessary for students. In the rural communities, many families are very poor so this could cause problems for children being able to enrol in the primary school.

I want to focus on the school registration fee. It seems too expensive for the poor and the parents who have many children cannot afford it and they have a lot of responsibilities such as buying books, school uniforms and other payment (PFS 3).
Participants had comments on students who were already studying in school since they needed a lot of support, and they needed highly focused attention from parents and teachers:

For children who are ready enrolled in school, in order to avoid their incompleteness and their dropout, more attention is needed. I can also help about that in the region. Recently, all parents who enrol their daughters in school encourage their children to complete at least the upper secondary school level (PFS 1).

Similarly, one participant commented that:

I would like the teachers at primary school to teach my children to have good manners and the children should listen to their teachers and ask the questions if they do not understand while the teacher is explaining (PFS 5).

In addition, the school should start to train students not only in the Lao language, but also in other languages. Also in other useful skills that students could take with them when they study in higher education. One participant said:

I want Lao education to train students about foreign languages and an IT subject at early age because young children will be able to use well in the future (PST 2).

One primary school teacher also explained in her comment below, if girls are paid attention and encouraged, they would be able to succeed in their education:

I want all teachers to pay attention to especially girls, encourage them to complete primary school so they can go to lower secondary school and next levels of education (PST 5).

She illustrated this by way of an example:

We or the school had worked on twin girls who wanted to leave school earlier because their parents moved to a very rural place. The school
knew that if these children went with their parents they could have problem with attending school, we tried to support these parents to keep their children at school and then they left their twins with their uncle to continue their education. The time went by these twins became the best students. They took the exam about Lao language subject and this test was the national competition and all students were from different primary schools taking examination together. These children won the competition (PST 5).

The findings from the two groups of participants reveal that in the future education could be improved if teachers of the first and second grades of primary school could speak local languages, such as Hmong or Khmu, because students in these levels do not fully understand Lao. They also need to be flexible in how they teach.

Furthermore, the findings show that Hmong students are perceived as more punctual, active, hard workers, and sought help when they had problems with their study. Some Hmong students had the best learning outcomes. The findings also reveal that the teachers had to not only carry out their teaching duty, but also focus on taking care of the students while they were at school.

Another concern for everyone who wanted to promote education for girls is the suitable age for school enrolment. One primary school teacher said that:

Parents should enrol their children in preschools, primary schools when they turn three and six respectively. Even though the teachers from primary school meet some parents and suggest that they should register their children in schools because attending school earlier can help young children to be familiar with and adapt into the school’s environment (PST 1).

Summary

This chapter presented the data gathered by using the semi-structured interviews. The interviews’ results and findings that emerged from the responses of the twelve
participants were discussed in terms of a number of themes such as: acquisition of literacy, acquisition of numeracy, preparation for the future, cultural competence in both Lao and Hmong, and it would appear balancing household chores and schoolwork for the Hmong girls. Other findings were summarised according to different yet crucial themes that related to the benefits of enrolling the Hmong girls at primary school, such as: ways that guardians and parents support the Hmong girls, changes in female Hmong students observed by the parents and teachers, factors to succeed in learning at primary school, and suggestions on how to improve primary schools and shift traditional beliefs.

The findings showed that there were many reasons stated by the teachers as to why they were motivated to work in this school. One reason was the cooperation and the teamwork amongst the primary school teachers. A second reason was the challenge of being teachers in multicultural classrooms, but at the same time they could gain lots of benefits because they could help people in the region. In turn, they could also acquire knowledge from their own students.

It was clear from the results, that primary education is very significant because if children enrol at this level of education, they may learn from an early age to enjoy study and may feel motivated to continue to study at further levels of education. Students have more opportunities to meet many new friends and explore the new environment. When they complete this level of education, they are able to enrol at the next level of education which is called lower secondary education. In addition, they are more likely to encourage their own children to attend school when have their own families. Importantly, if they are educated, they will be able to look after themselves, their family and their community. More broadly, they can contribute to the development of the nation and improve literacy levels.

The research findings presented herein are discussed in the next chapter in relation to the relevant literature presented in Chapter two.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the significant findings set out in chapter four. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a deeper understanding of the perceived benefits for keeping female Hmong enrolled in primary education as expressed by the parents and teachers. This chapter also provides a discussion of the findings in order to answer the research questions explained in chapter one. The discussion is framed by the significant themes that emerged from the findings and the literature reviewed in chapter two. The limitations of the research will also be presented in this chapter.

5.1 Gains in literacy

The objective of this research project is to “examine the perceived benefits of the viewpoints of parents and teachers for keeping Hmong daughters enrolled in primary education in the Hmong community in Lao PDR”. The findings indicated that the participants were aware of the importance of enrolling their children in primary school education. The research participants who had daughters enrolled in primary school knew that, as a result, their children were able to read and write in Lao and had basic skills of fluency in reading, writing and speaking. Psacharopoulos (2014) explains that education brings various benefits. One of the benefits for students at primary school is they will learn how to read and write. In Laos, the students who enrol and complete primary school are meeting the goal of eliminating illiteracy. According to the National Plans of Action for Lao Education for All plans, children throughout the country are required to complete a full course of primary education in order to enhance literacy (Bruns & Rakotomalala, 2003; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005). The finding that students are able to read and write are supported by the World Bank (2011) which recommends that children are be enrolled in primary school when they turn six. At a young age, young children are most responsive to learning and they can gain the essential skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The participants in this study recognised that literacy was the key benefit of primary school for their daughters.
5.2 Gains in numeracy

The interview results showed that all the research participants knew that at primary school Hmong girls learnt about numbers because when they returned home they sometimes practised their counting. The findings in this study also indicated that at primary school Hmong girls were taught about maths because when the girls were at home they also talked about their maths lessons and tasks with their older brothers or sisters. It would be appear, that these findings represent new knowledge because there is not any Lao literature related to them. According to the framework of Lao education, (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013), one of the five pillars of Lao education, has focused on the practice of numerical information in a variety of contexts. The intellectual pillar is an example because it focuses on knowledge of the natural sciences in terms of their principles, rules and practices. These findings are significant because of the importance of math and numeracy skills in everyday life such as measuring length, height and width, and dealing with all manner of numerical data. Based on Thompson (2010)'s work supports the point that there are various context for teaching numeracy at primary school. The teaching aims to create more opportunities for students to be able to think about the numbers and students should have the ability to apply arithmetic to their everyday life. According to Haylock and Thangata (2007), there are five crucial reasons aims in order to teach mathematics or maths in school namely “utilitarian, application, transferable skills, aesthetic and epistemological” (p. 3). Maths is one of the advanced contexts of numeracy. It is very important and it connects to people’s everyday life. Perhaps even more importantly, it develops students’ ability to think logically, it helps in solving the problems and concepts and principles of numeracy have been generalised by knowledge of maths (Haylock & Thangata, 2007).

5.3 Girls’ developing social skills

The findings indicated that by attending primary school, Hmong girls started to have knowledge and understanding of the world; they met a lot of new friends with whom they shared their cultures, and beliefs, and explored the environment around them. Hmong girls participated in primary school activities such as learning, promoting culture and helping communities around the school.
These perspectives align with Hayes (2009) who states that primary schooling encourages young children to be self-confident and reliable. Primary education enables students to know and understand themselves so they can operate comfortably in the places that are relevant to them. These findings can be linked relevant to the work of Jackson et al. (2010) who state that primary schooling made girls more confident; they were able to perform in activities well and ask questions about things that they do not understand or they want to learn.

The findings are also supported by the report from the OECD and CERI which state that the primary schooling of girls provides basic knowledge and skills for exploration new environments and ideas, and for developing the girls’ interests (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2013).

Both the parents and teachers interviewed revealed that the children had good skills for asking questions. In addition, at home, they engaged in extra activities in order to entertain themselves or relax, for example drawing or painting pictures. Furthermore, the findings from interviews with four teachers showed that the Hmong girls knew how to dress appropriately and beautifully as compared to the first time they came to school when they dressed informally. These teachers further explained that Hmong girls were in position to continue to mix the Hmong dress and the Lao dress together resulting in a good look. According to Jackson et al. (2010), school participation for the girls, gives them lots of opportunities to perform or behave in ways that are socially appropriate. Moreover, Sylva et al. (2010) highlight how girls could make correct and/or reasonable decisions about situations because education participation helps them to explore the real world around them.

5.4 Learning to care for themselves

The common positive change for Hmong girls emerging from the first day of attending primary schooling was that Hmong girls wore clean school uniforms. The teacher participants claimed that the female Hmong students could look after themselves well; they not only dressed in clean clothes, but they also washed them after wearing them
each time because they did not want to wear dirty clothes. The participants could observe that the Hmong girls had improved their self-awareness because they wore their hair in beautiful styles (such as pigtails, buns and ponytails).

Another finding indicates that attending primary school ensured the girls were well-organised and that they tidied up their belongings neatly after they used them. This finding is acknowledged as new in the research area because the issue is not found in the literature.

Moreover, the interview findings indicated that attending primary school helped the Hmong girls to learn how to take care of themselves and other people around them - family or community members and it also aimed to reduce illiteracy. This finding aligned with the report that emphasises that education has long-term benefits for children, families and communities because the children today will become adults in the future. At that point, they will be in a position to help look after other people (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2013).

5.5 School tasks as examples of household chores

The findings reveal that Hmong girls worked hard and had many responsibilities. At home, they had to work hard in order to help parents to do the housework (such as cleaning, washing clothes or dishes), looking after their younger siblings and doing a range of other tasks. The findings support the research from the Center for Disease Control Prevention (2008) which claims that historically in Hmong society men have had more power than women. Men were the ones who other family members believed in and relied on, while, women were in charge a lot of household and caring duties. For example, women loved and obeyed their husbands and worked around the house, picking up the firewood, preparing family meals for family, looking after family members and carrying out other such tasks. This research finding is also supported by Marieke (2012) who notes that Hmong families value only the sons. Parents in this society tended to believe that boys’ education had brought more benefits including more security (Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development, 2013).
Similarly, at school, girls were very active in helping their teachers to pick up rubbish in the school play grounds, to clean the classroom floors and other activities such as the school gardening. In primary school, Hmong girls are also trained in how to socialise. For example, they are trained to work in pairs or in groups and they help each other to learning and participate in activities. According to one of the five pillars of education, primary school implements the labour ethics dimension for the students. Sometimes, students practise this dimension through taught subjects such as knitting, sculpturing, handicraft, and textile as well as real activities that they do at school each day like cleaning their classroom (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). These perspectives align with Fowler et al. (2007) who note that preschool or primary school usually promote knowledge of activities that are related to what students do at home.

5.6 Future possibilities

The interview results from the study show that Hmong girls attending primary school helped to reduce the rate of illiteracy and that education could provide the girls with useful skills and knowledge for them to use in their future education and lives. Primary attendance provides crucial learning strategies for children to succeed in schooling (Aiglepierre & Wagner, 2013) and students who graduated from primary school were able to enter another higher level of education, the lower secondary school level (Psacharopoulos, 2014).

It can be seen that primary school gives students, especially girls, more opportunities to gain more advanced knowledge through being in a position continue on to higher levels of education (Psacharopoulos, 2014). Rihani (2006) claims educated women can contribute to educating children in the future once they are married and have their own children. This perspective also links to the work of King as cited in Manohar (2012) which states that schooling is important because everyone who is trained can get information or knowledge and they can use it again and again throughout their life.

Primary education improves individuals' living conditions in the future and these findings support the research of Johnes and Johnes (2007). Education of girls becomes a significant measurement by which to predict the likelihood of girls having the ability to
work in order to earn money. Many people with education can enhance their lives because they have better opportunities to work in important positions with private companies or state offices than those people who are illiterate (Johnes & Johnes, 2007). Education provides crucial knowledge and skills for future careers and relevant education can enhance the workforce (Monteiro & Sharma, 2010).

5.7 Learning supports income generation and eliminates poverty of the Hmong

According to the in-depth interviews, the majority of research participants acknowledged that Hmong girls attending primary school brought various benefits such as income generation and poverty reduction. The interview results from the research participants were able to answer research question one “What benefits do the parents/guardians of Hmong girls who are enrolled at primary school perceive for their daughters?”

The findings showed that both parents and teachers perceived the benefits of enrolling their daughters at primary school. All participants lived in the community near the primary school and they felt they could afford their children’s education. This finding indicates that there has been a change in people’s attitudes, which has not yet been established in the existing literature.

Furthermore, the finding indicated that teachers and parents understood the Lao education system and its main aim of to reducing illiteracy which could lead to eliminating poverty. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2012) notes that enrolling girls at primary school could move ethnic people out of the poverty cycle. Their education helps them to deal more successfully with new situations. This also aligns with one of the aims of EMP which indicates that expanding primary education is to reduce poverty. Primary education helps to improve quality of life, to promote culture among ethnic groups, to improve people’s health and well-being as well as broader social welfare (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011; Yokoyama, 2001). Education of girls is a powerful tool to improve the quality of life for poor families (Herz & Sperling, 2004). The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan clearly stated “to educate girls is to reduce poverty. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective that the education of girls” (as cited in Rihani, 2006, p. 6).
The finding showed that Hmong girls attending primary school not only helps to reduce the rate of illiteracy, but also contributes to the national development framework because one of its plans is poverty reduction. In the context of poverty reduction, Laos emphasises access to education for children who lack opportunities to attend school so these children can contribute to improving the productivity of their families (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

The findings revealed that parents thought that girls who were literate could help families to earn money because they could work in private companies or in the state offices. This corroborates the idea of Rihani (2006) that the benefits of education for girls have been extended to include gaining higher wages. Johnes and Johnes (2007) claim that girls who are educated have the potential to join the workforce as qualified individuals. Therefore, they are able to earn some money every month. Both personal and national income has increased because of the improvement of girls’ education (Herz & Sperling, 2004).

5.8 The challenges of learning a second language

5.8.1 What makes learning harder for Hmong girls

The results from the study revealed that all twelve participants emphasised that one difficulty for girls learning was that the girls had to learn the Lao language. The findings align with Mellanby and Theobald (2014) who claim that students felt happy to study if they liked the subjects. In this case, they do not have any problem with their study indeed they could enhance their knowledge and learning skills. They also could study by themselves when they were at home. The report from Ministry of Education and Sports (2008) recommends that it should be known that Lao is the national language and that the Lao education mainly and officially uses Lao for educational instruction at all levels from kindergarten to tertiary. None of the Lao educational equipment or material is written in any ethnic languages.

The finding also showed that more than the half of the research participants understood that in Grades one and two of primary schooling many Hmong children had difficulty in learning Lao as a second language because they did not use Lao at home. The Hmong
language is used orally among the Hmong people (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014b). This finding also support the report from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2009) which states that in Laos approximately 50 percent of ethnic students throughout country did not speak Lao at home. Marieke (2012) also encourages that the Hmong people prefer to live in isolated regions among their own people Hmong have their own unique language to communicate with each other. At home, Hmong children spoke only Hmong with their parents. Based on the report of The Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (2006), the Hmong people are very unique and they have their own language and culture which is crucial to the maintenance of their cultural identity. These people pass and share their traditions, culture and beliefs to the younger generation orally and children may be comfortable with this situation.

The findings from all six primary school teachers showed that even though some of these teachers were Hmong, when they taught in classes they used Lao because the textbooks were in Lao; the Lao written alphabet is officially used in Lao education materials. The teachers grasped their students’ situation so they helped students to overcome the issues by having their friends translate difficult phrases from Lao to Hmong during lessons. This relates to the research from Low and Hashim (2012) which points out that many ethnic children have to overcome language issues when they attend primary school for the first few years. In the review, the participants recommended that Hmong children needed help in the terms of managing their new language learning environment, which is very different from their mother tongues. In this regard, the authority concerned, the MoE is responsible for addressing language issues in education; the MoE outlines the policy that focuses on training new and senior teachers. These new teachers should have the ability to deal with ethnic language issues at primary school (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008). Furthermore, Cincotta (2009) explains that we need to support all our young ethnic children by making education more relevant to them.
However, the finding from the teacher participants working at primary school showed that though their teaching utilised Lao most of the time, they often had to remind themselves that they were teaching in a remote multicultural setting with the students in the classrooms comprising Hmong, Khmu, and Lao, and sometimes Hmong was the majority group in the class. The evidence from one teacher participant showed that, while Lao is used in classroom instruction, if students did not understand, the teacher would explain in Hmong or Khmu because they could speak both Hmong and Khmu at least a little. Participants observed that some of the teachers who work in the area are able to communicate in local languages using some simple phrases. In order to assist Hmong students to learn easily at primary school level, it was clear that the teachers, where able, needed to use two or more languages of the learners. This is a significant finding since it is new to the literature and perhaps to many readers.

5.8.2 Positives about learning Lao

The finding indicated that if Hmong girls who had the capability of using and understanding the Lao language well then they liked to study more. According to Popper (2014), at school there are many useful tasks to learn to do with their classmates and students can take part in any school activities and learning programmes that they like and potentially enjoy them. All students have the right to be educated, at the same time they can study their lessons with other friends (Bellamy, 2003).

A related point is that the teacher participants said that Hmong girls who understand Lao well do not have any issues when they study; therefore, their learning outcomes are improved and they become excellent students. This finding aligns with the work of Mellanby and Theobald (2014) which states that students who have good results in their study often know how to listen and ask the teachers if they do not understand. These bright students also like to communicate with teachers and classmates. The findings supported the report of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2014a) which articulates that girls are able to develop themselves intellectually, psychologically and socially through participating in schooling. Then the girls become excellent and knowledgeable students.
The findings from the primary teacher participants revealed that when giving instruction, they used their students to help to translate the Hmong from Lao for their friends. They said that they wanted to continue to use this strategy in their teaching because it was useful. This perspective is supported by Low and Hashim (2012) who explore the national language causes problems for many ethnic minority children.

Teachers’ participants indicated that the primary school was building up bilingual classes; therefore it could encourage all students to learn together. This finding is supported by the theories of inclusive education from Grimes (2009), which explain that all children from any group of people should be encourage into education, and they should be trained in the relevant knowledge and skills that they can utilise in their everyday lives. Learning for ethnic students in rural areas has improved over recent decades and it uses various teaching strategies to solve the problem arising from the language of instruction (Peters, 1998).

5.9 Support for Hmong girls

This section discusses the support parents and teachers provide for the girls. These findings could help the researcher to answer the third question of the research - “What do these parents think other Hmong parents with daughters in general might do to address issues of educational participation when their children are enrolled in primary education in the future?”.

The findings revealed that all participants who had daughters encouraged their daughters to study by enrolling them at primary school when they were six years of age. This finding supports the report of the Ministry of Education and Sports (2008) which states that when children are six years old, they must legally be enrolled at primary school, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and Japan International Cooperation Association (2015), which claims that in 2020, Laos is expected to meet the aims of enrolling all children throughout the country in primary education and encouraging them to study until they complete a cycle of five years at primary school.

The supports that the research participants provided were, for example, taking their children to school and picking them up after school every day. Previously, in Laos it was
normal for young children to go to school by themselves or with friends. Children do not feel neglected when their parents walk along with them all the way to school (Behrman et al., 2013). According to Nadeau and Rayamajhi (2013), some parents were worried about the safety of their children when they had to take a long journey to school.

Another support that participants provided for their daughters is spending some extra money on their daughters’ education such as paying for extra lessons. The findings are contrary to those discovered by other scholars, namely Lewis and Lockheed (2007) who illustrate that ethnic minority families prefer to support the sons’ education because they believe the sons obtain more advantages from education. Marieke (2012), too, states that often parents believed that educating girls wasted family money.

Furthermore, the results from the interviews showed that these girls had been helped also when they were at home. Parents paid attention to their female children’s education; they gave advice to their children when they needed help. For example, they helped to explain the activities’ instructions when their daughters got confused, they checked their daughters’ school tasks and gave suggestions as to what their children had to do. Interestingly, the finding is likely to be new to many readers because in the past many Hmong parents were illiterate. They did not want their children even attending the school to study because they had not gone to school themselves and so and could not read or write. They did not even grasp the nature of the learning process (Center for Disease Control Prevention, 2008, p. 16; Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

Another finding was that parents and teachers were satisfied with their female children when they saw them showing good manners. This finding aligns with the school textbooks of the Ministry of Education and Sports (2013) which state that all children are expected to enrol in school and be encouraged in their education. In particular, they should be trained to be good students and to behave properly. The report added that teachers, parents and all people who were close to these young females needed to monitor their manners so these students can become more polite (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013).
However, although there was evidence from the interviews that parents were providing supports for their daughters, there were some concerns that emerged about what happening at primary school. According to the interviews findings, there were some issues for female Hmong children around their primary school participation. The evidence was provided by both the parents and teachers and showed that a few students were likely to drop out of school in the middle of the year because of lack of support from parents. This finding is similar to that of Marieke (2012) who notes that some uneducated parents did not allow their children to study at primary school because, from their experience, not many Hmong children had got jobs. Incomplete primary schooling could lead to school drop-outs (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011).

The findings revealed that some of the ethnic girls who lived quite far from the centre of the community were registered at school but their attendance was not monitored much because their parents had other responsibilities such as working on the farms to obtain some food for their families. Therefore, these families could not fully connect with their children’s learning. This perspective is contradistinction to the International Fund for Agricultural Development and Association of International Property Professionals (2012) which indicates that financial: disadvantaged families did not register their girls at school. Parents did enrol their children in school and allowed them to learn at school while they worked hard on the farms. However, they were not in a position to ensure their children’s regular attendance.

Another issue was that some girls repeated grades because they could not pass the final year examination. This could be linked to those ethnic girls who were always absent from school and/or struggling with the language problems in Grades one and two. The more they were absent, the more they got behind in their lessons and could not catch up. This finding corroborated the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2012) which states that the rate of grade repetition is considerably high in primary school for Hmong girls.

The Ministry of Planning and Investment (2011) states that parents, the community members and the government need a lot of motivation for the education of girls in order
to ensure all girls are enrolled in schools. In the village, this is illustrated by the way in which the village chief cooperates with the primary school to monitor the enrolment rates for children ages over six years old, and ensure parents enrol their daughters. As a result most girls in the community are enrolled in school.

5.10 Participation in primary education of Hmong girls

The results of this study also indicate that positive changes in female Hmong students at primary school emerge in different ways from time to time.

In this regard, the findings suggest that the number of female Hmong students enrolled at primary school had increased every year as had the number of female Hmong students who completed primary school. This finding supports the study of Tembon and Fort (2008), which demonstrated that the gender gap in education has become smaller because girls’ enrolment at primary school grew dramatically over a ten year period.

In terms of expanding the network of primary schools, the Lao government has extended pre-schools and primary schools throughout the country, from cities to the rural remote communities. For example, in the most remote community, there might be one multi-grade primary school. This is to ensure all children have a chance to attend. The primary school network has significantly expanded throughout the country - from the city to mountainous areas, including private and state primary schools since 1975 (Chounlamany & Khounphilaphanh, 2011; Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011). Ethnic or orphan schools have been established in targeted places. Importantly, the schools taught subject matter and skills that are suitable for remote lifestyles (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011).

The finding regarding the behaviour of Hmong girls showed that in the classroom these girls studied hard and they were very active. They asked for advice when they did not understand the instructions at times. This finding indicated that Hmong girls paid a lot of attention to what teachers taught them. In this regard, this finding differed from the study of Marieke (2012) that states that the Hmong girls who were in remote areas were not interested in their education, especially at primary school level, because of their parents.
5.11 Suggestions about primary education for Hmong girls

One of the research project questions was to examine how parents and teachers might address the issues in relation to school participation for the girls in the future.

All 12 participants said that ethnic students, especially Hmong girls, could overcome the language issues if they were able to enrol at the kindergarten/pre-school level. This discussion supported the report of the Ministry of Education and Sports (2014a) which articulates that pre-school attendance helps prepare children’s knowledge of the language and other matter before starting primary school. Behrman et al. (2013) suggest that pre-school gives more opportunities for young children to learn, explore and become familiar with the school situation.

Additionally, the study showed that the school needs qualified ethnic teachers to teach in first and second grades of primary school because they could help deal with young ethnic students who have just started. An example of the actual problem is that the students did not understand what the teacher said to the class. This finding is supported by Ahuja (2006) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2014a), both of which note that in order to address ethnic language issues in education, teaching at primary school needs to use Lao and the local language if it is applicable. In order to do this well, quality and qualified ethnic teachers are needed. In addition, an education system within which mother-tongues are used by teachers to give instructions could motivate disadvantaged ethnic students to enrol and complete primary education (Ball, 2013). However, according to the Ministry of Education and Sports (2009), in the first and second grades of primary school, ethnic children do not fully understand Lao, but at least they could practise their speaking.

With regard to the findings about primary school enrolment, the study results revealed that primary education should focus on enrolling children, especially ethnic minority children, as soon as they turn six or when they were of school-age, approximately between 6 and 10 years old. This finding aligned with the report of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2014a) which states that some young ethnic children were late entering primary school and therefore were disadvantaged.
The interview results revealed that parents and teachers should support all students who are attending primary school because these young children need a lot of motivation to support them to complete their study.

5.12 Limitations of the research

One of the research project’s limitations is related to the semi-structured interview being the main method for data collection. Through the semi-structured interview, the researcher was able to interpret the qualitative data from interviewing with the research participants. However, if the observation was used alongside the semi-structured interview for data gathering it would be relevant and improved effectiveness because through observation, the researcher could notice the participants’ setting and consider the three elements of observation namely, observing what people do, listening to what people say, and asking people for clarification (Gillham, 2010). These significant tools helped the researcher to deepen the gathered data.

Another research limitation is that the data collection coincided with the start of a new semester (local time). During this period, some teachers might have moved from other schools to teach in this local primary school. As some teachers participants had been at school for a while, they might talk about their previous experiences at other schools rather than at the school in this study.

The Hmong mothers were less articulate than the teachers; they were quite shy and unused to holding conversations of this sort. One Hmong mother with children was particularly shy, and refused to talk to the researcher. She told the researcher that she relied on her husband to make all decisions in the family. The study therefore, predominantly reflects the views of the Hmong father rather than Hmong mother in this case.

This research project was conducted in the rainy season; it was quite hard for researcher to go to the field because the road to where the research was conducted was up a hill. In addition, when interviewing the participants, the recording process negatively impacted at times because the noise of the rain interfered with the sound clarity of the recording.
Overall, however, findings from this research are able to add new dimensions to several reports and research projects about Lao primary school education.

Summary

This chapter discussed the data findings based on the semi-structured interviews from the twelve participants in relation to the literature presented in Chapter two. The discussion was categorised into various themes regarding the viewpoints of parents and teachers of female Hmong children who were studying at primary school.

The first area discussed was about gains in literacy of the girls in primary school. The second was at discussion about the gains in numeracy of female Hmong children. The chapter then went on discuss various other aspects as follow: learning to socialise, girls learning to care for themselves, school tasks as examples of household chores, future possibilities for Hmong girls and the challenges of learning a second language as well as the provision of support for Hmong girls.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the Lao PDR education strategy in regards to Hmong is beginning to gain traction. The study results showed that more Hmong girls enrolled in school and are studying for longer. Furthermore, participants are showing a commitment to the education for girls.
Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This qualitative research project utilized an interpretive paradigm. The objective of this research was to explore “the perceived benefits of the viewpoints of parents/guardians for keeping Hmong daughters enrolled at primary education”. The study included twelve participants who were divided into two groups - the parents of female Hmong students and the teachers at the primary school.

In order to achieve the research objective, the following three research questions were formed:

- What benefits do the parents/guardians of Hmong girls who are enrolled at primary school perceive for their daughters?
- What difficulties have these parents confronted in keeping their daughters enrolled in primary school?
- What do these parents think other Hmong parents with daughters in general might do to address educational participation when their children are enrolled in primary education in the future?

This qualitative research employed the semi-structured interview for data collection in order to answer the research questions. Snowball sampling was the technique employed for selecting the participants of the research. Through this qualitative approach, the overall data analysis from interviews answered the research questions and the researcher can identify the key findings below:

6.1 Summary of key research findings

The findings indicated that the research participants knew and understood the benefits of enrolling female children at primary school. It can be seen that they all perceived that, as a result of schooling, their daughters made gains in literacy and numeracy, could explore a new culture, and achieve competence in using the Lao language, and others of learning. The children were also said to have a lot of fun and joined in on many of the school’s activities. The study confirmed that a primary school education level is very
significant in terms of providing basic learning tools, knowledge and skills that are considered important for children, family and community. The benefits for enrolling female Hmong children at primary school in the Lao context were supported by some of the existing literature, while other findings were new and so built on that literature.

The findings from the study indicated that the participants answered the research questions and a summary for each question is provided as follows:

6.1.1 What benefits do the parents and teachers of Hmong girls who are enrolled at primary school perceive for their daughters?

The results of the study showed that all participants perceived benefits of registering their daughters at primary school. In this field, attending the primary school made the young girls gain in literacy because this level of education trained students in the basic skills of how to read and write. In addition, the Hmong girls were also seen as having improved their numeracy knowledge. They learnt how to count the numbers, calculate in maths from the basic to the more advanced level. This knowledge and these skills are understood to become very useful tools for them.

Furthermore, it was evident to participants that at school Hmong girls were promoted to share Lao and Hmong cultures together because they learnt to work in groups and they took part in the school’s activities. Hmong girls felt happy that they could speak Lao, meanwhile they could speak their own language orally. They also liked to wear their Hmong dress with Lao clothing and they looked very presentable in such outfits.

The participants claimed that educated Hmong girls knew how to take care of themselves and the other people were around them. They looked clean and tidy in their school uniforms which they often cleaned themselves after they wore them each day.

Hmong girls are perceived as having more opportunities to work if they are educated and they would be able to contribute to developing their families and communities. People with education can increase productivity, generate income and reduce poverty because they are able to work in the office or private companies to earn money.
6.1.2 What difficulties have these parents confronted in keeping their daughters enrolled in primary school?

The study indicated that overall there were more positive impacts than negative impacts for enrolling the girls at primary school. Participants spoke of one of the major difficulties that emerged when some parents enrolled their daughters at primary school - the expense of the school’s registration fee. The family’s financial situation, especially if it was one or poverty could cause severe problems for families that had to enrol many children in school each semester. This was the case because the parents might have to use a large sum of the family money to buy learning equipment such as stationery, and pay for new uniforms, the registration fee or even a bicycle for children to ride to school.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that most of the Hmong girls who studied at first and second grades had problems with the learning of a second language, Lao; - they could not read properly and speak clearly in this language. Hmong have their own Hmong language which is used orally to interact among Hmong people so at home these girls speak only Hmong with their parents. Another related concerning finding from the study showed that all learning material was written in the Lao language.

6.1.3 What do these parents think other Hmong parents with daughters in general might do to address educational participation when their children are enrolled in primary education in the future?

The findings also showed that in order to make learning more relevant to the Hmong girls and to help them study more easily at primary school in this location, there should be more quality Hmong teachers to teach, especially in both grades one and two. The actual problems that surfaced for Hmong girls in these grades were that they could not speak Lao at all because they spoke only Hmong with their parents and so they found it was difficult to study. However, having quality Hmong teachers could address this situation. Actually, if the Hmong girls could pass these two grades, with the help of such teachers, then they would be able to learn easily.

The findings of the research revealed that many parents, especially those who live in rural remote regions, should enrol their girls at preschool when they turn three years of
age and then they could go straight on to primary school when they turned six years old. Girls who entered kindergarten education did not have any problems with language issues when they enrolled in primary school.

The participants proposed that Hmong parents who lived far away from the centre of town should send their daughters to school. The existing situation was that only a few daughters from families living in remote areas complete primary school education. In addition, teachers, village chiefs and parents should work cooperatively to encourage Hmong children to study until they complete their primary schooling.

It is better to expand to a complete primary school because that can contribute to increasing the rate number of enrolment of girls in primary school.

6.2 Recommendations for further study

This research studies the benefits of enrolling female Hmong daughters at primary school from the perspective of parents and teachers. It can be summarised as follow: that the attendance at primary school of the Hmong girls brings key benefits to themselves, their families, their communities and their country.

In order to make future studies in this filed more meaningful and reliable, research could explore the benefit of female Hmong participation in ethnic primary schools in other locations. Such a study would provide be useful for comparison to the one carried out herein. Furthermore, studies could focus on the advantages of education of Hmong women in tertiary education, such as at college or university levels, because at these levels of education the researchers could interview the participants directly.

In addition, it could be useful to combine methods for data gathering such as observation, secondary data analysis and even using quantitative approach. These methods might help the research to get a broader insight into the meanings of the data.

The Hmong housewives were quite shy, they did not like to talk and they refused talking about children’s life. They said they did not know about their children’s education and in any event, everything at home depended upon their husband’s decision. Future
research could focus on talking to Hmong women who are working or have a certain job; they might be more confident and able to give more relevant information.

It would certainly be valuable if further research is carried out to build on this study so as to better understand what parents in Laos in general value about their children's learning at primary school level education.


Manohar, B. (2012). Write to be understood, speak to be heard, read to grow: Lawrence Clark Powell. *Journal of Indian Society of Periodontology, 16*(1), 3.


Tracy, S. (2012). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact."


Manohar, B. (2012). Write to be understood, speak to be heard, read to grow: Lawrence Clark Powell. *Journal of Indian Society of Periodontology, 16*(1), 3.


122


Tracy, S. (2012). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*.


Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Hmong Parents Group
- How many daughters do you have attending in primary school?
- What do you think about your daughter when they attended the primary school for the first day?
- What was your impression of seeing your girls at school?
- What do/ did your daughters learn from school or education?
- How have your daughters changed since they went to school?
- What does your daughter like or dislike about school?
- What do you do to encourage your daughters to go to school or study?
- What are the advantage points of the girls to go to school?
- What are the negative impacts of girls to attend school?
- How does education change your daughter’s life?
- How do you think education might change your daughter’s life in the future?
- Did you attend school when you were young?
- When your daughter has a problem at school, do they talk to you? And how do you suggest them?
- What advice do you want to suggest for Hmong girls’ education?
- What do you do to support your daughter to learn in other level of schooling?
- What grade do you want your daughters/ girls to study or reach? Why?

Primary school’s Teachers Group
- How was your first day at this school to work as a teacher like?
- What is your motivation to work in this school? (How do you feel to work in this school/area?)
- Tell me about your class? (female and male students, the students’ parents, colleagues, languages)
- What changes do you see about female students when you first taught at this school?
- Who have better learning outcome female Hmong students or male ones?
- What things help Hmong girls to success their primary education?
- What do you like/dislike about teaching in primary school?
- What language do you use for teaching and learning in primary school?
- Who are more active in learning at school if compare Hmong girls and non-Hmong?
- What suggestion do you want to give for female Hmong children who are in primary school and outside?
- When your female Hmong students have problems about their studies, do they talk to you?

Demographic questions (Teachers and parents)
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<tr>
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<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age?</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of family?</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of daughters in school</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualification?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching experience?</td>
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</table>
Appendix 2: Information sheets for participants

**Information Sheet**

**Title of Thesis:** The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parents/guardians viewpoints and perspectives

My name is Sisamouth Saythongmany. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Social Practice degree in the Department of Social Practice at Unitec Institute of Technology. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of research for a MSocP thesis which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of this research is to investigate benefits from parents’ viewpoints of keeping Hmong children enrolled in primary education, especially, Hmong girls. I am primarily interested in examining girls’ education at elementary level among Hmong children who reside in the rural Kiew Kacham regions, Xieng Ngeun district, Luang Prabang province, Lao PDR. There has not any study related to this research topic previously.

I will collect data by conducting interviews, which will take approximately forty to sixty minutes. Some personal details such as the names, ages and number of family members will also be collected. This information sheet will be handed to you by the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. For the translation into Lao from Hmong, the Lao-Hmong interpreter will help and then the researcher will translate Lao scripts into English by herself. The participants will have an opportunity to check the transcription. The data collected by the researcher will be kept confidential at all times.

The Lao-Hmong interpreter who agrees to interpret during the interview has signed a confidentiality agreement and will not reveal anything to any other than the researcher that has been discussed by the participant during the interview.

If you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form. It is understood that if you do not want any information revealed by you during the interview discussed then you have to tell the researcher up to two weeks after the interview.

You will not be identified in the research study and your information will be kept entirely confidential.

I hope that you find this project interesting. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisors at Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

My supervisor is Helene Connor and may be contacted by email or phone.
Phone: + 64 9 815 4321 ext 5010   Email: hconnor@unitec.ac.nz, or Sue Elliott, telephone: +6498154321 ext 5151, email: selliott2@unitec.ac.nz and the director of Luang Prabang
Teacher Training College, Somluay Soutiyathai, telephone: +856 71 212 058, email: somluay@yahoo.com

Yours sincerely,

Sisamouth Saythongmany

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2015-1046)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (2015) to (2016). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participant Consent Form Interview

Programme: Master of Social Practice
Project Researcher: Sisamouth Saythongmany

**Thesis Title:** The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parents/guardians viewpoints and perspectives

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me. The researcher also has orally communicated the research project to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project; I can choose not to participate and may withdraw up to two weeks after the interviews.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only people who can access will be the researcher and the supervisors. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely in password protected file for a period of up to five years.

I understand that my interview with the researcher will be recorded and transcribed and I will be given an opportunity to verify the transcription.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

**Participant Name:** ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Participant Signature:** ………………………..   **Date:** ……………………………

**Name of researcher:** ………………………………………  **Signature of researcher:** ………………………………………..

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER:** (2015-1046)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 2015 to 2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 4: Interpreter confidentiality agreement

INTERPRETER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Project Title: The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parents/guardians viewpoints and perspectives

Researcher: Sisamouth Saythongmany

Interpreter:

I agree to be an interpreter for the above research project. I understand and agree that the information contained within this study is confidential and will not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researchers associated with this project. This also means that I will not disclose the identities of any research participants and will keep all data from this study confidential.

Name: _____________________________

Signature: __________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix 5: An approval letter from District Administration Office
Appendix 6: An approval letter from District of Education Bureau
Appendix 7: Application approval letter (An Ethic approval letter)

Sisamouth Saythongmany  
4 Starforth Place  
Henderson  
Auckland  

20.8.15

Dear Sisamouth,

Your file number for this application: 2015-1046

Title: Benefits from parents' viewpoints on keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in LuangPrabang province of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)

Your application for ethics approval has been reviewed by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and has been approved for the following period:

Start date: 30.7.15  
Finish date: 30.7.16

Please note that:

1. The above dates must be referred to on the information AND consent forms given to all participants.

2. You must inform UREC, in advance, of any ethically relevant deviation in the project. This may require additional approval.

You may now commence your research according to the protocols approved by UREC.

We wish you every success with your project.

Yours sincerely,

Sara Donaghey  
Deputy Chair, UREC

cc: Helene Connor  
Cynthia Almeida