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The Relationship between Comparative Adult Basic Education Approaches and Poverty Alleviation in Selected Tay, H'mong, Dao and Black Thai Communities in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines two approaches to Adult Basic Education and their influence on accessing poverty alleviation resources in selected ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. In a multiple case study that relied heavily on structured and semi-structured interviews, investigations focused on the curricula, methodology, teacher / facilitator training, use of local languages, link to poverty alleviation and post-course use of literacy and literate environments by participants in each of the three selected case study communities.

Although there are numerous models and methods for implementing ABE programmes, this paper focuses on *Reflect* and the Government of Vietnam's Adult Literacy Programme implemented by local education authorities. *Reflect* an approach developed by ActionAid is based on the theory of conscientisation, pioneered by Paulo Freire. Adult learners explore development challenges and these become the basis to be taught literacy and numeracy skills. Findings concentrate on: How do differences in ABE / literacy approaches impact on how specific ethnic minorities access specific poverty alleviation resources in Vietnam?

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Introduction

This is a study that investigates the relationship between Comparative Adult Basic Education (ABE) Approaches and accessing poverty alleviation resources in selected ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. The study has been conducted over a period of four years from the development of the Research Proposal in April 2008 to the completion of the thesis in June 2012. This paper outlines an overview of the study, reasons and rationale for undertaking the study, the relationship between the researcher and the area of research and includes study objectives and specific research questions. In addition the methodological approach is summarised providing the reader with an overview of the approach and a concise overview of the research findings and recommendations.

1.2 Study Overview

The examination of two approaches to Adult Basic Education (ABE) and their influence on accessing poverty alleviation resources in specific ethnic minority communities in Vietnam constitutes the main objective of this study. This investigation has been conducted as a multiple case study relying heavily on qualitative data gathered from structured and semi-structured interviews. The main focus of investigations centred on the curricula, methodology, teacher / facilitator training, use of local languages, link to poverty alleviation and post-course use of literacy and literate environments by ABE participants in each of the three selected case study communities.

Although in Vietnam and throughout the developing world there are many models and methods for implementing ABE programmes, this study focuses on *Reflect* and the Government of Vietnam's (GoV) Adult Literacy Programme implemented by local education authorities (DOET). *Reflect* is an approach that is implemented by ActionAid and is based on the theory of conscientisation, developed by the Brazilian educator and pioneer of critical pedagogy Paulo Freire (Freire, 1973, ActionAid Vietnam 2011). Development challenges are explored by adult learners and these challenges become the basis for a participatory learner centred curriculum. This unconventional approach is compared and contrasted with the more conventional functional literacy approach of DOET using the Government of Vietnam (GoV) poverty alleviation programme P135 as a measurement of the influence both approaches have on access and participation. The rationale for using P135 as a measurement of access and participation is based on its implementation in all designated poor communes in Vietnam which helped to increase choices for research locations and scope for the potential application

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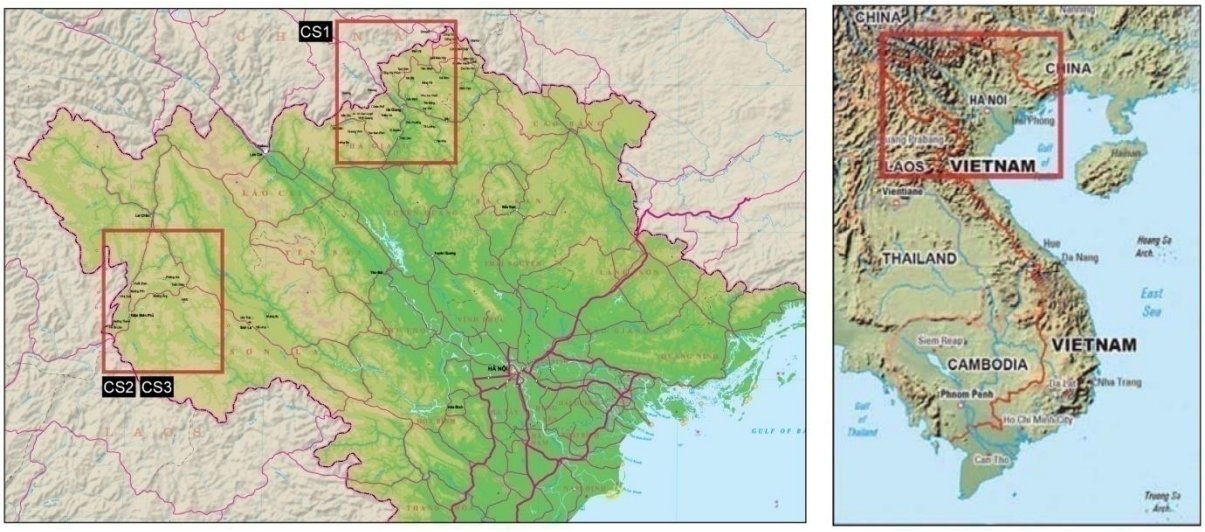
of research findings. Research findings concentrate on answering the main research question that focuses on how differences in ABE approaches impact on how specific ethnic minorities access specific poverty alleviation resources in Vietnam (see CSA, 2009, Nguyen and Baulch, 2007, Swinkles and Turk, 2008).

Map 1.1: Location of Study (CS1, CS2, CS3)



Source: FFI (2004) Vietnam Nature Tourism Map

1.3 Study Relevance

The reasons and rationale for undertaking this study stem from the concentration of poverty alleviation interventions in Vietnam in ethnic minority regions where Kinh (Vietnamese) is not the main language spoken and where the indigenous cultures have been developing for hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years. While it is widely acknowledged that Vietnam has recorded significant progress in alleviating poverty in the last 25 years, ethnic minority groups who represent 14% of the population account for 52% of the poor. Recent research confirms that the proportion of ethnic minority poor is disproportionate to their overall percentage of the population. Geographical location, cultural diversity and differences in economic and educational development contribute to this over-representation of ethnic minorities living in poverty (CSA, 2009).

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Although there have been many studies that correlate general education, particularly primary and secondary, with the achievement of overall development ambitions in Vietnam there has been a lack of specific research on the relationship between Adult Basic Education (ABE) and poverty alleviation. Research from the World Bank and supported by data from the Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS) indicates that in spite of a concerted effort by the government and donors to alleviate and reduce poverty, ethnic minorities lag behind the mainstream Kinh majority population. This study attempts to directly investigate tangible links between ABE, with a particular focus on adult literacy in Kinh, with accessing and participating in government poverty alleviation programmes. In order to include mainstream and alternative approaches to ABE both the government approach and Freirean *Reflect* approach have been investigated.

The government ABE approach based on functional literacy principles developed by UNESCO in the 1960s has in recent years been curtailed due to the acclaimed successes of the final nationwide 'Eradication of Illiteracy' drive in the 1990s. Official statistics indicate that over 96% of the population is now literate in lowland Kinh areas and over 90% in remote rural ethnic minority areas. According to official and independent surveys the majority of illiterate adults are now concentrated in poor ethnic minority communities which are supported by poverty alleviation programmes such as P135.

Reflect is active in a large number of ethnic minority provinces in Vietnam and is implemented by ActionAid Vietnam and a number of other INGOs and local NGOs. The *Reflect* approach attempts to directly link adult literacy with community development issues placing an emphasis on dialogue and action, awareness-raising, cooperation and empowerment. In contrast to conventional ABE approaches *Reflect* participants explore local development challenges in an attempt to find localised solutions. By including both approaches in this particular study there is an opportunity to look more closely at what adult participants learn in ABE interventions and how these interventions impact on participants' access and participation in P135. By focusing on specific elements of both approaches such as curriculum development, methodology, teacher / facilitator training and methods, use of local languages, links to poverty alleviation, and post-course use of literacy and literate environments the impact of each approach can be compared and contrasted using access and participation in P135 as a tangible basis for measurement.

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In doing so it is hoped that the scope and robustness of this research will be improved and that findings reflect an unbiased evaluation of the impact of two ABE approaches on a specific government poverty alleviation programme that has been implemented countrywide since 1999. A third phase of P135 is now under consideration by the government and it is hoped that findings from this limited study can contribute to a better understanding of the potential influence of ABE on programme objectives. The literature review and theoretical framework endeavours to link both national and international theory and practice in ABE and poverty alleviation to help contextualise the aims and objectives of this research. Vietnam as an active member of the UN and signatory of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All Compact has developed localised strategies to achieve targets and goals that bind national interventions to international global ambitions. It is in both these contexts that this particular study has been located and it is hoped that this provides a relevant framework that helps to justify the time and endeavour needed to complete this investigation.

1.4 Researcher's Background in Vietnam

The researcher's association with educational and development issues in Vietnam began in 1998 during a three year placement as a teacher trainer with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) in Da Lat Teacher Training College located in the Central Highlands. The following eleven years 2001-12 have been spent working on various development programmes supporting rural development and poverty alleviation in mainly ethnic minority areas and conducting research on the impact of ABE on accessing poverty alleviation resources.

During the course of this direct involvement in development projects in Vietnam the experience as a development practitioner has gradually led the researcher to the realisation that further research was required in order to fully understand the impact of ABE on government and donor poverty alleviation interventions. After spending most of these 14 years living and working in ten provinces with a high proportion of ethnic minority people, issues relating to language, literacy, communication and implementation of various programme objectives began to formulate recognisable patterns. Although the researcher has been involved in directly supporting ABE initiatives and understood the general importance of ABE to achieving development goals this was not fully appreciated until the link between levels of participation were correlated to different ethnic groups during the researcher's involvement with the Sida Chia Se (Sharing) poverty alleviation programme from 2006-2008.

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In this programme supported by the Swedish and Vietnamese governments access and participation results were significantly higher in one more predominately Kinh (Vietnamese speaking) province compared to the two other predominately ethnic minority provinces. As an adviser who had worked for the first year (2006) in the Kinh province and later moved to work in one of the ethnic minority provinces, the differences in awareness and participation while partly explained by more top-down management styles and cultural differences were perceived to be possibly linked to participants' levels of ABE. It was during the final period of the researcher's involvement in this particular programme that the proposal for this research on the relationship between ABE and accessing poverty alleviation was developed and accepted by the University of Dublin, School of Education.

While the researcher has been involved in supporting programmes directly and indirectly in both of the provinces in this research (Ha Giang and Dien Bien), including the collaboration with ActionAid *Reflect* and advice to DOET ABE interventions in Dien Bien, during intermittent periods of involvement between 2002 and 2005 with the EU Son La Lai Chau Rural Development Programme (EU SLLCRDP), mechanisms were integrated into the research design and methodology to reduce the conscious and sub-conscious intrusion of biased opinions and attitudes. Advice from Yin (2009) was particularly helpful in avoiding bias while collecting case study evidence and every effort was made to acquire Yin's proposed skill set necessary for effective case study enquiry prior to the commencement of data collection (Yin, 2009, 69). Familiarity with the socio-economic and cultural diversity of the three case study locations created distinct advantages for the researcher in organising and conducting data collection and personal and professional relationships within both provinces were invaluable while negotiating access to research sites, individuals and official documentation (see Map 1.1). A conscious effort in the development of the research design that incorporated diverse ABE and poverty alleviation theories and concepts assisted in the development of an approach that helped to triangulate findings using multiple data sources in order to limit the influence of bias.

1.5 Research Objectives and Questions

The research objectives concentrate on completing an investigation of the relationship between Adult Basic Education (ABE) and accessing poverty alleviation resources in selected ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. The main objectives can be summarised as follows:

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- Investigate two approaches to ABE / literacy (*Reflect* and DOET / GoV Adult Literacy Programmes) with a focus on the following:

    1. Curriculum
    2. Methodology
    3. Teacher / facilitator training and methods
    4. Use of local languages
    5. Link to poverty alleviation
    6. Post-course use of literacy and literate environments by participants.

- Measure the impact of approaches on participants' access and participation in poverty alleviation programme P135 II and incorporating the planning and implementation of the following outcome objectives of P135 II.

    1. Production development
    2. Infrastructure development
    3. Capacity building
    4. Improvement of socio-cultural living standards.

- Explore the impediments to accessing adult education and poverty alleviation resources.

The main study objectives as outlined above are developed to assist in answering the following overall research question and sub-questions.

Research Question

- How do differences in ABE / Literacy approaches impact on how specific ethnic minority adults access specific poverty alleviation resources in Vietnam?

Research sub-questions

- Are there differences between the *Reflect* and DOET Adult Literacy approaches?

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- How do different approaches to ABE / adult literacy impact on ethnic minority adults' participation in poverty alleviation programmes in Vietnam?
- What are the impediments to accessing ABE resources for specific ethnic minority adults?
- What are the impediments to accessing poverty alleviation resources from P135II for specific ethnic minority adults?
- Are policy changes implied by the research findings? What are these?

1.6 Methodological Approach

Having explored the available approaches and attended workshops related to undertaking educational research in development contexts it was decided after considerable discussion and reflection to conduct this research as a mixed methods multiple case study. Because of the nature of the research, location of the communes and ethnographic uniqueness of the populations a case study approach was considered the most appropriate and culturally sensitive methodology to use. The researcher's experience of living and working in the region and understanding of the potential limitations of exclusively quantitative survey methods in areas with poor communications, lower literacy levels and restrictive and bureaucratic barriers helped to identify a case study as an appropriate methodological approach. In addition the advice and warnings of Yin (2009) and Chambers (2008) were taken into consideration throughout this rather lengthy process.

In essence this study relies heavily on qualitative data collected using in-depth structured and semi-structured interviews and observations during field visits to case study sites. A substantial amount of quantitative data from official government documentation, statistics, reports and archival records has been used to supplement qualitative data. In the development of the 7 in-depth structured and 10 semi-structured interview forms, questions focus on research objectives and answering the overall study questions. In total there were 64 interviews as well as over 20 informal interviews conducted inside and outside the confines of the three case study areas. Questions were piloted in locations similar to the case study areas in one of the selected provinces (Dien Bien) and adjusted based on feedback, experiences and practical considerations. General guidelines from Robson (2002, 253), Bryman (2008, 42) and Kvale (1996) were used in the development of in-depth and semi-structured interview

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schedules.

All interviews were conducted in both English and Vietnamese (Kinh) with the researcher's questions being translated to interviewees into Vietnamese (Kinh) and replies translated back into English by the research assistant. At no stage during the 9 separate fieldtrips (38 days) to the three case study locations was it necessary to use local ethnic language interpreters. All in-depth and semi-structured interviews were recorded in both written and audio formats. Data collection in case study locations and other locations in Vietnam was conducted over a twelve month period from September 2010 to September 2011. In addition to interviews in case study locations there were interviews with government agencies, donors, INGOs, NGOs and UN agencies and Irish Aid and Embassy officials in Ha Noi. Follow-up interviews on a second trip to Vietnam were conducted with ActionAid, research centres and Irish Aid in April / May 2012.

Following suggestions from Yin (2009) the triangulation of information from multiple sources including documents, archival records, interviews and observations helped to develop converging lines of inquiry and increased the robustness and reliability of the case study evidence. The development of a case study protocol that included an overview of the study, field procedures, case study questions and an outline of the case study report helped to guide the researcher and inform local authorities and agencies about the aims and objectives of the study. Because of the size of this document and the time needed to study and understand its contents a more concise version of the study objectives was used during individual interviews.

A continuous process of document analysis was conducted prior to, during and after the completion of field research. The recording of interviews, observations and field notes detailing summaries of events and the researcher's initial reflections were conducted using principles developed by Bryman (2008, 417). In total there were three large A4 size research journals used in the recording and analysis of case study evidence during this study. The use of images and to a limited extent video augmented recordings and field notes. Images play an important role in the portrayal of geographical locations, socio-economic conditions and ethnographic and physical environments in each of the three case study locations. While each case study description provides geographical, historical, social, economical and ethnographic context for the reader it is difficult without prior experience of the region to visualise local realities without the inclusion of images.

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Cross-case synthesis techniques have been used to analyse data from this multiple case study research. This technique treats each individual case study as a separate study and following the advice of Yin (2009, 160) word tables have been developed to display the data from individual cases according to a uniformed framework in order to enhance argumentative interpretation. Strong, plausible and fair arguments are supported by data using this technique throughout this study. In this study aspects of validity and reliability were considered as important requirements for the development of effective and credible conclusions. The multiple aspects of validity and reliability that are outlined in Chapter 4 by Cohen et al. (2007), Hammersley (1992), LeCompte and Prissle (1993), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Kvale (1996) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) helped to guide the researcher when conducting field work and data collection. The 'Integrative Framework for Inference Quality' developed by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) was utilised extensively to keep a check on aspects of research design and interpretive quality.

During the course of this research all ethical considerations as outlined by Cohen et al. (2007, 51-57) in planning and implementing research were adhered to. The integrity and wishes of the individuals and groups who took part in this research were respected and at no stage were participants involved without their knowledge and consent, coerced or misinformed about the nature of the research, or deceived.

2.1 Study Summary

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between Adult Basic Education (ABE) and accessing poverty alleviation resources in selected ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. The selection of the communities was based on protracted negotiations with relevant government agencies, NGOs / INGOs and local authorities. The final selection of the three case study sites in Ha Giang and Dien Bien provinces was influenced by their compatibility with the main study objectives, permission to conduct data collection field-trips as well as important ethical and logistical considerations.

The development of overall study objectives in 2009 before undertaking fieldwork provided a realistic roadmap and reference for all who participated in this research. The literature review combines elements of ABE and poverty alleviation theory in order to develop a theoretical framework that combines both fields of study in a conscious attempt to conceptualise and

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locate this research in a Vietnamese and international context. Concepts of ABE outlining definitions of ABE and the various theoretical perspectives including Freirean and functional literacy elements provide a framework for evaluating ABE as an agent for social change, linking specific initiatives in Vietnam to the Education for All Compact and Millennium Development Goals ambitions. There has been a conscious attempt in this study to build on significant research studies that focused on ethnic minority poverty and development in Vietnam in an attempt to include specific research findings linking education and poverty alleviation with the aims and objectives of this particular research. By focusing study objectives on investigating the relationship between ABE and accessing poverty alleviation resources it was necessary to integrate both elements into a theoretical framework that assisted in an empirical and reliable measurement of this phenomenon.

The government poverty alleviation Programme 135II became the main focus for measuring access and participation of ABE beneficiaries from the *Reflect* and MOET / DOET courses. In addition to exploring impediments to accessing ABE resources impediments to accessing poverty alleviation resources were also examined. Throughout this research there was a focus on the main study question which investigated how differences in ABE approaches impact on how specific ethnic minority adults access specific poverty alleviation resources. In answering the main research question sub-questions relating to differences between ABE approaches and the impact of these approaches on participation in programmes after gaining access were addressed and outlined.

From a methodological perspective there was a reliance on qualitative data collected using structured and semi-structured interviews, observations, documentation and archival records. Following the advice of Yin (2009) a multiple case study approach concentrating on three remote ethnic minority communes with both ABE and P135II interventions was applied. While this increased the scope of the investigation prolonging data collection and analysis the robustness and possibilities for generalisation of research finding was significantly improved.

2.2 Major Findings

Major findings based on the study objectives and summary of the overall research findings will be highlighted below. In order to avoid repetition and to concentrate on significant findings that link directly to research questions major finding will be outlined in a succinct

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format under headings that lead to achievable recommendations.

2.2.1 Impact of ABE Approaches on Access to P135II

- ABE approaches that deliver good overall levels of literacy in Kinh provide a necessary platform for participants to understand the objectives and regulations of P135II thus improving access.
- ABE approaches that provide participants with an awareness of P135II and other poverty alleviation programmes enhance possibilities of access. Findings indicate that the *Reflect* approach provides better awareness.
- ABE teachers / facilitators who are trained in PRA methods and aware of and understand poverty alleviation strategy and community development are better equipped to create and develop awareness among participants.
- Trained ABE teachers / facilitators, who are from a local ethnic group, understand local languages and cultural sensitivities are more effective at integrating awareness of poverty alleviation interventions into ABE curricula irrespective of method used.
- ABE approaches that invest in teacher and facilitator training focusing on adult learning styles and adult teaching methodology linking curricula with community development issues are more likely to impact on access to P135II.
- ABE approaches that use participatory methodology such as PRA have the potential to impact access to P135II and other poverty alleviation interventions provided that these interventions embrace and promote participation.
- ABE approaches that deliver additional skills such as agricultural, animal husbandry, income-generation and credit management skills provide participants with additional basic knowledge that does not necessarily improve access to training courses targeting these skills conducted by P135II and other programmes. Findings indicate that *Reflect* is significantly better at delivering these additional skills.

2.2.2 Impact of ABE Approaches on Participation in P135II

- ABE approaches that deliver good levels of literacy in Kinh enhance participation and

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benefits from all 4 components of P135II. Literacy in Kinh is essential for meaningful participation in P135II meetings, training, capacity building, evaluation and improvement in socio-cultural living standards. *Reflect* in this study (CS2) when implemented in its pure form by a well trained and dedicated local facilitator proved equal to DOET in delivering good levels of literacy.

- ABE approaches can impact participation in the planning of P135II interventions by empowering participants to speak up and lobby for benefits. In this study *Reflect* was significantly more effective (CS2) when implemented by an aware and informed local facilitator.
- ABE approaches with motivated local teachers / facilitators who understand participants' needs are more likely to encourage participation in planning and evaluation meetings of P135II than teachers / facilitators from outside the commune and ethnic group. *Reflect* in CS2 and to a lesser extent DOET in CS3 were more effective at encouraging participation.
- ABE approaches that provide PRA skills have the potential to improve participation in all aspects of P135II provided that P135II interventions are conducted using grassroots bottom-up principles. *Reflect* provided these skills to all participants in this study to various degrees. Evidence indicates that CS2 participants have sustained these skills and continue to utilise them.
- ABE approaches that include agricultural techniques and animal husbandry skills in their curriculum provide participants with a distinct advantage when taking part in P135II production development training. *Reflect* includes these skills when requested using PRA methods by participants.

2.2.3 Impediments to Participation in P135II

- Limited P135II funding at commune and especially village level impedes participation. All three case study locations had limited funding to fully incorporate all villages in P135II.
- Prioritisation of community infrastructure restricts limited funding for other components that include training and capacity building. All three case study locations

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prioritised community infrastructure. In CS2 *Reflect* had significantly higher participation levels in P135II training compared to CS1 and CS3.

- Limited use of needs assessments before planning impedes participation. All three case study locations used needs assessments but only in CS2 was this implemented with the meaningful involvement of villagers. CS1 and CS3 needs assessments utilised opinions from village leaders.
- Methodology used in planning, training and evaluation restricts participation. No systematic use of participatory methods in all three case study areas for planning, training and evaluation of interventions.
- Budget restrictions impede the use of PRA which could improve meaningful participation. Evidence from all three case study locations confirms this.
- Use of Kinh for all communications, meetings, training and reporting excludes meaningful participation for illiterate villagers. The development of alternative methods of communication using local languages combined with a re-evaluation of strategies for conducting meetings, trainings and reporting would help to involve illiterate villagers in a more meaningful way. Use of PRA methods is a viable alternative according to findings in this study.
- Location of participants in relation to P135II activities and interventions impacts levels of participation. The further families live away from commune centres the less likelihood that they will participate in P135II.
- Mobility of villagers and lack of transport and roads to travel to P135II activities impedes availing of facilities and interventions. Findings in this study indicate that villagers who live in remote hamlets (Na Lun CS1) are particularly affected by mobility restrictions. Because of traditional residential locations of ethnic groups such as the H'mong and Dao these groups have been particularly disadvantaged in this regard.

2.2.4 Impediments to Accessing Adult Education Resources

- Limited availability of resources and activities restricts access. All three case study areas have limited ABE resources. Ethnic groups who reside near to district and provincial centres have better access to limited ABE resources. In this regard the Tay

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and Thai ethnic groups are better located. However, in all three case study areas people are relatively poor and dependent on GoV support for resources.

- Location of residence when outside commune and village centres impedes access as most available resources / activities are located in commune or village centres. In CS1 70% of *Reflect* participants were particularly disadvantaged because of residential location. These were from the H'mong and Dao ethnic groups. Thai and Tay ethnic groups are better located to avail of ABE and general education resources as schools and learning centres are situated in commune centres.

- Complicated and expensive ABE management structures impede effectiveness diverting limited funding from essential ABE interventions. In this study *Reflect* in CS2 had the most efficient and cost-effective management structure while receiving sustainable support from the local NGO CCD. ActionAid in CS1 was evaluated as providing the least efficient and cost-effective management structure.

- Limited and effective use and location of CLC facilities impedes participation. Both CS1 and CS3 have large new CLC buildings with limited resources and located in commune centres that are difficult for participants who live outside the commune centre to avail of. In both CLCs activities were limited and the effective use of both CLCs is restricted by limited resources and funding.

- Time, motivation and incentives for adult villagers to take part in ABE activities are inhibiting factors that impact on participation. Findings indicate that all three case study participant groups are inhibited by these factors. However, *Reflect* in CS1 and particularly CS2 provide incentives linking micro-credit to ABE activities and the provision of small animals (chickens, ducks) and agricultural training to participants. In CS3 successful completion of DOET courses was rewarded with official DOET literacy and post-literacy certificates that could be used to prove literacy and produced to gain a place on DOET continuing and complementary education programmes. *Reflect* participants are particularly disadvantaged by lack of recognised accreditation.

- Limited literate environments impede the development of gains made by ABE interventions and increase the possibility of participants becoming re-illiterate. Findings show that all three case study locations have limited literate environments.

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> *Reflect* participants in CS1 were more disadvantaged because of residential location, lack of stable electricity and inadequate support from *Reflect* management and local authorities. Again this disadvantage was exacerbated along ethnic lines and H'mong and Dao participants because of the remoteness of their villages, hamlets and isolated farms are more likely to be living in areas with limited ABE resources and activities. Findings in all three case studies indicate that the development of literate environments are not calibrated and honed to include local perceptions and expectations.

Major findings as listed above directly address study objectives and research findings from the literature. The link between the major findings and the literature review will be briefly outlined in these concluding paragraphs. Studies conducted by researchers from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) school of thought advocate the development of literate environments based on the social and cultural interpretation of literacy by targeted communities. This idea of developing situated literacies based on literacy use as opposed to advocating one dominant model for all as the basis for improving the literate environments in ethnic minority communities is supported in this study. Ethnographic approaches to literacy in countries where there exists a dominant indigenous literacy and other suppressed literacies as promoted by the NLS and outlined in the literature (see Trudell and Klass, 2010; Wedin, 2008; Street and Lefstein, 2008; Barton, 1994; Street, 1994) are more likely to be sustained in the three case study sites investigated. Although the use of local ethnic language literacy would help to reinforce a social and cultural connection to ABE there is evidence in this study from interviews and observations that the resources and commitment needed to revive written ethnic scripts in Thai, Tay, H'mong and Dao languages are not present.

Recent research in Vietnam identifies education as a central pillar in the development of sustainable poverty alleviation strategy among ethnic minority communities. As gaps between the majority and minority groups grow, differences in education levels reinforce disadvantage leading to less mobility, less access to credit and from findings in this study less access to and participation in poverty alleviation interventions. In this study the importance of ABE for the achievement of GoV and donor development goals including the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals supports the literature and case study evidence confirms the prioritisation in education strategy on resources for primary and secondary education development at the expense of ABE. Investments in primary and secondary education without

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parallel support for ABE and the development of culturally sensitive literate environments runs the risk of locating literacy in an exclusively school environment while neglecting its sustainable growth in the community as a whole.

2.3 Recommendations

Recommendations arising from having conducted this study are based on the implications of findings for ABE and Poverty Alleviation policies. Recommendations for ABE policies centre on the location of ABE activities, provision of material and human resources, development of CLCs and enhancing literate environments.

2.3.1 ABE Policy

- Locate all ABE activities including *Reflect* and DOET close to target groups and particularly isolated villages and hamlets. Instead of participants travelling long distances to attend ABE activities encourage the mobility of local ethnic minority trainers, facilitators and teachers to provide activities in villages and hamlets using local houses when satellite schools / CLCs don't exist.
- Conduct needs assessments before developing ABE interventions. Support initiatives with the development of local ethnic minority human and material resources.
- Develop the CLC concept in line with local needs and expectations. Encourage efficient and cost-effective management and organisation of ABE. Provide adult libraries and equipment when establishing CLCs. Develop a concept of satellite CLCs utilising existing satellite primary schools or cultural houses when possible.
- Enhance literate environments with appropriate and culturally relevant reading and audio material. Link ABE activities to social, economic and cultural realities.

Implications of research findings for poverty alleviation policy centre on the scope and planning, funding for components and methodology used in planning, training and evaluation.

2.3.2 Poverty Alleviation Policy

- Develop P135 to be more inclusive in planning and prioritising activities by using a bottom-up approach starting at village level using needs assessments. Involve

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villagers in all aspects of planning and decision making including Monitoring and Evaluation (M+E) and Operation and Maintenance (O+M) activities.

- Increase funding and focus more on production development and improving socio-economic living standards. Include access to micro-credit and reduce funding spent on procuring free handouts of seeds, tools and equipment.
- Plan community infrastructure based on better access for isolated villages and hamlets.
- Develop training and capacity building based on literacy levels. Focus training on villagers and increase budgets and training days using trainers from local ethnic groups.
- Use PRA methodology for all aspects of P135 including planning, training, M+E and O+M.
- Utilise participants' local indigenous knowledge, culture, language and skills to develop programme objectives.

2.4 Study Limitations

The limitations of a relatively small scale study located in three rural ethnic minority communes in two remote provinces in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam are obvious. The region has thousands of communes and over thirty different ethnic groups spread out in ten provinces. While findings are limited and can only be considered applicable in the communes, districts and provinces where the study was situated, there are also aspects that reflect the general situation regarding ABE and poverty alleviation in the region as a whole. P135II, DOET and *Reflect* ABE approaches have been implemented in all ten provinces using similar management and implementation structures. However, findings may have been different if the study was conducted in different locations and therefore may not be generalisable to other contexts. This has been acknowledged in the development of the methodological framework and choice of using a case study approach. There has been a considerable effort to guarantee the validity and reliability of this study and the potential for bias was counter balanced by methodological triangulation and adherence to strict ethical codes. It is therefore hoped that the limitations have helped to locate this study in the general context of other studies conducted in the region and among similar ethnic minority groups.

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2.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Suggestions for further research based on major findings and recommendations centre on two interconnected areas. The first area relates directly to findings linking the importance of ABE with a particular emphasis on literacy in Kinh to accessing and participating in GoV poverty alleviation programmes. As most of these programmes are situated in remote mountainous areas targeting ethnic minority groups there is a need for further research on:

- The impact of illiteracy / limited literacy in Kinh on the overall effectiveness of GoV poverty alleviation interventions.
- The use of communication, planning, training and evaluation methodology that relies heavily on didactic methods that require high levels of literacy in Kinh to be effective.
- Comparative study on the impact of participatory approaches on community awareness, understanding of and involvement in GoV poverty alleviation programmes.

The second area is related to research on sustaining ABE gains and enhancing literate environments in ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

- Ethnographic research on the understanding and use of literacy in Kinh in communities where indigenous languages are the first language used in the home and community.
- Development of self-sustainable village situated ABE models utilising local facilitators and approaches that match local expectations and ethnic sensitivities.

2.6 Reflections

Personal reflections on the 'research journey' are too many and subjective to include in a short paragraph. Considering the process involved and the four years of continuous learning and reflection there have been some important watersheds. In order to narrow down the research to suit an independent researcher working mostly alone there was a lot of time spent developing overall study objectives. Although this was eventually articulated on one side of an A4 sheet of paper the focus that resulted from its development acted as a roadmap for the completion of the study. In hindsight and reflection it was the most important page in the entire thesis and had it been developed at an earlier stage valuable time and effort might have been saved. Other lessons learned while conducting this study include the negotiation of

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complicated and bureaucratic procedures that were necessary to convince gatekeepers of the relevance and value of this study to the paradigms of ABE and poverty alleviation enquiry in Vietnam.

As a practitioner who has been involved at the 'coalface' of ABE and poverty alleviation development for over ten years in Vietnam it was not easy to adapt to full-time academic enquiry. From the literature and development of the methodological framework I have learned much about ethical approaches to research that consider aspects relating to improving robustness that are often understated while under pressure to implement project ambitions in the field. I believe that my research has contributed in a limited way to understanding the dynamics and relationship between ABE and implementing poverty alleviation programmes in selected ethnic minority communities in Vietnam and that it will hopefully help to encourage further research in this field.

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