

Educational Disparities of Ethnic Minorities in Lao PDR with Comparative Cases from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis has been to explore and systematize the factors and influences, gendered perspectives, and interrelationships in educational equality in Lao PDR with comparative perspectives from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand. The effects of ethnic minority cultures and linguistics, socio-economics, governmental policy, and national and local infrastructure have been analyzed using social and human capital theories through social constructivism.

As this thesis will show, teacher salaries, all-season road access, and linguistic differences, imbedded in these areas have prevented educational equality and hindered nationalistic agendas aimed at creating stronger states through weak infrastructure and lack of capacity to implement government policies. That has hindered the socio-economic opportunities and educational attainments of ethnic minorities, especially women, in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand.

Thus, the social and human capital of ethnic minorities have the potential to grow and provide better educational equality along with achieving nationalistic agendas of economically stronger states by addressing the interrelated issues discussed in this thesis.

Key Words: Education, Ethnic Minority, Policies, Linguistics, Teachers, and Government Capacity.

1. Introduction

Education, despite poverty, is something that cannot be taken away from a person, and it forms a person's intellectual identity and increases their worth in a globalized world by being part of collective social and human capital. Ethnic minority women in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand have had few opportunities for education and to improve their ethnic group's status via that education due to many factors including linguistics, accessibility, finances, and state marginalization. With focuses from gender perspectives, educational, and social construction perspectives this thesis outlines the need to research, and thereby, improve the lot for women in ethnic minorities in those countries in order to meet the rapidly globalizing climate of the twenty-first century.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The study of educational disparities by gender for ethnic minorities in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand provides a window on groups of people at a significant time period in their changing culture based on internal and external factors of nationalism, traditional life, livelihoods, and values against a more globalized society and the roles that people play in it. Many ethnic minorities occupy some of the most poverty stricken areas of these countries due to their marginalized status and traditional ways of life; therefore, educational advancement is of concern. The women in particular have been forced to sacrifice education due to various reasons. Therefore, a contrast of the educational opportunities for many of the same minority ethnic groups in these different countries has its own comparisons and contrasts by location. Therefore, although the main focus is on Lao PDR, the cases of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand are also incorporated.

As these countries struggle to become stronger states within Southeast Asia, issues like equal opportunities for ethnic minorities will come to greater attention in the globalized world. Also, educational development could be key to ethnic minority

survival as employment conditions and exploitation of natural resources have been changing exponentially in Southeast Asia. In order to surmount those challenges and help in cohesive ethnic survival, women will most likely need to be better educated as their roles within their societies and families begin to change. All of these conditions would not only change the entirety of marginalized women in minority ethnic groups, but it could most likely affect the national standards of living and the future development projects of the country. Thus, a comparative perspective using cases from Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand has been employed due to many of the same ethnic minority groups as well as wider linguistic ties throughout the region. The governments of Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia have also shared similar socialist ideologies in the past with Lao PDR and Vietnam closely linked even in the present making them especially good comparisons for education policy.

Research Question:

- What are the factors behind educational disparities for children of ethnic minorities in Lao PDR with comparative cases from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand?

Sub-questions:

- What influence do these factors have on education?
- How would these factors rank in terms of addressing the educational issues in order to change them?
- Does educational disparity also have a gendered dimension?

1.2 Design of Study

1.2.1 Comparative Case Study

For my research into educational disparities, I have employed exploratory comparative case study research, as outlined by Yin (2008: 5 and 6) and Creswell (2007: 73). This has been used to gather, process, interpret, and correlate qualitative and quantitative data among Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand due to the close cultural, ethnic, and linguistic ties of the minority ethnic groups these countries share in their border regions.

I employed a syncretic approach combining positivist and interpretivist epistemological methods through the use of official reports, policies, and national statistics. I further employed a gendered approach along with social constructivism and social capital theory, which included the corollary of education as human capital, supported by quantitative data within the comparative cases of the four countries. This mixed approach effectively supported the qualitative research of this study and complimented my overall analysis.

1.2.2 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Analysis from the standpoint of social constructivism in order to “unmask” the issues related to educational opportunities for girls of minority ethnic groups regarding primary school education is meant to be an overall theme of my research (Hacking, 2001: 53 and 56). The principle parts of the issue regarding gender in ethnic culture and linguistics, government policy, socio-economics, and infrastructure benefited through analysis of the methods and constituted parts that constructed these aspects and how they were interrelated. Therefore, social constructivism provided the basis and the vehicle that allowed for a triangulated case study on educational disparities by gender to be most effective.

Within that vein of thought, Bacchi (2008: 53) stated that social constructivism was an intrinsic process due to how the principle actors placed themselves in time and space; therefore, the qualitative knowledge gained of what was important to families in ethnic minorities in a specific educational context was important to the opportunities for girls in primary school attainment. Thus, using Bacchi’s (2008) approach of “What’s the Problem?” provided a starting point for social constructivism in using multi-faceted aspects of ethnic minority realities in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand to analyze the situation. And thereby, provision for analyzing the interrelationships in “unmasking” the issues within social constructivism was possible, as Hacking described (2001: 53).

According to Bacchi, a “What’s the Problem?” approach within social constructivism was built from “deconstructing the social problem constructions on offer”

(2008: 51). Therefore, several aspects dealing with educational opportunities for girls of primary school age in ethnic minorities in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand would have entailed a deconstruction of government educational policies and applications, socio-economics related to minority ethnic groups, perceptions and issues of education by minority ethnic groups, and rural infrastructure in order to more fully understand the complex issues that have created and shaped these components. From there, it was possible to fundamentally illuminate the interrelated processes and factors that have affected the educational opportunities provided to girls within minority ethnic groups based upon the deconstructed challenges that they have had and continued to face.

Social capital theory also provided the necessary theoretical basis for using Bacchi's (2008) "What's the Problem?" starting point within social constructivism due to the complex nature of human interactions that have created the situations being analyzed. According to Bourdieu (2011: 88),

"Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition--or in other words, to membership in a group---which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word."

By looking at educational opportunities using human capital theory, as a corollary to social capital theory, it was possible to further address the aspects dealing with education in order to illustrate where and what has created these gendered issues along with quantitatively describing them. As Coleman stated,

"human capital of the sort that is produced in schools---the person who invests the time and resources in building up this capital reaps its benefits in the form of a higher-paying job, more satisfying or higher-status work, or even the pleasure of greater understanding of the surrounding world---in short, all the benefits that schooling brings to a person" (2011: 110).

Then, social and human capital theories together provided analytical tools to link the qualitative and quantitative research in order to explain the value attached to education

and the returns of it for women of ethnic minority groups by comparing the data from different country cases.

1.2.3 Ethical Considerations

The most important consideration when collecting, researching, and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data involved remaining as objective as possible. As social constructivism was the main framework for this thesis, it was important to consider many aspects of issues concerning educational disparities for girls of ethnic minorities with regard to their primary school education. Further recognizing that perceptions of what education was and the importance of it vary with culture, country, and time period while not incorporating any ethnocentric values of the researcher into the analysis were also paramount.

1.3 Previous Research

Research of ethnic minorities and women's issues within the sphere of education have been done by Vatthana Pholsena, Faming Manynooch, Carol Ireson-Doolittle, and Geraldine Moreno-Black. Their research has spanned almost thirty years and encompassed many hours of fieldwork in ethnic minority villages, interviewing government representatives, and amassing large quantities of qualitative cultural data to follow the history of the people of Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia. Whereas, Jonathan D. London concentrated on the general education system in Vietnam with regard to enrollment, government policies, and decentralization of education. Truong Huyen Chi and Theraphan Luangthongkum specialized in ethnic minority education issues often involving linguistics, government policy, and socio-economics with Vietnam and Thailand, respectively. And, Kimmo Kosonen focused exclusively on general linguistic commonalities and differences among ethnic groups in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand as a way of explaining government policy differences and common themes relating to minority ethnic groups in these countries.

Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black (2004) were at the vanguard of feminist research in Lao PDR by conducting studies into Lao Women's Union projects throughout

the country concerning education for girls of ethnic minorities. They began to document the different cultural and political aspects that might prevent girls of ethnic minorities from obtaining basic primary education. For example, they noted that due to a lack of funding, most schools in ethnic minority villages and regions tended to be rudimentary structures without supplies and adequate funding for instructors (ibid: 151). Also, they noted that basic survival has been crucial to Lao Seung and Lao Theung minorities; therefore, they were usually unable to send their children to school regularly based on the need for child labor in the family (ibid: 166). London also found a similar situation with regard to primary schools in Vietnam; they would sometimes be nonexistent or would have had to combine with several communes in order to afford to operate them (2011a: 18). In Cambodia, the situation was very similar for ethnic minorities that often depended on outside help other than the national government just to have a school constructed, according to Kosonen (2005: 125). Those countries have had vastly different experiences with ethnic minorities compared to Thailand because it was never colonized as the rest of Southeast Asia was by European countries and lacked issues with post-colonialism, according to Luangthongkum (2007: 187). However, it would seem that statement would advocate a more nationalistic and biased view of internal demographics compared to the reality of actual historical and current events.

Pholsena (2006) and Pholsena and Banomyang (2006) represented the research field from an indigenous Lao perspective. Pholsena took ethnographic data into account as she chronicled the state processes in the history of ethnic classification in Lao PDR in the post-war period following the 1975 communist coup that toppled the royal Lao government. Of particular attention were the details on government policies regarding resettlement of ethnic minorities in lowland areas in order to accomplish the national goals of civilizing them. Pholsena stated the rationale as, “The principle remains to integrate minorities into a single political, economic and social fabric”, which has also been part of the integration plans in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand (2006: 175). In Vietnam especially, the Communist Party was and is involved in every aspect of education planning which included integration policies and procedures (London, 2011a: 19). This often turned out badly for the affected minorities because they became

separated from their traditional means of living even if infrastructure provided more new opportunities for jobs and education (Pholsena, 2006: 175).

Also, from a linguistic perspective, Pholsena and Banomyang further took into account linguistic culture that separated the 66% of the Lao PDR's Tai-Kadai speakers to those in the ethnic minorities from the Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong, Tibeto-Burman, and Hmong-Mien linguistic groups that constituted the rest of the population (2006: 174). Therefore, the most basic communication skill of conversation has not been available to a wide margin of the population in reference to that research. The contrast in percentages have been more stark, according to Kosonen because Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand have had much larger populations that have only spoken the national language, so minority ethnic groups with few linguistic ties to those languages were severely constrained by their lack of knowledge (2005: 124, 131, and 132). However, Thailand had begun to take a more inclusive approach to all ethnic groups through The Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2007-2011 that had the main goal of increasing the quality of life for all Thai citizens. This included four education targets that aimed to increase the compulsory education to ten years, improve testing, lift people out of poverty based on educational attainment for national socio-economic strength, and increase the numbers of researchers relative to population (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 201). Through widespread policies like that, Thailand has tried to consistently stay ahead of other Southeast Asian countries with respect to the inclusive Second Millennium Development Goals (MDG2)(universal primary education) and the Third Millennium Development Goals (MDG3)(gender equality in education) that are to be achieved by 2015 throughout the country (ibid: 211).

From a more feminist educational perspective, Fox gave a progression of post-1975 history of how gender, ethnicity, and citizenship could influence, for better or worse, educational opportunities. Of particular note in her research was that the teaching guides and training for most teachers did not have effective methods for how to teach children of different ethnicities with regard to different forms of learning, which also meant that a similar discourse has been lacking at the higher levels that have developed

education policy (2003: 410). Also, according to Fox, using culture as the sole reason for a lack of education or opportunity was not an excuse because there were different situations for the same ethnic groups dependent upon many factors in society (ibid: 407).

More recently, Manynooch has contributed to the knowledge of funding and goals for education in Lao PDR. In her research, she followed the creation and operation of the Girls and Ethnic Minority Education Unit (GEMEU), which was funded partly from AusAid and the Asian Development Bank at the request of the Lao government in order to improve the education system as well as access to education in 1998 (2010: 3 and 4). However, the design and application of this unit has not gone smoothly. The notion of creating the GEMEU was to educate girls from ethnic minorities in order to turn them into teachers who would have been contractually obligated to return to their home areas and teach the village children. However, most of the students wanted the freedom to move to other areas and experience life away from their villages, so the rate of native returning teachers was not always as high as the government would have liked (ibid: 15, 18, and 21). Hirosato and Kitamura have argued for a decentralized approach to educational structure in order to prevent similar negative aspects from happening in Cambodia and Vietnam despite respective government unwillingness to relinquish control to local authorities to decide how to run their own schools efficiently and provide qualified teachers to remote regions (2009a: 12 and 13). Therefore, this study aims at filling the gap of separate research into areas affecting education by combining them and comparing them in one study for a more holistic approach to the whole issue.

1.4 Disposition

This thesis has been constructed by grouping the research and analyses into four main components. Within each category, country cases have been compared and organized by theme in order to relate the comparative findings. Finally, the four main components have been discussed in the conclusion and ranked according to their relevance to the comparative research for each part.

2. Minority Ethnic Cultures, Linguistics, and Education

2.1 Ethnic Groups

Many ethnic groups and linguistic families are shared among Lao PDR, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia. However, the exact numbers of languages and ethnic groups in each country have been debated for a long time. The main groups are, according to Watson:

Cambodia:

5 Ethnic Groups: Khmer, Cham (Khmer Islam), Khmer Leou (hill tribes), Chinese, Vietnamese

17 Languages: Khmer (official), Chinese, Vietnamese, Malayo-Polynesian

Laos:

71 Ethnic Groups: Lao Lum (lowlanders), Lao Theung (middle Lao, made up of 36 clans), Hmong, Tai, Chinese, Vietnamese

92 Languages: Lao, Tai, Mon-Khmer

Thailand:

? 30 Ethnic Groups: Thais, Chinese, Malays, Khmers, Mons, Highlanders

76 Languages: Thai (official), English, Chinese, Malay, minority languages (hill tribes)

Vietnam:

54 Ethnic Groups: Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, Cham, Highlanders (hill tribes)

86 Languages: Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, Tai, Hmong

(2011: 291 and 292)

GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION



(United Nations 2004)

Ethnic groups in Lao PDR could be categorized as matrilineal and patrilineal depending on the group and location, so there was not a set standard of cultural practice with regard to the manner in which females would be treated and how their education might have been regarded in that plurality in comparison to the state and its values (Phonxay and Tollefsen, 2010: 422). However, girls often fell at a disadvantage because of what their future roles would most likely be in their ethnic group in the highlands of Lao PDR. For example, girls were expected to care for their younger siblings, while their mothers worked in the fields and gardens, until they were married (Rehbein, 2007: 38). That assessment seemed to agree with the approximate age of eight that Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black gave as the age when girls started to take on responsibilities, such as taking care of younger siblings, which occupied all of their free time (2004: 17). In the matrilineal cases, daughters were responsible for the care, organization, and family economics (Phonxay and Tollefsen, 2010: 433). That rendered them very useful to their family and community; however, they were far less likely to matriculate in primary school after they took on those types of responsibilities even though they had a higher average of not repeating grade levels compared to boys, which could have suggested that they were more attentive students (Noonan, 2011: 89). According to Phonxay and Tollefsen:

“If parents could not support the family or the children’s education, the oldest daughter felt compelled to drop out of school and move to work in the city in order to help them. The ‘need to leave’ was not only for income, employment, and remittances, but also as part of growing up and assuming the task of providing for others.” (2010: 433).

In that sense, the girls’ duties were looked on not only as duties but also as a rite of passage in order to become fully-fledged members of the community and ethnic group by assuming adult responsibilities. As many groups, like the Hmong, have also been found in the highlands of various areas in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, there could most likely be very similar cultural dynamics.

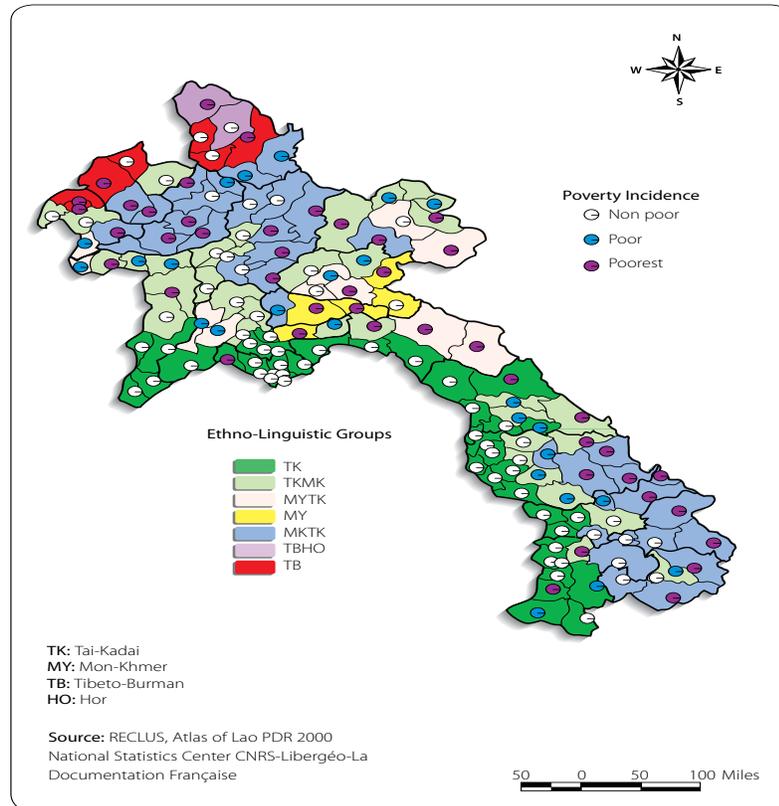
2.2 Primary School Issues and Local Traditions

There have been many cultural reasons that could have explained the limited primary school opportunities and low matriculation rates for girls of ethnic minorities in Lao PDR. On a very deep level, Manynooch contended that many ethnic groups in Lao PDR did not consider gender equality for children relevant because children themselves were not full-grown adults and thereby incapable of understanding what their traditional roles would be within their ethnic group, family, and village (2010: 12). In other words, children only gained their identities as people through valued roles in society, and until they did so, they were not seen as productive members of society who have certain rights. If Manynooch was correct, building more schools in that case may not help because the human right to education could be overlooked due to the value placed on children in an ethnic group (ibid: 13). For example, if compared with the case of Cambodia, the percentage of women who were illiterate in ethnic minorities was at approximately 9.4% higher than men, and that seemed to often have been the case also in Lao PDR and Vietnam, which could have been a reflection on lack of education (Kosonen, 2005: 126).

However, girls have also been limited by the traditional religious practices within regional Buddhism from formal educational opportunities. Traditionally, boys could have obtained education from the monks at the village temples (Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, 2004: 15). Meanwhile, girls could have only obtained some rudimentary education through their parents at home (Rehbein, 2007: 100). Cambodia has had a similar history of educating only boys at the local Buddhist monastery/temple in the traditional manner, until the Khmer Rouge took power, and their system completely excluded girls as well (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 34).

2.3 Linguistic Issues and Educational Quality

Figure 1: Ethno-Linguistic Groups and Poverty Incidence by Districts



Poorest Districts: 4 of 7 (57%) Tibeto-Burman; 1 of 2 (50%) Tibeto-Burman/Hor;
 4 of 5 (80%) Hmong-Yao; 4 of 11 (36%) Hmong-Yao/Tai-Kadai; 22 of 37 (59%) Mon-Khmer/Tai-Kadia; 9 of 36
 (25%) Tai-Kadai/Mon-Kmer; 3 of 44 (7%) Tai-Kadai

(MOE EFA NPA, 2005: 26)

An estimated eighty-six languages are spoken in Lao PDR with ethnic groups in the border regions with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand speaking languages other than Lao by at least nine ethnic groups with at least 100,000 people in each group: Khmu, Tai Don, Hmong Daw, Phu Thai, Hmong Njua, Lu, Kataang, Phuan, and So (Kosonen, 2005: 128). Consequently, a major obstacle for minority ethnic groups in Lao PDR, such as Hmong, Akha, Lahu, Khmu, Mien, Mon, and Tai, could be language (Luangthongkum 2007: 183-185). They have been grouped into Tai-Kadai (Thai and Lao), Sino-Tibetan, Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien), Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer), and Austronesian (ibid). Lao and Thai are part of the Tai-Kadai language family (Kosonen, 2005: 124). In fact, Noonan goes so far as to say that a lack of schooling for minorities can be based mainly

on culture and geography. According to his research, most of the children cannot speak Lao and other majority languages due to their lack of contact with outsiders in their isolated highland homes, which means that most teachers who are sent to the village would not be able to speak the local ethnic language either (2011: 91).

Rehbein seemed to support the linguistic part of that research because he noted that the Tai-Kadai language group dominated everything in Lao PDR and also Thailand; thus, fitting in culturally for non-Tai-Kadai language group speakers would be an essential but difficult to attain component in society (2007: 57). Approximately seventy-four languages are spoken in Thailand if you also count some Tai-Kadai languages that the government classifies as only dialects, and it is estimated that Thai is spoken by approximately 90% of the population (Kosonen 2005: 131-132). Therefore, linguistics is a significant enough factor for the Lao-Australia Basic Education Project to specifically target “remoteness” and “cultural and linguistic differences” affecting girls’ primary school retention rates in order to aid ethnic minority linguistic groups in the midst of linguistic hegemony by the Tai-Kadai group (Manynooch, 2010: 6 and 7).

In Figure 1 above, the links between remoteness and cultural/linguistic differences can be seen clearly in Lao PDR. The poorest areas correspond with areas that are also in the highland. For example Lao Seung regions are where the majority of people speak languages other than Lao as their mother tongue. Therefore, the government operates ethnic boarding schools that act as instruments of nationalism by teaching the Lao language as a significant 45% of the curriculum (Manynooch, 2007: 186). However, despite that immersion into Lao language and separation from their ethnic heritages, the students often repeat grades at the primary level due to a lack of linguistic training in Lao (ibid). This linguistic difference can also be seen on the map of Lao PDR in the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group region in the north. The Tibeto-Burman group includes the Hmong-Mien ethnic group, and as of 2005 only about one in ten women from that group were literate in their own language, let alone Lao, due to isolation and lack of education (Rigg, 2005: 29).

Many minority ethnic groups have been stereotyped as uneducated, which has not necessarily been through their own doing, and backward due to their lack of linguistic skills in Lao and completion of primary education; however, that has represented the need for primary education because it could enable the women to communicate more widely in order to earn money and alleviate some of the stress on themselves and their families (Rigg, 2005: 135 and 136). However, in the evolving education systems of recent years, the new training schemes by the government could actually have had a positive effect on the villagers in the highlands of ethnic majority areas. Although, many of the rural teachers at the village schools have had only a rudimentary education and may not have even completed the full five years of primary school; however, they still taught in their capacity as the most educated person in the village (Manynooch, 2007). Cambodia has shared a similar problem with only 34.5% of teachers in rural areas completed primary school according to the 2006 data (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 44). That perception agreed with the official statistics that claimed only 77.5% of teachers in rural districts in 2002/2003 were actually qualified to teach (MOE EFA NPA, 2005: 19). However, it was important to note that, “Getting children to enroll does not mean regular attendance; regular attendance does not mean learning; and even learning does not mean children receiving quality education necessary for effective functioning in the society” (Chansopheak, 2009: 137).

2.4 Primary Education Comparisons by Country

In Vietnam by 2006, there were 11,582 kindergartens and 14,834 primary schools in the country, and the system has kept expanding at a steady rate since then. Here preschool and kindergarten are nearly synonymous and comprise ages 3 to 5 while primary school is organized for children 5 years and older in grades 1 to 5 (London, 2011a: 20 and 21). Of similar note, primary school is the largest sector of education in Cambodia with a net attendance rate of about 93% with about 52.5% matriculating to sixth grade (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 38). In order to encourage further participation in primary education Cambodia devised a plan to incorporate minority languages into the system in a manner

that would suit the government, "...the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) approved Khmer-based writing systems for five ethnic minority languages spoken in the Eastern Highlands..." in 2003, but that initiative did not include Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese (Kosonen, 2005: 127-128). The abolition of school fees in Cambodia in 2001 was also a measure that greatly helped in encouraging the parents of all students, male and female, to send their children to school despite linguistic differences (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 38). Costs associated with schooling in general despite many fee exemptions were and still are major reasons for children to not attend school despite their ethnicity in these countries whether or not they can speak the language of instruction (London, 2011b: 92).

Besides Thailand, Vietnam also has had high rates of matriculation for primary school students, even ones from ethnic minorities, and much of that has had to do with community participation through the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). Of course, one consideration to always keep in mind is that the CPV has been in every part of the education process in Vietnam pushing the whole process along. Depending on the size of the commune, there could be many villages with a combined primary school and preschool which has been common in rural areas of Vietnam and similar to previous initiatives mentioned earlier in Lao PDR. In communes, People's Committees have been responsible for managing kindergartens and preschools; also, they have also been responsible for getting children into primary school (London, 2011a: 18 and 19). It has been hypothesized that the quality of primary education has caused high matriculation rates to secondary levels in Vietnam since the mid-1990s due to such involvement (Holsinger, 2009: 196). As of 2005, there were 168 schools in Dak Nong Province alone, and it "has the lowest student to population ratio in the Central Highlands" with only 27% ethnic minority enrollment at the primary level (Truong, 2011: 179).

2.5 Inequality Issues

Inequality has in general been quite low in education in Vietnam, compared to Lao PDR and Cambodia, due to so much intervention by the government and international NGOs especially in the 1990s after Doi Moi began and US sanctions were lifted (Holsinger,

2009: 195 and 196). Although, ethnic minority students still have had lower primary enrollment and completion rates compared to the majority Kinh and Hoa (London, 2011a: 31). Attendance has generally been higher for girls than for boys in kindergartens but only 39% of ethnic minority groups have attended school at that age compared to 60% of the Kinh majority. There has been little sex discrimination as well in early education even for minority groups according to official government data (ibid: 34). In Vietnamese communes, People's Committees are responsible for managing kindergartens and preschools, and they are also responsible for getting children into primary school (ibid: 18).

In 2006, 93.5% of the children attended primary school in Vietnam with most matriculating on time respective to age. That figure rose as of 2008, when it was estimated that approximately 97.5% of all primary school students in Vietnam would have reached fifth grade (ibid: 35). Although, the Northwest and Central Highlands regions of Vietnam have been the poorest regions with the lowest primary school attendance rates along with the Mekong Delta region which the government has regarded as a wealthy region and may not have been included in that prediction (ibid: 36). "Most scholars of the subject attribute Vietnam's pronounced regionalism to the historically accepted practice of capitalist agriculture in the south and to the enduring presence of independently minded ethnic hill tribes in the north and west" (Holsinger, 2009: 205). About 30 of the 54 groups, which represent about 13% of the population, in Vietnam have had the opportunity to study in their own language in primary school in 278 schools comprising almost 86,000 pupils throughout the country in 2007/2008 (Huong and Fry, 2011: 229 and 230). In these areas, parents wanted their daughters to complete almost as many years of primary to upper secondary education, but the boys were more favored for higher education (Truong, 2011: 195). Private tutoring has also been the norm in Vietnam in order to help students excel and pass their tests, and that even included tutoring while at the primary school level no matter the ethnicity of the family. Ethnic families on average spent less money in tutoring for only the primary level, but for the secondary education on up, it has been relatively the same as the Kinh majority (Holsinger, 2009: 211 and 212).

2.6 Comparative Matriculation

Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia has struggled to rebuild its education system in a way similar to Lao PDR but quite dissimilar from Thailand and more recently, Vietnam. In that sense, it has started late with reforms and restructuring because there has been a complete reform cycle in recent decades in order to catch up with other Southeastern countries, like Thailand and Vietnam. Cambodia and Lao PDR, therefore, have had the greatest gender discrepancies as the grade levels progress (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 77). In the case of Cambodia, reforms started in 2001 with the abolition of school fees in order to increase enrollment and provide more equity in education by encouraging more families to send their girls to attend school (Chansopheak, 2009: 134). NGOs in the remote regions of Cambodia provided some of the first schooling that the people have had and it has been done bilingually in the native tongue and Khmer (Kosonen, 2005: 125). Gender issues of attendance had been strong in rural areas, but the net proportion of primary enrollment in 2007/2008 was 93.2% boys and 93.3% girls, and the proportion of girls increased as the grade levels progressed since those reforms (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 43-44).

Approximately 10% of primary school students in Cambodia have repeated grades due to having to help their parents with farming or other livelihoods (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 38). Primary class sizes, though, in Cambodia have been huge in the advent of reforms with an average of forty to fifty students per class, which was partly due to a short supply of teachers and a higher enrollment rate than in the past (ibid: 44). There has also been tacit support within the Cambodian government and MoEYS for native language instruction. One government official said,

“Using local languages-which the people understand-for basic education brings ethnic minorities closer to engaging in the national society and facilitates nation-building and decentralization...All citizens of the country have the right to read and write the national language as well as their local language. The basic skills make them stronger citizens and facilitates their engagement in civil society” (cited in Kosonen, 2005: 127).

In the eastern mountainous provinces of Mondulakiri and Ratanakiri in Cambodia, Khmer has not always been the majority language, so the international NGOs have begun projects to teach indigenous languages as the main language of instruction in primary schools to great success (ibid: 124).

2.7 National Pedagogies

Pedagogically, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia have shared many similarities with regard to how students are taught in schools. First of all, teachers teach the students as a large block instead of giving more individualized attention due to class size, so that inhibits students being able to learn the language of instruction and can induce shyness instead of answering questions and excelling in their education according to Truong (2011: 184). Therefore, teachers have been more likely to ask non-minority children or those who fluently speak the national language to participate due to the language barrier. The lives of teachers in Vietnam for example, who are mostly Kinh, have also been separated from the ethnic minority students with the students living in remote areas while the teachers lived closer to main roads and operating businesses to supplement their meager incomes. Often, ethnic minority children have not attended kindergarten, so they have been quite ill-prepared for formal schooling. That lack of preparedness has become illustrated in standardized testing results from primary school onwards which almost always favor the Kinh; although, there has been a great deal of corruption in exams with teachers providing answers to Kinh students and ethnic minority children not cheating, and that particular event was even posted on the internet in video in 2006 (Truong, 2011: 184 - 195).

Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE), which has been the bilingual instruction for minority students in Lao PDR in the highland regions has not been applied well because most of the teachers are not bilingual (Kosonen, 2005: 129). That actually mirrored the Thai education system, which has been loosely based on the British system in the early days of formal education, where 30% of the curriculum allowed for minority language study. But as of 2005, that only totaled up to a few hours a week with most schools not coming anywhere close to that maximum percentage of instruction time due

to linguistic problems and emphases put on other subjects (Watson, 2011: 289; Kosonen, 2005: 133). Although, that 30% has been allocated for language instruction as a foreign language and has not necessarily been meant for someone to necessarily become bilingual (Kosonen, 2005: 134). There are currently eight core subjects in the Thai curriculum: “Thai language, mathematics, science, social studies, religion and culture, health and physical education, arts, careers and technology, and foreign languages” which were all part of the 2008 education reforms (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 199). Since the Thai Constitution of 1997, though, more bilingual instruction has entered in the Thai school system, especially in the border regions where many minorities have traditionally resided (Kosonen, 2005: 133). In Thai society, students and families have rarely criticized the education system and teachers openly or have spoken up to them; also speaking outside of a group has been unusual, so children who might have questions do not ask them along with adults even if there are curriculum issues that need to be solved (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 214-215). Of course, the situation has been different in Southern Thailand where there has been difficulty attracting teachers to problematic areas like the war torn south due to security reasons (ibid: 216).

2.8 Literacy

The Hmong ethnic group has been one of the most populous and marginalized in the highland regions of Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand; therefore, there have been studies specifically of them with regard to linguistics and education. The Central Highlands of Vietnam used to be a stronghold of the Hmong and Rhade ethnic groups until 1975 when mass migrations took place by the lowlanders, so the cultural, linguistic, economic, and social demographic shifted. In fact, the Central Highlands were composed of 50% minority groups in 1975, 24% in 1988, and 20% in 1998. Although, the Hmong are still quite numerous in the highlands of Vietnam overall making up approximately 10% of the total population in Dak Nong Province alone (Truong, 2011: 177 and 178). Only about 43.9% of Hmong in the border areas between Lao PDR and Vietnam have completed primary school, but that has not inhibited their Vietnamese language skills with about 60% of Hmong able to speak it as adults but not necessarily as children (ibid: 182).

Groups in Lao PDR, like the Hmong, often have taught their children their native language on an informal basis at home if they were literate in the language themselves (Kosonen, 2005: 129). However, that could have been part of the reason why young Hmong children often have had trouble with even simple classroom versions of the national language even after a few years of instruction, all of which could have been due to the total immersion process, the lack of the spoken national language at home, and few hours spent in the classroom (Truong, 2011: 184). Although, linguistics among the Kinh and others have varied widely by region, along with Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Thailand, so many minorities have had difficulties understanding accents that have been quite different from what was spoken on tv (ibid: 186). Predictably, literacy rates for women in the ethnic minority groups have been less but especially so in the Hmong-Mien language family (Kosonen, 2005: 130). In Vietnam, for example, the Tay, Nung, Muong, and Khmer are far more advantaged in many ways than Hmong and other groups in the Central Highlands, so it has not been an equal education system yet for females or males (Huong and Fry, 2011: 230). Some officials have ascribed to the stereotype that the parents of minority children do not understand the value of education, so that was why their children most likely would not succeed scholastically; however, that has actually been a direct refutation of what the parents have said and could have more to do with the linguistic differences than aptitude (Truong, 2011: 188-190).

2.9 Boarding School

Within the ethnic boarding school system, the Lao government has aimed to equalize education and also improve the quality for the students but also for their own ends. In the government's Education Strategic Vision by 2010 and 2020, the first objective is "Education development needs to serve two criteria: (1) promotion of political, ideological and sociological consequences, and (2) promotion of educational quality to international standards" (MOE EFA NPA, 2005: 37). That goal was further elucidated by Manynooch through the education that was found at the ethnic boarding schools that was really meant to be an equalizer and modernizer of all people for the political, economic, and nationalistic endeavors of the government (2007: 183 and 189). Many

schools, both public and private, are quite ethnically mixed in the highlands, so choosing just one ethnic minority's language as the main one for instruction would not be a good option either (Truong, 2011: 186). Therefore, if the education system in the boarding schools is heavily nationalistic, the students still would have to learn only Lao and nothing in their mother tongues, which could create a protracted learning process no matter how good the system is or is not. All of that can create a linguistic paradox when trying to advocate for the use of ethnic minority languages as the main linguistic medium in any school.

2.10 Discussion

Primary education has been a cornerstone of investment not only in Lao PDR but also in Vietnam, Cambodia, and especially Thailand. It has been a multifaceted approach to combine nationalistic, educational, and socio-economic into one by creating a solid base upon which a stronger state could be built. The boarding school option used by the state in Lao PDR was one example that included education and nationalism with the national language as the medium of instruction. That could be contrasted with Cambodia's handling of minority groups by the composition of Khmer script for their indigenous languages as a means of integration. Whereas, ethnic minority families in Vietnam have used tutoring to boost testing scores in order for better integration and more equal opportunities. While Thailand's cultural and educational issues have not been as great, except in the south, educational attainment by ethnic minority students has been greater compared to the other countries when looking at their history of uninterrupted institutionalized national education.

3. Socio-economics

3.1 Social and Human Capital

Socio-economic standing for many ethnic minority groups in Lao PDR has been quite low compared to the Lao Loum majority. As village schools have often been funded directly by the people in the village, due to lack of government funding or late funding, the educational situation has posed a problem. For example, when funds have not been available through the government for resources to build a school and fund a new teacher, the villagers have had to do it, but often, they were unable to do so because they were too poor (Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, 2004: 162). In fact, ethnic groups comprising the Lao Seung and Lao Theung have often been more concerned with subsistence survival issues, which have hampered their socio-economic prospects (ibid: 166). Indeed, socio-economically, rural Lao PDR has often operated along less formal economic ties that have been based on a subsistence model that involved reciprocal relationships among villagers who also have ranked survival above everything else (Rehbein, 2007: 54). Therefore, education has suffered because it has become only a secondary concern, and that has not been a situation unique to Lao PDR. As of 2008 data surveys, many of the rural kindergartens/preschools in remote regions of Vietnam did not even have electricity, water, or toilets and could not serve the needs for a whole community of children either (London, 2011a: 34). Parents did value education and wanted it for their children to improve their socio-economic standing to manage a household well for the benefit of the family, but they often seemed to be trapped by their financial situations (Truong, 2011: 190).

Those informal but crucial ties have often meant that many cultural socio-economic practices have operated outside of the law and, sometimes, in contradiction to it. Inheritance laws in Lao PDR, for example, are equal with regard to the husband and wife; however, traditionally, in many ethnic groups, the woman inherits the land and house (Manynooch, 2010: 12). Therefore, the women control the equity that the family

has with regard to what they physically own. Furthermore, Rehbein stated, “While it is true that Lao are generally honest in their economic dealings, honesty is linked to the social sphere of reciprocity that does not necessarily extend to other ethnic groups, political bodies, and anonymous individuals---their most prominent partners in the market economy” (2007: 69). In effect, that has rendered a very small market for ethnic minorities because business dealings would be on an inter-village level, which could sustain poverty levels.

Stereotyping of the socio-economic status of many ethnic minority groups by international aid agencies actually could have a positive effect on the lives for the girls. For example, the Basic Education Gender Project, which was funded by AusAid in 2000, was particularly targeted at girls and women of ethnic minorities in order for them to “participate in socio-economic development, as well as to improve the quality of education” (Manynooch, 2010: 5). If targeted national investment would be made in marginalized ethnic groups, the external costs to education could actually go down because it might provide more equality between the internal and external spheres of education represented by these people (Hirosato, 2009: 37).

3.2 Village Life

Based on a report from UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, the socio-economic dimension of ethnic village life has been a significant component of whether or not a girl has access to primary school education (2005: 22). For example, impoverished families of an ethnic minority may value education greatly; however, the economic situation of the family might dictate that the immediate value of the labor lost by having a girl in school could not compensate in immediate terms (ibid). Therefore, since a girl often has more productive additive tasks in a family compared to that of a boy, her labor has usually been more highly valued and needed. A further breakdown of figures regarding poverty and its relationship relative to population can be seen in the high percentage of poorest districts as compared with the non-poor districts below in Table 1.

Table 1: Poverty and Poor District Classification

Indicators (in%)	Type of District			
	47 Poorest Districts	25 Poor Districts	70 Non-Poor Districts	Total 142 Districts
Average poverty incidence (proportion of poor households)	64	38	23	39
Average population share (district population/total population)	0.5	0.5	0.9	0.7
Average poor population share (district poor/total poor population)	2.1	0.6	0.6	0.7
Percentage of district to total population	24.3	13.5	61.4	NA
Percentage of poor to total poor population	46.9	15.3	37.8	NA
Percentage of poor		50.6	18.9	NA

(MOE EFA NPA, 2005: 25)

As of 2005, seventy-two out of one hundred forty-two school districts in Lao PDR were not ethnic Lao majority with 50.4% of households in 77% of 4126 villages as below the poverty line (ibid: 24). The Lao PDR government had a strongly vested interest in improving these numbers because from 1995 to 2005 the percentage of women in wage employment in the country only rose by approximately 1% per year, which was not conducive to a strong local and national economy and also not in line with meeting the Millennium Development Goals that aimed for a good foundation in education in order to create a stronger more equitable workforce by 2015 (UNDP 2012b). Indeed, the primary school completion rate overall had a 1% per year progress in the years 1991 to 2003, which coincided with the wage employment statistics (UNDP 2012a). Those statistics would feed into the vicious cycle of poverty and an ethnic village not being able to take over remuneration of teachers for a local school and for family economic survival, which was what Rehbein (2007) and Ireson-Dolittle and Moreno-Black (2004) had also mentioned as an ethnic village reality.

3.3 Financial Issues for Teachers

The Lao government has implemented programs that have been from the same villages and therefore were culturally and socio-economically linked to the area as a way to force the educated to return to their home areas and teach the village children, as was

mentioned earlier. However, a huge component that has made that program unsuccessful has been the teacher’s salaries. Teacher salaries in rural ethnic areas have been incredibly low, so they often leave the profession or the region, which also has left the villages and schools without educators (Rigg, 2005: 93). In the Education For All (EFA) initiative, the Lao government has stated, “the increase in teacher salaries is the single most important factor driving education expenditure for the near future”, which would bring salaries in some regions up to approximately 2.4GDP per capita (MOE EFA NPA, 2005: 6). That increase would in theory enable some teachers to stay in their remote villages and still be able to make a living and improve their socio-economic status; thus, they would stay and make the local education system stronger.

Table 2: Teacher Salary Options

	2002/03	OPTION 1		OPTION 2		OPTION 3
		2010/11		2010/11		2010/11
	Sal/GDP cap	Sal/GDP cap	Ratio to Av. Pr. Sal	Sal/GDP cap	Ratio to Av. Pr. Sal.	Sal/GDP cap
ECCD	0.61	1.80	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.20
Primary	0.61	1.80	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.20
Lower secondary	0.81	2.38	1.32	2.64	1.32	2.90
Adult & NFE (additional)		0.72	0.40	0.80	0.40	0.88
Upper secondary	1.02	2.99	1.66	3.32	1.66	3.65
Vocational & technical	1.02	2.99	1.66	3.32	1.66	3.65
Teacher Training	1.04	3.06	1.70	3.40	1.70	3.74
Tertiary education	1.94	3.42	1.90	3.80	1.90	4.18
Administration	1.03	3.02	1.68	3.36	1.68	3.70

(MOE EFA NPA, 2005: 72)

However, as can be seen in Table 2, the salaries commensurate with the primary level have been capped below those of the lower secondary and upper secondary levels despite rising at least almost a full point from where they had previously been. Therefore, the problem of teachers leaving their remote village schools because of low salaries was expected to continue beyond 2005 when this information was processed. Various Lao

government ministries have also been in direct competition for hiring of workers with private companies since the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) due to competitive wages, so many of them have not had an impetus, despite EFA initiatives to return to remote areas and teach (Lintner, 2008: 172).

In Cambodia, teacher's salaries have only been between US\$30 to US\$40 per month depending on experience, similar to Lao PDR levels, so teachers have usually spent only four hours in the classroom and the rest of the time at another job (Chansopheak, 2009: 149). The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) in Cambodia would like to increase salaries further for teachers to keep pace with inflation and the economy to make the education more stable and to compete with private companies (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 35). The ESP announced a 20% salary increase from 2006 to 2010 plus the option of earning extra money in performance-based incentives, which was like commission for enrolling new students and keeping current students in school (ibid: 45). Unfortunately, the financial state of Cambodia compared to its neighbors has been such that the gross national income per capita in 2008 in was lower than Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Thailand, which has made it financially difficult for families and teachers (ibid: 31).

Thailand, like Lao PDR and Cambodia, has had difficulty attracting teachers to rural areas due to distance from large towns where extra income could be made, but more than that, they have not been attracted to schools in the southern provinces that have been having problems with terrorism and strife (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 216). It was a Catch-22 for teachers because they needed extra income to support their families, and the same went for the students who often needed to support their parents (Truong, 2011: 191). Whereas, in Thailand in 2006, the average teacher to student ratio was 1:25 and part of that could have been due to 25% of total government expenditure on education and represented one of the best official figures in the region (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 213). From 2002-2007 the expenditure on education in Cambodia was low with only 12.4% as compared to 14% in Lao PDR and 25% in Thailand, which could have been due mainly to the inefficient taxation system that would have been unable to provide the funds needed to match a higher expenditure like Thailand's (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 41-42).

In Vietnam, it has been very difficult to improve the quality of education because teacher's salaries have also been low, so that necessitated outside work just like in Cambodia and Lao PDR (Huong and Fry, 2011: 231). About 77% of the teachers in Vietnam have taught at primary and secondary levels with 78% of those teachers having been women, which has represented the government's strong dedication to basic education (ibid: 232). Provincial authorities in Vietnam have been aware of socio-economic constraints as evidenced by Dak Lak Province, for example, dramatically increased their education budget from VND24billion in 1999 to VND38billion in 2002 (ibid: 183).

“General budget support for poverty reduction and education sector program support including target budget support can be regarded indeed as a means of internalizing additional investment through aid (converting to internal cost) with the improvement of developing countries' ownership of the development process” (Hirosato, 2009: 38).

That could have been seen as a very positive step in basic education by the Vietnamese government and a model for other countries because.

3.4 Cost Associations

Costs related to schooling in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, despite many exemptions and despite ethnic background, are still major reasons for children not attending school (London, 2011b: 92). In Vietnam, families can obtain a “poor household” certificate to exempt them from extraneous school fees, which is often negatively internalized by many students, parents, and school officials as being less than worthy as a person (Truong, 2011: 200). However, National Target Programs (NTP) and Program 135 provide for financial assistance to socio-economically disadvantaged families (often minorities) in order for them to be able to send their children to regular schools or even boarding schools by paying for any extra costs that could be incurred (London, 2011b: 91). In fact, as of 2001, the World Bank said that Vietnam would be a model country in terms of how their economy has been progressing at 7.6% at that time despite the fact that socio-economic inequality was increasing especially in the Northern Uplands, Mekong Delta, and North Central Coast (Holsinger, 2009: 191-192).

Countrywide as of 2008 in Vietnam, 42 out of 63 provinces were financially able to provide compulsory primary education, and 53% of the students could pay reduced tuition fees or obtain loans from banks to help due to poverty, which did present some degree of progress compared to a few years previously (Huong and Fry, 2011: 227). To improve the socio-economic situation, the government invested US\$24billion in education from 2008 to 2010 but still needed to improve capacity in order to handle that funding effectively (ibid: 239). However, 22 of the 61 provinces in Vietnam continued to have a higher Gini coefficient than the national average despite such large investment (ibid: 237). Therefore, if the Kinh ethnic majority percentage were high in a certain region that could have made the ethnic minority groups seem even more disadvantaged by comparison to a large population.

Looking at the situation from an international and state level, economic growth has been seriously eroded by corruption, political strife, lack of good governance, education, and individual welfare, so those have been huge challenges to overcome for economic security (Cummings 2009: 61). And, the extraneous fees that existed even when education was considered free or when facilities were lacking could have been a mark of corruption and/or bad governance at a more localized level. Cambodia's taxation system has been regarded as fairly inefficient and therefore unable to provide funds adequately for social services as another cause of education sector inadequacies (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 42). While in Thailand at the same period, there were twelve years of free education, and primary school was from first to sixth grades, which made a total of nine years of compulsory education that was considered high for Southeast Asia. Then in 2009, the government added preschool and kindergarten to the free basic education structure for three to five year olds in order to expand the system and strengthen the education sector (Trakulphadetkrai 2011: 199). As of 2009, the Thai government increased funding for a total fifteen years of free education that could even include supplies for poorer students along with extra funding for the upkeep and expansion of smaller schools as part of the 15 Year Free Education Scheme (ibid: 213).

In 1989, Vietnam saw the opposite situation of Thailand with the introduction of primary school fees, which were about 44% of the costs for a student by 1994 (Holsinger, 2009: 206). However, the current constitution of Vietnam has guaranteed free primary education for everyone (London, 2011a: 35). Meanwhile, the Cambodian government developed an incentive program for schools, not students like in Vietnam and Thailand, that gave them US\$125 per annum along with US\$1.50 per student per annum in addition to the other costs of running the school for each student enrolled and kept in the system (Chansopheak, 2009: 136). That incentive program was developed in part due to about forty-three out of every one hundred children dropping out before the fifth grade according to data from the 2006/2007 school year (ibid: 138). Cummings claimed that “Declining population growth rates reduced the quantitative demand for those public services intended for young people, notably education and health”, but that also has paved the way for more investment per child (2009: 63). In theory, though, the government’s abolition of school fees within the Cambodian school system seemed like a good idea; however, it has been blamed for a greater rate of absenteeism because parents have been less committed to education knowing that their children could leave and return at any time to the system (Chansopheak, 2009: 140-141).

3.5 Discussion

Most of these examples have shown a distinct disadvantage with human capital for both the teachers and the families. Also, the fact of inequality among ethnic groups appearing to rise could mean that government incentives to keep children in school despite the guarantee in most cases of free education could also continue and rise. The quality of education might also be affected in the long term due to the salaries of the teachers not being commensurate with the rapid economic development at the center as opposed to the periphery, which would not induce good well-trained teachers into ethnic minority schools.

4. Government Policies Regarding Education

4.1 Political History and Reform

There has been a long history of progressive government policies specifically aimed at girls' of ethnic minority groups and their equal access to education; however, even the best policies have not always been effective for various reasons. The countries that joined ASEAN first in 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, have made much greater progress in terms of educational equality than the others that joined in the 1990s like Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 77). Lao PDR has had a one party system since 1975 and since 1986 when the NEM took effect, the new government had no capacity to disseminate policies on provincial and local levels, so development regressed until 1991 when the government centralized everything again (ibid: 85-86). Beginning in 1990, Lao PDR signed the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA), which began a six-year planning and implementation for compulsory state-sponsored education in the entirety of the country (Noonan, 2011: 85). Usually though, there seemed to be more policy issues with the Lao Loum majority attempting to implement policies for Lao Seung and Lao Theung minorities based upon the ethnic majority's view of what the minorities have required in the form of education (Rehbein, 2007: 141). Currently, though, five years of compulsory schooling have only referred to primary school, and less than 60% of students have completed it (Noonan, 2011: 86). In Vietnam, though, reforms began early in 1979, which enabled them to press ahead of Lao PDR and Cambodia in many sectors including education (Holsinger, 2009: 193). In 1994, the US lifted sanctions on Vietnam, which allowed aid to flow in, and many aspects of the education sector began to see even more rapid changes as well (Kamibeppu, 2009: 176).

According to Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black women in ethnic minority villages in Lao PDR have met with government representatives and the Lao Women's Union to discuss the needs and wants of the village inhabitants relative to policy, and

most of them reiterated the need for improved health and educational facilities, but often, the villagers had to try to fund projects themselves because government funding had not arrived on time or at all following the completion of schools (2004: 155 and 162). Then in 1995, the Lao Women's Union sent representatives to the Fourth World Conference on Women which took place in Beijing and thereby caused the Lao Ministry of Education (MOE) to create the Gender and Ethnic Minority Education Unit that superseded all other organizations for girls of ethnic minorities by 1998 (Manynooch, 2010: 3 and 4).

4.2 International Aid

Outside donors to Lao PDR's educational system have regularly asked for reports that concern education sector reforms due to the large amounts of money appropriated to those sectors, an estimated US\$2.846 billion as of 2005, that has been lent and granted to the government to support educational development policies (Phraxayavong, 2009: 245). For example, the Asian Development Bank and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency supported the Second Education Quality Improvement Project with US\$23 million and US\$15 million, respectively, which was specifically targeted at girls' enrollment rates and ran from March 2002 to June 2010 had a success rate of 10.5% from 2005 to 2010 (ADB 2012). There were two main reasons why that program was a success. First, there was enough money to compensate impoverished families for the loss of a daughter in school, and secondly, there were preschool and daycare facilities at schools that benefited from the program, all of which allowed parents more time to work (ibid). One could also hypothesize that it was successful due to the targeted outreach to such a specific demographic along with government accountability to the donors.

That was a very important contribution that had promising effects and was necessary due to the statistics that stated as of the middle of the program in 2006/2007, the education sector in Lao PDR only received "12: of total public expenditure", which was less than 3% of GDP at the time according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2008: 19). That percentage corresponded with Cummings estimation of the ideal program funding at a minimum of 3% GNP and 15% of the government budget if the education sector were to at least function on a basic level (2009: 64). Therefore, the Lao

PDR government policy of the time could not keep pace with the financial obligations related to education, and therefore, had to depend on outside sources to keep up with its goals and the Millenium Development Goals (MDG). Conversely, The Cambodian government is multiparty, so decisions regarding education funding are tedious and costly to approve through much competition between parties compared with the situations in Lao PDR and Vietnam that have only had to contend only with donor accountability (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 84).

Of course, many changes within these countries could not have been done by policy alone. International donors and organizations, such as The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have provided funds to them, except Thailand more recently, in order to help bring about changes in the educational system much more quickly whether or not the governmental capacity for it has existed or not by making the governments accountable for the aid that they have received. Since 2003, Thailand decided that it wanted to transition from a receiver of aid to that of donor country; therefore, education sector funding had been limited due to an unwillingness to accept outside aid (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 216). Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia have been at the opposite of that position with few governmental and ideological conflicts to prevent aid from flowing into the country for the past few years. The Lao and Vietnamese governments were also in competition with international NGOs to offer comparable services in order to thwart foreign influence and maintain political hegemony to counter the perceived ideological threats (Lintner, 2008: 172). Notwithstanding those reservations, the Lao government had accepted financial aid predicated upon the different ways in which the money would be applied. The Program-Based Approach (PBA) applied funds to targeted programs within a sector while the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) applied funds more widely to the entire education sector (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009a: 7). Therefore, the Lao PDR has been hoping to reach 2020 as the culmination of many government plans that were meant to revolutionize the country and exit the Least Developed Country (LDC) list and join the ranks of Thailand in the transition to a donor country in the future (Lintner, 2008: 171).

Within the education sector in Vietnam, many international aid groups sponsored particular areas of education in conjunction with the World Bank (Kamibeppu, 2009: 180). However, those donors have also required certain degrees of accountability to ensure that the funds were well spent within their target areas. Therefore, the NTP in Vietnam was meant for poverty reduction along with Program 135 that has targeted benefits for minority ethnic groups (London, 2011b: 91). In Vietnam, 20% of the national budget in 2008 went to finance education, and that figure did not include loans from the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and international NGOs, so the figures could have been higher and more comparable to the level of what Thailand has spent on the education sector (Huong and Fry, 2011: 231).

4.3 Internal Regulation

As of 2009, the Lao MOE was formally espousing the tenet from The National Socio-Economic Plan that advised specifically “equitable access/.../Increasing primary school attendance/.../, such as ethnic people, children with special needs and girls” as targets for the Education for All initiatives (MOE 2009: 11 and 12). The Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) support system has had high priority for inclusivity with regard to gender and ethnic groups because it has also been linked to the economic sector through formal ties in the ESDF that controlled the direction of public spending and investment within many areas of the education sector (ibid: 15 – 17). Also the ESDF has been supporting non-formal education initiatives that have been intended to reach the most remote ethnic groups and encourage at least some form of educational experience for children, mostly girls. For example, the non-formal education program entailed lessons outside of normal school hours that were flexible enough for children to attend when they were not needed by their parents and would have effectively aided about 20% of primary school dropouts (ibid: 25). Thus, as of 2009, approximately 63% of children completed primary school compared with lower percentages in other years (ibid: 13). Despite all good intentions, the government expenditure for education was only 8.5% in 2008/2009 and 10.2% in 2009/2010, and will have to rise to almost 18% by 2015 in order to meet the MDG goals initially begun by the government (ibid: 17).

4.4 Decentralization Initiatives

Decentralization of the education sector of these countries has also been a contentious issue with varying degrees of success. Hirosato and Kitamura recommended decentralization of education policy in order to mix locally important values with national goals as the impetuses for education,

“Decentralization in many developing countries entails the risk of disseminating corruption and profiteering that exist at the central level to the local level. Inadequate governance is a problem often graver at the local level than at the level of national government. Thus, the assumption here is that external cost tends to increase, if school enrollment rate is to be improved in the context of decentralization”. (2008a: 12-13)

However, decentralization could also be construed as a dissemination of power that works against central authority, so it has been a contentious idea. In the process of decentralization, these governments were and are becoming more liberal as a result of increasing education and economic welfare; however, that opens up countries to increased globalization, which they may be unprepared for at an early stage and many aspects of which they might be ideologically opposed (Cummings, 2009: 62).

In case of the Cambodian government, “The feature of decentralization in the education sector was “deconcentration” of authority but the central government retained power over personnel and resources allocation” in which case very little actually changed (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 84). And despite an active nationwide PTA system with legitimate concerns, all guidelines for ESP have been guided by the government and not on a district or school basis (Chansopheak, 2009: 142). The administrative capacity in Cambodia has not been capable of disseminating tasks and money properly, so decentralization has not been practical or prudent (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 84). Although, the Cambodian National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) for 2006-2010 specifically focused on gender equality for education in three targets areas: “equitable access to education, increasing the quality and efficiency of education services, and institutional development and capacity building for decentralization” (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 34). The ESP in Cambodia, as part of their 2006-2010 plan, wanted to see

education decentralized at the primary level, but there was little capacity to do so because everything in the government operated in a highly centralized bureaucratic manner and not in an accountable way either to any other internal and external sources (ibid: 45-46). Overall, three-quarters of the decisions regarding education in Cambodia were made by the government and not at provincial level as of 2003 as opposed to 11% at the local level and 14% by individual school districts due to the most powerful political parties wanting to remain in control of all resources in that concentrated web of political hegemony (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 84).

In Thailand, the decentralization process started earlier than in other countries in the region and had more success due to the capacity of the national and local governments to handle those changes. That process would not have been possible without a long timeline of official governance in education, beginning with the Department of Education in 1887 (Trakulphadetkrai, 2011: 198). The Education Act of 1999 promoted the decentralization of services to the provincial and district levels along with new “learner-centered teaching practices”; however, education planning was still done mainly at the central ministerial level (ibid: 199). Therefore, Thailand has had more experience with a more tailored education system on a less-concentrated level for a long time and has developed the capacity to deal with it bureaucratically on some levels, which could have also demonstrated a lower level of corruption in that sector. However, Cambodia and Lao PDR have experienced the opposite ends of that spectrum with a great deal of bureaucratic corruption in the education sector to such a similar extent that they were both ranked 158th out of 180 countries in an overall corruption study (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 46).

Despite even the largest reforms, the Lao MOE has reserved the authority to “institute or abolish educational institutions” along with controlling educational services at the provincial and district levels (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 86). Therefore, the education sector has been completely centralized as though the reforms had not existed. Comparatively, in Vietnam’s evolving version of a decentralized education system, control has been exercised in two ways by the local branch of the communist party and

by local education administration bodies in which the government has only recently allowed private educational institutions independent of that system to operate (ibid: 87). That situation was very similar to Lao PDR where, after 2000, a few issues of education were given to village level authorities, such as implementation of government plans, while the county and provincial levels retained planning and budgeting concerns for the 142 education bureaus in the country below provincial level (ibid: 86). All of those reforms looked positive in theory; however, without actually separating ideologically from the central governments, there were little changes in those countries. Therefore, there were few comparative differences on whether or not the state was one-party or multiparty with regard to reform.

4.5 Educational Planning

One internationally funded program that has been implemented across the region has been the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI). The FTI Catalytic Fund “was established to provide transitional financial support for about two or three years where the aid recipient country should be able to enhance its own education sector plan/strategy in line with the financial support provided by the fund and should be able to seek long-term support from new donors in the future” (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009a: 17). Vietnam created their Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy in 2002 and has been in EFA-FTI since 2003 (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 81). However, EFA-FTI could not be viewed as an entire success in Vietnam because of ideological conflicts with the government and the speed at which the country was undergoing education reform did not give enough time for EFA-FTI to allot funds correctly in league with the political capacity at the time (Kamibeppu, 2009: 181).

Cambodia, like Lao PDR and Vietnam, developed five-year plans for action that corresponded with the financial support plans, such as the Education Sector Support Program (ESSP) and the ESP (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 79). The Cambodian ESSP planned how to achieve the ESP goals and how to fund them (Hayden and Martin, 2011: 35). There were twelve Priority Action Programs (PAP) in the MoEYS and were part of Cambodia’s ESP in the five-year intervals (Chansopheak, 2009: 135-136). The

government also developed the PAP to allocate funds directly into the education sector along with the ESSP at a provincial level in order to speed up development in education by bypassing the MOE (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 79). Despite so many organizations meant to keep everything running smoothly, government run primary schools in rural Cambodia also had similar struggles with the quality of education. Therefore, Cambodia's government-sponsored plans largely failed because there was no administrative capacity for that kind of development, so funds were allocated improperly with mismatched programs or with programs that had little capacity to implement changes (ibid: 80). A more positive paradigm came from the non-governmental sector where the Highland Children Education Project (HCEP) was developed and operated by CARE International to fund bilingual schools for minority children mostly in the countryside (Kosonen, 2005: 124). Many of the ethnic minority schools in Cambodia have been working well because of the assistance from the community and guidance for administration and curriculum development from HCEP that does have the capacity, experience, funding, and low level of corruption to make the system work relatively smoothly (ibid: 125).

Vietnam has needed to build their administrative capacity for these programs as well, so they developed the Fundamental School Quality Level (FSQL), which reports to aid agencies and is maintained by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 81). Much of the aid and planning in the primary school sector has been coordinated by JICA post-2000 and liaises with MOET (Kamibeppu, 2009: 181). MOET drafts plans that need approval from the National Assembly and Communist Party of Vietnam, then, these plans are implemented by large city or provincial level in the department of education by the offices of education at the district level (London, 2011a: 18). In 2003 CIDA, the World Bank, and the Norwegian Aid Development established Education Sector Group (ESG), which was meant to provide and support the government with education, issues of leadership, program implementation, economic development, and poverty reduction (Kamibeppu, 2009: 182). The World Bank, Vietnamese government, and the Department of International Development (DFID) of the UK supported the 2005 Targeted Budget Support for the

National Education for All Plan Implementation Program that was meant to reach all schools that did not meet FSQ standard in order to make quality standardized in the system (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 81).

An early policy in Vietnam included a provision to fast track education reform in the 1990s, similar to EFA-FTI, so that ethnic minority children could pass two grades in one year and five grades in 120 weeks, looked good in theory, but was an obvious failure in the long term and was a complete opposite to internationally recommended educational policy (London, 2011a: 31; Cummings, 2008: 65). On a positive note, Vietnamese education reform through government and international projects, like the World Bank's Primary Education Project for Disadvantaged Children has been directly applied to poverty stricken ethnic minority communities and implemented through local governments for the greatest effect similar to SWAp (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 81).

4.6 Discussion

Education policy, decentralization, and international aid have characterized developments in these countries. Thailand could be seen as most successful overall with policy dissemination and application, except in the south, which had been helped along with their early admission into ASEAN along with their long history of institutionalized education. However, it is important to note that successes and shortcomings of reforms, decentralization, and utilization of international aid have not been dependent on the type of government a country has had. For example, Cambodia's government may be multiparty compared to Vietnam and Lao PDR, but the same problems persisted with a lack of bureaucratic capacity to handle reforms, like the EFA-FTI. Whereas, Vietnam has had much more guidance with capacity development due to the rapid influx of international aid after US sanctions were lifted in the mid-1990s.

5. National and Local Infrastructure

Basic infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, electricity, and water are basic to communication and life in order to build a more socio-economically stable society (Ali and Pernia, 2003: 4). Physical access to education is of paramount importance, although, ethnic minority areas are often remote and lack infrastructure (London, 2011a: 31). On the village level, there have often been projects initiated to make life easier for rural families in order to allow more girls to attend school, such as immediate access to clean drinking water instead of hauling it over long distances on narrow paths (Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, 2004: 51). As most ethnic minorities live in more mountainous regions of Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, they have less access to health and education services because of their locale (ibid: 165). Rehbein also stated that geographical positioning was very important in Lao PDR because a village near the Thai border is closer to more opportunities based on infrastructure than a village in the mountains that does not have all season road access and/or arable land (2007: 57).

In 2004, Lao PDR launched the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, which had education as a significant component as well as transport infrastructure, so poverty reduction became quite firmly entwined with the MOE (Hirosato and Kitamura, 2009b: 80). Another example was the Basic Education Girls' Project where the government devised some resettlement plans for Lao Seung and Lao Theung in order to incorporate a series of villages into each other and consolidate village schools into larger schools that has saved the government money in the long term by only necessitating the construction of a few schools instead of many and keeping many people centrally located near each other (Manynooch, 2010: 5 and 10). However, Rehbein has argued that these resettlement programs often have not worked because of significant cultural differences from food production to traditional livelihoods between the majority Tai-Kadai speaking groups and the ethnic minorities, so the minority groups sometimes

moved back to the highlands despite the obvious advantages of good infrastructure and access to education in larger lowland villages (2007: 97).

The road system in Lao PDR has progressively been becoming more extensive and improved over the past twenty years. The Ministry of Communications, Post, Transport, and Construction has been responsible for infrastructure projects (Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, 2004: 76). Within that ministry, the Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning department has had the gargantuan aim of developing rural roads as a way to reduce poverty in Lao PDR, and that plan has also been integrated with socio-economic improvements in conjunction with expanding the reach of the government to rural communities (Rigg, 2005: 27). Despite the overall progress of building roads, as of the 2008, only approximately 20% of the 31,000km of roads in Lao PDR were paved all-season roads with about 70% of the total number accessing rural more mountainous regions of the country (Warr, 2008: 270). Therefore the task of upgrading all roads to an equal standard along with the creation of new roads has been the largest task in the country's plans for poverty reduction, economic success, and universal education that have been dependent upon each other for ultimate success.

Building infrastructure has been a long-term goal with investment as far back as the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, which totaled more than US\$500 million in loans and grants (Pholsena and Banomyong, 2006: 103). Overall, the types of roads in Lao PDR could be broken down in three categories according to Warr: "(i) no vehicular access; (ii) dry season only access; (iii) all-weather access" (2008: 270). As of 1999, though, it was estimated that approximately 53% of Mon-Khmer, 35% of Hmong-Mien, and 50% of Sino-Tibetan villages in northern Lao PDR did not have road access at all despite the massive infrastructure projects of the mid-1980s to mid-1990s (Rigg, 2005: 28). Also, despite continued aid for infrastructure projects, in 2004 only 38% of the roads in the entire country were listed as in a good state of repair for all-season access to rural areas. Warr speculated that it was probable that the government only maintained and improved roads where the socio-economic situation was good; therefore, there was a positive correlation among all of the factors linking the maintenance and upgrading that would

have prevented upward mobility for the marginalized minority groups in areas with substandard infrastructure (2008: 270 and 271).

Contributing to that lack of organization regarding maintenance and upgrading was the way in which the entire system had been organized to upgrade a pre-existing road. If a dry-season road was already in place, it was usually upgraded to a black top all-season road; however, a no-vehicular road (read: path) was usually converted into a dry-season road without directly upgrading it to an all-season road (ibid: 271). That could have meant that a relatively isolated community could have waited many years before the cycle of refurbishment was complete to convert a no-vehicular road into a black top all-season road. In that time, the community would have continued to suffer the negative socio-economic and educational effects of being effectively marginalized from the wider world. However, rural farming communities were not always as isolated as one would expect. Rivers have often acted as alternatives to roads during the rainy season when dry season roads became impassable (Pholsena and Banomyong, 2006: 107).

Table 3

Laos: Welfare of rural households by road access, 2002–2003

Welfare indicator	No road access HR1	Dry season access only HR2	All season access HR3	All rural HR
Real consumption expenditures per person (Thousand kip per year)	1,712.6	1,917.0	2,280.2	2,070.1
Poverty incidence	45.57	36.05	28.64	34.17
School attendance	51.90	70.48	80.67	69.41
Females (%)	47.54	67.82	80.00	67.06
Males (%)	56.27	72.98	81.37	71.72
Average expenditure on education (kip per student per month)	65,152	86,973	111,963	96,209
Proportion of persons who became ill in the last 4 weeks (%)	15.63	13.37	13.31	14.07
Of those ill, those who did not seek treatment (%)	89.80	83.16	80.69	84.35

(Warr, 2008: 271)

Above in Table 3, the case using education, economic improvements, and types of roads can be positively correlated through a time regression from 2002 to 2003. There was a steep reduction in poverty incidence when comparing the no road access at 45.57

with the all season road access in the same time period at 28.64. Overall, school attendance also improved, but there was a dramatic difference in attendance rates for females from 47.54 in the no-road access category to 80.00 for females whose families had access to an all-season road. Ethnic minority parents had mentioned that distance and safety were contributing factors as to whether or not their children, especially girls, could go to school. Therefore, the safety, propinquity, and socio-economic factors provided by better road access to larger communities where schools and other services were available created more favorable conditions for education equality in those cases.

As a comparison, Thailand used road projects from 1960 to 1990 in order for the state to gain more direct control over highland minorities under the auspices of economic development, universal education, and connecting rural communities with more populated areas to alleviate poverty (Rigg, 2005: 128). Vietnam also had a similar strategy to gain more control over highland groups also using similar reasons. In Vietnam, it was estimated that rural areas with paved roads had a 67% higher chance of escaping poverty than those communities without all-season paved roads (Ali and Pernia, 2003: 6). The government of Lao PDR, likewise, did effectively recognize that most poor families must stay near home in order to make a living, so travel was done only locally, like when women and children took goods to market or when the children went to school (Rigg, 2005: 136). Therefore, Lao PDR could most likely have the same or similar motives for rural road improvement as Thailand and Vietnam with primary and secondary motives of control and socio-economic development, poverty reduction, and educational equality as corollary motives. No matter what the reasons, though, positive change through poverty reduction and integration could happen in all of those cases.

In the cases of Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam, improved infrastructure also could be seen as the catalyst for a myriad of other opportunities, which could quite possibly have provided more free time for children to attend school. After dry-season roads have been upgraded to paved ones, the conditions for providing clean water supplies and electricity often can begin as the next steps in the development process. For example, rural electrification could make life better via such services as being able to

work later at night, using household and farm equipment dependent on electricity, or the internet for use in the informal education sector, such as distance learning if schools were still too far away or if the children were needed at home for some reason (Ali and Pernia, 2003: 9). Also, irrigation has been seen to enable a family's socio-economic status to rise by increasing the crop yields that could be sold at the market along with providing a food surplus for everyone in the family. According to one Asian Development Bank report, the use of irrigation lead to more than a 77% increase in income (ibid: 7). Thus, a positive chain reaction in Lao PDR could begin with improved infrastructure as could be seen from Thailand and Vietnam. However, approximately 15% of the population in the case of Vietnam is of an ethnic minority and still less likely to have a complete education due to location (London, 2011b: 96). As Huong and Fry confirmed earlier, after Doi Moi in Vietnam, educational inequality for minority ethnic groups actually increased due to their remote locations from where reforms were first implemented (2011: 237). Like in Lao PDR, the education equality was not as good in ethnic majority regions that correspond to the mountainous parts that suffer from poor infrastructure and cannot access the fast-paced economy (Holsinger, 2009: 197).

5.1 Discussion

In recent decades, the national and local infrastructure of these countries has not only connected them with each other externally but internally as well. However, most ethnic minorities still live in remote mountainous areas, so the quality of the roads as in the cases of Vietnam and Lao PDR prevent them from accessing not only education but also economic opportunities. Therefore, parents are less likely to send their female children to school due to safety issues over long distances. Thailand started much earlier with road improvement projects, mainly for nationalistic reasons, so not only have their ethnic minorities in some regions benefited educationally, but the state has also benefited by more government control through contact with remote ethnic minorities despite significant problems in the south.

6. Concluding Discussion

Unmasking and examining the four main issues of ethnic minority cultures, socio-economics, government policy, and national and local infrastructure with their effects on education have been an overall theme in my research. Using social constructivism along with social and human capital theories, the task was to find the roots of the problem in four main areas and examine them by what should be addressed in order to surmount the problem of inequality in education.

Overall, Thailand has made the most impressive advances with regard to improving educational equality as compared with Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia. They do have a long history of institutionalized education, but more importantly, they have had longer governmental stability compared to Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia where civil wars and changing ideologies have characterized the last fifty years. Therefore, Thailand has been able to expand their education system to ethnic minorities living in remote border regions through improved infrastructure and the bureaucratic capacity to implement reforms. Therefore, they accomplished the nationalistic agenda of better control of ethnic minorities, except the insurgencies in the south, while providing better educational opportunities at the same time. Also, that stability has enabled the socio-economic status of ethnic minorities to grow in concert with all of these reforms.

In order for Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia to be able to implement changes as well as Thailand, several things would need to happen. First of all, the local infrastructure would need to be improved to encourage development in remote ethnic minority areas, which are often in the highlands. That has been a nationalistic goal of these countries, like Thailand, but the capacity to implement such large schemes has been slow. Therefore, parents would be more likely to send all of their children to more years of school because girls' labor might not be as needed if the new infrastructure could bring about a shorter and safer route to school along with the economic opportunities that

would more easily be accessed by highlanders in remote regions. Then, the teachers in those remote areas might also receive their salaries on a more dependable basis due to better physical access, which would enable them to spend more instructive time in the classroom for the benefit of their pupils. But most important with regard to their salaries would be a competitive living wage as compared with what they could receive in the private sector. The government and the ethnic minorities, therefore, have significant stakes in infrastructure and its subsequent possible benefits. Thus, the government would be able to have more nationalistic control over the highland ethnic groups, the ethnic groups and teachers would have access to a range of educational and economic opportunities, and both would benefit from the future possibilities in that chain reaction.

Government policy and capacity to implement change would have to be in conjunction with improved infrastructure. As was stated earlier, despite the best policies, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia have been unable to implement them due to a lack of bureaucratic capacity due to highly centralized systems and possible corruption. Also, although these countries share some significant differences in ideology and national organization, they share similar issues with regard to concentration of power in political parties and geography. Programs like EFA-FTI have the possibility to improve life greatly and rapidly in the education sectors of Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia; however, there was very little capacity for widespread governance and application of those funds in the appropriate sectors with any degree of accountability. Therefore, the application of reform has not been dependent upon whether or not a state is communist, socialist, or democratic, as they have had similar issues with reform. If the decentralization process were to make an improvement in the education sector, more international guidance would be needed for them to meet the MDG2 and MDG3 goals by 2015 to bring Lao PDR, for example, out of least developed country status by 2020.

One important factor that has also contributed to educational successes in some cases has been community involvement. In cases like the HCEP in Cambodia, a strong community base within the ethnic minority has aided education equality and quality, which has had reciprocity with socio-economics. Therefore, the interrelationships of

educational quality and socio-economic progression could aid each other in time and turn a country like Lao PDR that is still on the list of least developed countries into a donor country like Thailand by making the most of that social and human capital.

In conclusion, the areas of ethnic minority cultures, socio-economics, government policy, and national and local infrastructure are completely interrelated and dependent upon each other for positive change in educational equality from a gender perspective. Therefore, the social and human capitals of ethnic minorities have often evolved over time with those opportunities that education has offered. With reciprocal cooperation, improved infrastructure to remote regions, and effective policy management, ethnic minority groups stand to benefit educationally and economically, and the state could benefit as well for the nationalistic agenda, to ensure a more equitable share in social and human capital.

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