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## **10. INEQUALITY OF ACCESS TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN VIETNAM**

*A Case Study*

In efforts to make English language teaching (ELT) congruent with global and regional trends, Vietnamese education leaders have introduced a national policy in which English is made compulsory from Year 3 at primary level. The goals of primary level English as a foreign language (PEFL) education in Vietnam are described as developing communicative skills, promoting intercultural knowledge and fostering English language learning strategies. The implementation of this new policy, however, indicates many challenges, of which inequality of access to English is the most prominent. This chapter provides insight into the inequality of access to English language education at the primary level between rural and urban areas in Vietnam. The findings support the proposition that inequality of access comes from the teaching and learning conditions and methods and the level of engagement of different stakeholders. Some suggestions are offered to help bring English to all learners, regardless of any social background or economic divide.

### INTRODUCTION

The new policy for primary English as a foreign language (PEFL) teaching in Vietnam focuses on communicative competence, which is in accordance with global and regional trends of English language education. Indeed, enhancing communicative language proficiency has become a priority of English language education policy throughout the Asia Pacific Rim (Nunan, 2003). English language teaching (ELT) has been implemented at primary level in non-English speaking countries in Asia due to an underlying belief in the adage ‘the younger the better’ (Hayes, 2008; Lee & Azman, 2004; Pinter, 2011). These trends have inspired Vietnam to introduce English at Grade 3 (8 years old), from which time English learning is compulsory.

This policy is also grounded in and developed from the previous PEFL curricula in Vietnam. Since 1997, English has been taught as an elective component of the primary curriculum in Vietnam. Initially, the new policy was piloted in schools in metropolitan cities prior to nation-wide implementation in 2003. This

implementation attracted a lot of attention and drew reactions from different social groups in Vietnam. In response to social needs, a revised policy for PEFL education was introduced. Specifically, English is now taught as an elective subject for Years 1 and 2 and as a compulsory subject from Year 3 to Year 5. PEFL education in Vietnam aims to develop communicative skills, encourage intercultural knowledge and support English language learning strategies.

From the introduction of the policy by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to the actual implementation of compulsory PEFL education within primary schools, many challenges have presented, of which inequality is the most prominent. Research has focused on many different aspects of the policy such as the trials of implementation and the shortage of human resources (L. Nguyen, 2007; T.M.H. Nguyen & Q.T. Nguyen, 2007; T.M.H. Nguyen 2011). However, very few research studies have been conducted on inequality during policy implementation, from macro- to micro-levels (Kheng & Baldauf, 2011). This chapter, therefore, by focusing on English teaching and learning situations at primary schools in urban and rural areas in Vietnam, aims to pursue an in-depth understanding of inequality of access in the implementation of PEFL education in this specific context.

#### INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION AND ELT

The issue of equity has been a central concern within the educational systems of many different countries. Education is, commonly, regarded as a central component in the development process of each individual, community and nation. Most governments aim to attain equity in education quality, opportunities and outcomes and great efforts have been made to ensure success. Nevertheless, to maintain fairness in education, inequality has emerged as a controversial issue. The topic of inequality in education, therefore, has attracted a large number of research studies over recent decades.

Current research has explored several reasons for inequality in education. It has shown that a lack of fairness can result from disparities in the quality of education or from other factors including geographical area, ethnic origin and gender (Burt & Namgi, 2008; Collins, 2008, Holsinger, 2005; Ram, 1990; Rew, 2008). It has also found that supply-side, as well as demand-side, factors seem to make the inequality issue in education worse (Bing, 2008). Unequal access to education emerges, in many countries, due to poor management of education budgets and can be reflected in a variety of educational aspects such as the supply of educational institutions, allocation of qualified teachers, support for teaching and learning materials (Bing, 2008). Bing (2008) also cites family background as a factor involved in educational inequality. From this research, some effective strategies have been suggested to minimise the causes of educational inequality in Asian countries, for example in Cambodia (Collins, 2008), in South Korea (Burt & Namgi, 2008), in China (Bing, 2008) and in Vietnam (Holsinger, 2005; Rew, 2008).

The abovementioned issues of equity in education are also visible in the field of ELT. McKay (2010) warns that the current state of English language education

creates many critical issues of access, of which the central concern is “how to provide less advantaged children in the society with equal access to English so they can succeed in institutions of higher education”(p. 106).Nikolov and Djigunović (2011) are, similarly, worried about the unequal access to English language teaching in primary education. They argue that learners in rural schools or low socio-economic areas tend to have less opportunity to learn a foreign language. This discrepancy can, also, be seen between public and private sectors where the foreign language programmes at private elementary schools are more advanced (T.M.H. Nguyen, 2011).

The effects of inequality of access to English education seem to be more pronounced in Asia than anywhere else in the world (Butler, 2009). Park and Ableman (2004) argue that English in Korea is regarded as a class indicator: more opportunities, not only in education but, also, in wider society, tend to be available in Korea to those with better English proficiency. In mainland China, the policies that support ELT in elite schools exacerbate educational inequality (McKay, 2010). Likewise, access to English, the perceived language of power and wealth, is available for only a minority of primary pupils in Hong Kong (Choi, 2003). Choi contends that the ultimate effect of the policy of ELT in Hong Kong is to “perpetuate a form of linguistic imperialism” (Choi, 2003, p. 673). Addressing the disparity in the implementation of primary English instruction between the city and rural areas in Taiwan, Scott and Chen (2004) point out that children in urban areas, especially in metropolitan cities, have higher English proficiency than their peers in remote areas. Pessimistically, they conclude that it would be hard to reduce the divide in primary English language education in areas with different socio-economic status. Enever and Moon (2009, p. 12) speak generally about the issue of equity in the introduction of teaching English to young learners in the state school system:

It is unsurprising to note that countries are increasingly concerned about children’s access to Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) and the equity of provision, with frequent reports of large differences in access and in quality of provision between rural and urban areas, between geographical areas and between different urban schools.

In Vietnam, the issue of inequality of access to English learning is of great concern to different circles in society. However, it has been unexplored, in education in general and in ELT in particular. While not directly addressing the issue of inequality in PEFL education in Vietnam *per se*, T.M.H. Nguyen (2011) indicates that there are differences in teaching and learning practices between private and public schools. For example, the teaching methods at private schools are more communicative and child-friendly than those at public schools. As inequality of access to English has been of concern in Asia in general, and in Vietnam in particular, this chapter is directed towards providing insight into the inequality between rural and urban areas in the Vietnamese context.

## METHODOLOGY

The study discussed in this chapter is part of a larger research project in which the focus is on PEFL teachers' work and life in Vietnam. 6 PEFL teachers, 3 from rural areas and 3 from cities, were selected as focal cases to explore the themes regarding teachers' work and life in PEFL education. A group of parents whose children are learning English at primary level also participated in the research project to raise their voice about PEFL education.

In the research design of the larger project, no plan was made to highlight the phenomenon of inequality of access to English learning; however, it did emerge during the stages of data collection and analysis. In particular, the three cases from rural schools directly expressed the issue of unequal access to English learning when comparing the countryside and the city. As a result, this study was developed to provide in-depth understandings of inequality in PEFL education in the Vietnamese context. In the larger project, a variety of methods of data collection were used but the data sources that served this study were mainly selected from the semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with 6 PEFL teachers and 1 parent. The responses were translated from Vietnamese to English and pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality. Cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were employed as the primary analytical tools.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data from interviews with 6 PEFL teachers and 1 parent have revealed some advantages and disadvantages that rural students and teachers are facing in comparison with their city fellows. The differences leading to the inequality of access to English language teaching and learning at primary school level in Vietnam can be classified into: (i) unequal conditions for learning and teaching, (ii) unequal access to child-friendly approaches to teaching English to young learners (TEYLs), and (iii) unequal participation of other stakeholders.

### *Teaching and Learning Conditions*

There is no doubt that the success of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in general, and at primary level in particular, partially depends on teaching conditions and facilities in the classroom. Indeed, the humble teaching and learning conditions faced by the rural English language teachers were mentioned as a major difficulty throughout the interviews. Specifically, the lack of teaching and learning supports and the differences in students' backgrounds were cited. As a teacher in a rural area, Thao shared the idea that children at her school did not have enough textbooks and learning resources such as Internet access, computers and CD players to learn English. She emphasised that teachers should be understanding and sympathetic to the students' living and learning conditions as well as being supportive and encouraging.

The students here are worn-out, schools are poor and even students don't have books... in class they have nothing to work with. Every summer, I have to go and ask for used books from the senior students to support these difficult students. If they do not have books, I cannot teach. I am so disappointed. (Thao)

Under these circumstances, it would be hard for both teachers and students to follow the national curriculum and to improve learning success. This situation extends the recent studies by Hayes (2008) and L. Nguyen (2008) who indicate that the large classroom size in primary schools and very few or no language learning rooms in schools in small provinces are obstacles for teachers to implement effective principles of TEYL.

Nevertheless, the participating teachers expend a lot of effort to overcome the limitations in facilities and equipment within the limited resources they have, and have shown a lot of creativity.

If we do not have computers, we can use pictures or our drawings instead. If we don't have a CD player, we can read for the students to practice listening skills. We have been trying to make the lesson as interesting as possible to motivate the students with games and a variety of activities. Teaching in rural areas, we have to accept the insufficiency...we have also requested the schools to provide resources and materials but they considered English as a supplementary subject, so they do not want to invest in facilities, and English teachers are also marginalized. We have to be active and adaptive; it would take 100 years to wait for the changes. (Thuong)

This account reveals the fact there exists inadequate attitudes and a lack of awareness amongst school leaders towards PEFL education. The inequality of access to PEFL is reflected in biased priorities under which English is just a supplementary subject even though it has been upgraded to a compulsory one. The situation in rural primary schools seems to be far from improved, however certain investment has been made in urban schools.

The difference in background and family conditions of the students is also stated as another difficulty for rural teachers. According to the teachers' observations, city students enjoy a more favourable life and are, thus, thought of as more intelligent and more capable than the country students. Thao made the following comment:

With a desirable nutrition diet and good nutrients, city children are more developed in terms of brain capacity than country students. The children in my areas have no ideas about 'milk' while the city children have milk as part of their compulsory diet.

In addition, the students of wealthy households in the city are well equipped, with necessary learning facilities like headphones, e-books, internet access and, even, mobile phones. In comparison, the rural students do not have even a book to study from. She continued:

Most of my students in the rural areas come from families of farmers or manual workers... Their parents often go to work very far way to make ends meet. Some of my students do not have money to buy basic stationery, even a notebook. They have to rely on the low and unstable income of their parents who work far way.

This situation, conversely, reflects the unequal investment and engagement level of parents regarding the support given to their children's learning.

Another disadvantage that rural students are facing is the lack of a communicative learning environment where they can practice and apply what they learn in real life contexts. The chance to use English can be a motivation for learning. One teacher participant admitted that, over the past 20 years of teaching in rural areas, she has never seen any foreigners (Thuy). Another teacher also stated,

Students living in big cities or tourist cities like Hoi An or Danang have many more chances to practice and use English while students in the countryside do not. Also, when they go to work, most good jobs require English and the city students enjoy the benefits... it is not easy or hardly possible to find a good job in the countryside. (Thao)

Notably, there are many language centres available in the cities where the learning environments allow the learners to communicate with English native speakers and foreigners to improve their accent and pronunciation. These English classes are affordable for a considerable number of urban families but the students in the countryside cannot afford such courses. If they can afford to go to a private class, they can only learn with local teachers and the major learning focus is grammar. Consequently, city students tend to be more confident in social communication and better able to follow the national curriculum, whereas the country students appear to be left behind.

From these narratives, it is likely that both city children and teachers are enjoying more favourable living and learning conditions than the rural children, leading to a severe disparity in their performances and opportunities for learning and employment. The life circumstances of rural students disadvantage them and rural teachers are being challenged by working in underprivileged conditions. Teachers' central concern seems to focus on overcoming the unfavourable circumstances they find themselves in rather than developing their professional expertise.

#### *Access to Child-friendly Approaches of English Teaching and Learning*

##### *Child-friendly methods in classrooms.*

To young learners at the primary level, the selection of appropriate teaching and learning methods is of significance. As Cameron (2001) stresses, teaching children is not "simple and straightforward" (p.xii) even though young children's worldview is less complicated than older children's or adults'. All 6 cases emphasised that *how*

to teach children was much more important than *what* to teach. For example, due to the psychological and developmental characteristics of learners at primary age, it is impossible for teachers to use authority or power to force them to study in the same way as teachers at higher levels can (Pinter, 2011). Nor can they explain the importance or global status of English for their young students' career prospects. Rather, PEFL teachers better engage children with English learning by combining English language with songs, games and stories (Moon, 2000). In this sense, teaching young learners (YL) requires teachers to integrate pedagogic, psychological, affective and creative activities into their lessons (Linse, 2005). In most urban schools in Vietnam, PEFL teachers have created a child-friendly atmosphere to maintain children's interest in English learning:

I know that many teachers [in Danang] are very good at singing, dancing, and drawing. Their English is of course good too, so they know how to combine these things in English classes. In one teaching period [35 minutes], we often design at least three activities. For example, I use a game for the warm-up, a song for teaching vocabulary, and play or role play for free practice. (Huong)

Realising that textbooks used for PEFL teaching do not inspire young learners, another participant, Hong, used activities of entertainment and arts to create meaningful learning contexts: "When I teach animal names, I have to show the picture of a zoo and ask children what they can see there. This simple thing can arouse children's curiosity and interest". This way of adapting materials has a great impact on learning outcomes, as teachers can make their classroom a non-threatening, comfortable and stress-free environment (Moon, 2000).

Compared to the teaching and learning practices in urban areas, PEFL education in the countryside lags behind. Tuy, a participant in the study, admitted that PEFL teachers in most village schools did not utilise child-friendly activities. Instead, they were still influenced by traditional methods which were usually dominated by grammar translation. This teaching style may result in rural children having negative attitudes towards English learning, unlike their city fellows who are presented with interesting English lessons:

In most primary schools in the countryside, teachers just enter the classroom to show that they are teaching. They don't inspire children to learn English like teachers in cities. For example, in one teaching period, they ask children to open the textbook. They read some words and simple sentences, and then children repeat. For practice, the whole class do grammar and vocabulary exercises. Just a few teachers think of games or songs.

Looking at the ways children in the two regions access English language learning, as manifested in the teachers' perspectives, one can easily recognize inequality issues. More and more children in urban schools are provided with good conditions to maximise their learning efficiency, whereas many of their peers in the countryside have not even known a song or played a game in English classes. As a result, the

quality of English language teaching is generally poorer for rural children and, by the time they reach the later stages of higher education, they feel inferior to their fellow students who were educated in the city.

In addition to the large disparities in teaching approaches which lead to disadvantages for rural children, their socio-economic conditions and globalisation, with its attendant global spread of English, appear to make the gap wider still between the two areas. It is acknowledged that PEFL teachers in urban schools have made great efforts to renovate PEFL education. However, many parents in metropolitan cities are still not satisfied with their children's English learning. They think that English is a passport for their children to participate in a global context and gain economic capital. Not surprisingly, their children are sent to elite schools and international English centres to attend higher quality English classes taught by native English speakers (NES) According to McKay (2010), what parents invest for their children leads to "an economic divide in the learning of English" (p. 105). A mother in Danang city talks about her son's studies in an English centre:

NES teachers are very friendly. I know that Vietnamese teachers are also friendly and helpful, but they try to keep a distance between themselves and students. They may let students play games, but always stand and sit on the area around the teacher's desk and blackboard. NES teachers' approach to students is of course excellent. They always go to each student's seat to give support. Children feel that they are working and playing with a friend, not a teacher. For example, they also move on the floor and play with the kids. Vietnamese teachers never do that. They always show power to students. (Le)

Such an elite and ideal English class can only exist in the imagination of the young learners in rural schools while their PEFL teachers simply wish for their school to have basic facilities for language learning.

Entering the stage of primary education, many children in the countryside, the same as in any environment, have talent and aptitude for foreign language learning. However, the poor teaching and learning conditions prevent them from going very far on the path of English learning. The unfortunate reality is that teachers and their teaching approaches in most rural schools do not inspire and motivate children. In contrast, the PEFL teaching and learning practices in many urban schools have been innovated to catch up with current ELT trends in the Asian context.

*Teaching cultural practices and values.* Celce-Murcia (2008) highlights that learning a foreign language no longer focuses just on linguistic competence but also on other components, including cultural competence, in the communicative competence model. Understanding the significant role of culture in learning a foreign language, Vietnam educational policy makers emphasise the incorporation of cultural elements from both English-speaking and local cultures into the textbooks (X.V. Nguyen, 2003).



However, in the implementation of this policy, rural teachers might encounter a number of problems in imparting these cultural values to their students when a number of unfamiliar topics and values are embedded in the textbooks. The students in the city are likely to have fewer problems in understanding and applying what they are taught but it can, often, be a big challenge for country students to identify and realise such concepts. For rural students, this can also apply to even the local concepts, not just the ‘foreign’ ones.

I can see that children in my school know very little about other cultures, even our own cultural values are unknown to them. Some topics in the text book are unfamiliar to them. For example, most of my students do not even understand such places as: airport, hotel, museum or supermarket (in textbook for grade 4). When teaching this topic, I felt sorry for them, they are too poor to be entitled a chance to visit these places. For example, some of them cannot even imagine what a ‘museum’ is. I can see a dream in their eyes, a dream of coming to such places. (Thao)

Celebrating Christmas is an example of a cultural practice that is popular in English speaking countries but that may cause difficulties for the rural students:

When teaching about Christmas to city students, they seem to understand and be more familiar with the practice, to what people do on Christmas...but for the rural children, they have hardly ever heard of this concept or seen this event. (Thuong)

Therefore, it can be a challenge for teachers in rural areas to explain the message and the vocabulary related to such cultural topics. The data in this study showed a tension in teaching English to city and rural students with reference to the teaching of cultural values and concepts. This resulted from the inequality in cultural backgrounds and economic conditions between the two areas. A teacher in a private school talked about her experience in teaching simple values like ‘queuing’ as follows:

Besides teaching about festivals, we teach them about the lifestyles of people in developed countries. For example, our children are not used to queuing but we tried to encourage them to practice when teaching about buying food. I asked them to role-play, the children are very excited when learning these courtesies and are willing to do it. They feel they are more polite and civilized people. (Ly)

Besides teaching the literal meaning of a concept, they elaborated on the cultural values and their connotations. These teachers’ accounts supported a proposition that despite difficulties, they made every effort to enact their role not only as a language teacher but also as a cultural transmitter. The teachers managed to turn their teaching into interesting lessons with the support of more advanced students and with their own creativity.

I have also tried to create some visual teaching aids and encourage them to become involved in the activities. It was a nice surprise that many of my rural students can talk about Christmas through their imagination from reading and watching television. (Tam)

The data also suggested that, while teachers in the rural areas were struggling to teach such simple concepts such as ‘museum’ or ‘queuing’, the city teachers could challenge and empower their students by teaching about more complicated values or cultural aspects. The underpinning reason could be the higher level of living standards and conditions that allow them to have more experiences of such intricate concepts. For instance, when teaching to city students about the word ‘subway’ and ‘lunchbox’, even the city teachers could not find a real example to illustrate because there is no subway in Vietnam and a lunch box is not a familiar item either. However, the teachers were able to teach the terms by associating them with some cultural practice and values:

I tell them why there is lunchbox and what the children in the UK do with the lunchbox. I also tell them that this is a feature of children’s independence. They bring their lunch and serve themselves at school. This is different from Vietnamese children. They are excited to learn about this from their peers, they saw this as a good point to learn. They apply it to themselves and want to change. (Hong)

Through teaching such values, these teachers would expect the students to learn, selectively, some good values from other cultures and disseminate them to their parents, friends and communities.

I think these lessons are beneficial to them as they grow up and work in any environment; especially if they are equipped with basic social skills to live in an international context. (Huong)

Although the rural teachers were quite optimistic about such content in the textbooks and perceive these difficulties as a professional challenge, their stories have exposed the inequality of access to cultural norms and concepts among students and teachers between regions. This has reinforced the proposition that there exists inequitable access to the cultural values of different countries in English language teaching which results in learning that is of a poorer quality in rural areas.

#### *Stakeholders’ Participation and Engagement*

Stakeholders’ perspectives and participation in PEFL education can also have a great impact on teaching and learning outcomes. 3 of the teachers interviewed acknowledged that education leaders and ELT specialists in the cities were all concerned with PEFL education and made efforts regarding the implementation of innovative approaches to teaching and learning. For example, stakeholders at different levels have specific

and practical strategies for PEFL teachers' professional development (PD), the most prominent of which is a number of training workshops delivered to teachers. All of the teachers interviewed appreciated the beneficial changes for both teachers and learners as a result of appropriate PD policies. In the countryside, English, as a selective subject, is, according to many stakeholders of different levels, less important than numeracy and Vietnamese literacy. Not surprisingly, such differences contribute to inequality of access to English learning between the two areas.

Huong, an experienced teacher and a participant in this study, perceived excellent progress in her teaching performance and students' learning outcomes. She thought that such an achievement resulted from education leaders' support for the innovation of PEFL education. Knowledge of teaching methods she acquired in PD workshops has changed the teaching and learning quality in her English classes, as it has for other teachers:

When I began teaching, I didn't know how to teach in a child-friendly way. All of the [PEFL] teachers at that time just remembered their prior English learning experiences from their own time in school and then taught in the same way. I didn't use pictures or let children play games. But my teaching practice has changed a lot since 2008. I think the ELT specialist in Danang city and officials in the Department of Education are aware of the importance of English, so they have done all the best things for PEFL teaching.

However, in the countryside, stakeholders' participation suggests more commitment to their administrative duty as leaders than to the development of PEFL education. In a study of educational reform in Vietnam, Hamano (2008) concludes that a lack of PD opportunities will demotivate teachers and manifest as shortfalls of teachers in both quantity and quality. In PEFL education, Grassick (2007) found that workshops for teachers in local areas were limited and sporadic. According to Thao, a teacher in a village school, there has been hardly any training workshops for PEFL teachers in her local area. In the beginning period of PEFL teaching, she felt isolated because she could not share her experiences with colleagues who also taught PEFL. Instead, she familiarised herself with primary teaching approaches by learning from teachers of numeracy and literacy at school but she found there were differences between English and Vietnamese. She was unable to consult other PEFL teachers because English teaching and learning at the primary level was new to everyone.

I had to learn everything by myself. I figured out appropriate teaching methods. When I had any problems, I couldn't ask anyone in the school because I was the only one who taught English. Sometimes I consulted the ELT specialist in the Department of Education, but she said PEFL teaching was not her concern. She even told me that she was not responsible for PEFL teaching because that was the business of individual schools. The principal seemed to understand my difficulties, he observed some of my classes, but gave no feedback because he had no idea of ELT.

Stakeholders' participation is also exhibited in parents' involvement in their children's English learning. The emergence of English as a global language raises parents' awareness of the importance of this language for their children. As well as sending their children to international English centres, parents in cities have a variety of ways to become involved in their children's English learning. An increasing number of parents in metropolitan cities are competent in the English language, and so they can capitalise on their English expertise to help their children at home. Lan, a PEFL teacher at a renowned private school in Hanoi, talks about how parents are consulted to study English with their children:

In the meeting between parents and teachers in my school, I explain to them the content of the English curriculum. I also instruct them how to join in with the kids' English learning at home. For example, I encourage them to watch a cartoon in English with their children for 15 minutes. And then they can ask the kids to remember some words. Some parents are good at English; we encourage them to talk to the kids in English at home.

Most parents in the countryside do not have a strong academic and professional background and are less well equipped to get involved in their children's learning in the same ways as urban parents. Also, they seem to have little to no idea of the global impact of English. If they are interested in the schooling of children, they just think that it is important to invest in mathematics and Vietnamese literacy:

Many parents think that English means nothing with primary pupils. They just want their kids to study maths and Vietnamese. Some pupils didn't concentrate on the lessons in class; I told the parents the kids' problems. But they didn't care. Some even told me "no need to teach English to the kids in primary schools". I felt a little bit hurt when they made such a comment. (Thuong)

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the inequality of access to English language education at the primary level between urban and rural areas in Vietnam. The findings strengthen the proposition that inequality of access comes from teaching and learning conditions, teaching and learning methods and the level of engagement of different stakeholders. The emergence of these issues indicates that the implementation of the national language policy from macro- to micro- level in Vietnam has neglected the geographical and economic features of the stakeholders. These inequalities can, therefore, impede the success of the current operational policy and quality of PEFL.

Despite numerous efforts and generous funding from the National Foreign Language Project 2020 targeted towards improved language teaching and learning conditions, the voices of the participants in this study appeal for greater investment to provide sufficient facilities and materials in rural schools, which are those with the least opportunity in foreign language learning, as discussed by L. Nguyen

(2007). Indeed, this inequality of access in PEFL is reflected in the teachers' efforts to overcome the difficulties in their learning and teaching conditions. This current research has revealed a need for the provision of more, and better, teaching facilities along with academic support and professional development for rural teachers so that they can apply updated methods and knowledge to their teaching.

Empirical data from this study also suggest the ineffectiveness in the current model of professional training conducted by the MoET every summer, in which teachers are asked to participate in an intensive training programme with local experts. This form of training has proved to be a waste of money and effort due to the unavailability and lack of frequency of such activities. A number of models have been proposed to replace the transmissive approaches to the PD of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Burns & Richards, 2009). In particular, the social theory of learning by Wenger (1998) and socio-cultural perspectives (Johnson, 2009) are being implemented in a variety of EFL contexts that are similar to Vietnam. Given the paramount importance of the local context for teachers' PD, Johnson (2009) raises awareness that "L2 teacher education must take into account the social, political, economic and cultural histories that are located in the contexts where L2 teachers live, learn, and work" (p. 6). Therefore, a community-based model of professional development involving monthly in-service training from such professional institutions as TESOL, British Council and/or Universities' language teacher educators should be implemented.

This chapter also recommends the involvement of stakeholders at community levels in the process of professional development for teachers. It is evident from the data that teachers working in very humble learning and teaching conditions are eager to learn and to change. However, they receive little support from higher levels of management. In such contexts, there should be exchange programmes between teachers in cities and rural areas to further teachers' professional development. In the meantime, so as to avoid the increasing inequality in PEFL between regions, it is necessary to raise parents' social awareness of the importance of English in contemporary society so more adequate attention can be paid to their children's learning and development. Other possibilities for further research exist as well. Having found these inequities in the implementation of PEFL between rural and urban stakeholders, it would be interesting to investigate how any changes to these indicators could relate to improvements in city and country students, in order to better inform language policy planning and learning.

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